

# ODYSSEY



Volume 9  
Holiday Issue 2013

A PUBLICATION OF FUND FOR TEACHERS



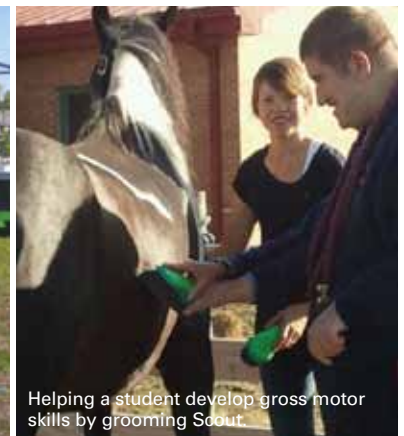
Maggie combines love of learning with love for horses.



Students with special needs visit the school barn yard.



Maggie enlists students for a special trail ride.



Helping a student develop gross motor skills by grooming Scout.

## Equanimity Through Equine Studies

Maggie Kendall, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences – Chicago, IL

*Chicago Ag* isn't the name of a new television show, it's the nickname of my school. We're located on the last farm in the third largest city in the nation, a 72-acre campus established by Chicago Public Schools as an experimental high school devoted to teaching agricultural science to urban students. In addition, 18% of our kids are categorized as "special needs." I designed my Fund for Teachers fellowship to learn ways of helping these particular students benefit from our animal science program. The experience changed my life and the lives of our "regular ed" students in the process.

I've taught for 14 years, but not agriculture or special education. I have a Masters degree and am a National Board Certified Teacher in biology. My life-long love of horses found its way into my previous school's science curriculum, where I created an after-school riding club attended by a couple of students

with autism. I loved that they were there and observed how they positively reacted to the horses, but I didn't feel safe putting them up on one. So during the summer of 2012, I used my Fund for Teachers grant to attend seminars and complete 60 hours of mentored teaching to achieve certification as a therapeutic riding instructor from the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship.

*The experience changed my life and the lives of our "regular ed" students in the process.*

That certification completely changed the landscape of our animal science program and how our "regular ed" and "special ed" students interact. Large animals were always learning tools within the curriculum, but no riding program existed before my fellowship. Now, students occupy the barn all

day, every day, with special needs kids coming most often because of the hands-on work and exposure to life skills. Students ride together, clean stalls together, attend field trips together. Able-bodied students actually seek out students with special needs, asking to partner up as mentors.

*Continued on page 6*



The holiday tradition of re-gifting takes on a positive light when **education** is the gift. In this edition of *Odyssey*, Fellows share how their FFT grant continues to open opportunities for their students.

## Mission in Motion

*"My fellowship strengthened my resolve to build solidarity between my students and the girls in Tanzania so that this next generation of leaders can envision a world where all girls have the opportunity to live healthy, safe and educated lives."*

- **Mindy Burger**  
Nativity School - Cincinnati, OH

### Project Description

- Combined her passion for education, girls' leadership and the transformative power of travel
- Explored girls' educational opportunities in Tanzania to expose students to the socio-economic challenges and impact of educating young women in developing countries, and examined practical ways to support those efforts
- Extended her commitment to the United Nation's Girl Up movement, which she and after-school club members currently support by making and selling crafts to aid girls' education in developing countries

### Fellowship Experiences

- Visited Saint Theresa's School outside of Moshi, Tanzania, which her Girl Up group supports financially
- Researched complexity of issues associated with tribal traditions and rituals concerning young women
- Experienced Olduvai Gorge, where the Leakeys unearthed oldest evidence of human beings
- Toured markets and collectives selling crafts and cultural arts around Mount Kilimanjaro to gain ideas for after school-club activities

### Classroom Impact

- Growth of Girls Up group as they make crafts for the holiday sale to benefit girls' scholarships at Saint Theresa's School
- Pot luck supper for club members and their moms to talk about issues facing young women and how to support the Masai girls in Tanzania
- Participation in the International Day of the Girl, sponsored by the United Nations, including poster making, PA announcements at school and lobbying campaign to have day recognized in Ohio

[www.MakingConnectionsInTanzania.blogspot.com](http://www.MakingConnectionsInTanzania.blogspot.com)

To keep the momentum going,  
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## From the Executive Director

School house innovations are devised by clever types; individuals with the vision and clarity to see *what is* and the imagination, determination and entrepreneurial spirit to figure out what is *next*. Stars.

