Sixth graders get a glimpse of college

Berkshire County’s four college campuses welcomed over 1,200 sixth graders from 20 public schools for the sixth annual Berkshire County Goes to College Week in April.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), Berkshire Community College, Williams College and Bard College at Simon’s Rock each planned a series of short workshops to show students about different aspects of college life as a way to inspire them to pursue higher education.

MCLA offered students a lesson about astronomy inside the inflatable Starlab Planetarium, a resource that is available to educators throughout Berkshire County as part of the Berkshire STEM Pipeline.

BCC offered several new workshops this year, including Library Jeopardy and Lungs: They’re Not Just for Breakfast Anymore, providing students with hands-on activities.

Some of the other highlights of the visits were a visit to the Williams College Museum of Art, a study abroad presentation at Simon’s Rock, tours of residence halls, science experiments, musical performances, visiting a TV studio, physical fitness activities and eating in dining halls.

In a followup survey, 93 percent of staff who accompanied students felt that the college visit helped encourage students to aspire toward post-secondary education.

One teacher wrote "Many students are unaware of what college life is like and this gave them the opportunity to experience it even for a short time."

A student from Undermountain Elementary School noted “There are lots of different things you can go to college for; it can help you in life.”

Funding for Berkshire County Goes to College is generously provided by the Berkshire United Way.

Compact Chair Andy Mick honored at MCLA

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts recognized Andy Mick ’09 for his contributions to the college as he was inducted into the Zeta Zeta chapter of the Delta Mu Delta national honor society on April 20.

Mick recently retired from his position as president and chief executive officer of New England Newspapers, Inc.

During Mick’s tenure as Chair of the Berkshire Compact from 2007 to 2013, the Compact expanded to include early childhood through higher education and the Berkshire Readiness Center was established to support professional development for educators.

Mick was instrumental in generating positive coverage of education through the creation of an Education section in The Berkshire Eagle.

While chairing the Berkshire Compact, Mick earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in interdisciplinary students from MCLA, graduating in 2009.

According to Dr. Nancy Ovitsky, business administration professor at MCLA and the faculty advisor to Delta Mu Delta, Mick has been a great friend to the College since his arrival in the Berkshires, giving considerable time and energy to his position as chair of the Berkshire Compact and as a member of the MCLA Foundation Board of Directors.
Wee Read Berkshire County promotes early literacy

Throughout April, 1,500 copies of ‘The Tiny Seed’ by Eric Carle and customized bookmarks were distributed to young children at countywide events to celebrate the third annual Wee Read Berkshire County.

The initiative is led by the Berkshire Compact for Education and its early childhood and library collaborators with a goal of promoting early literacy. The events were held in recognition of The Week of the Young Child and National Library Week, also celebrated in April.

"It's a great way to show families the importance of reading early and often," said Sue Doucette, Early Childhood Coordinator for the Pittsfield Public Schools. "The Tiny Seed' was a wonderful choice because of its vibrant language and illustrations. It also tied into fun activities related to spring gardening themes."

Story times, some of which included arts and gardening activities, were held at the libraries in Cheshire, Dalton, Great Barrington, Housatonic, Lanesborough, Lee, Lenox, Monterey, New Marlborough, North Adams, Pittsfield, Richmond, Sheffield, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge and at many local playgroups.

Children also had the opportunity to see pages of the book displayed in creative settings through StoryWalks that were offered in downtown North Adams, Williamstown, Adams, Lenox and Great Barrington, at the Berkshire Botanical Garden in Stockbridge, at the Berkshire Mall and at the elementary schools in the Central Berkshire Regional School District. StoryWalks were first introduced in 2007 in Vermont by Anne Ferguson.

Wee Read Berkshire County is funded by the Central Berkshire Fund of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, MCLA, the Friends of the Berkshire Athenaeum and Child Care of the Berkshires.

Students showcase projects at STEM middle school and high school science fairs

The Amsler Campus Center at MCLA was bustling with activity this spring as 179 student projects were presented at this year’s regional STEM science fairs.

The Science Fairs are sponsored by the Berkshire STEM Pipeline, part of a statewide program designed to improve science, technology, engineering and math education for students and teachers.

