



MONTANA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF & THE BLIND Express

giving kids the building blocks to independence

Volume XV, Issue 3, Summer 2016



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Supports MSDB

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Weekends for the Deaf
and Hard of Hearing
Celebrates 20 Years!

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MONTANA COLLABORATES WITH TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

By Barbara Balko, Outreach Consultant

For the past five years, Montana has been actively involved in two federal grants funded by the U.S. Department of Education and offered through Texas Tech University to train specialized teachers who desire to work with children with sensory impairments. The grants provide(d) a high-quality personnel preparation program to scholars via a hybrid program that combines distance education, face-to-face instruction, and local support with outcomes that scholars will become trained professionals with expertise in one area of sensory impairment. Grant students are chosen from four collaborative partner states: Idaho, Montana, Texas, and Wyoming. Project SASI (Students with Autism and Sensory Impairments) was the first of two consecutive grants created to train professionals. Between 2012 and 2016, Project SASI recruited and trained a total of nine teachers from across Montana. A second federal grant titled Project CAT-SI (Collaboration and Assistive Technology for Students with Sensory Impairments) was awarded to Texas Tech University in the fall of 2015 with the first cohort beginning its coursework in January of 2016. Project CAT-SI is currently training four teachers across Montana in the first cohort of the grant. The second cohort is scheduled to begin in January of 2018. Scholars are currently training in the areas of Visual Impairment, Deafblindness and Orientation and Mobility. The program also offers training in the area of Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Project CAT-SI supports 2.5 years of training in the teacher's prospective program of choice. After completion of the program, grant recipients will be eligible to be certified in their state within their specialization area. Applicants must



TEXAS TECH
UNIVERSITY.

be aware of their state certification/licensure requirements. To be eligible for a Project CAT-SI scholarship, a potential scholar must be either a general or special education teacher with current licensure/certification in Montana and be a U.S. citizen. Grant funds pay for all tuition, fees, books, and travel during the program if accepted. Those accepted must commit to completing the program within the established timeline and must commit to working with students with sensory impairments for at least two years for each year of scholarship received.

The collaboration effort between Texas Tech University and the state of Montana is quite unique and one of very few grants being offered of its kind throughout the United States. The grant was written to specifically identify, recruit, and train professionals in rural, remote, and high-need locations to increase each selected state's capacity to serve students with sensory impairments from birth through secondary transition age. Montana was fortunate to have been selected as one of the few states that Texas Tech University was committed to support. The ongoing relationship of the past five years between Montana and Texas Tech University has been a very positive one. If you are interested in one of these grant opportunities, please feel free to contact Barbara A. Balko, Outreach Vision Consultant and Project CAT-SI Collaborative Partner in Montana at bbalko@msdb.mt.gov or call 406 544-7537. ■■

SENIOR TRIP 2016

By Michelle Cross, Outreach Consultant

Kyle Hotzel and Mikayla Ellermann, the Class of 2016, have been raising money for the past 4 years to save for a Senior Trip. –We recently returned from our great adventure in California. When we arrived, we went straight to Disneyland We spent three days at Disneyland and California Adventures, and one day each at SeaWorld,

Universal Studios, the beach and whale watching. SeaWorld had great shows and the Mantra Roller Coaster. Universal Studios was amazing with their newly opened Harry Potter Village. It was fun to ride the tour bus and see the movie sets and we even got to see some movie action. Kyle and Mikayla had a magical time on their Senior Trip. We would like to thank the MSDB Foundation for their support in making this trip possible. I would like to send a special thank you to my Co-Sponsor Lynda Eddards for all of her love and support during the past four years. ■■

A Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Families, Staff, Students, and Stakeholders around the state and country,

Welcome to this edition of the Express. You know the saying, “it takes a village...” It takes multiple people to produce the Express each printing. Huge thanks goes to Leann Goss for spearheading and organizing these efforts! She goes above and beyond for each edition. Thanks go also to each and every person who submits articles! If there is a topic or event you would like to see featured, please let us know!



