

# the Stand

## south side news

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Syracuse, NY

WINTER 2012-13 Issue 23 FREE

### POWER OF TEACHING

Students learn math, technology, science from a driven teacher

Friendly Five on the move  
Catch up with bands that travel and perform

happy 50th

Corcoran High School celebrates anniversary of its groundbreaking

Early love of writing  
Workshops help youth develop their voice in written expression

BULLY BUSTING WITH KARATE



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PHOTOGRAPHERS**STUDENTS AT THE  
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**SPECIAL THANKS  
THIS MONTH**CATERINA D'AGOSTINO, ELINA  
BERZINS, JIM REITH, NICHOLAS  
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KOLBRENNER, KATHY SIMS,  
CHERYL MOLESKY**CONTACT US**SOUTH SIDE NEWSPAPER PROJECT  
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■ Cover photography of Gwendolyn Maturo-Grasso by Maya Gao Qian

**CALENDAR | DECEMBER / JANUARY**

**What:** "The Adventures of Rudolph"  
**When:** 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 8  
**Where:** Mulroy Civic Center Theaters, 411 Montgomery St.  
**More Details:** A holiday tradition in Central New York, "The Adventures of Rudolph" is a narrated ballet for the whole family presented by the Cultural Resources Council, directed by Deborah Boughton and performed by students from Dance Centre North  
**Cost:** \$15  
**More Info.:** For tickets visit [ticketmaster.com](http://ticketmaster.com), call or visit The Oncenter Box Office at (315) 435-2121 and located at 760 S. State St. (inside the State Street Entrance of The Oncenter War Memorial Arena) or call Ticketmaster at 1-800-745-3000

**What:** The Molly Project: Focusing on Women & their Families  
**When:** Exhibit ongoing from Jan. 4 through Feb. 8, 2013  
**Where:** Red House Arts Center, 201 S. West St.  
**More Details:** This project coordinates free, on-location photography sessions for women whose lives are being redefined by cancer or other terminal diseases. The purpose is to capture images of their everyday moments with loved ones  
**Cost:** Free admission  
**More Info.:** Call (315) 425-0405 or visit [theredhouse.org](http://theredhouse.org)

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**UPCOMING AD DEADLINES**

Issue	Due Date
February	Jan. 23
March	Feb. 20
April	March 27
Summer	April 24

The holiday season is well under way, which means time with family, New Year's resolutions and massive amounts of food. With so much happening around this time, we will not offer a workshop in January, but several are in the works for 2013.

Check online for updates and feel free to contact us with suggestions. We'll be partnering with the Syracuse Poster Project again to offer a session on poetry and haiku. In 2013, we hope to train even more aspiring journalists — youth from local high schools and South Side residents. Our workshops cover journalism writing, photography, video and more. If you've ever thought about contributing to The Stand, our workshops are the perfect way to start getting involved.

Or, instead of taking on the role of reporter, there are other ways to support The South Side Newspaper Project. We are always looking for story ideas and are open to suggestions. We also welcome nominations for our South Side Achiever profile, where we spotlight someone who is doing good work in the community. If you know of someone going above and beyond and who is deserving of recognition, call us and let us know. Another regular feature is Strolling the South Side, which tells the story behind local places you potentially could overlook.

And as a nonprofit, The Stand is always working to recruit new advertisers. We have opportunities to run ads in our print issues. Local businesses or groups looking to promote an upcoming event also can run ads online and even in our monthly eNewsletter. Our rates are reasonable — beginning at just \$25 for a business card-size ad up to \$350 for a full-page, full-color ad. All ad sales cover our printing costs.

For now, turn the page and enjoy all of the local stories in this winter issue. And consider this idea as your New Year's resolution: Take a stand and support your local paper — by volunteering, providing feedback or supporting it with advertising.

Ashley Kang



## UPCOMING EVENT

Dec. 3

### 15th annual South Side Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

**When:** 5:45 p.m.  
Monday, Dec. 3

**Where:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**More Details:** The event is being held inside the library due to construction outside where the event is typically held. The evening's emcee is Dr. Rick Wright, and local Community Service Awards will be presented.



> Jalen and Mekhi Tudor, 10, and their parents, Melissa and Corey, watch as their bridge is tested at the Build 'em and Bust 'em competition. | Jason Greene, Staff Photo

## BUILDING A FUTURE

On the morning of Nov. 10 in the Milton J. Rubenstein Museum of Science and Technology, more than 600 students from across Central New York in fourth through 12th grades competed in this year's Build 'em and Bust 'em competition, where students design mini bridges. Schools from the South Side, including Danforth Magnet Elementary, located at 309 W. Brighton Ave., and Corcoran High School, at 919 Glenwood Ave., took part in this competition.