We relish our role in the supporting cast. Because of your generous gifts, Fund for Teachers provides grants to these remarkable people, our Fellows. They are the driving force behind the kinds of initiatives that make our schools challenging, healthier, more vital places to learn.



Speaking to 350 teachers and supporters at 2013 Food for Thought event.

*For in the final analysis, our most common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future.*

- John F. Kennedy

The narratives and pictures herein more than speak for themselves. They are wonderful, uplifting and truly reflect the spirit of the holiday season. It is our privilege to curate these stories – relevant testaments to the indomitable spirit of teachers. Your gifts, re-gifted, in the most innovative ways.

My thanks to each of our teachers, partners and donors for sharing your unique gifts; all make our children's future promising. Let's keep the giving going and greet 2014 with excitement and headlong momentum.

Happy New Year,

**Karen K. Webb**  
Executive Director

## Our Mission

Fund for Teachers enriches the personal and professional growth of teachers by recognizing and supporting them as they identify and pursue opportunities around the globe that will have the greatest impact on their practice, the academic lives of their students and on their school communities.



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Team at Space Camp in 2010.

*“The empowerment we feel as teachers whose ideas were respected and supported by Fund for Teachers makes us want to do (and believe we can do) even more.”*



Team in front of McDonald Observatory in 2013.

## *Bringing Galaxies Far, Far Away to Sheboygan*

**Deb Ericsson**, Jefferson Elementary School - Sheboygan, WI

Kids just have a natural curiosity about space. In the past, science teachers at our school tried to meet that curiosity by purchasing ready-made kits to enhance our district-mandated curriculum. But we were told that kits like that didn't exist because the part of the brain that processes information about space doesn't develop until middle school. That answer didn't work for us. So we designed two Fund for Teachers fellowships, three years apart, that let us blend with other people who shared our passion for science, collaborated with us on ideas, and inspired two new school-wide science curricula for our students.

In 2010 with a Fund for Teachers fellowship, a team of ten teachers from Jefferson Elementary School attended Space Camp in Huntsville, AL. After that week, we came back home and wrote a solar system curriculum that the school embraced and implemented across five grade levels. Last summer, also with a Fund for Teachers grant, that same team

of teachers spent four days on top of a mountain in western Texas studying the night skies at the McDonald Observatory. Full days began with touring the research telescopes where university students were conducting research on the solar system. Many indicated that their interest in astronomy began at a young age, confirming our decision to make space science a vital part of the curriculum at the elementary level. So, again, we returned from our fellowship to create a new curriculum, again adopted school-wide.

Our fellowships started a domino effect that gains momentum each year. We wrote a local grant to partner with the Sheboygan Space Port, bringing experts to our school, taking students there on field trips, and purchasing manipulatives to support the learning. Students' space projects, such as a 3D community on Mars constructed with dry wall, add to that museum's displays. This summer, our fellowship team

plans to make a road trip to the Yerkes Observatory in upstate Wisconsin to continue learning about the skies. We're so proud of what's happening at our school that this February in Houston, we're presenting a 90 minute workshop at the Space Exploration Educators Conference, attended by teachers from across the country and around the world. The empowerment we feel as teachers whose ideas were respected and supported by Fund for Teachers makes us want to do (and believe we can do) even more.

Sometimes, teachers' hands are tied by district mandates; other times, you have a good idea, but not the freedom to run with it. In the case of our school's new science program, we had the vision and Fund for Teachers listened. TWICE, they said "We believe in you – GO FOR IT!" And now, science is a celebrated part of our school – not just icing on the "reading, writing and arithmetic" cake.





Students paint different biomes for the climate change mural.



Using the tool of paint to communicate.



Laying out the mural in Mexico.



Students spend summer days painting community mural with Matt (far right).



Relying on art as the common language in Valladolid.

## Maya and Murals

Matt Christenson, City Arts & Technology High School – San Francisco, CA

My students are DEFINITELY not into art on their own. They're required to take my class and come in turned off from previous experiences with art and/or saying they don't have skills. So we start by looking at graffiti – artists' inspirations, self-expression, imagery. By the time we're through that unit, they begin to believe they can be creative, too. But the largest pieces they painted before my Fund for Teachers fellowship were 2"x4" wood panels.