Several exciting things will be happening the next school year. As most of you know, we will be embarking on accreditation processes for both the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) and the National Accreditation Council (NAC) accreditation. As part of these processes, we will be defining and refining our school and agency mission as well as the mission of all our programs and activities. Every moment and every activity should have purpose and be meaningful to our students.

This year, we will be implementing the Great Falls Public School's model of “early out Wednesdays.” We will be dismissing all students every Wednesday at 2:00pm. Day students will go home and residential students will be dismissed to the cottage.

We will be using this time for professional development of certified staff. In the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Department, we have the opportunity to begin learning more about ASL-English Bilingual Education. We will also be learning more about Listening and Spoken Language practices. To be clear, we are NOT becoming an ASL-English Bilingual school. We are NOT becoming an oral or Listening and Spoken Language school. We do want all of our students who are deaf or hard of hearing to have all the bilingual language skills they deserve as members of the hearing world and potential members of the deaf community. We also want all of our students who are deaf or hard of hearing to be fluent users of English both in reading and writing and to develop all the listening and spoken language skills that they can accomplish.

In the Visual Impairment (VI) Department, we will be designing sensory-specific training and learning for all Teachers in the VI Department as well as VI Support Staff. This training will include Unified English Braille transitioning, Orientation and Mobility (O&M) consistency, ongoing assessment, and implementing classroom accommodations.

I am excited for this next school year and our continued learning both together and individually. Enjoy the remaining weeks of your summer and when school starts, have a great year! 🍀

*Wishing you peace,
Donna E Sorensen, MSDB Superintendent*

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Job Shadowing...A Sweet Experience!

By Jennifer Briggs,
School Counselor

Crooked Tree Coffee and Cakes shop is a family owned business in downtown Great Falls that has been in business for 5 years. They specialize in crafting delicious coffee and custom cakes, including cakes for weddings, birthdays, and other special events! They welcomed one of MSDB's students from the Visually Impaired Department as their first student to ever spend a day of job shadowing them! Mikayla, a graduating senior, had the opportunity to bake and decorate a champagne cake. She learned there is a lot of time that goes into the baked goods that Crooked Tree sells. In addition to decorating the cake she created flowers with purple fondant.



"I spent hours decorating the cake with edible pearls and fairy dust. It was so much fun and takes a lot of time!" said Mikayla

Later we saw Mikayla's cake sparkling on the display shelf. "We had a great time today with Mikayla! She has so much ambition and excitement to one



Mikayla was honored to be given the purple fondant flower she had created at Crooked Tree Coffee and Cakes.

day become a pastry chef; and she came in today to job shadow with us. What a blessing to be able to encourage young people to chase their dreams!" says the Crooked Tree Family. ☼

MSDB Learns about the Arts "Hands on" Style

By Yvette Smail, Behavior Specialist

Jeff Kuratnick, Education Director of the Paris Gibson Square (PGS) Museum of Art, contacted the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) to offer us an exciting and educational opportunity made possible under a contract with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Students and staff of MSDB visited the PGS Museum of Art as a recipient of a 2015-2016 VSA Museum Access for Kids Program Grant to provide programming for students with special needs. This grant allows for two visits to the PGS Museum of Art through the end of the 2015-2016 school years. MSDB attended on April 28, 2016 and May 20, 2016. Students and staff started with a tour through the museum where they learned about two dimensional art, three dimensional art, kinetic art, and other forms of art media. After the tour, the students and staff were allowed to do different art projects such as origami frogs and clay bowls. It was very exciting to go to a "Please Touch" art museum as it allowed our students that are blind or have low vision to have



equal access to the art pieces. The students did great and had many questions and comments about the art they saw. Many students asked how to get their artwork into the museum; so hopefully that can happen in the future. Our visit on April 28, 2016 actually put us on the KRTV news which was an unexpected and terrific surprise for MSDB! If you would like a chance to see us, go to <http://bit.ly/1rEIwf9>

Seven school districts in total benefited from the VSA Museum Access for Kids Program grant including Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, Conrad, Belt, Sun River Valley, Vaughn, Highwood, and Great Falls. It is our hope that this grant will continue to be funded as it was a fantastic experience, and also a terrific way to teach the students about community and all the things that can be found within our own communities. ☼