Participants were divided into three categories according to their grades. During the competition, every bridge is placed on a platform where increasing force is applied by a square pad until it breaks and reaches its maximum load. All of the participants vie for 18 awards, including bridge efficiency, Best Bridge Design and Best Team Name.



Read a full story about this event by going online to [mysouthsidestand.com](http://mysouthsidestand.com)

## LOCAL ACHIEVERS

The South Side Achiever feature highlights an accomplished person in the community.

### LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL STEM CLUB ACHIEVEMENTS

#### Build 'em Bust 'em:

**2012** 4th Place & Best Team name: "Bacon Galaxy Engineers"  
**2011** Best Design

#### Cardboard Boat

##### Regatta:

**2012** Fastest Boat  
**2011** Most Spirited Team

#### Nationals:

**2009** Best Poster Design  
 SECME Nationals

#### Soapbox Derby:

**2012** 2nd Place  
**2011** 3rd Place

#### SECME Mousetrap Car

##### Syracuse Regionals:

1st Place in Regionals  
 2002-12 (except 2007)

#### VEX Robotics:

**2012** (Spring) Energy Award  
**2012** Best Team Award

# Gwendolyn Maturo-Grasso



*Teaches students lessons for school and for life*

By | Maya Gao Qian  
 Staff reporter

For one middle-school teacher, helping students is more than a job

One recent day at 7 a.m., a classroom inside Lincoln Middle School library is already crowded with students from the STEM club. Gwendolyn Maturo-Grasso, wearing a black brace that resembles a fingerless glove, asks the students to think about how to distribute weight to make a bridge stronger.

Maturo-Grasso, 51, has been teaching English and science at Lincoln Middle School since 1986. She is the founder of the school's STEM club. About half the club members are from the South Side of Syracuse, she said about STEM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

In her role as the club's mentor, Maturo-Grasso cultivates passions for science and technology in a school where an estimated 80 to 90 percent of the students come from families that are receiving public assistance, according to the New York State School Report Card in 2010-2011.

"She has a very strong passion for students, making sure that they are able to get ahead, to function with their highest ability," said Suzanne Detore, a high school science teacher who has taught many of Maturo-Grasso's former students. Detore helps Maturo-Grasso to organize STEM club activities.

Trained as an English teacher, Maturo-Grasso attended a program in 1999 that she says broadened her vision. "It taught me the power of using technology," Maturo-Grasso said of the Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering program.

Maturo-Grasso started creating science activities and lectures for students. She connected schools with technology companies and founded STEM at Lincoln Middle School in 1999. In recent years, the STEM club has competed in the Syracuse Soap Box Derby, Salt City Technical Robotics Competition, and Build 'em and Bust 'em bridge building competition.

Now Maturo-Grasso is pursuing a doctorate degree



> Gwendolyn Maturo-Grasso has been a teacher for 26 years and head of Lincoln Middle School's STEM Outreach since the program's founding in 1999. | Provided Photo

in instructional design, development and evaluation at Syracuse University. She says that the model she wants to set for her students is constant learning.

Passion and knowledge, however, are not enough in a time when many schools, including Lincoln Middle, are besieged by financial difficulties. Detore recalled one such struggle in 2011 when Maturo-Grasso tried to organize a VEX Robotics Competition. She had to go through every logistical detail, including where to seek funding and where to hold the event. Much of the preparations meant spending several hundred dollars out of pocket and sacrificing time outside of her typical work hours.

"She will do anything, make any sacrifices for any of those kids. She has gone beyond teaching," said retired teacher Eduardo Rodriguez, who has worked with Maturo-Grasso and the STEM club for almost a decade. "The way she nurtures them, every student became a family."

She has been told many times by her family and colleagues that it is impossible to save everyone, but she is unable to accept the possible consequences of inaction.

Several weeks ago, a father lost his temper in the teachers' offices, bursting out abusive words and throwing his son's stuff everywhere. The first thing that came to Maturo-Grasso's mind was "the boy can't go home with a father like this." She contacted child protective services and ensured someone from the extended family

## NOMINATE SOMEONE

Do you know a South Side Achiever? Nominate that person by contacting Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054

could be there for the boy after school. Later, the school discovered the father had psychotic disorders and was unable to control his emotions.

“What if I said I couldn’t save them all?” Maturo-Grasso asked rhetorically. “I never had that attitude, never.”

Maturo-Grasso believes the widely accepted “rigor-relevance-relationship” education theory, which encourages repeating good behaviors first and then building connections, should be reversed.

A colleague explains Maturo-Grasso’s teaching philosophy. Establishing mutual respect and relationships, according to Heather Jenkins, an English teacher in the school, is always Maturo-Grasso’s priority.

“She taught me how to create a strong bond between the students,” Jenkins said. “First you have to create a relationship and then you can become a teacher.”

In her English class, Maturo-Grasso chooses books that students can relate to, such as Gary Paulsen’s “Hatchet,” a story about how a 13-year-old boy from a broken family survived in the wilderness after a plane crash.

