

Taking the



Pulse



of Palliser Regional Schools

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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



It's difficult to believe Christmas is almost upon us, as is evident by the number of good deeds and charitable work flowing across Palliser. This issue of

The Pulse celebrates that spirit of giving in many different forms, whether the heart-warming gifts teachers receive from students or the gift of experience one administrator can share with another.

This year, Calgary Christian elementary and middle school students were treated to all the fanfare and drama that comes with being the official send-off school for the annual Operation Christmas Child campaign. The school community filled 1,200 shoeboxes with gifts and goods for children in poorer parts of the world. County Central High School students donated cash and goods to a school in Bagatelle, Dominica, where even the most

basic school supplies are in demand.

Palliser people are giving of themselves in other ways as well.

Students at Brant Christian School volunteered at the Samaritan's Purse warehouse in Calgary sorting through donations for the campaign. Students at Kate Andrews High School in Coaldale are being encouraged to donate blood again this year, truly a gift of life to a recipient.

Here at Central Office, staff have donated enough cash and goods to "adopt" three families whose children attend Palliser schools who need help this Christmas.

While it's a hectic time of year for everyone, it's always gratifying to see our staff and our students giving of themselves through kindnesses, large and small, in service to others. In doing so, they demonstrate leadership and spread warmth through their local communities and far beyond.

I wish all of our Palliser staff and families a safe and Merry Christmas.

— Kevin Gietz, Superintendent of Schools

THANKS, SHANNON!

This month's Palliser Unsung Hero is Picture Butte High School teacher Shannon Collier, nominated by learning assistant Helen Poppe. Helen

describes Shannon as a most deserving hero for her positive attitude and the incredible gift she has for drawing students in to activities and out of their shells.

"This woman gives of herself to the school in so many ways," Helen says. "She coaches all year round, organizes tournaments at the school with little or no credit given to her; she books referees and officials. She spends endless extra hours, trying to get things organized for all the extra-curricular activities at the school. She volunteers at almost all the activities."

Shannon received a Palliser travel mug and a \$25 gift certificate to Moxie's.

To nominate a Palliser Unsung Hero, email pulse@pallisersd.ab.ca with the name of your nominee and why they deserve recognition.



Operation Christmas Child lands at Calgary Christian School

By Catherine Feenstra

Friday, Nov. 20 at Calgary Christian School was a day filled with blessings! Our elementary gym was filled with elementary and middle school students, staff, family and community members and more than 1,200 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. Our assembly began with worship and the EMS Honour Guard, and continued with stories of children who have received the boxes in the past, letters and prayers from our students for the children who will receive this year's gifts, and huge thank yous to everyone involved.

After the assembly, everyone piled the boxes into the STARS and HAWCS helicopters and

EMS vehicles, including a vintage ambulance that was rescued from a farmer's field. The gracious volunteers from Samaritan's Purse, EMS, STARS and the Calgary Police Service answered questions and let everyone explore the amazing equipment.

Our school community was honoured to have the opportunity to partner with Samaritan's Purse for this campaign, and for our students to really live out our theme verse of Matthew 22:37-39 in such a meaningful way.

Staff members who helped to organize collection parties say the community-building within our school tremendous and we are grateful for the opportunity to have the students come together, working toward a common goal.



SOME GIFTS THEY'LL NEVER FORGET

Teachers reminisce about gifts that moved them or even mewed at them



Margie Haase holds a teddy bear a student gave her.

As Christmas approaches, you can bet teachers across Canada will be unwrapping tokens of appreciation from students, often in the form of novelty coffee mugs. But the gifts that most warm the heart are often not of the ceramic variety.

Instead, as Palliser staff recount, unexpected gifts most touch the heart.

For Margie Haase, a teacher at Glenmore Christian Academy, the most moving gift was a stuffy.

"I always do a teddy bear theme in the fall with my Grade 1s and wrap it up with a special Teddy Bear Day," she says. "At the end of one year, one of my little boys wrapped up his first ever teddy bear and presented it to me, saying, 'You love teddy bears so much, I want you to have mine forever. I know you will always take care of him.'"

The student was right. Margie still has the bear.

"I felt pretty humbled by the whole thing," she says.

The student came back 10 years later to visit this special teacher and this special stuffed animal.

For Cheryl Miller, a vice-principal at Glenmore Christian, her most memorable gift of the warm and fuzzy variety wasn't a stuffed animal. It was a live one!

A few days before Christmas, Cheryl answered the door at her home to find two of her Grade 6 students and a parent carrying a cardboard box.

