



BHGA Newsletter

Fall 2015

Our Mission ~ The Benton Harbor Girls Association is a non-profit corporation dedicated to enhancing educational opportunities for middle schools girls in the Benton Harbor area. Our goal is to provide an academy for middle-school girls that offers superior education in a safe and nurturing environment.

From the Desk of the Director

By Patricia Ann Quattrin Ph.D.

ACADEMY NEWSLETTER:

- 1) Director's article
- 2) Listing of new staff
- 3) Article on the Girls Discover Summer Program
- 4) Academy Field Trips, especially Prairie Farms
- 5) New Library - Hilda
- 6) Lakoya's Graduation
- 7) Benton Spirit Article on Pam
- 8) Wish List
- 9) Fund Raisers
- 10) Volunteering – Loretta
- 11) Update board list

FALL FUND RAISER – FAMILY EVENT

Or Go To the BHGALS Website www.bentonharborgirlsassociation.org

A Non-Profit 501C3 Corporation



Our New Library

By Hildegard Molter

For several years we have looked at a classroom that we dreamed would one day be our library and game room. This fall that became a reality! With lots of hard work, we have a wonderful library for the staff and girls.

This could not have happened without the volunteer help and expertise of many people. With her knowledge and vision, Mary Kynast, former director of the St. Joseph Public Library, made our library a functional and a peaceful place to be. Dr. Patricia purchased many library shelves from Galien Public Schools when they closed. It took muscles and hard work to put them together and move them into the proper places in the room. Noah Hanau, a graduate of Lakeshore High School, Emilio Quattrin, a sophomore at Lake Michigan Catholic High School, and several days of work by Noah Britt, a senior at Berrien Springs High School, made that happen. Noah Britt spent many hours using his carpenter skills to assemble the shelves and move heavy objects. These boys were willing to do anything to help. We thank these volunteers and many others for all the hours they worked to make this project happen.

Another important group we thank is the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Sigma Kappa Chapter for their donation of many new hard covered books on African American women in history. They also generously donated \$500 for library purchases.

Our new library and game room will service both our staff and our girls. Computer stations will be set up shortly for the girls to use in research.

We all are very proud of our new library and we thank everyone who helped to make this a reality. We also invite you to visit our wonderful room.

Girls Discover Summer Program

Once again this summer, the Benton Harbor Girls Association for Learning & Self-esteem ran the *Girls Discover* Summer Program. This summer, the theme was Girls Discover Electricity. Bryanne Masterson, a teacher from the area, coordinated the Program. She was assisted by Intern Megan Hepker, a college student at the University of Northern Iowa, volunteer Rachel Holbert, a college student at Western Michigan University, and aid Tiora Young, a former BHGA student now attending St. Joseph High School. **In the morning hours, the girls worked with staff and volunteer mentors on silent reading, comprehension, oral reading, and vocabulary.** The girls were tested at the beginning of the Program in June and again at the end of the Program, the last week in July. They all showed improvement in their reading skills. **In the afternoon, the girls studied the history and development of electricity and planted and harvested the Academy garden. They took a field trip to the Rosenhagen farm where they had lunch, played with the animals, and learned how early settlers created their own electrical and water sources.** On the final day, the girls, the staff, and family members ended their summer together with a picnic at Lion's Beach Park. The girls expressed interest in coming back next summer.



EDUCATION THROUGH FIELD TRIPS

by Pamela Britt, Mistress and Head Teacher

Last year ended with many exciting and educational field trips for our girls. A local field trip was planned for every Friday in May. The girls and their parents signed a field trip contract agreeing to keep up with all schoolwork and homework, always be in uniform, and have no misbehavior reports. This was an encouragement for the girls to keep working hard and stay on task at the end of the school year.

We began with a trip to Lansing to tour the State Capital building in the morning, followed by a picnic lunch and a walk through Potter Park Zoo. It was definitely a beautiful day to be outside. Next we spent the morning at Krasl Art Center in St. Joseph. We toured the current show and finished up the morning making some prints ourselves. The girls definitely enjoyed trying a different art media. The third week we spent the day with the knowledgeable staff at Sarett Nature Center. We toured the grounds at Sarett to complete a river ecosystem study, had a picnic lunch there and then drove to Grand Mere State Park to compare and contrast the dune ecosystem. Although walking up the dunes was hard work, it paid off with a relaxing rest at Lake Michigan's shore. The last Friday in May we invited the girls' families to join us for a day at Lion's Park in St. Joseph where we cooked out for lunch. We then packed up and moved over to Silver Beach, rode the carousel and played in the fountains.

Our final field trip for the year was to Conner Prairie Interactive History Park in Fishers, Indiana. The girls were able to walk through and interact with an 1836 authentic prairie town, experience a civil war battle that took place in Indiana, walk through a Lenape Indian Camp, and interact with animals. This was the highlight of all the field trips for the girls and staff. **One of our parents was able to go with us for the day making it a wonderful experience for all involved.**

Although many things can be learned in the classroom, having an opportunity to explore our community, and all that it has to offer, solidifies and brings to life what has been taught.

(Does that mean each girl was able to bring a parent?)



Benton Harbor Girls Academy Celebrates its First Graduation

On June 10, 2015, BHGA joyfully celebrated its first graduation ceremony with Lakoya Barber, who had been a student at Benton Harbor Girls Academy for four years and now was the first girl to graduate from 8th grade. Family, friends, students, and the BHGA community witnessed this momentous event at Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church. A time of pride for all.