“Those kids are living in rough neighborhoods, and they are all about survival. They don’t think about the future,” she said. “I am not just teaching them science and literature, I am trying to teach them to be responsible, professional, to be the best they can be.”

Maturo-Grasso finds a strong personal connection

with her students. She grew up in subsidized housing, sharing a small bedroom with three sisters. But she had an extraordinarily strong mother who told her never to be ruptured by any ills or difficulties, to always “put on a smile” for a new day. She found the advice helpful, especially when she later became a single mother with endless bills to pay. She said no matter how frustrated she felt, giving up was never an option. When many of her students became the first in their families to choose a college path, this belief was deepened.

People wonder why Maturo-Grasso always wears a black brace on her arm.

Seven years ago, while trying to stop a fight in the hall, she smashed her hand on a locker door. The tendon and ligaments were seriously injured, making it hard to even lift her thumb. After three surgeries, she still cannot open a doorknob with her right hand. And now she has to wear that protective brace every day.

But there are too many things crammed in her head this early morning to think about her physical pain. She talked about buying a weekly pillbox for a girl who always forgot to take her medicine; she spoke to a boy with a troubled mother and a father in jail about getting back to the classroom; she tried to persuade an improperly dressed girl to change her mini shorts. And when the bell rang and the class started, she smiled — like her mother taught her — just as she has each day in this school for the past 26 years.

## AWARD-WINNING TEACHER

- “National Teacher of the Year” Southeastern Consortium for Minorities in Engineering, June 2012
- Parents Public School Teacher of the Year, 2010
- Science & Technology Outreach Award, 2006
- Teacher of the Year Partners Education & Business, 2006

## FAVORITE QUOTE

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”

— Attributed to Mahatma Gandhi

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## EXPRESS YOURSELF

Writing Our Lives, a free writing workshop for students in the community, encourages participants to “write for a change.” A series of workshops held yearly discussed a variety of ways to express oneself through composition, including:

- Poetry
- Comics/Illustration
- Action letters
- Digital composing

In addition to the Writing Our Lives conference, there are also smaller writing workshops held throughout the year at Beauchamp Library.

### For events BEAUCHAMP LIBRARY

- [http://www.onlib.org/web/locations\\_hours/branches/beauchamp.htm](http://www.onlib.org/web/locations_hours/branches/beauchamp.htm)
- 2111 S. Salina St.  
Syracuse, NY 13205
- Phone: (315) 435-3395

#### Hours

- Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Tuesday & Thursday: 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- Saturday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Sunday: Closed

# WRITING IT OUT

Workshops help students learn to speak up through letters, poetry



> Students Nahja Mathis, Nottingham freshman, and Finella Morgan, Jamesville-Dewitt senior, discuss their group manifesto with A. Wendy Nastasi during the Writing Our Lives workshop at Nottingham High School. | Ruthnie Angrand, Staff Photo

By | Elizabeth Doyon  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

Writing program encourages young people to take action, express themselves with words

Nearly 100 middle school and high school students turned out on a recent Saturday for a free writing class — the latest effort by Marcelle Haddix, an education professor who has led youth-centered writing programs for the past five years at the Beauchamp Library and the Dunbar Community Center.

The event, called “Writing Our Lives,” took place at Nottingham High School on Nov. 3, a larger version of the free events Haddix will hold for young people during the coming months at Beauchamp.

“Writing is an area of interest for me,” said Haddix, an assistant professor at Syracuse University’s School of Education. “When I moved here five years ago, it was something that my neighborhood folks were talking about — how the kids were not really having the opportunity to engage in effective literacy teaching and learning.”

Haddix started offering small writing workshops at Beauchamp Library, 2111 S. Salina St., and volunteering in the community, which led to creating the conference.

She held the first Writing Our Lives conference in 2009 at the Dunbar Center on South State Street.

“It is successful because kids come, parents come, faculty members and community members who volunteer their time,” Haddix said. This year there were more volunteers than before, including Nottingham High School teachers, and the Nottingham student group Spotighting Justice, which hosted the event.

The event started with a free breakfast of granola bars, fruit and juice at 9:30 a.m. Students were given notebooks and pencils, and they attended two 50-minute writing sessions on varying topics or genres of writing. The program included writing action letters, writing poetry, comics and illustration, and digital composing. The workshops were taught by people who donated their time to be there: SU professors, community members and SU students.

“We want to make sure the students don’t have to pay for things,” said Sally Sayles-Hannon, a volunteer at the event who is also a doctoral student at SU. “And they also get to have those writing materials to take home afterwards to encourage them to continue writing.”

Partnership for Better Education, which assists Syracuse City School District students in graduating and

pursuing higher education, donated notebooks and pencils as well as funded part of lunch and breakfast, Sayles-Hannon said.

