



MERRIMACK SPECIAL EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE

Volume 2, Issue 1 News for the extended MSEC community January 2013



We are: Devoted

■ Page 2: We celebrate the long-time service of MSEC faculty members like Patricia Evans. Former student Ray Busby has been part of the MSEC family for 23 years.



We are: Contributing

■ Page 3: Thanks to the efforts of MSEC students, the osprey population in Newburyport has a new place to call home.



We are: Building Skills

■ Page 5: Sierra Ortiz, a student in the Merrimack Alternative Vocational programs. MSEC offers a host of alternative high school programs.

Happy New Year from MSEC

I wish you all a Happy New Year. I hope you had some time to rest and relax with family and friends. We have much to be grateful for as we begin the new year. I feel fortunate to work for a school community that shares my sense of responsibility, accountability and desire to serve our students, their families, and our communities. We share the same guiding principles and values: we believe that we can help each and every student reach their full potential; we believe our efforts make a difference; we believe in kindness; and we believe in the resilience of the human spirit.

Our Collaborative is doing well and the programs we are offering our students continue to support their academic, transitional, emotional and behavioral progress.. The MSEC Board and I are committed to offering high quality programs in a fiscally responsible manner. A student-focused budget with a mission to improve student outcomes is always more cost-effective than a budget disconnected from the mission.

Communication and outreach are key to our success. In this spirit, the Collaborative hosts periodically a meeting for all its member districts' Special Education Directors. Each meeting has a working agenda of issues we need to collaborate on to better serve our students. In addition, we are now instituting a lecture series on topics relevant to Special Education. Furthermore, I have been visiting our member districts and attending School Com-



Dr. Chris A. Scott, Executive Director

mittee meetings. It is a pleasure to connect with our School Committees across the Merrimack Valley and inform them of the progress we are making. The Collaborative takes seriously its responsibility to be transparent in all matters and to communicate with its stakeholder groups.

Again this year, in order to better understand the corrections that need to be made to "straighten the ship" I am holding meetings with various employee groups and I have been attending staff meetings at the Collaborative's schools. Please remember that a healthy school community relies on two-way communication. We are more effective when everyone takes responsibility for their role and all voices are heard. My door is always open.

Happy New Year and I look forward to working with you in 2013 to make our Collaborative the best that it can be. ■



WE ARE: AN EXTENDED FAMILY

Patricia Evans joined the staff of the Collaborative 25 years ago, while former student Ray Busby has had a 23 year association with MSEC and continues to participate in our work programs.

At the Collaborative, we proudly think of ourselves as an extended family. Many of our staff members have worked with MSEC students for years.

Melissa McKenzie is a dedicated, caring professional who has committed her life to working with students with special needs. Thank you Melissa for your 36 years of service. Another MSEC employee, Patricia Evans, joined the staff of MSEC 25 years ago. She is loved by all and cares deeply for the adults in the Today and Tomorrow Program. Congratulations to Melissa and Patricia.

We salute all of the MSEC staff who have been here for 10 years or more, including: Laurie Ford (10 years), Amy Gagnon (10 years) Charles LeBuff (10 years), Joel Williams (10 years), Isabelle Kunselman (11 years), Lynne Castelli (11 years), Jerold White (11 years), Denise Devine (11 years), Chrystalia Metrakas (11 years), Debra Austin (11 years), Darren Goad (11 years), Geraldine Beadle (11 years), Cindy Cue (12 years), Robin Gill (12 years), Susan Larkin (12 years), Janet Flood (12 years), Cheryl Crumb (13 years), Karen Blackburn (13 years), Robert Nimblett (13 years), Christa Cassidy (14 years), William Bryant (14 years), Susan Totton (15 years), Patricia Delisle (15 years), Janette Casey (17 years), Joseph Reilly (17 years), Barbara Bacheller (19 years), Cindy Brown (22 years), Timothy Callahan (23 years) and Sean Curran (23 years).

Meet Ray Busby

We would also like to recognize a former MSEC student with a long relationship with the Collaborative. Ray Busby has a 23 year association with MSEC, endearing himself to the teachers and staff here, as well as to the many job sites where he continues to participate in the work programs. Ray has an easygoing manner and a very strong work ethic, which makes him an exceptional crew member, wherever he goes.

