

'Summer slide' in the SPOTLIGHT

Ever heard of the academic "summer slide" that many low income kids experience when the school year is over? It is often a predictor of truancy, high school drop-out rates, eventual unemployment and worse. For the 86 kids enrolled at Horizons at Radcliffe Creek School this summer, it is a very real enemy.

"Over the summer, disadvantaged children tread water at best or even fall behind," says Bob Parks, Horizons' executive director. "They spend the summer watching TV, playing videos or wandering the streets and suffer an achievement gap that's hard to recover from. Better off kids are building their skills during the summer by going to the library, visiting museums, attending camp. Without intervention, our county's low income children will continue to fall behind."

Since 1995, the Horizons summer learning program has served hundreds of Kent County children at or below the poverty level as part of a growing national initiative to reduce the summer slide.

The six-week-long program headquartered at Radcliffe Creek School in Chestertown is currently serving kids from kindergarten through seventh grade. The idea is that they come back year after year, building on what they've learned. "It's a program, not a camp," observes Jose Oromi, chief program officer for Horizons National, which serves 32 affiliates in 14 states. "It's not a singular thing. It's much more than that." Next year, the local Horizons program, one of the oldest in the country, hopes to add eighth graders and, at some point, expand into high school.



Jacqueline Armstrong

Fourth graders Tymika Wallace, left and Cecilia Llamas on the opening day of Horizons in June.

A hands-on approach

Horizons has a unique hands-on approach to learning, according to Oromi. The vast majority of programs, for example, don't use textbooks but activities to promote project-based, inquiry-based learning. Music, art, science, reading and swim lessons are all pillars of a curriculum that is tailor-made for each child.

"We work with the schools and do a pre-assessment of each child so, coming in, we understand the needs of each student. We work in small groups. It's a five-to-one student to staff ratio," he adds. "The challenge is coming up with strategies to use in these small groups that spark questions and expose these children to new things. It's all about doing. You can read about something but you don't get it until you do it."

There's a lot of science behind the program. Studies have shown that low income kids start school already behind their middle

Continued on page 2

Horizons Alums

Many local Horizons graduates have gone on to think big – pursuing their goals, passions and dreams. Meet three of those graduates.

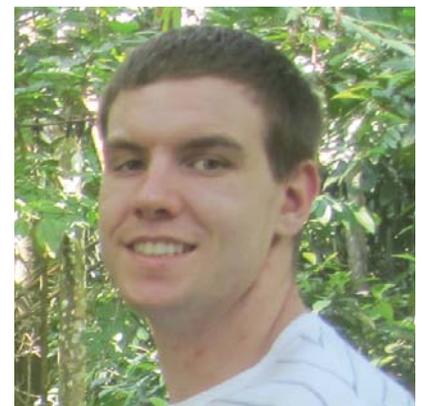
Steven McGuire

As a child, Steven describes himself as "the kid that was 'yes Ma'am' this and 'yes Sir' that" – a hardworking boy who enjoyed math and science, and exhibited early on a passion for philanthropy.

That little boy is still evident in the man Steven has become. At 24, Steven, a member of Horizons' first graduating class, has a degree in computer science from McDaniel College in Westminster, Md. His immediate career goal: a software engineering job. During college he helped raise puppies for a nonprofit that trains dogs for people with disabilities. It wasn't the first time Steven demonstrated community goodwill. In elementary and middle school, he spent hours after school volunteering at the Sultana shipyard.

"I want to help other people if I can – better to do something good with my life than something destructive. Growing up, my mom didn't have much money. Anything I have I

Continued on page 3



Horizons Heroes

Horizons at Radcliffe Creek School wishes to recognize those HORIZONS HEROES who have supported our program with annual donations of \$1,000 or more.