Josanique Everson and Anttyesha Crutchfield, eighth-graders at Danforth Middle School, discussed social injustice and the need for change within schools. They attended an action writing workshop where they drafted a letter to the Syracuse City School Board explaining what they needed to improve their education, and how equality was important in order to achieve that.

The conference's theme was free writing and youth writing for change.

"We really wanted to get youths discovering their voice and thinking about how they can change the world," Sayles-Hannon said. "Often in schools, they do not help the students become creative thinkers about how they have a voice, or utilize their writing skills or creativity in that way."

After the sessions, students ate their lunches in the Nottingham cafeteria while Verbal Blend and Underground Poetry Spot, two spoken word groups from SU, performed. The cafeteria buzzed with chatter and, at times, the students offered rounds of applause.

Haddix said it is a misconception that students are not writing. She said students are writing at home and on their own, but they are not getting the opportunity in schools to write the way they would like. "I think it is more structured in school because of various national and state standards and requirements that teachers feel a lot of pressure to follow, and there is only so much time in the day," she said. "And so a lot of the type of writing they are doing this Saturday is the type that they are doing outside of school or in their own time."

Bridget Lawson, a doctoral student at SU who volunteered at the event, said she hoped the conference would give students confidence. "The most

important thing is that students realize that they have a voice, and that what they have to say is important," she said.

Conference volunteers tried to advertise and connect with students more this year by creating Facebook events, using Twitter, and emailing a digital flier designed by Jennifer Russo, director of marketing and events at SU, for free.

*"The most important thing is that students realize that they have a voice."*

— Bridget Lawson

"I hope students get a respect for writing, a love for writing, courage to share their voice, courage to dream, and permission to dream," Russo said. "The idea is that they will look ahead, and higher education is not this pie in the sky, but that it is accessible and attainable. It really bridges the gap between high school and college."

Haddix said these activities need to be sustained for the students' benefit. She intends to hold more free workshops at Beauchamp Library.

"One thing we are looking for in the future is more community involvement to keep this running," she said. "This year we sought out donations greatly and didn't receive them. We really had no luck."

Haddix keeps her focus on the students. "I want them to come away from this seeing themselves as writers, having a positive attitude about who they are, about their writing, about having a voice," Haddix said. "I want them to feel like they are confident in what they have to say and their ability to express it."

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# Sticking Up for Yourself



> John Nelson shows John Sheridan, 8, how to fend off a choking attempt as part of class at the Central New York Karate and Kobudo Schools. | Jim Tuttle, Staff Photo

By | Becca Milliron  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

After-school program teaches karate, other ways to solve conflicts through nonviolence

To help children deal with bullies, a Roman Catholic elementary school has teamed up with a karate school to offer a weekly program for young boys and girls. The Tuesday afternoon program — called “bully-busting” — is hosted by Most Holy Rosary School, at 1031 Bellevue Ave., in collaboration with Central New York Karate and Kobudo Schools. The program takes place during after-school sessions in the school’s gym.

“Our school has a Catholic identity which transfers

into all aspects of our curriculum and extracurriculars,” said Brenda Reichert, the principal. “The program teaches self-discipline and control which benefits our students in and outside of the classroom.”

Marvin Labbate, director of CNY Karate, located at 720 W. Manlius St., East Syracuse, explained the program’s philosophy. “Our mission is to teach students character development and bullying prevention. The program includes more life lessons and verbal prevention than physical technique.”

The four main facets of the program are: character building; prevention and avoidance; verbal resolution; and protection. Labbate and child psychologists developed the program to ensure students learn how to handle bullying.



“Psychologists train here that are black belts, and over the years they have helped me to formulate a concentrated bully-busting program that has an actual curriculum to build character,” Labbate said. “We don’t expect students to just learn through osmosis, but truly **internalize** the lessons. We then have students verbalize them back to us and then practice.”

John Nelson, manager of CNY Karate, teaches the Holy Rosary program and has seen a transformation in students.

“The kids at Holy Rosary were terrific to start off. Very behaved. Very polite. But I can see these children growing into confident young people,” Nelson said.

The class lasts 45 minutes and is structured the same each week. Nelson leads the children through a short warm-up, followed by a discussion of a life lesson and how martial arts can be a part of it. Bully busting is the main focus, and a different technique is taught in each class. Students are dismissed after a fun drill that ties the lesson together.

“We start at base level. If someone pushes, they block. If someone grabs, they break the hold. If they have to go to the next level, we do show techniques that cause some discomfort to the bully but couldn’t injure him or her,” Labbate said.

“Our hope is that children gain the self-confidence so they don’t become a target of bullying and are able to stand up to bullies and help other children,” Nelson said. “If they need these techniques, they’ll have them.”