In July 2012, I spent my fellowship managing a community-wide mural project in Valladolid, Mexico. I wanted to deepen my knowledge of indigenous Mayan history and culture to expand the ancestral knowledge of students (50% Latino at our school) beyond the all-encompassing Cesar Chavez offered in public education. I also wanted experience to lead a similar mural project

with diverse ages, ideas and members of the working class neighborhood around our school.

After completing a mural on the side of a Yucatan hotel that summer, I felt confident to take on a barren school wall. With the administration's support, my art curriculum morphed into a research project with students selecting themes and developing images depicting multiple facets of the topic. So far, my students have transformed school hallways into a statement on climate change and a retrospective on the organic food movement.

Last summer, we took our mural projects to the streets of San Francisco. I interviewed community members to find out issues important to them, sketched out a plan and convinced a business owner to provide an exterior wall of his store as our canvas. For three weeks

in June, students worked alongside neighbors of all ages to turn a 9'x36' street corner into a mural supporting the green movement (clean energy, organic food, community gardens, farmers markets, etc.). A local taqueria already asked to be the next project site.

Students now think of art as a way to communicate. But I also teach them that to communicate *about* their art and get grants like mine from Fund for Teachers, they also have to write well. To mix paints and create art, they have to use formulas and ratios they're learning in math. Art is now a way to enhance learning, make a statement and beautify spaces. Over the next five years, my students and I expect to transform at least ten more walls in our school and community.



Sixth graders worked with experts in natural resources in the field for arsenic lab research.



One stop on Laura's exploration of 12 national parks.



Students developing ointment for treating burns.

## Defeating Nature Deficit Disorder

Laura Wilbanks, Whiteface Elementary School – Whiteface, TX

*“The future will belong to the nature-smart—those who develop a deeper understanding of the natural world and who balance the virtual with the real. The more high-tech we become, the more nature we need.” - Richard Louv, Last Child in the Woods.*

These thoughts formed the inspiration for my Fund for Teachers fellowship because I wanted to change the way my students viewed the great outdoors. We live in Cochran County – one of the most rural areas in Texas and the last one settled by frontiersmen in the late 1800’s. There is plenty of room for exploring out west, yet children don’t take advantage of time in the environment. Where is the **balance** between being indoors reveling in technology and the desire to unplug the Xbox and plug into real life?

As a wildlife biologist who became a teacher, my passion is to develop a love for wild spaces in students who rarely travel more than 100 miles from home. So in the summer of 2012, I trekked through every major national park in the western United States on an unforgettable road trip to address the Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD) I observed in my students. The experience led to classroom collaborations with scientists in 12 states and helped students “catch the bug” for outdoor experiences. Students formed research teams, identified community problems and asked experts from the National Park Service to serve as mentors for projects that received national attention.

A group of seventh graders studied

the healing effects of natural antibiotics and conducted research leading to the development of an all-natural ointment that fights MRSA infections in burn victims. Native plants became the active ingredients and proved more effective than traditional antibiotics in curing wounds. The student-named “Chilly, Chilly, Bang, Bang” ointment won the National Science Teachers Association’s middle school science project of the year in 2013. Students also presented their findings to top military scientists in Washington DC last June, with each earning \$3,500 towards their college education.

*Without the support and experiences provided through my fellowship, these students would not have experienced life-changing connections with experts in the field...*

A group of sixth grade boys built on ideas from biologists at Yosemite and Grand Canyon National Parks to invent a method for fighting wildfires that plague the western United States. The Christopher Columbus Foundation chose their use of superabsorbent polymers in roof shingles as one of the top ideas in the nation. Last June, these students showcased their research to Disney engineers at Disney World and won the foundation’s Chairman’s Award for their work.

Another group of sixth graders studied ways to keep water and soil

free from arsenic contamination – a dangerous environmental and health issue in our area of Texas. The team conducted research using information I brought back from my fellowship and collaborated with scientists from Texas A&M and Texas Tech. Their work placed them among national finalists in the Army’s eCYBERMISSION program and won the Discovery Channel’s *Explore the Blue* national contest. Additionally, this month, the students won our region’s Lexus EcoChallenge for best Land/Water Project in the Southern United States and accepted \$4,000 for their groundbreaking research. First Lady Laura Bush, representing the Take Care of Texas campaign, personally congratulated the students, calling them “true citizen scientists.”