35TH ANNUAL GAMES for the Visually Impaired

By Michelle Cross, Outreach Consultant

MSDB recently held the 35th Annual Games for the Visually Impaired on May 13-14. It was a huge success thanks in part to the MSDb Foundation, MSDb staff, volunteers and the families of our athletes. The Games for the Visually Impaired are held each spring at the Montana School for the Deaf & the Blind campus in Great Falls. Athletes from around the state compete



in track and field, gymnastics, gym activities, swimming and showdown table. This is a competitive event for blind and visually impaired students ranging in age from 3-21.

The Games started on Friday, with the Pentathlon for athletes ages 10 and over. The pentathlon consists of six (6) events: 90 meter swim, 60

meter run, 100 meter run, shot put, standing broad jump and a 400 meter run (optional and can be substituted for another event). On Saturday, athletes ages 3-21 competed in swimming, gymnastics, gym activities, endurance activities, Showdown table and track and field. The look of joy and accomplishment was evident on the athletes' faces when competing in events during the Games and when accepting their medals during the closing ceremonies.

The VI Games is an uplifting and confidence-boosting weekend for participants, families, and the MSDb staff who provides lots of support for the kids. Volunteers are willing to swim and run with athletes. Any student with a visual impairment is welcome to participate in the event. For more information on future Games for the Visually Impaired, please see our website at www.msdb.mt.gov for dates and guidelines. ■■

College Students Engage MSDB Students

By Missie Hill, Special Education Coordinator

On May 16, MSDb was honored to have students from Salish Kootenai College's (SKC) teacher education preparation program come to observe and lead some activities with our students. A total of 18 SKC students came with their professors to engage with our student population. They toured the campus and spent the morning observing classrooms. In the afternoon, they



lead various activities with our students, including painting with egg yolk colored with berries, playing Sticks, making wire art, and working on Native American designs. All of the MSDb students were excited for this chance

to see more of the Native American culture. There was laughter and smiles all afternoon.

When the group from SKC got ready to leave, they mentioned how wonderful our school is and how much they were touched by not only the students, but by the caring of the staff. They were so happy with the day's activities that together, we are already planning for their return visit next school year.

In the final days of the school year, when testing and paperwork are in full force, it was nice to have a day to enjoy new things and make new friends. We thank SKC for coming and hope for many great visits in the future. ■■



Untangling the Dots Across the State

By Kerri Norick, Outreach Consultant

The 9th braille in-service workshop was held at MSDB on April 22-23.. MSDB Outreach Consultants collaborated with special guest speaker Allison O'Day, National Federation for the Blind Braille Instructor, to provide braille training to over twelve participants from around the state. With the 147,

164 square miles that our state covers, MSDB Outreach Consultants often find the distances cumbersome when providing braille supports to teachers from Bainville to Stevensville. Since the passing of the Braille Bill in 2006, school districts are required to assign a teacher or paraprofessional "within two years of the date a student with a visual impairment has been identified as in need of

braille instruction and/or materials. AUTH: 20-2-114, MCA IMP: 20-1-121, 20-7-475, MCA"

This can be a huge feat for small, rural towns like Joliet and Dillon. Teachers assigned to teach braille feel very isolated and frustrated, but when participating at the Untangling the Dots workshop, teachers often report:

"As someone who has no knowledge of the visually impaired, I was so pleased to experience these days – ideas, hands-on experience was great."

"Being with other people working toward same goal, Allison being here and available for questions and quick lesson-checking immediately."

"Learning to communicate better and teach a blind child braille. I especially liked how well the instructors adjusted their expectations and agenda to accommodate different skill levels."

"Many great tips and support."

"How the staff made accommodations for the learning levels of braille. I also really loved all the hands on braille practice and tips on how to remember key things about braille."

The next Untangling the Dots workshop will be held at MSDB on October 7-8, 2016. For more information please go to: www.msdb.mt.gov ■■



DEAF ENRICHMENT WEEKEND AT MSDB -A BIG HIT!