To begin, BHGA students processed down the aisle to "Find your Wings" by Mark Harris. Then, Pastor Brian Clayborn welcomed everyone with prayer and a blessing of the students. Executive Director of the Benton Harbor Girls Association for Learning & Self-esteem and the Girls Academy, Dr. Patricia Ann Quattrin, also welcomed everyone and introduced the students, board members, volunteers, and staff members present. She thanked the parents for their presence and support. This was followed by Teacher Pam Britt and Teacher/After School Coordinator Sara Mort's presentation of a lively and informative slide show with music highlighting the BHGA students and their activities throughout the year. Next academic awards were given to Lakoya and other BHGA students. Lakoya received the awards of Honor Roll for 1st, 2nd, & 3rd marking periods. Other students receiving awards were Josephine Blue for all four marking periods, Kendra Kyles and Victoria Sawyer for three marking periods, Tonetta Holmes for one marking period,. Finally Dr. Quattrin called up graduate Lakoya to present her with her 8th grade diploma. Lakoya was jubilant and friends and family applauded generously. An air of celebration permeated the room. After the ceremony, all guests were invited for a reception of ice cream and cake there in the church. A good time was had by all and BHGA is most grateful to Pastor Clayborn for the use of Ebenezer Baptist Church and for participating in the ceremony.

Rewards of Being a Volunteer

By Loretta Kasmer

I have been part of Harbor Girls Association since the beginning when Dr Patricia approached me, asking me if I was interested in something she felt called to do. Having been a volunteer for Birthright for longer than I can remember, and watching children giving birth to children, I knew it was a chance to make a difference in the lives of young ladies at risk during their middle school years. It was an opportunity to help families to raise these young girls to have choices through education in a safe environment.

For the first few years, I volunteered with summer and after school programs while taking care of the financial obligations and fund raising of our corporation. After retiring from the money duties, I really wanted to be in touch with the girls.

Last year, I asked to help in the classroom. The Teacher, Pam Britt, and the girls welcomed me with open arms. Not being a teacher, I was a little apprehensive. Being with the girls has been a very rewarding experience. Getting to know each one has been a joy. Sharing their problems, the hopes and dreams of these young people has given this grandmother another perspective on life in general.

Sometimes we are lost in our own situations, but we don't live in a vacuum and we ARE influenced by the lives of all those around us. Our girls keep my eyes open to a whole different world and my life is truly enriched.



Benton Harbor Girls Association for Learning & Self-esteem, Benton Harbor Girls Academy Staff Members

Dr. Patricia Ann Quattrin,
Executive Director,

Pamela Britt,
Mistress of the Academy & Head Teacher

Luz Duarte,
Social Studies Teacher & **Extra Curricular** Activities
Coordinator (new)

Kelly Alexander,
Academy Secretary

Mary Ellen Mammina,
Part-time Secretary (new)

Loretta Kasmer,
Classroom Volunteer

Hilda Molter,
Classroom Volunteer

Mary Kynast,
Part-time Librarian (new)

Our Teacher



Give young children reasons to feel confident about themselves, and they'll manage to succeed. That's how Pam Britt, head teacher for the Benton Harbor Girls Association for Learning & Self-Esteem, describes the academic leaps that her five students made last year. "I can tell you that my girls – on average – increased their test scores two grade levels," Britt said. "That was so exciting."

That excitement is all the more meaningful, according to Britt, because such major changes don't happen so often to young girls as their education moves along. "When they get older, they become afraid of failing," Britt said. "They're afraid of giving the wrong answer. They're afraid to speak up in class, because they're taught too many times there's only one right answer, one right way – cut and dry, end of story." By contrast, boys volunteer answers more freely, even if they're wrong, she notes. This creates a major disparity between the number of boys and girls pursuing math and science careers.

Britt based her own academic turnaround efforts on two simple observations. "Give them the confidence and let them go – and let them discover that part of learning is being wrong sometimes, and it's OK. That's the process," she said. The next step in Britt's strategy focused around a project-based learning style which encourages students to work together. "It really mirrors the work world: 'Here's a project, you're the expert, give me a product when you're done, to demonstrate what you've learned,'" Britt said. "I love to teach in that manner, and see what students come up with – because they'll blow my socks off. It's amazing how creative they can be."

For the school Christmas program, Britt taught the girls how to perform a song in sign language. "It's not an easy thing to do – especially with middle school students," Britt said. "They're afraid to put their voice out there, but if they learn to sign – they don't feel like they're putting as much of themselves out there. We get to talk about people who are deaf – how they speak in sign language, how it's a completely different culture." To reinforce the lessons, Britt and her students read a book, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, and wrote a play based on it. "What was interesting is that it gave them confidence. I said, 'If you want to perform something, it's up to you.' In response, one of her students spent a week teaching herself how to play the piano, while the other girls decided to sing. They felt confident because of the other things they had done. It wasn't Broadway, but it was good, and they were proud of themselves."

By focusing on a small group of students, it's possible to provide them with the individual attention that's often lacking in other types of school environments, suggests Head Mistress Dr. Patricia Quattrin, who credits several other factors with making her school successful. "It's an all-girls school, so we can minimize the distractions – it's non-graded, and it's faith based," Quattrin said. "Part of the philosophy of this school is that faith is a needed leg. There are four legs to every personality – the intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. And if these kids are trying to make it on three legs, it's almost impossible. **Spirituality** is a major part of how we teach here."

This year, Britt will get to test her theories with a younger group of students, ranging from third to sixth graders. "Obviously, their needs are different than middle school students. I plan on having a little bit more structure," Britt said. "I'll have to do more explicit teaching of working within a group. I'm looking forward to a different type of atmosphere. I thrive on the challenge."

In Britt's view, once students get used to working collaboratively, they become more confident and learn to communicate better with each other – which will pay off as they get older. "So many students believe you're inherently born smart, or ignorant, and you can't change it," Britt said. "What we need to be saying to our children is, 'Hard work pays off' -- because what they're learning is, 'If I apply myself, I can succeed.' And that's what we want to teach these girls."

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