Without the support and experiences provided through my Fund for Teachers fellowship, these students would not have experienced life-changing connections with experts in the fields of environmental science.

John James Audubon said, “A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers but borrowed from his children.” If not in nature, how will this generation of children ever learn to care enough to become conservationists at heart? The students of Whiteface are now leading the way as true citizen scientists making a difference in their world, thanks to the opportunities provided by Fund for Teachers.





## *Containing Students' Excitement for Gardening*

Lynn Gerbode, Harvard Elementary School - Houston, TX

The Kinder Buddies sow seeds.

An architect by training, I don't profess to be a gardener in any shape or form – in fact, houseplants seem to die within days, if not actually on the way home from the nursery. But a science teacher by choice, I also realize the importance of connecting students with living organisms, particularly when there aren't that many places left to do so in a large city. My 2012 fellowship to Italy, where containerized gardening is an art form, sent me to expansive nurseries, small farms, a hesperidarium (yes, there are such things as plant museums) and community/civic gardens. I learned about small scale organic gardening techniques to jump-start and support a containerized gardening program in my land-locked school two blocks from a major interstate.

My goal was to steer students toward progressive involvement with environmental responsibility, beginning with exposure and engagement in the

classroom and extending to their homes. I hoped this would foster students' life-long appreciation of and interest in the environment, including learning to grow things for enjoyment, personal consumption and even aesthetics, no matter their age or where they live (primarily apartments).

Implementing my fellowship learning at school proved challenging, as cluttered eyesores or "random acts of gardening" weren't allowed on the few unclaimed outdoor spaces. So we started containerized gardening in my science lab by growing herbs in water bottles, milk jugs and food cans collected from the school cafeteria. The opportunity to cultivate and share our harvest with families turned out to be a pretty strong motivator for students of all ages.

Tasting success, my students asked to grow something bigger and better – vegetables. They joked that they

were planting pizza sauce, as the most common choices were tomatoes, bell peppers and more basil. (Apparently, no fans of squash or beans.) These crops required considerably more time, but reaped badges of honor for those taking home metal cans of green patio tomatoes.

While most classes were quite content growing things to take home and cultivate on their back steps, one grade level stepped out of the box. Our school follows the PYP International Baccalaureate program, whose philosophy embeds inquiry, social awareness and action. Therefore, it was encouraging to hear third graders express concern about the drought affecting Houston at the time. Millions of trees died in the city's notable public parks and protected urban forests and were cleared out as safety hazards. Thinking that containerized gardening could assist in some way, students





Basil transplanted from plastic cups.



Tomatoes and peppers planted in cans from cafeteria.



Lynn trims trees at a nursery in the Montecatini Terme region of Tuscany.



Raised beds now occupy school's green space.

contacted the local arboretum and joined its reforestation project. The arboretum provided students with materials to test acorns for viability, then germinate and nurture surviving seedling oaks for the remainder of the school year, after which the arboretum would retrieve for distribution around the city. We tended so many containers around the school that the administration suggested moving them to a small U-shaped clearing behind the building near the utility systems.

Indoors, students continue to grow kitchen herbs in small, recyclable containers, but have also instigated a unique experiment: Fourth graders started their plant life cycle unit by sowing special brassica rapa seeds, a.k.a. Wisconsin Fast Plants, that go from germination to harvest in about five weeks. Other grades are lined up to access the growlight system as soon as the first harvest was complete. Outdoors, grade-level teachers now plant wider variety of edible botanicals that include components difficult to implement indoors, such as poles, stakes and trellises. A couple of Kinder Buddy groups (5th grade "leaders" paired with Kindergarten "learners") tend non-edible plants, such as those that are photosensitive or attract migrating Monarch butterflies, providing learning opportunities about natural cycles beyond those of plants.

Small scale but great range, gardening is exposing all our students to deeper experiences of environmental awareness by connecting them to nature, enriching their time outdoors, and scaffolding enthusiasm for taking care of their world in simple, but contagious ways.