One of Ray's favorite job sites is the Tyngsborough High School. Ray is a resident of the town and is very proud to work at the school. He has made a lot of friends there and is greatly appreciated by both the faculty and the students. Everybody knows his name and are happy to greet him on sight. He's also an avid team supporter and can be seen at many of the school's sporting events.

He is quick to act as a mentor to his less seasoned workmates, and isn't afraid to let them know how to do the job correctly. There will be no dilly-dallying when Ray Busby is on the team. Ray helps to make a good day an exceptional day. Outside of work Ray is famous for his key collection, which numbers into the thousands. Everyone knows where to go when they are looking to dispose of unwanted or obsolete keys. Ray delights in this hobby. ■

We love you Ray. Thanks for being part of the MSEC family.

Friends and Family

Milestone

Congratulations to MSEC therapist **Kari Morrin** on her marriage to Gregg Kleckowski. The couple tied the knot on November 10, 2012 at BelBelhurst Castle in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Gregg works as a business manager at Bernardi Honda in Natick. Congratulations to Gregg and Kari!



From our family to yours

Every year, the **Merrimack Alternative Vocational High School** programs enjoy donating to the **House of Hope** located in Lowell, MA. "House of Hope, Inc. has provided emergency shelter and services to hundreds of homeless families in Lowell." For the fifth year in a row, MSEC organized a donation drive, and students and staff visited the House of Hope to personally present all of the donations received from our school community.

MSEC Students Give a Lift to Local Osprey Population

By Will Webber, student and Paul Aziz, science teacher

Students from biology, environmental science, and wood shop classes at the Merrimack Vocational High School in Topsfield, gave a lift to the local osprey population in the Newburyport area. This fall they



MSEC STUDENTS AT THE MERRIMACK VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL BUILT THIS 16 FOOT "OSPREY POLE" AND INSTALLED IT ON AN ISLAND IN THE MERRIMACK RIVER.

built a 16 foot "osprey pole" and platform and installed it on Carr's Island, an island in the lower Merrimack River.

An Osprey is a raptor also known as the "Fish Hawk." The Osprey is the only hawk on the continent that basically eats only live fish. In North America more than eighty species of live fresh- and saltwater fish make up 99% of the Osprey's diet.

An Osprey pole is a man-made structure built and installed in a way that makes it attractive to a mated pair of Osprey looking for a place to nest. The reason why Osprey would want a pole is because they are very picky on where they make their nest (they like high, lonely places with lots of open

space.). With the population growing steadily since they were removed from the Endangered Species list, suitable nesting sites are at a premium.

So our students joined wood shop teacher Mark Webster and science teacher Paul Aziz aboard the Yankee Clipper harbor tour boat in Newburyport. We built the giant structure in pieces in the wood shop, loaded it onto the boat, and beached the boat on the salt marsh at Carr Island. There, we dug a deep hole in the marsh, assembled the structure and hoisted it into place. Now we will keep a close eye on it in hopes that a pair of osprey choose to build a nest on it next spring. We hope to install a web-cam in the spring so that we or any other school can watch any activity directly from the classroom!

Osprey are a conservation success story and their rebounding populations have been aided by pesticide bans and the construction of artificial nest sites. Osprey numbers rapidly decreased in the early 1940s to 1970s. The osprey suffered the same fate as the American Bald Eagle; the widespread use of pesticides (DDT in particular) in farms and other areas along rivers built up in the food chain and poisoned the ecosystem, accumulating high concentrations in these top predators. This caused a thinning of their eggshells to the point that when females sat on their eggs in the nest, they would crush them. Osprey studies provided support for wider legal arguments against the use of pesticides. After the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, its DDT ban helped populations to increase and

the Osprey became a conservation success symbol.