"I invited them in and was very surprised to see a kitten with toys and pet food," she says. "I was underwhelmed!"

She graciously thanked the students for the gift – and has since shared the story along with the message advising against giving pets as gifts.

Fortunately, the story had a happy ending. "Mitzi-cat joined our family for the next 18 years," Cheryl says. "We still miss her!"

For other teachers, the most memorable gifts are treasures created by students themselves.

Renee Laugesen, a teacher at Master's College in Calgary, says one of her students wrote a poem for her, framed it and presented it as a going-away gift when she was a student teacher.

Cory Hegland, a teacher at Jennie Emery Elementary School in Coaldale, had spent 10 years teaching at the elementary school in Vulcan when he transferred in 2008. As a farewell, his Grade 6 Prairieview students videotaped each other offering Cory messages of appreciation and farewell. They incorporated photos and music in the presentation. The class had spent months learning to use Windows Movie Maker "and to have them use what I had taught them to actually honour me was quite emotional," Cory says.

The students and learning assistants also planned a party and gave Cory an X Box 360.

Teacher Cheryl Byrne's most memorable gift was something a lot less tangible than a

gaming system.

This gift came from one of her Grade 1 students at a Hutterite colony. This little boy hadn't

uttered a word in English since starting school. One day in mid-September, Cheryl recalls, she dismissed her class for recess and began walking toward the office.

"I heard, amidst the hustle and bustle of students, a faint little voice behind me say 'I wuv you.'"

Cheryl thought she must have misheard what the child said so she kept walking. When she turned around, there was a five-year-old.

"With his hands planted firmly on his hips and looking directly at me with wide, astonished eyes, he said in the most indignant voice I've ever heard from someone under four feet tall, 'Didn't you heah me? I said I wuv you!'"

"I don't know what was more surprising – the fact that he had just demonstrated such an unexpected command of English or that I had unintentionally jilted such an avid admirer. . . . It was the sweetest acclamation of 'wuv' I'd ever heard."

NEW PROGRAM HELPS ADMINISTRATORS 'AIM' HIGH

Palliser Regional Schools expects its administrators to "AIM" high, and the division is helping them do just that.

The Administrators Induction and Mentorship program, or AIM, was established this fall to support the professional development of principals and vice-principals who are either new to the division or new to their positions.

The first of four meetings planned this school year was held Dec. 2.

The evening featured presentations by David Townshend, a researcher with the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, and by County Central High School Principal Ken Garinger and Vice-principal Sharon McNiven.

For Deryk Hamilton, a vice-principal at Coalhurst Elementary School who joined Palliser

this fall, the session was a "fantastic" blend of the latest research from Townsend and the very specific examples of putting theory into practice offered by the Vulcan high school's team.

"I walked away with a pretty big smile on my face," says Hamilton, who hopes to take in all the AIM sessions this year.

Associate Superintendent of Human Resources Kevin Garinger says AIM is a natural extension of the induction programs Palliser already has for its first-, second- and third-year teachers, offering professional development in-house and connecting experienced staff with individuals just starting out.

To contain costs, AIM meetings are being held after Administrators' Association meetings, to eliminate any additional travel costs.

As the program progresses, new administrators will be matched with more experi-

enced ones as mentors.

"There's an incredible store of wisdom and experience in our schools," Garinger says. "Through this program, we'll make sure our new administrators have access to some of the best practices and advice of more seasoned school leaders. The AIM program is just one more way Palliser can encourage collaboration, information-sharing and problem-solving."

That emphasis on collaboration is part of what attracted Hamilton to Palliser from his teaching position in Grande Prairie. In considering a move to Palliser, Hamilton says he read the division's annual results reports where the common theme of collaboration and PD rang out loud and clear.

"I think that's one of the major pluses in this division is working together as a team and finding new ways to accomplish goals," he says.

Garinger says he expects AIM will eventually expand to include lead teachers who aspire to careers in administration, as part of an overall succession plan for Palliser.



MASTER'S, CALGARY CHRISTIAN ARE NEW DANCE PARTNERS

When the student council at Master's College approached Principal Derrick Mohamed with their latest idea for a school event, the one-man jury wasn't out for long.

The students wanted to break new ground, inviting other Palliser schools in Calgary to Master's Winter Ball, Dec. 10. "Mr. Mo" didn't hesitate in his response.

"Great! I didn't really have to think about it," Mohamed says of his initial reaction.

The principal sent a letter to his fellow Palliser administrators in Calgary, and set the ball rolling for a formal dance to be enjoyed by both Master's high school students and teens from Calgary Christian.