Steve and Margaret Sheridan enrolled their three

children in the Holy Rosary karate after-school program. The sons, Christopher, 11, and John, 8, have begun to take additional classes at CNY Karate during the week, as well as a program taught by CNY Karate at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, 5402 W. Genesee St. Evelina, John’s twin, continues to attend the after-school program.

“My wife and I thought it would help our children gain confidence in themselves and enrolled them in the Holy Rosary program a couple years ago,” Steve Sheridan said. “Our boys really look forward to it and were invited to join a tournament team.”

He added: “CNY teaches a great bully-busting program which, I think, calms children down and gives them the confidence to handle different situations.”

The Sheridans have seen the biggest change in Christopher. His confidence and listening skills have improved, and he has become more focused, Sheridan said.

“When the boys do drills, it’s light contact, and they don’t allow my sons to spar against each other because it’s much easier to **escalate** between two brothers,” Sheridan added with a chuckle.

Labbate’s program has set out to disprove that karate is violent. CNY Karate improves students’ balance, speed and agility through martial arts, and Labbate teaches students to avoid confrontation first.

“We want to improve the student as a human being. These are the young people that will become future productive members of society, and we simply use martial arts as a vehicle to do so,” Labbate said.



> The bully-busting program’s goal is to build students’ self-confidence, says instructor John Nelson. | Jim Tuttle, Staff Photo



Find these words  
in this story

#### **Psychologists**

Specialists in the study of the science dealing with the mind and with mental and emotional processes.

#### **Internalize**

To make a part of one’s own thinking.

#### **Escalate**

To grow or increase rapidly.

How would you use these words in a sentence?

## HOW TO REGISTER

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- Mail it  
1025 Erie Blvd. West  
Syracuse, N.Y. 13204
- Fax it (315) 435-6276

Most classes are for adults only and do not allow children to attend. While child care is not provided, the district will reimburse at a set rate for the provider of the parent's choice. When registering for classes, parents should indicate that they will need child care.

Parents from the following nonpublic schools are also welcome:

- Blessed Sacrament School
- Cathedral Academy at Pompei
- Most Holy Rosary
- All Saints Elementary
- Eagle Wings Academy
- Faith Heritage School
- The Jowonio School
- Ihsan School of Excellence
- Merriday School

Contact Monique Wright-Williams, executive director of parent and family engagement, at (315) 435-6275.

# PARENT UNIVERSITY

*Say Yes and Superintendent Contreras launch free classes for adults*



> Marina Rodriguez, left, and Marisol Hernandez dish up some dinner at Salsa, Salud y Sabor, a class they teach at the YMCA. As part of Parent University, class attendees learn about nutrition and serving sizes. | Manuela Marin Salcedo, Staff Photo

By | Laura Jungreis  
*Staff reporter*

## Program offers workshop series to parents to better support their children's education

Syracuse City School District Superintendent Sharon Contreras recently gave nearly 200 local residents a look at an expansive new program designed to help parents with their schoolchildren.

The program, Parent University, is a series of workshops for parents of elementary, middle and high school students — intended to teach mothers and fathers how to better support their children's education, Contreras said.

The superintendent, inaugurating the program at a “kickoff summit” at Onondaga Community College, told the crowd that when the Syracuse City School District Board of Education hired her a year and a half ago, she spoke to residents at churches and backyard barbecues. Her mission was to hear what parents needed to better support their children. She said she got the idea for Parent University from a similar program run by a school system in Philadelphia.

“Classes available include things dealing with bullying,” said Kathleen Sims, communications specialist for the district. “There’s stuff on how to talk to your kids.

There’s stuff about Say Yes to Education, understanding exactly what the program is. There’s a wide variety of different things available to our parents, and the superintendent feels it’s really important because it’s a way to keep our parents engaged and get them engaged.”

Monique Wright-Williams, executive director of parent and family engagement for the school district, said she chose classes that would be useful to parents. “I surveyed family and district staff my first few months on the job and, based on the feedback from the parents and the administration here, we devised some topics that we thought would really be beneficial,” she said.

The district paired with Say Yes to Education to kick off the program Oct. 20 at Onondaga Community College. Parents were invited to attend a day of inaugural seminars. When registration began at 9 a.m., a line of parents stretched out of the glass doors of the Gordon Student Center. Yellow buses shuttled parents and their young children to the center from various schools in the district and locations in the city.

“We provided child care,” Sims said. “You had to sign up for the child care in advance but it was provided.” Wright-Williams said child care was provided for 101 children.

Once parents registered, they received folders

filled with brochures, schedules and information, all on brightly colored sheets of paper. They then entered the main room of the student center, radiant with morning sunlight that streamed through a wall made up entirely of glass panels. On the other side of the room was a long table with a buffet breakfast, including large pitchers of orange juice and coffee as well as platters of breads. Children waiting to be taken to the YMCA on campus for the event explored the maze created by the rows of round tables. A little boy ran down an aisle smiling, carrying a muffin with a bite missing from the top.