Our thanks go to:

David A. Bramble
Foundation

The Campbell
Foundation

Chesapeake
Physical Therapy

John and Peggy Christie

Mr. and Mrs.
Harry Duffey III

Mickey and Margie Elsberg

Terence T. Finn
and Joyce M. Purcell

Greg and Jamie Fleetwood

Jim and Erin Gillespie

Richard and LT Goodall

Bob and Joy Grace

Ed Hatcher
and Angie Cannon

Jane E. Hukill

Nina Rodale Houghton

Bill and Kay MacIntosh

Chris and Ellen McClary

Carole and Randy
McMenamin

Marilyn and Bob Parks

Kahle and Ally Perez

Barbara and Bert Rein

Ellen Uzelac and Gil Watson

Veverka Family
Foundation

Anonymous (1)

Horizons Appoints New Board Members

Horizons at Radcliffe Creek School has named four new members to its Board of Directors.

“These four people represent a wealth of nonprofit experience as well as a passion for education. They really deepen the bench,” says Kay MacIntosh, president of the Horizons board. “We are delighted that they have joined us in our mission to provide academic and cultural enrichment to underprivileged Kent County children.”

The board members are:

- Wendy Coslett, a board member and volunteer coordinator of the Kent Association of Riding Therapy, or KART. She has lived in Kent County for over 30 years.
- Erin Gillespie, who has served on a variety of Kent County boards and committees including the Chester River Hospital Auxiliary, Kent County Food Pantry and American Cancer Society.
- Ed Hatcher, president of the Hatcher Group, a communications and public affairs firm that works with foundations and nonprofits.
- Deborah Julian, a former public school educator and founder of Corsica Consulting, which serves educational nonprofits.

Continued from page 1

class peers. “Maybe it’s because they weren’t read to as much, or talked to as babies,” says Oromi. “The good news is that during the school year, kids tend to learn at the same rate. The trouble is the concept of learning for our kids begins and ends in the school year. Without intervention, losses in the summer continue to compound. By the time a child reaches fifth grade, they can be two to three years behind their peers. A psychology of failure plays in and contributes to a child making poor decisions in life. But with a nurturing, engaging and challenging environment, the changes can be incredible.”



Jacqueline Armstrong

Sydney Blake, below and Makayla Neal, above, arrive at Horizons.

When this summer’s Horizons students jumped excitedly off the school buses at Radcliffe Creek School on the program’s opening day in mid-June, they represented what Parks calls “our hope.” They are pulled from all of the elementary schools in Kent County as well as the middle school.

Some come from loving but financially distressed homes. Others are part of dysfunctional families full of stress, uncertainty and unstable relationships. One thing they do have in common: Each Horizons student qualifies for the federal free and reduced meals program and has been identified by teachers or guidance counselors as someone who shows potential. Their families also pay a \$35 registration fee as an accountability measure.

Test Results

At the end of each summer, Horizons retests students for reading and math. The most recent results indicate that some students held grade level and that most actually increased achievement by two to three months in both subjects.

Oromi, the former executive director of a Horizons program in Connecticut, said that one of his favorite moments was on a last day when kids are typically absorbing everything they’ve just experienced and realizing that it will be another 10 months before they can do it again.

“It’s so emotional. There was a boy in his eighth grade year, his final year, sitting outside the bus. He wouldn’t get on,” says Oromi. “I went over and asked him what was wrong. He told me ‘I just can’t believe I did this. I’ve never finished something.’ It changed his life.” That boy will enter college in the fall.

—Ellen Uzelac

Continued from page 1

basically earned,” says Steven, currently a culinary supervisor and dining room host at the Heron Point retirement community in Chestertown. “I’ve learned you have to work hard for what you deserve.”

When he first attended Horizons as a third grader, Steven thought: “Okay, nice. It’s school but more fun.” He remembers playing math games on a computer and a science project that involved making a parachute for an egg. Looking back, he says he values Horizons for teaching him the importance of responsibility. He also says it helped him retain what he had learned in school – a lesson that is not lost on him today.

Steven graduated from McDaniel in 2012 and he hopes to land a career job that will provide “a comfortable life” and “a place of my own.” Meanwhile, in recognition of the year-long gap since he got his degree, Steven studies – a lot. “I write a lot of programming,” he says. “I don’t want to forget what I learned in college.”

Dustin Crouch

When he was in third grade, Dustin could barely read. Language skills eluded him. Horizons, he says, changed all that.

“I had a big time problem with language and reading and talking. I couldn’t pronounce certain letters. With Horizons, they tutored me and helped me pronounce correctly,” says Dustin, 18. “Without that, I’d still be reading at a sixth grade level.”

