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New PTA Helping Teachers Find Resources, Providing Help In Classroom



(From left) Fifth graders Carly Gracey, RayLee Downing and Reagan Cool test a new rocket launcher as part of a science and math enrichment program at APS. The new PTA organization helped fifth grade teacher Mr. Neth find the resources to purchase the rocket launchers. (Kevin Neth photo)

Arnold fifth graders are building their own straw rockets and testing them on a Straw Rocket Launcher. Just like early rocket pioneer Robert Goddard, they can conduct scientific experiments by carrying the trajectory angle and launch energy. By taking part in this fun activity, students grasp a variety of physics concepts including force and motion, mass, thrust and center of gravity, while making predictions and taking measurements.

Fifth grade teacher Kevin Neth says he is getting a lot of educational mileage out of this new resource, made possible by the newly-formed Arnold Parent Teachers Association.

"Fifth grade students are expected to perform a plethora of science based investigation skills. It includes, but is not limited to, identifying factors that have the potential to impact an investigation, use equipment correctly and accurately, make relevant observations and measurements, collect and organize data, develop reasonable explanations based on collected data and share results with peers," said Mr. Neth. "This was the first activity that came to mind that I could use to touch on all of these points, while still including other standards, including forces, motion, angles and measurement. What this equipment has allowed my students to do is put their learning into action. We all know there is a big difference between hearing about how to set good corner fence posts and actually getting the jobs done. Likewise, I wanted my students to take their learning and put it into action. In addition, rockets are

just plain cool. I have a feeling we will be seeing more of them before the year is over."

PTA organizer Lana Cool, who helped Mr. Neth find financial resources for the rocket launchers through the Sandhills Open Road Challenge, said she was contacted by Principal Dawn Lewis last year about organizing a PTA to encourage parent involvement in the school.

"(Dawn's) primary goal for the PTA is to provide teachers and parents an organized avenue to work together," said Lana. "Research has shown that when parents are involved, good things happen. Students perform better, parents are more engaged and have a better understanding of classroom processes and curriculum, and educators experience greater respect and improved communication from involved families."

PTA has several active, hard-working members from each class, K-12. Lana said Jessica Tickle, Katie Coleman, Heather Furne, Holly Hornung Remund, Lori Stutzman and Cindy Tullis have all stepped into strong PTA leadership roles. The parents meet the first Wednesday of each month at 5:30 p.m., at the school, and one of the organization's goals for the new year will be to establish sub-committees and elect officers.

The PTA's first priority is to show support, encouragement and appreciation to the teachers. PTA launched last spring to celebrate National Teacher Appreciation Week in May. Parents, students, administration, church members, community members and local businesses

came together to show appreciation with a week-long blitz of gifts, notes and food. Lana said it was a joy to be a part of something so positive and the feedback from the teachers was incredible.

In August, Mrs. Lewis scheduled a time for the PTA to meet with the primary and secondary teachers to discuss opportunities for parents to provide support. Each teacher provided input and the result was a long and diverse list of needs.

"Each teacher has unique projects and opportunities," said Lana. "This was exciting, because our parents have a diverse set of talents and skills to offer. We matched Classroom Captains with teacher based unique skill interests. For example, Melody Coleman's musical gifts made her a natural match with music instructor Ms. Bailey."

Lana said what they've discovered is that the teachers love to do extra projects and activities, but aren't sure who and how to ask for help. Parents enjoy being involved, but don't know how to jump in. Classroom Captains solve this conundrum. Captains are assigned to each primary teacher and several secondary teachers. The Classroom Captain will be the go-to volunteer coordinator for that particular teacher. He/she will communicate regularly with the teacher to identify needs and will round up help from other parents.

Volunteer needs will vary by classroom. Some examples might be planning holiday parties, preparing classroom materials, acting as a small group volunteer or tutor, assisting

with AR, bulletin board helper and helping with special events such as field trips, the book fair, Read Across America, One-Acts and music programs. During the fall's parent-teacher conferences, each captain met with their assigned teacher to identify specific needs and requests.

The PTA is just getting started, but the list of how members are helping teachers is growing long. One time-consuming project was when Lana stepped in to help provide content for the new APS website.

"The school website is an important project. It's our face to the world," said Lana. "Dawn Lewis, Nicole Badgley and Julie Mohr were working hard to ensure a high level of quality control for the site, but it's a huge project: wide and deep. I've worked with Kristi Dvorak on a variety of marketing projects in the past with some web and copy writing experience, so it made sense to jump in and help with a few details. I appreciate the time and care they all took to make sure APS has a fantastic site. It was worth the wait."

Members have also organized parents and grandparents to be special guest readers each week in second grade; typed a year's worth of weekly assignments for a high school English class; organized meals for the choral clinic for eight schools at the Arnold Community Center; organized and hosted holiday parties for elementary classes; designed seasonal bulletin boards; planned incentive parties for junior high students; assisted with costuming for the One-Act plays; worked shifts during the Book Fair; and finally provided supplies and resources for Mr. Neth's science and math enrichment projects.