## Equanimity Through Equine Studies

(Continued)

The impact of these relationships is profound. One 17-year-old young man with autism tells his parents stories about "friends" from the barn—his parents shared with me that he's never before *had* friends. A different student, who doesn't speak, smiles confidently on a horse that others find ill-tempered: the student communicates with the horse using body movements, not words, and the horse respects the student's quiet demeanor. And yet another special needs student weeps each day as he grooms the horses; I feared the experience was overwhelming or frightening, but his teachers told me this is a safe place for him to release pent up emotions.

A goal of our program is to enter riders in Special Olympics' equestrian events. Athletes must compete regionally before qualifying for the state meet, however, there are no equestrian events in Chicago. So we're hosting our own this spring. I called the state office to make sure I had all the paperwork and the representative said, "Wait, you're from an agricultural school...in Chicago?" We're pioneers!

To accommodate the program during Chicago's harsh winters, our school started a fundraising campaign to build a year-round arena that can also be used by the community in the evenings. And since the students and I are here everyday during the summer caring for the animals, we're planning a summer camp for elementary-aged kids, with my students as counselors. I've promised that all proceeds will fund a group camping experience on a working ranch in Missouri next fall (another milestone as many of my students have rarely even ventured to other parts of Chicago).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's principal of least restrictive environment states: "To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who do not have a disability." The riding program at Chicago Ag is a shining example of this principle at work, and it all started with my Fund for Teachers fellowship.



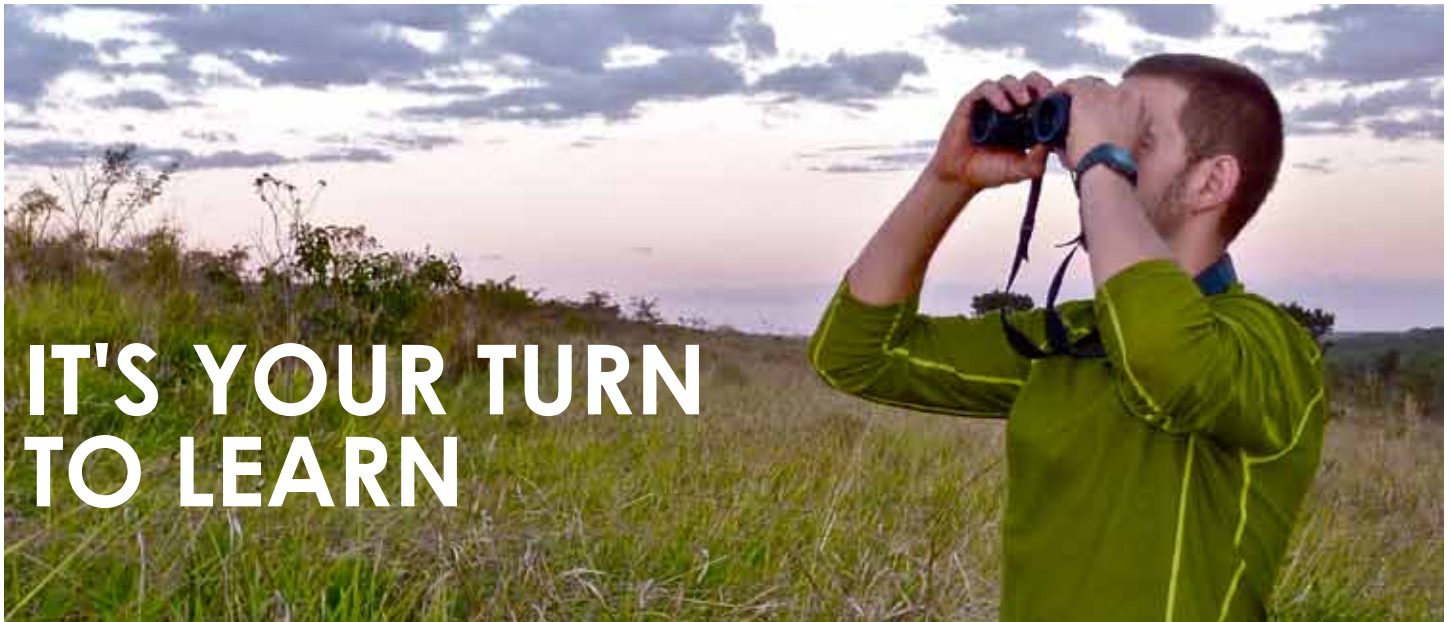
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