Dustin says he liked Horizons because it was so hands on.

“It wasn’t just a math lesson it was math combined with agriculture. We would count seeds, plant seeds, measure different depths in the soil. It was a completely different way of looking at things,” he recalls. “It made learning fun.”

His exposure to the guitar at Horizons also spiked a keen interest in music. Today, Dustin plays seven instruments and for a time performed with the Kent County Community Marching Band. His memory of his last day at Horizons? “Only that I wanted to stay longer.”

Dustin, who graduated from Kent County High School in May, will join the U.S. Navy in August – following a family military tradition that includes his father, an aunt, uncle and cousins. “I’ve always known I had the potential to learn and since fifth grade, I wanted to join the Navy,” he says. “I’m really excited about it.”

After two months of basic training, Dustin will serve in the medical corps. He plans on staying in the service for his “full 20.” Along the way, he hopes to get a college degree and become a commissioned officer.



Jiordan Carter

The first thing Jiordan noticed about the Horizons program was the comfort level she felt with the other kids.

“All the kids were kind of in the same circumstances as you. It’s not like in school where sometimes people are divided and you have these groups and cliques,” says Jiordan, who attended the program for six summers, beginning in first grade. “People were nice, friendly and respected one another. I always enjoyed it and always looked forward to it.”

She also knew that, one day, she wanted to work for Horizons.

Jiordan, 15, a rising junior at Kent County High School, has interned with the program the past two summers. This year, she’s serving as a teacher’s assistant to a sixth grade instructor.

“I wanted to come back because I enjoyed it so much when I went,” says Jiordan, whose mother Jana Carter sits on Horizons’ board of directors. “I think it helps that I was in the program. I understand some of the issues kids might be going through. Some of the kids tend to be, I guess, kind of insecure. This helps build up confidence.”

Jiordan is enrolled in advanced placement classes at the high school, where she plays lacrosse and field hockey. “I like contact sports, the team atmosphere,” notes Jiordan. “I like working together and winning and being part of something. You put in an effort as a team all together and you make a difference.”

At the moment, Jiordan has her sights set on what’s ahead: college.

“I’ll never forget Horizons,” she adds. “It helped me interact with people, set goals for myself and figure out what you need to do to make your goals happen. Right now my goals are real clear: to get all my schoolwork done, maintain my place on Honor Roll and prepare myself for college.”



Jaqueline Armstrong

Note: Look for profiles of other Horizons alums in the next issue of Horizons Today.

Horizons partners with Washington College

Horizons middle schoolers are attending classes this summer on the Washington College campus, a programming first.

“This is entirely new,” says Academic Director Connie Schroth. “It takes us to another level.”

The move reflects an interest by the Horizons National organization in partnering with local colleges and universities. Just as important, Schroth says the partnership with the college is providing a learning environment that makes the oldest children in the program feel distinct from “the little kids.”

When sixth graders were reintroduced into the Horizons curriculum last summer, she adds, they weren’t all that happy with the amount of time they had to spend with those of elementary school age.

As Schroth puts it: “We needed to revamp. Last year was not a particular success because we were hard pressed to find things that would make them feel separate, make it special and also accommodate their social and emotional needs. This gives them an opportunity to be out in the community, to experience a college situation.”

About 20 fifth-, sixth- and seventh-graders are spending two afternoons a week researching a special project at the newly refurbished Miller Library, the John S. Toll Science Center and Goldstein Hall, which houses Washington College’s writing center and language lab. Working with them are three Horizons teachers, including a recent Washington College graduate, and three assistants.

The project involves the exploration of an energy resource, which is the state’s current science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM, theme. “We try to align our curriculum with what Maryland state schools are doing,” Schroth says. “That’s where the children come from and it’s where they’re going back to in September.”

In small groups, students will create presentations for a science fair – and in the process learn about the topic, refine their group work skills, and test out new talents like researching, graphing and illustrating.

During the rest of the week, the middle schoolers will participate in programming at Radcliffe Creek School and take Red Cross-certified swim lessons at the Kent County pool in Worton.

“This will keep them coming back,” says Schroth. Horizons plans to add an eighth grade next year.