For Mohamed, the collaboration at the student level is just part of a growing relationship at all levels among Palliser's Christian-based alternative programs in Calgary.

This fall, the Master's principal had cooperation from Glenmore Christian and Menno Simons in reaching out to parents of their Grade 9 students who were encouraged to consider continuing their Christian education at another Palliser school. Glenmore and Menno don't offer high school programming.

Meanwhile, Master's and Calgary Christian, which cater to all grades, have been encouraging their students and parents to consider each other's schools for different program needs. Master's has technology programs not found at Calgary Christian. Calgary Christian has careers and trades



Members of Master's Student Council Joshua Chua, Isabella Hernandez, centre, and Dinah Jowett are looking forward to their first social event with Calgary Christian students.

Master's doesn't offer. Instead of parents having to choose one school over the other, Mohamed says they can take advantage of programming at a neighbouring Palliser school.

The four schools are relatively close together in Calgary's southwest. Heritage Christian is located in the northeast.

Such collaboration tops the list of advantages of being part of Palliser, Mohamed says. Formerly private schools that operated independently and in isolation, the alternative programs can now work together, whether in encouraging parents to consider continuing their faith-based education at a Palliser school, or by sharing

concerns, issues or brainstorming at division gatherings.'

Students at Master's College and Calgary Christian have known each other only on the competitive level, doing battle in 2A volleyball or basketball competition. The social event will be a welcome change, bringing teens together, rather than against one another.

Gwen Uittenbosch, principal of Calgary Christian's high school, says she plans to attend the winter ball at Master's as a chaperone, and she thinks the whole idea of students sharing a social event is simply "phenomenal."

Calgary Christian has a spring dance in the works, and fully expects to reciprocate with an invitation to Master's students.

Joshua Chua, Master's student council president, says the nine-member council believes the invitation to Calgary Christian will be good for school spirit, giving students at both schools access to twice as many dances at no additional cost. In fact, the council may be in a position to donate some of the profits to charity, Chua hopes.

The council didn't just leave an open invitation at Calgary Christian. They visited the school in person with marketing materials for the event. They also incorporated technology in the effort, with online ticket sales, making an excellent learning opportunity for Chua and others on the council who have entrepreneurial aspirations.

Teachers return from the Hill with new appreciation of MPs

For junkies of Canadian politics and Social Studies teachers, there's nothing like a week on Parliament Hill to inspire an appreciation of the federal government and public service, say two Palliser teachers who took part in the Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy.

Kristin Wengel, a teacher at R.I. Baker Middle School in Coaldale, and Ryan Brennan, from Heritage Christian School in Calgary, were among 70 teachers from every province and territory in the country to spend a week on Parliament Hill Nov. 1-5.

The program is offered under the auspices of the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons and is organized by the Library of Parliament.

The teachers were treated to behind-the-scenes views of Parliament and panel discussions with key movers and shakers in Ottawa, including MPs, Senators and Supreme Court justices.

"The best part was having first-hand experience talking to people who make the decisions, and to find out what their jobs are like," says Wengel. The visit changed Wengel's perception of federal politicians, from a somewhat cynical view of grand-

For photos from the trip, please visit Palliser's website and click on the new "Special Events" at www.pallisersd.ab.ca/Events.php

standing individuals, cat calling each other during question period, to an appreciation of just how much work MPs do and how devoted they are to public service.

Wengel got to meet Lethbridge MP Rick Casson at his Ottawa office, and she was impressed by Red Deer MP Earl Dreeshen, who was a teacher before entering politics.

For Brennan, high points of the trip included hearing from Ed Broadbent, an elder statesman of Canadian politics, meeting a Supreme Court justice and having a conversation with Bob Rae, former Ontario premier, now foreign affairs critic for the Liberal Party of Canada.

Brennan says the week included panel discussions with politicians themselves discussing how to reform question period, which leaves Canadians the impression MPs behave like children. In

fact, Brennan says, the week left him with an appreciation that our federal politicians "are not as partisan as they seem. . . In committee work, they do get things done.

Both Wengel and Brennan say they left the experience with a wealth of information to share with students and fellow Social Studies teachers, including an abundance of free resources available online.

The teachers say they hope to be able to provide a presentation to other teachers at an upcoming collaboration day to share those resources.

For an online subscription, visit www.pallisersd.ab.ca
For a paper copy, contact Dawn at (403) 328-4111 or toll-free at 1-877-667-1234

Merry Christmas from **The Pulse**

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