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Embrace Diversity

By Dawn DuVerney Wilkins

The new UPG District-wide Diversity Committee is co-chaired by Dawn DuVerney Wilkins and Judy Heath. Having held four planning meetings at various venues throughout the township thus far, the committee is off to a good start! Our aim is to create school environs that embrace rather than simply tolerate the wonderful diversity that exists in our community.

As an initial charge, the chairs have asked members to establish a mission and vision for the Committee that truly expresses their collective desires. Recognizing that one cannot teach that with which one is unfamiliar, the chairwomen are challenging themselves and the membership to look deeper -- beyond race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, economic

status, aptitude, culture, and the many "isms" that may divide -- to their common bonds so that they may undertake true, honest, open and confidential discourse -- a healthy start to creating real community. A family "Cultural Exchange" is planned for December and, if well received, may be repeated in the spring of 2005.

The next meeting will be held on January 4, 2005 at 7:30 PM in room 112 of Cheltenham High School. Minutes of every meeting are available on the UPG website and meeting notices are posted on Channel 42 and on flyers distributed at all schools. Come to the next meeting to learn more! Parents, teachers, business owners, community and civic leaders -- All are welcome and encouraged to attend.

Enhancing School Relationships Through Powerful Communication

By Rory Cohen

Relationships are at the core of all human interaction, and every conversation with another person is an opportunity to either deepen a relationship or damage it. As important as relationships are, in business, families and life, most of us aren't taught high-level communication skills. The ability to really hear and understand another person and, most importantly, to let that person experience our understanding is THE most important leadership skill. Ramping up skill in this area will absolutely enrich your experience of every relationship you have.

At the recent workshop co-sponsored by UPG and the Cheltenham African American Alliance we experienced two communication skills. The first, deep listening, involves listening with the intent

to understand the other person's point of view. We are to pay attention to our tendency to be distracted by our own thoughts, advice or disagreement. Can you accept the possibility that the other person, regardless of your feelings about them or your perception of them, just might, by virtue of living a life separate from yours, have some small thing to contribute to you? Listen to the other person as if a diamond of great value were about to come out of his or her mouth, and you will be surprised at the wealth you will accumulate. Even from our children and our parents! After all, you can always listen to the noise in your own head.

Please turn to the top of page 2

The United Parents Group

Mission Statement

The United Parents Group (UPG), an umbrella organization comprised of parent representatives from all the public schools in the Cheltenham School District, serves as a vehicle to facilitate communication among parents, administration and the school board to ensure the continued excellence of education provided by the District.

The next UPG meeting is scheduled for

Wednesday, January 19th @ 7:15 PM
in room 102
of the Administration Building

Please, check us out on the School District Web Site at:

www.cheltenham.org/upg

If you would like to be placed on our E-mail distribution list or if you have a question or concern you can contact us at:

UPG@Cheltenham.org

Powerful Communication continued...

The second skill was asking open-ended questions as a way of getting the other person to more clearly know their own mind, and therefore, let us understand them better. Open-ended questions are questions that pull a people more deeply into their own wisdom. For example, asking your child, "What were your thoughts about the social studies class today?" might elicit a deeper response than the grunt

we normally get when we say, "Did you have a good day at school today?"

As with any skill, practice will create habit. You will soon see how truly powerful it is when you are able to have another person experience him or herself as being heard and understood.

Look for more information about the ideas generated at the workshop in the next issue.

From the desk of...the President of the Board of School Directors for Cheltenham Public Schools

Each issue of the UPG Newsletter features a message from a representative of the Cheltenham School System.

Dear Parents:

I grew up in Cheltenham. I went to school and have lived most of my life here. My four children have all gone through our schools...three have graduated, and one is now a junior at CHS.

In all that time, our community and schools have gone through many changes. Yet there are constants too. Our community is more beautiful than ever. Our schools still produce class after class of students well equipped to meet the challenges and succeed in an increasingly complex, demanding world.

One of the most important reasons why Cheltenham continuously produces such high-caliber students has always been the ongoing interest, dedication and active participation of our community's parents. Every educator acknowledges that the success of a school is unequivocally linked to proactive parental involvement. Your thriving UPG and PTO organizations are prime examples of this, as are our standing-room-only Back to School Nights.

For the past six years, it has been my privilege to serve on the Cheltenham School District's Board of School Directors. Here too, I have seen countless examples of how direct, consistent parental interest and participation has helped maintain the high quality of our schools, so important to the success of our children and the life of our community. We meet almost every Tuesday night throughout the year in the Administration Building. Our meetings cover District educational and business matters and all are open to the public. Meeting dates and times are always posted on the District website, at the Administration Building and on Channel 42.

While our Tuesday night meetings have specific agendas, our Legislative meetings, on the second Tuesday of each month, always give any Cheltenham resident in the audience an opportunity to bring suggestions, comments or matters of concern before the Board for consideration.

If you have something to say regarding one of our schools, the best, most direct way to be heard is through the teachers, counselors and administrators at the individual schools. However we always welcome your input and look at your remarks as one more way that we, as a Board, are able to stay in touch with a community that succeeds because it truly cares.

I invite you to stay in touch. Stay informed. Come to our Board meetings. Keep advocating for your children, our teachers and our schools. Together we will continue our tradition of educational excellence for all our children.

Sincerely,

David M. Rackow

Speak Up and Eat!

Parents and CHS teens are invited to chill out and drop by the student center for good food and great conversation (free of charge). We'll be talking about "pop culture"...decoding the music, art, fashion, and terminology of young people today. Join the world café from 7:00-9:00 p.m. on Monday, January 10.