By Kitty Griffin, Outreach Consultant

On a beautiful Montana spring day in April, Deaf and Hard of Hearing students from around our state, gathered on the MSDB campus for Deaf Enrichment Weekend (fondly called DEW by the staff). DEW is specifically "designed to create opportunities for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing to interact with peers, rather than providing information for parents and siblings. The weekend promotes socialization and activities that are implemented to build confidence and a sense of responsibility in each participant." (msdb.mt.gov) This year, we partnered with Special Olympics for activities and the students were grouped based on age with the Young Athletes (Preschool to 2nd grade), Club UNIFY (3rd-6th grade) and Youth Activation Committee (YAC) 7th grade to Post High School.

The students enjoyed a pizza party dinner together and participated in Bocce Ball in the warm sunshine Friday evening, followed by swimming. In addition, the students decorated banners, attended a Respect Rally, and participated in a Share and Tell Time. One favorite activity was the "secret" crafting of gifts for the presenters at DEW. The students added their special touch with colorful fingerprints and a group picture in a gorgeous frame. Those will surely be displayed in a place of honor and bring back the great memories year after year.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Outreach Consultants hustled around guiding students, talking with families, finding old friends and taking pictures of the event. Interpreters were on hand for each group and the cottage staff kept it all flowing smoothly. Thank you everyone! No DEW would be complete without mentioning DEW Planner extraordinaire: Jennifer Wasson. We love you, Jen!

Before departing on Saturday afternoon, families were gathered for awards and the showing of an iMovie created during DEW. Whoops, laughs and cheers went up as the students recognized themselves on the "big screen." Yes, there are movie stars in our midst! ■■

THYME TO HARVEST

By Missie Hill,
Special Education Coordinator

So what do you do when presented with an area like this, pictured right? You plant a garden, of course!

In Mrs. Hill's science classes, the students were studying sustainability and recycling. The discussion turned towards food. The classes decided to plant vegetables, herbs, and flowers. We decided the vegetables and herbs would be used in the life skills classes on campus, giving the students the experience of cooking and eating things they have grown. The flowers would be sold.

Once growing season ends, the seeds from these plants would be preserved and replanted to continue the process.

Out of the blue, information came to the classes about a contest for recycling and sustainability which dealt with milk cartons. It was quickly agreed that we needed to sign up



for the contest. The entire school voted to be called MSDB Thyme to Harvest. There is a large cash prize for the winner, as well as gardening equipment. The rules stated we needed to use 100 milk cartons, write up some information, and show how we were sustainable. Well, we went

all out. We used a total of 237 milk cartons and the entire school was involved in the process.

Milk cartons were used to plant, as were coffee containers, and most of what we used to decorate was recycled or reused materials.

We beautified the area by freeing it of weeds and junk. Then we set about hanging all the beautiful flowers, lanterns, and baskets made by our students to further decorate. Furniture was donated to make the area a relaxing place where students can go with their class to read or enjoy the sun.

The students really enjoyed the whole process and the science classes continue to work on plants. Many students stopped us in the halls to ask about the garden. It was very enjoyable to see the entire school turn out for the decorating. We truly are one big family.

I believe the sign on the greenhouse says it all. ■■

A Club of Crafts, Community, and Camaraderie

By Carrie Dawes, Teacher

What do you get when you combine 7 energetic students who are visually impaired, 3 daring adults, lots of laughter, tons of fun, and a spirit of adventure? Why, MSDB's very own Cane Club!

Cane Club is an after school program which is located on the campus of the Montana School For the Deaf And the Blind (MSDB). We meet the second and fourth Wednesday of each month during the school year for about 1 to 1 1/2 hours each time.

A "typical" meeting is not to be had! We may be found on campus in VI 1 in the Aspen Building making beaded key

chains, peanut butter pinecone birdfeeders, or decorative cans. You might also find us sprawled on the floor in the midst of an intense card or board game. If our music is a bit catchy, you may see some of the kids movin' to the



groovin'! Setting up equipment for an upcoming event on campus may also be on our agenda.