But Osprey are still listed as endangered or threatened in some states—especially inland where pesticides ruined many popula-



IN MARCH, STUDENTS WILL RETURN TO THE NEST TO INSTALL COMPUTER HARDWARE THAT WILL GENERATE A LIVE FEED OF ANY OSPREY NESTING ACTIVITY AS IT HAPPENS.

tions. As natural nest sites have disappeared due to tree removal and shoreline development, specially constructed nest platforms and other structures such as channel markers and utility poles have become vital to the Osprey's recovery. ■

Coming Soon: Live Feed

Thanks to the owner of a local marina who provided access to his wireless internet network, MSEC students will soon be installing a real time web-cam at the osprey nests. When the Ospreys return in the spring, the web-cam will capture any nesting activity. Special thanks to Jay Lesynski of Merri-Mar Yacht Basin and to Captain John Holtgreffe of the fishing boat "Victoria Rose," who shuttled photographer Marilyn Humphries out to the nest to take photos.

MSEC Alternative Vocational Programs

Merrimack Alternative Vocational High School programs partner with various small businesses in the Merrimack Valley and other communities to expose our students to different workplaces that are interest specific. Currently, our students' support services team members include principals, educators, transitional instructors, social workers, speech language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists. In addition, the Merrimack Alternative Vocational programs support students in their vocational training by utilizing resources such as our in-school shops. Our programs specialize in assisting students to develop transitional skills to prepare them for their future. Our MSEC in-house businesses include a small engine repair shop, fine furniture making and wood shop, introduction to landscaping, car detailing shop, and culinary arts and catering. Students develop trade skills and independent life management skills through vocational training and community-based work experiences.

Our transitional instructors provide students with work experiences to assist them in attaining valuable skills. Our students gain opportunities to work successfully in a trade, and develop relationships with co-workers and customers. Students also attend academic and enrichment classes that align with the Massachusetts common core standards and prepare and support them in earning a high school diploma and college acceptance. Our small class sizes and a variety of teaching methods motivate our students to gain these skills, in and out of the classroom.

Student Profile: Matt Allen

By Bill Bryant,
Principal

Matt arrived at MSEC in 2008 as a junior in high school. At his previous school in Methuen, Matt had passed all of his MCAS testing and was getting by. However, he longed for a more vocational, hands-on school setting. As soon as Matt arrived staff was to recognize that he was extremely motivated to get to work in both the classroom and at his vocational internship repairing small engines. Matt also tried to improve the community as a whole by setting forth a great example for others to emulate. He was seen by many as a leader and students looked up to him in an attempt to duplicate his work ethic and obtain his knowledge.

When he faced times in his life that were too hard for him to get through it alone, Matt would reach out to MSEC staff and just talk. More often than not, just talking gave him validation of his feelings and thoughts as well as a better understanding of how to approach a situation. Knowing that support was around him got him through these difficult times.

Matt's main area of excellence has always been his desire to work. In addition to his vocational work he had a job at CVS, where he continues to work at least one day a week. Being out of the school building continued to let Matt see that he was capable of accomplishing much



FORMER MSEC STUDENT MATT ALLEN. AFTER GRADUATING FROM THE ALTERNATIVE VOCATIONAL PROGRAM, MATT ATTENDED THE UNIVERSAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE AND NOW WORKS AS AN ENGINE MECHANIC AT PENSKE AUTOMOTIVE.

more than he ever thought. He was able to see that he was able enough to deal with the issues he incurred at home, in school and in the "real world" with fewer supports than he'd ever thought. Nonetheless if anything became too tough, Matt knew he had people who were there if he needed them.

Matt also began to see that his goal of attending a post-secondary school was not only obtainable but quite viable. Matt had determined through his own research as well as a visit to Universal Technical Institute (UTI) that he was extremely interested in their Automotive & Diesel Mechanic Certification. Matt's parents, MSEC and UTI's Max Steiner kept Matt informed about the schools requirements and what was needed to apply.

Continued on next page

Building Skills, Independence

MSEC Student Profile

Continued from previous page

Matt got everything together, sent his application in and was accepted. He then did what most high school seniors do toward the end of their last school year—he began to apply for scholarships. He worked closely with his parents to develop essays that were required in order to get scholarships granted by his town and other agencies. Matt succeeded, and gained some much needed financial support to help pay for his dream. After he gained admission to UTI, Matt began to wear their hats and shirts with a sense of pride that showed in a smile that stretched from ear to ear.