One mother, Patricia Egbuson, went to the kickoff summit to learn how to help support her daughter, a 10th-grader at Henninger High School who receives special help. "I'm here to get some information on empowering my daughter for success," Egbuson said.

The day was split into three sections, with each parent registered for three workshops throughout the day.

"The first session I'm signed up for is Special Education 101, and then session two I'm signed up for empowering and motivating my daughter, and the last session I'm signed up for the common core," Egbuson said, referring to new state standards for education. "And they're going to give us lunch." Egbuson said she would like to continue attending classes throughout the year "if they're informative."

Nina Freeman, a mother of a fifth-grade boy at HW Smith K-8 School, said she was excited to be at the kick-

off of such an important program for parents. "It gets them more involved," Freeman said. One of the classes she was signed up for was Raising a Son in the Absence of His Father. "It's not really necessarily for me because my son's father is always there. I just know other people, other women, who go through that," Freeman said.

Superintendent Contreras addressed the crowd before the first seminars began, expressing her gratitude for parent participation in the program. Contreras, originally a high school English teacher in Illinois, worked her way up to chief academic officer in Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia, and then in the Providence Public School District in Rhode Island. Throughout her career, Contreras is credited with successfully expanding gifted programs and programs for struggling students. She graduated in 2010 from the Broad Superintendents Academy, a school that prepares leaders to head urban school districts. Contreras was appointed the superintendent of the Syracuse City School District in March 2011.

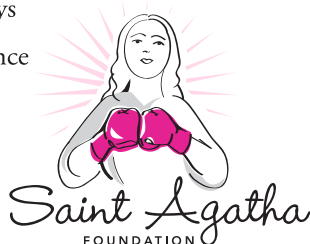
At the end of the kickoff event, parents gave feedback about the seminars. "The evaluations suggest they went really well," Wright-Williams said. While the classes were filled with enthusiastic parents, Wright-Williams said she hopes more get involved. "I thought it was a good start to what we need to do but there's still a lot of work that has to happen," she said. "One hundred eighty-two is fantastic based on what we've ever gotten from parents, but certainly not nearly satisfactory."

## Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

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## An Evening in **South Africa**

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201 S. West St.  
Syracuse, NY 13202

**Inkululeko** invites you to experience an evening in South Africa. The evening will feature:

- South African Tasting Menu
- South African Music
- Pictures and Videos from Inkululeko participants
- Silent auction featuring art from South Africa
- Information on Inkululeko's collaborations around CNY

RSVP with Mallory Munro at [mallorymunro@inkululeko.org](mailto:mallorymunro@inkululeko.org) or on Facebook.

\$30 for adults  
\$20 with a valid student ID

Payments will be taken at the door the evening of Dec. 12. \$2 extra if paying by credit card.



## CLASSES OFFERED

Throughout December

**Tuesdays:** Learning Spanish to Help Your Child Learn Spanish

**Wednesdays:** Salsa, Salud y Sabor

**Thursdays:** Common Sense Parenting and a one-time seminar on Social Security

For more class offerings visit the website [www.scsdparentuniversity.com](http://www.scsdparentuniversity.com).

Questions? Contact Monique Wright-Williams, (315) 435-6275.

## CORCORAN FUN FACTS

Corcoran High School is named for Thomas J. Corcoran, who was the mayor of Syracuse from 1950-1953.

Three other names had been considered for the school:

### Edward Powlesland High

- a longtime principal and mentor of OVA

### Herbert Hoover High

- the 31st President of the United States

### John F. Kennedy High

- the 35th President of the United States

## SCHOOL COLORS

Onondaga Valley Academy had maroon and white; Vocational had mustard and maroon. Corcoran adopted maroon and white, and it was decided that the mascot would have the same first letter as the school — the Cougars.

Source:  
Paul Grace

# STROLLING *the* SOUTH SIDE

*Learn all about the origins of Corcoran High School*



> Paul Grace graduated from Corcoran High School in 1973, but he continues to spend hundreds of hours each year staying involved in the school — including preparing for the 50th anniversary of its groundbreaking. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo

By | Natalie Caceres  
*Staff reporter*

## Corcoran High School artifacts, memorabilia detail the school's 50 years of rich history

Although school has been let out for the day, the halls still echo with the sounds of students who are walking and conversing with one another. Some, dressed in athletic gear, head off to practice. Others are excitedly ready to head home for some rest after a long and busy day. There is one person, though, despite having graduated years ago, who still walks the halls long after the others have left.

Paul Grace, a 34-year employee of Carrier Corporation working in its International Business division, has dedicated himself to preserving and documenting the long and fruitful history of his alma mater, Corcoran High School, 919 Glenwood Ave. Whether he is collecting clippings or uncovering long lost memorabilia, his appreciation for his former high school is a passion. And with the 50th anniversary of the school's groundbreaking in January, Grace's labor of love will show just how precious Corcoran's history is.