If you stop by the Aspen Building and we are not there - you may find us walking to the neighborhood store for a treat. We could also be at the mall practicing the money skills we learned in school or riding the escalator! We have also been known to check out the great variety of

museums in Great Falls.

Cane Club is full of fun, fellowship, and camaraderie. What a great way to spend time with your friends at the end of the day! Cane Club Advisors are Dee Blake, Christy Haagenon, and Carrie Dawes. ■■



Montana School *for the*

HELP US GIVE KIDS THE BUILD

THE PLACE WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE...

When you see those words, what place comes to mind? Yes!! DISNEY.

That statement is their tagline along with “the most magical place on Earth.” While MSDB might not be the most magical places on Earth, it is one of the most magical places in the state of Montana for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. There is something here for everyone! MSDB provides partial to full-time placement options, access to language and communication, access to the environment, mainstreaming options with Great Falls Public Schools, and so many events designed specifically for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. MSDB offers Deaf Enrichment Weekends, Games for the Visually Impaired, Family



Richard and Darreck supervise a game at Summer Skills Camp for students with visual impairments. Thomas tosses a ball while Kaelyn and Billy stand nearby.

Learning Weekends, Focus/Goalball Weekends, and summer camps!

Some of the hardest skills to learn for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind become easy at MSDB. We have an environment where staff members understand how to break tasks down into manageable steps. Staff members understand the needs of the students because they have specific training. They also train each other so everyone on campus can empower students to use the individualized accommodations and modifications established by their education teams. These accommodations and modifications

allow each student equal access to information and to the environment. For students who have vision conditions, good orientation and communication are needed

“Individual commitment to a group effort--that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”

—Vince Lombardi

HOW YOU CAN HELP

You can change the world for a student who is deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind by supporting the MSDB Foundation. With your

help, we have been able to provide funds for services, programs, and equipment for over 30 years.

Donate at justgive.org

We appreciate your support! Thank you!

Deaf & Blind Foundation

ENDING BLOCKS TO INDEPENDENCE

to assure the students understand something as simple as a swimming pool. For most of us, we take a quick look and notice the pool has four sides, goes from shallow to deep and we quickly evaluate the people or objects within. To someone who cannot see an arm's length past their body, they don't have that same access to information and must be taught and/or shown, which takes time.



A close up of Whalyn greeting a small horse, or is the small horse greeting Whalyn?

How can MSDB do all these things? MSDB has staff members who are dedicated beyond compensation to ensuring each and every student has opportunities to practice skills that lead to independence. Staff ensure those skills lead to every student being able to reach their full potential. Most of these activities happen outside of anyone's regular work time. The MSDB Foundation financially, along with other partners, supports each of these activities from paying staff to purchasing supplies to reimbursing families for transportation. The Foundation engages in fundraising opportunities so our students can participate in all the "extras" that build their

foundational skills in so many areas.

Recently, we had our week long Summer Skills Camp for students with visual impairments. One student, Whalyn, wrote, "We are going to the movies tonight and they have special headphones that describe the movie to us." Audio description is something that should be provided at every movie theatre. This camp and MSDB sets the

foundation for students to know what their rights are and to ask for the necessary accommodations.

Whalyn also wrote, "I swam for two hours last night. I hung on to the sides and had a life jacket on." He attended the Games for the Visually Impaired a few months earlier. When he swam at VI Games, he was somewhat scared. He clung to the person who swam with him and learned how to use the wall. It sounds like he showed off his independent swimming skills at camp.

If you want to support our students in learning more independence skills, please consider donating to the MSDB Foundation! Thank you! ♠

MSDB Foundation Board of Directors

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WHAT'S UP ON THE HI LINE?



ABOVE: 2016 Frazer High School Valedictorian Joni Jones plans to give back to her family and community following her high school graduation. Joni is a talented artist and is very appreciative of all the support she has received during her years of education. It has been an honorable adventure to watch you grow, Joni!