"I was thrilled to find out that the PTA found funding through the Sandhills Open Road Challenge for the purchase of equipment used for this science and math investigation," said Mr. Neth. "I had a need, made the request to my PTA parent captain, and like magic, equipment appeared. As a new staff member, I'm still in awe of the support that our school receives, things like this just don't happen in other districts."

Principal Lewis said she is grateful that the PTA has become such an organized presence at APS.

"On a regular basis, I observe parents working together with teachers, accomplishing more than we could on our own," said Mrs. Lewis. "When I first approached Lana Cool with this idea, I honestly had no idea how great it would become, and how quickly we would feel the impact. The creative approach our parents have taken to make sure this is an effective collaboration has been more than impressive. Every teacher feels comfortable, and every parent has the opportunity to help make a difference for our students!"

Christmas Around Town is Saturday

The annual Christmas Around Town is scheduled for this Saturday, December 6. The day includes several fun events.

A craft show will be held at the community center from 1:00 to 7:00 p.m. Kids can enjoy a free showing of the movie "Frozen" at the Rialto at 3:00 p.m., with free child care provided by the National Honor Society and the National Junior Honor Society during the movie. Santa's visit will be held from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m., at the community center, where children will receive treat bags. Arnold Chamber's Annual Appreciation Soup Supper will be served from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m., at the community center, and is free to the public.

Local businesses will be offering extended hours, specials and drawings throughout the day. See last week's *Sentinel* for what individual businesses are planning for the day.

The Chamber Bucks shop-at-home promotion has started. Customers can enter at participating businesses with each purchase of \$10.00 or more. Tickets may be deposited under the Christmas tree at Pinnacle Bank. Drawing dates are December 5, 12, 19 and 26.

PTA Planning School Giving Tree

Have a hard time figuring out what to buy for your child's teacher? Let us help you this year. The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) will be doing a School Giving Tree for this Christmas. We welcome parents and community members to participate in this new project.

The Giving Tree project is to help teachers get supplies for their classroom. We have asked teachers to give us a list of wishes they would like for their classroom and we will put each wish on a tag and place the tag on the Christmas Tree. We invite parents and community members to grab a tag and look at the wish. If you can grant the wish than take the tag with you. Bring back the wrapped wish and tag to the office at the school by the deadline.

The Giving Tree will be located at 110 W. Arnold Ave (old Cutting Crew building) during Christmas Around Town (Saturday, December 6) and then placed at the front entry at the school. The deadline will be Thursday, December 18.

Caroling Planned at Community Center

Those who enjoy singing are invited to join in caroling at the community center during Christmas Around Town. The group will start singing at 2:00 p.m.



Parents, like Lana Cool (shown above), are becoming more involved in helping with needs at the school through their involvement with the new PTA organization.

Nebraska Land and Sky Features Breathtaking Aerial Views of State

LINCOLN, Neb. – Nebraska's diverse landscapes and attractions, captured on high-definition video by air, will be featured in the NET Television special "NEBRASKA Land & Sky." The 60-minute program, set to be rebroadcast Wednesday, December 3, at 8:00 p.m. and repeat at midnight CT on NET1, includes sweeping aerial views of Nebraska. Segments also showcase interviews and compelling events from around the state.

"Everyone watching gets a window seat in a helicopter and an amazing view of this place we call home," said NET Executive Producer Joe Turco. "I've traveled the state many times and have never seen anything quite like this."

From high above the land and down on-the-ground, the docu-

mentary traces Nebraska's history and legacy. Featured stops include Willa Cather's childhood home in Red Cloud, Nebraska's majestic and rugged landscapes around Wildcat Hills in the Panhandle and the vibrant cityscapes of eastern Nebraska. Homage is given to Nebraska's ranchers and farmers, the state's culture, recreation and exciting moments in Nebraska sports history.

A British aerial videography team, Skyworks, joined the NET crew on their statewide journey to film and archive Nebraska's vast landscapes and hidden places from above. Skyworks specializes in top-end aerial filming, creating footage and shows for broadcasters all over the world, including National Geographic, PBS and the BBC.

"You don't have to go very far before the landscape completely changes," said Richard Mervyn, Skyworks' director of photography. "The Sandhills were completely riveting. I likened it to waves; I mean, it just looks like a choppy sea of green. I haven't seen anything like that before. Scotts Bluff (National) Monument was fascinating. Nebraska is more varied than I thought. It looked brilliant."

"NEBRASKA Land & Sky," funded in part by the Nebraska Tourism Commission and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, is a production of NET Television. NET1 is part of NET Television, a service of NET. For a complete television program schedule, visit NET's website (netNebraska.org/television).