Even though Matt was at a school where a vast majority of the work and tests were completed through hands-on demonstrations there were still some struggles. Completing written exams and staying focused didn't come easily. But Matt still had his supportive family at MSEC, ready to listen. Some words of encouragement and a reminder to take advantage of his IEP accommodations helped Matt. UTI gave him some extra time to complete his work, and soon after Matt was flying through his school work and on track to graduate. Not long after he graduated from UTI as a Certified Diesel Tech, Matt found employment at Penske Trucks where he works today, repairing 18 wheelers.

Matt still stops by MSEC every month on his day off, to check in and tell us how he is doing. He says that MSEC has always been there for him and to help him prepare for the real world.

MSEC congratulates Matt Allen for his hard work and success. You are an inspiration! ■



MSEC VOCATIONAL STUDENT SIERRA ORTIZ LEARNS WOOD-WORKING SKILLS WITH THE HELP OF PRINCIPAL BILL BRYANT AND INDUSTRIAL ARTS TEACHER LYNNE CASTILLI.

Letter of Appreciation

Nothing makes us prouder than when our students succeed outside of the classroom, working independently and brightening the lives of everyone they encounter. We recently received the following letter of appreciation from the Chelmsford High School Athletic Department, for the work of MSEC student Ryan Poisson.

Ryan has worked with Chelmsford High Athletic Department since 2009. Everyone loves to see Ryan come through the lobby doors each afternoon. He helps us out in so many ways, it is hard to name them all. As the athletic department assistant, Ryan makes sure all the teams have everything they need to play or practice, he sets up the fields, checks in with the officials, opens the stadium and press box, and more. Everyone knows Ryan is here when they see the golf cart speeding across the field. The students know that Ryan is there to help, and when they see him they always greet him with "Hi RyGuy!" The best part is that Ryan comes here everyday with the biggest smile on his face, and he immediately brightens the mood of everyone he sees. ■

MSEC Programs

Elementary

- Early Childhood Center
- Programs for Students with Pervasive Development Disorder
- The Intensive Special Needs Program
- After-School Social Skills Development Program
- In-district Classrooms

Middle School

- Merrimack Transitional Middle School
- Merrimack Middle School Extension Program
- Supported Center for Occupational Awareness and Placement (SCOAP)
- Programs for Students with Pervasive Development Disorder

High School

- The Merrimack Transitional/Vocational High School
- School-to-Work Program
- Center for Occupational Awareness and Placement (COAP)
- Supported Center for Occupational Awareness and Placement (SCOAP)
- Programs for Students with Pervasive Development Disorder
- High School Drop-out Prevention Programs

Adult

- Today-and-Tomorrow – Adult Day Work Program (in collaboration with the Department of Developmental Services)
- Transitional Job Placement Services (in collaboration with the Mass Rehabilitation Commission)

Other

- The Merrimack School 45-Day Assessment Program
- Complete Vocational Assessment Battery (McCarron Dial Systems)
- Partners in Advancing Children's Education – Home/School Program (PACE)
- Merrimack Assessment of Social, Transitional & Employment Readiness Skills (M.A.S.T.E.R.S Assessment)
- On-site Assessment and Support Program

MSEC Leadership Team

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WE ARE: INDEPENDENT
MSEC student **Brandon McHugh**
and his grandmother **Lucille**. An
MSEC student for the past 10 years,
Brandon is increasingly independent.

MSEC Board

Chair: Mr. Donald Ciampa
Superintendent of the Tyngsbor-
ough Public Schools

Mr. Timothy Piowar
Superintendent of the Billerica
Public Schools

Dr. Frank Tiano
Superintendent of the Chelms-
ford Public Schools

Mr. Steven Stone
Superintendent of the Dracut
Public Schools

Mr. Anthony Bent
Interim Superintendent, Groton-
Dunstable Regional School
District

Dr. Judith Klimkiewicz
Superintendent of the Nashoba
Valley Technical School District

Ms. Joan Landers
Superintendent of the North
Middlesex Regional School Dis-
trict

Dr. John O'Connor
Superintendent of the Tewksbury
Public Schools

Mr. Everett (Bill) Olsen
Superintendent of the Westford
Public Schools

Mass, Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education Repre-
sentative—to be announced.

Special Thanks To:

- Marilyn Humphries**, photography
- Copley Business Service**, printing
- Little House Communications**, newsletter design and production