ABOVE: Emma Rose celebrated her preschool graduation and will be entering kindergarten in the fall! With support from MSDB's Family Advisor Program (Thank you, Darci!), the amazing staff (Thank you, Debb, Tracey and Rylie!) at Fairview Elementary and her loving family (Megan, Gabi, Nana & Papa), Emma is on track with her hearing peers!

BELOW: Congratulations, Joseph Kohl! We first met Joseph when he was young and attended the MSDB Summer Camp for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. As Joseph grew he brought his family to Family Learning Weekends and he joined the MSDB student body for Griz games. Since those days, Joseph has graduated from Froid High School and from Dawson Community College studying art, welding and business. Most recently Joseph shared his life experiences with us on the Young Adult Panel at the Family Learning Weekend for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Thank you, Joseph, for being the dynamic individual that you are. You are a wonderful role model for our students, staff and our families!



ABOVE: 2016 Plentywood High School graduate Nick Friedrich is heading to Montana State University Bozeman to study computer engineering. Plentywood School staff, Montana Vocational Counseling, MSU Bozeman and MSDB Outreach collaborated to serve Nick in his educational adventure. My personal thanks goes to Chelsea, Nick's sister. Chelsea, you are an amazing young woman and you have lovingly and unselfishly raised Nick to be the young man he is today. I am in awe of both of you.



LEFT: Congratulations go to Riata Smith, 2016 graduate of Terry High School and our favorite cowgirl! Riata is following her love of horses and her natural talent to complete a Farrier Program at Montana State University Bozeman. What does a Farrier do? Riata's simple explanation, "It's basically a pedicure for horses." You're a beautiful young lady, Riata. Your smile and personality bring sunshine to our world.



MSDB student, Juan, practicing with his Central Catholic High School cheer team for the statewide Cheerfest competition. Central took first place overall.

MSDB's Proud History of Athletics

By Bob Corwin, MSDB Athletic Director, Retired

I first stepped onto the MSDB campus in the spring of 1976. I was a senior in college completing a course in Education and part of the requirements were to visit as many different educational experiences as we could find, and then report on them. I was hooked on what I experienced here at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. My degree was in Special Education and Recreation/Physical Education. It turned out I knew the Principal of the school and I asked him if I could do my student teaching at MSDB. That fall I student taught under the Physical Education instructor, Mr. Gary McManus. It was an honor to work with him; and he was a great mentor in the education of deaf students. Gary was also the basketball coach, wrestling coach, track coach, cross country coach, and Special Olympics coach. Gary did everything at MSDB for athletics. That first fall I assisted Gary as the Athletic Trainer and Assistant Coach. In those years Athletics at MSDB were whatever we could make them. Gary was on the phone constantly trying to secure games for the boys. We traveled a lot to other towns just to play games. We played a Junior Varsity schedule as we did not belong to any state conferences or districts. Highwood was one of the teams we played. Highwood was coached and administered by Mr. Bud Williams. Bud was instrumental in getting MSDB into the Montana High School Association. The following year we joined the Northern C, District 8 which supported teams from Highwood, Geraldine, Geyser, Stanford, Dutton, Brady, Centerville, Power and MSDB. We were not very good;

but our students loved the games and enjoyed traveling to other schools. Back in the day we were a novelty when we traveled. I often heard comments from the "locals" such as, "these kids aren't too strange, I didn't know what to expect, they play basketball pretty good", and there were some negative comments as well. We did not realize it at the time; but we were embarking on a journey that would bring friendship, heartache, frustration and compassion from our competitors. Eventually girls' basketball would join the Northern C, District 8. You guessed it, Gary coached them too! Gary was the single most dedicated individual MSDB could ever hope to have. It was several years before MSDB won any games. MSDB lost something like 90 games before they won their first game. That never publicly bothered Coach McManus. He knew his teams would eventually win. MSDB stayed in the Northern C for many years until changes in school enrollments forced District 8C to modify its members. Schools switched classifications and some formed co-ops with other schools to continue playing. Eventually, MSDB's enrollment declined and MSDB went back to playing a Junior Varsity schedule for a couple of years. Later, we formed a co-op with Great Falls Central Catholic School (GFCCS). To this day we are still in that agreement and it is a distinct advantage for MSDB. This co-op allows students at MSDB to participate in sports offered at GFCCS. Many of our students have played for GFCCS in the past 10 years or so in football, basketball, volleyball, track, golf, softball and cheerleading. We have become good partners with GFCCS and they are very accepting of our student athletes. We look forward to many more years with GFCCS. ■■