"In January of 1963 we broke ground," Grace said.

On Jan. 18, 2013, to be exact, Corcoran will celebrate a historic 50th anniversary of the groundbreaking that began the rigorous 24-month building process before the school was finally completed.

"They (JGA Construction Co.) had estimated about a 19-month build cycle," Grace said. "That did not happen."

According to Grace, in the 1950s the school district, along with the state and federal government, realized that the city school district had not gone through a major building process since the 1920s. In addition, World War II produced the "baby boom," a steep rise in birth rate spanning from the 1940s until the 1960s. School officials grasped that their current school system wasn't prepared to handle the influx, and they began to plan for a bigger school.

The project, temporarily called Southwest High School during initial phases, was to combine two neighboring and competing schools: Vocational High School (now West Academy at Blodgett) and Onondaga Valley Academy (now Faith Heritage School). By September 1965, a name had been chosen — Thomas J. Corcoran, after an inspirational former mayor — and both schools were finally able to attend the now completed school,

## SUGGEST A LOCATION

To submit an idea for Strolling the South Side, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com



> Onondaga Valley Academy and Vocational High School fed into Corcoran High School when it was founded. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



> In the original plans, Corcoran High School would have had a planetarium. Jan. 18, 2013 marks the 50th anniversary of the school's groundbreaking. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo

Grace said. By June 1966, the first official Corcoran High School diplomas were awarded.

The current Corcoran principal, Leo Cosgrove, said the anniversary of the groundbreaking is a testament to Corcoran's impact in the community.

"It's the recognition that this is a big piece of the community," Cosgrove said. "We had a gentleman here who hadn't been back to Syracuse in 20 years who came back just to walk the school."

Grace mentioned a couple of Corcoran High School sweethearts who are still married and who still come back to "where it all began."

Those little **anecdotes** remain, even as the decades have passed.

"I had a tremendous experience here," Grace said about his time at the school from 1970 until 1973. Corcoran's impact on Grace was so strong that he committed his services to the school in several capacities for decades after graduating.

Brian Nolan, former principal of Corcoran High School and now the executive director of High Schools & CTE Programs at the Syracuse City School District, said that events such as the anniversary of this groundbreaking would not be feasible without Grace's help.

"He got himself involved because he knew not only how important it would be for the school but because of the pride he has in it and the need to continue that on for

kids in the future," Nolan said when describing Grace.

Despite Grace's full-time job, he still commits hundreds of hours each year, usually on weekends, to head up the alumni association and various other committees, and, most importantly, to collect and uncover old artifacts that help tell Corcoran's story. He has one document in particular that is quite special, a blown-up newspaper article from 1963 that contains a photograph of the groundbreaking. It is those artifacts, such as documents, photos and memorabilia that chronicle the history inside and outside of Corcoran High School.

"The attachment to the school becomes a long-living memory," Nolan said. "People had a great experience here and still fondly remember those experiences even so many years later."

Cosgrove added, "We have great, great kids and the teachers love being here."

The legacy of Corcoran 50 years from now will be about the halls that helped to spark change, according to both Cosgrove and Grace.

"The most important thing is to have the kids really try to change what's around them and make the community stronger," Cosgrove said.

With a smile, Grace added, "If they could return and think 'How can I give back?' then that's all that matters."

And that is history in the making.



Find these words in this story

**Memorabilia**  
Mementos; souvenirs.

**Vocational**  
Instruction or guidance in an occupation or profession.

**Anecdotes**  
Short accounts of a particular incident or event.

How would you use these words in a sentence?

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Find these words  
in this story

#### Score

A set of 20; very many.

#### Gigs

Musical performances;  
jobs.

#### Percussion

An instrument played by  
striking or shaking.

How would you use these  
words in a sentence?

# TRAVELING SOUND

Syracuse artists often take to the road in search of places to perform



> Derryl Rivers, a percussionist and drummer, left Syracuse in the 1990s to continue his musical pursuits. He supplements his drumming with a variety of other instruments, such as cowbells, tambourines and chimes. | Photo courtesy of Derryl Rivers

By | Reggie Seigler  
*A Friendly Five columnist*

## Local band members who left Syracuse ‘come home’ through memories of where they began

Syracuse has been home to a **score** of bands, musicians and singers over the years. Some of them have been really good and some, well... you know what momma said, “If you can’t say nothin’ good ....”

A lot of the talented ones are still participating regularly on the local music scene. But with limited opportunities locally, some keep it together by looking for **gigs** that are a short drive away along the New York State Thruway or Interstate 81.

“When musicians take gigs out of town together, it gives them feeling of family and unity,” said Eddie “Wallstreet” Brown. Wallstreet’s band, “The Blacklites,” has a 40-year history in Syracuse. But for a while back in the ’80s, they relocated to the Boston, Mass., area. Through that experience, the band members were able to live and bond as a family.