"We live in a world that is increasingly reliant on science and engineering, but not enough students are studying sciences," said Dr. Chris Himes, STEM Program Manager at MCLA. "The science fairs are a great way to expose students to hands on learning and to let them know that scientific research is fun and engaging."

The Massachusetts Region I High School Science Fair was held on March 14. Pat Muraca, president and chief executive officer at Nuclea Biotechnologies of Pittsfield, was the keynote speaker at the Fair.

At the high school level, first place awards went to Shannon Boley of Westfield High School for her project Effects of an Administrator’s Prosody on Autistic Children and to Dillon Sienko and Patrick Monette, also from Westfield, for their project Effects of Organically-Enriched Soil on Tagetes Tenuifolia Development.

The Region 1 Middle School Fair was held on April 27. For the first time, the Fair was combined with a STEM Summit, featuring a Gateway Information Session for teachers, led by Dr. Yvonne Spicer.

Dr. Spicer, who is Vice President of Advocacy and Educational Partnerships at Boston Museum of Science, also delivered the keynote speech to the students and their families prior to the awards ceremony.

At the middle school level, one of two first place awards went to AJ Morissette, an eighth grade student at BART Charter School, for his project Waste to Wattage, the Journey of Microbial Fuel Cell. His project also received a Genzyme Biology Award. The other first place award went to twins Paige and Hayley Lavinio from Hampshire Regional High School for their project Magnetic Levitation Train.

A second Genzyme Biology Award went to Allison Wolfe from Herberg Middle School and Ella King from Lenox Memorial High School (pictured below) for their project Plant Pigment Segment Paper Chromatography.

Many of the winners from the two fairs went on to compete in the Massachusetts State Science & Engineering Fairs, held at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
More than 1,400 students awarded degrees in Berkshire County

2013 commencement speakers in Berkshire County were, clockwise from lower left, Astronaut Stephanie Wilson at BCC, First Lady Diane Patrick at MCLA, former tennis champion Billie-Jean King at Williams College and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke at Bard College at Simon’s Rock.

Berkshire County gained a new cadre of college graduates this spring, as more than 1,400 students were awarded degrees from Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA), Berkshire Community College (BCC), Williams College and Simon’s Rock College at Bard.

During the 114th commencement ceremony at MCLA on May 18, 389 students received bachelor’s degrees, 35 received a Master of Education, four received a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in Educational Leadership and 22 received a Professional Master’s of Business Administration degree. Approximately 40% of MCLA’s graduates are Berkshire County residents.

At Bard College at Simon’s Rock’s 44th commencement ceremony, also on May 18, 51 students received bachelor’s degrees and 74 students received associate of arts degrees.

BCC held its 53rd commencement ceremony on May 31 in Lenox at Tanglewood. The college awarded 259 associate degrees and 56 certificates to 305 students, ranging in age from 18 to 61.

Williams College celebrated its 224th commencement on June 2, as 527 seniors were awarded bachelor’s degrees. Master of Arts degrees were awarded to 12 students in the Program in the History of Art, and 28 fellows from the Center for Development Economics received M.A. degrees in Policy Economics.

In addition to the degrees awarded to graduating students, 12 honorary degrees were awarded by MCLA, Simon’s Rock and Williams College. Among the recipients were MCLA’s commencement speaker, First Lady Diane Patrick, and Williams College’s commencement speaker, former tennis champion Billie-Jean King.

Youth Leadership Program Class of 2013 celebrates graduation

On May 14, the Youth Leadership Program, an initiative of the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, celebrated the Class of 2013 with a graduation ceremony for 29 high school juniors. The students, representing nine Berkshire County schools, successfully completed the 10-month program.

The Youth Leadership Program exposes young individuals to career pathways in Berkshire County and helps them to develop as the next generation of leaders. The program was established to address the Berkshire Compact for Education’s goal of fostering connections between the education system and the workplace, while engaging young people to consider living and working in the Berkshires in the future.

The 2013 Youth Leadership Program began last August with a two-night retreat at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Conducted by professional facilitators, the retreat included training in all aspects of leadership and problem-solving.