The Good Stuff: Staff Honors Inspirational Teacher Retiring After 39 Years at MSDB

By Leann Goss, Outreach Consultant

Every year, MSDB staff has a Thanksgiving potluck lunch. The first one I ever attended was about 10 years ago and I was invited to sit at a table where Bob Corwin was also seated. The line had been very long to get lunch so imagine my surprise to see Bob taking his last bite of a delicious homemade dessert before I had even gotten to sit down. As he stood up he announced he'd go get his lunch. Stating the obvious I blurted out, "You just finished dessert!" With that huge smile of his, he replied, "Yep! I always go for the good stuff first; and besides, the line was shorter." As I got to know Bob through the years and had opportunities to observe him with students of all ages, my mind always went back to what he said at that potluck lunch. Just as Bob found the best food first that day; he first finds the best part of each student he encounters. As teachers, part of the job is to address students' areas of weakness and build them up, fill in gaps. From what I observed, that is not at all how Bob Corwin ever approached his job. He was always more interested in getting to know what made a student "tick" and using whatever that was to motivate and instill confidence and self worth into each and every student. He interacted with his students as a mentor and a role model. He maintained focus on guiding students to become successful, independent, productive citizens. He earned their respect and made it clear he was not looking for their friendship; but instead held high expectations that they would find what they needed to be successful from within themselves. It was always about them; not about him. Bob's approach to teaching continues to inspire me to always try to "go for the good stuff first" when I encounter students and maybe even potluck lunches.

Certain that I could not be the only one who felt inspired by Bob's dedicated work with students, I decided to seek out a few people who have had the privilege to work closely with him over the years and their responses were so extensive I could not fit them all in print; so I have a few words from each person I contacted here. If you would like to read the letters in their entirety, please go to our website at www.msdb.mt.gov and select MSDB Express from the side menu.

• **Jim Kelly, Dean of Students:**

The hats Bob has worn over the years have been many.



Bob comforts preschooler, Gracie, in the preschool room in 2006.



The students have benefited from your dedication and loyalty every day. Pictured left: Mr. C making cotton candy in 1986.

• **Gail Bechard, retired teacher:**

Bob was a great role model for the preschool class. They loved him! We were studying Mr. C and his Cotton Candy (Letter People). So Bob (Mr. C) would come into Preschool every year when we were learning about Mr. C. Again, he was so great

• **Bill Davis, Former MSDB teacher, counselor, Dean of Students, and Principal:**

Bob Corwin was always a good role model for students in approaching and dealing with problems. He knew the students well and could capitalize on their abilities effectively influencing, teaching, counseling, and securing employment for them. Bob Corwin always demonstrated humor, a caring attitude, and a commitment to the students he served.

• **Pam Stuckey, retired Communication Technician:**

Bob had done the intricate job of advising the class

sponsors – he was the go-to person, for example, when a student was not able to come up with at least a small portion of the dues needed for going on a senior trip. Bob would liaison with the cottage and other groups in order for the student to have an extra chore to earn dues.

• **Mary Lou Weist, Retired Teacher's Assistant:**

He taught me how kind words of encouragement, a smile, patience and “listening” to the students whether signing or speaking meant the world to them. Students knew they could depend on Bob, they knew they were worth something. I learned no matter what the age of the student they have the potential to do their best if given the chance. I know we all have a work ethic, I know Bob helped me improve mine.

• **Yvette Smail, Behavior Specialist:**

Bob was one of the most welcoming people when I started working at MSDB and I feel blessed to now call him friend.

• **Steve Sangwin, former Teacher:**

I always enjoyed Bob being calm, especially when things did not always go as planned.