Vynce Watson of the band “Soul Mine” agrees. “We do short trips to venues in Utica or Vernon and occasionally Rochester. The band likes it because we get a chance to play for new audiences, and we are able to let them

know that Syracuse has some good musicians.”

Other local musicians have taken their talents on the road, too, but some have not come back. Thinking way back, I can remember some of Syracuse’s best musical talents that have left here via I-81 and I-90. Duane Branch, Stephen “Steve” Wise and Kim Hill were just a few of them back then. Even more recently, Hiram Swain, Darneal Jackson, Kent Frazier, Missy Seigler, JJ Cannon, Tim Reed and Sam Wynn have all relocated.

I was hoping that I could persuade a couple of “Syracuse’s musical soul children” to come home. I was not able to bring them home literally, but I was able to bring home a couple of their stories.

Derryl Rivers, 50, is a drummer and percussionist. When Derryl plays the drums, you’ll hear the beat, but you’ll also hear little **percussion** instruments like cowbells, tambourines and chimes, too. I asked him to share part of his Atlanta musical experience with us.

“I have gotten studio calls to play on radio and TV commercials, and I been called to play on demos for artists that have never even released the songs,” he said.

Derryl left Syracuse in the mid- to late ’90s and hasn’t been back to stay since.

Like Derryl, Vic Smiley left Syracuse a long time ago, too. “I had a lot of encouragement when I left, if

## BEHIND THE NAME

Reggie Seigler’s “A Friendly Five” column is named in memory of a singing group in which his two uncles — Mango Gray and George Gray — were members.

The group was called “The Friendly Five,” and his uncles moved it from Clarksdale, Miss., to Syracuse in the 1950s.

you know what I mean,” Vic said.

For the most part since the late '80s, when he initially packed up his guitar and took his talent on the road, he has been based in Cleveland. There he got the opportunity to record with the O'Jays and Miki Howard.

Vic has traveled a lot and has performed and spent some time in cities all over the country. In Atlanta, he had the opportunity to make history as the first African American guitarist with the UniverSoul Circus — the first circus of its kind featuring a largely black cast. Vic performed with the group for several years.

“There are a lot of great opportunities out there on the road, and I've been blessed to have some.”

Vic quoted Proverb 18:16: “A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.” Vic understands that what he has is a gift and knows to accept it with a humble heart. He learned this and many other scriptures at a very early age. His mother was an evangelist, his father was a deacon and his brother is a local bishop.

I received Vic's bio with all of his accomplishments, and he emphasized to me that the most important thing to know is that he still lives day to day like everyone else. He said he doesn't make much fuss about the pay and the material things. “If you want the opportunities to

keep coming, just put one hand out for your check and the other one over your mouth,” he said.

Vic reflected on the loss of his childhood musician friend and bass player, Delmar Breland. Delmar, who also left Syracuse a little while ago, passed away tragically in an automobile accident. Vic, now 55, wants to talk to younger musicians about the dangers of being on the road.

“Much of a musician's life is spent traveling,” he said. “That means lots of driving.”

He emphasized the importance of staying focused and driving within the speed limits — something he says he had never been very mindful of — and he also wanted to share some safety tips for traveling with musical gear.

“You should always strap it down in the back or when possible put it in the trunk. If you drive a van, having a cage installed is good investment. You never know when you might have to come to a quick stop. If that happens, all your gear can come flying forward and you can't do anything to stop it.”

*Have A Friendly Five suggestion? Contact Reggie at [reggie@softspokenband.com](mailto:reggie@softspokenband.com) or (315) 479-9620*

## CHECK THEM OUT



Vic Smiley and Derryl Rivers both have

Facebook pages listed under their names with plenty of pictures of their experiences.



Vic Smiley is featured in this YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVv67woAvfc>

Derryl Rivers is featured in this YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asOhkQKXWc>

*Even more photos are shared online at [www.mysouthsidestand.com](http://www.mysouthsidestand.com) in slideshows*



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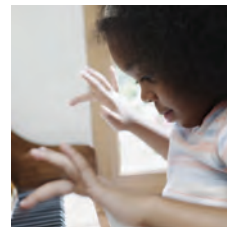


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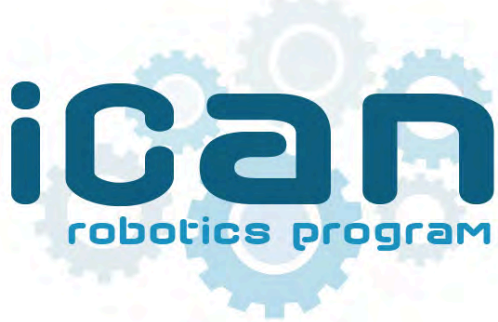
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