Following the retreat, participants attended nine afternoon sessions focusing on topics such as government, creative economy, economic development, education, health and leadership, among others. The sessions were held monthly throughout the school year.

Each year, the students are required to conduct a class project. The Class of 2013 held a food drive in the spring to benefit the Lee Food Pantry. Students collected contributions at their schools and in the community.

Up to 30 high school juniors are provided with the opportunity to participate in the Youth Leadership Program each year. Selection is based on a written application, essay, letters of recommendation and an interview.

This year’s 29 graduates join the 54 graduates from the Classes of 2011 and 2012 as alumni of the program.

The Youth Leadership Program is generously sponsored by the Berkshire Bank Foundation, Greylock Federal Credit Union, the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and General Dynamics.

For additional information, visit www.berkshirechamber.com/ylp.
Berkshire Readiness Center supports educator development

The Berkshire Readiness Center, one of six Readiness Centers in Massachusetts, provides a collaborative approach to county-wide educator development. Highlights from 2012-13 were:

- Working with the Berkshire Superintendents Roundtable to support countywide professional development for K-12 educators that aligns with Common Core Standards and can be delivered cost-effectively.
- Developing professional learning networks focused on middle school science, technology, principals, fine arts, world languages, physical education, school nurses, and other groups, to enable job-alike educators to collaborate and share best practices with their peers.
- Preparing new teachers for success through New Teacher Induction and Mentoring programs.
- Supporting the early education system by implementing educator training and career path programs through Early Learning Challenge Grant funds.
- Working as part of a 22-state consortium to develop next-generation K-12 assessments in English and math through the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) initiative.
- Recognizing excellence in teaching through Educator Recognition Awards, in collaboration with the Berkshire Superintendents Roundtable.
- Working with the other five Readiness Centers to promote statewide collaboration and facilitate interactions between educators at various levels.

2013 Educator Recognition awards were presented to (from left to right with plaques) Barbara Minkler, Muddy Brook Elementary School; Carol Ide, Undermountain Elementary School; and Charles Bradshaw, Wahconah Regional High School at a ceremony on May 9 at MCLA. Each award recipient was joined by their district superintendent.

SUMMER CALENDAR

Berkshire Community College, three summer sessions, May 28 - Aug. 13, includes credit and noncredit courses, online learning, offered at five locations, www.berkshirecc.edu

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, three summer sessions, May 28 - Aug. 15, courses offered day/evenings, hybrid and online, undergraduate and graduate. Open to MCLA students and members of the community. For more information: www.mcla.edu/summer/

Workforce Wednesday, Massachusetts Labor Law Review for Employers, June 19, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m., 160 North Street, 3rd Floor, Pittsfield, register at www.berkshireworks.org, sponsored by BerkshireWorks Career Center and the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board.

Collaborative Curriculum Mapping Training, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (June 25); Berkshire Community College (June 26, 27), 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Ten school districts will work in teams to develop curriculum maps tied into new curriculum frameworks. Funding provided by Community Innovation Challenge Grant and Race to the Top, through the Berkshire Readiness Center.

Upper Housatonic Valley Experience, June 24 - June 28, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Pittsfield Intermodal Center and various sites within the heritage area. For middle/high school teachers of history, social studies, English, science, business and industrial technology. Offered by MCLA and BCC.

Summer Youth Works Program, July 8 - Aug. 16: Berkshire Works Career Center, in collaboration with the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, Inc., will implement their ninth annual summer jobs program for income-eligible, Pittsfield youth ages 14 - 21. Funded by Commonwealth Corporation. Approximately 40 Berkshire County employers serve as mentors. For more information: www.massyoutheemployment.org

3rd Thursday: Weird Science, downtown Pittsfield, Aug. 15, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. Featuring family friendly activities related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

Berkshire Youth Leadership Program Opening Retreat, Class of 2014, August 16 - 18, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

Visit our website: www.berkshirecompact.org
Visit our Berkshire Compact Facebook page and follow us on Twitter, @berkcompact

The Berkshire Compact for Education’s mission is to support every Berkshire County resident in aspiring to obtain 16 years or more of education and training in order to thrive in the 21st century economy.

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