• **Denise Rutledge, Teacher:**

Bob's career has impacted thousands of students and staff members. He coached students and taught physical education classes for many years—teaching his students the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, exercise and the importance of pushing oneself to do their best, as well as teaching them the importance of working together as a team. The gym is going to echo with the sounds of the equipment and the grunts of exertion, but there will be a hollow silence from the loss of conversation and laughter.

• **Emily LaSalle, Outreach Consultant:**

Bob Corwin is a noble man with qualities that inspire. He holds our students to high expectations; no short cuts or excuses. I admire Bob for the many years of dedicated service to our school. Bob, you have touched many lives both young and old. I will miss your smile and your ability to make gray skies turn blue.

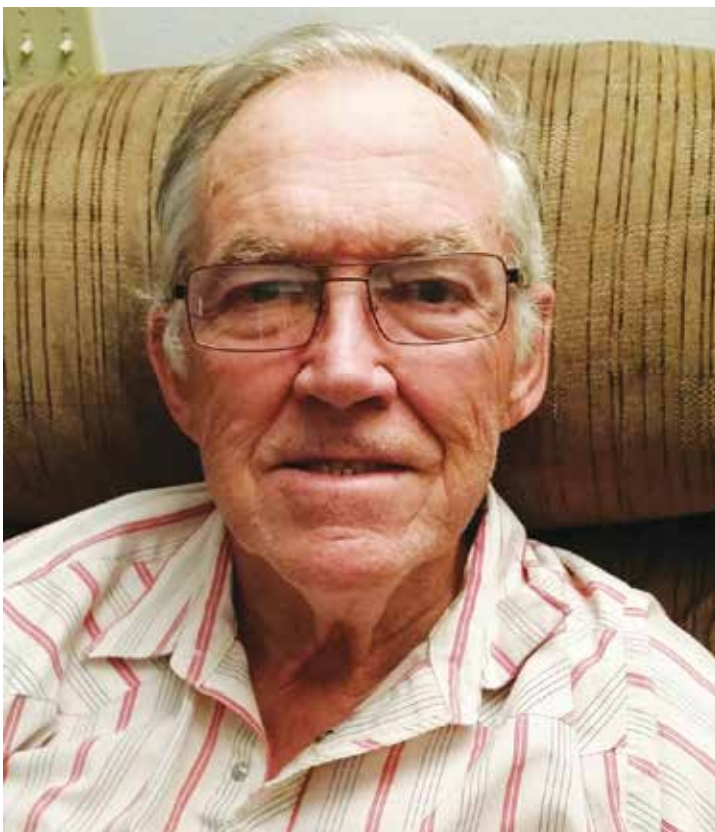
• **Gary McManus, Retired Teacher:**

Bob Corwin is the kindest, most caring, and generous man I have ever known. He cared deeply about the students and the staff. He worked hard and put many hours into setting up the Jr. High School tournaments at our school. Many of the coaches and athletic directors from the many other schools really appreciated Bob for all he did to make

the tournaments run smoothly. Bob was there to open up the gym, there all day to see that everything went smoothly, and he would then close up; putting in 16-18 hours a day on the weekends to run the basketball tournaments. He then cleaned up on Sundays because he knew that no janitors came in until Monday afternoon. If he hadn't cleaned up, the gym would not have been clean for my classes in the morning!!! He received no money, no appreciation for his extra work. He is very humble and would not want to gain attention for anything that he did for the school. He always helped get sponsors for the freshman class so that they could start raising money for their senior trip; Bob is just the nicest guy around! ❖



***“Thanks for all you have
done for MSDB, Bob,
you will be missed.”***



1958 MSDB graduate, Rolph Foster.

Where Are They Now? ROLPH FOSTER

By Gary McManus, Retired Teacher

Our featured former graduate for this edition is Rolph Foster. He graduated from MSDB in 1958. Rolph's high school sport of choice was



basketball. If you are ever in the Mustang Center on the school campus you can look him up in the Hall of Fame!

Rolph has been married for 55 years to Lois, a graduate of California School for the Deaf at Berkley!

Rolph was raised in Joplin, Montana. He was a farmer there until 1997. Rolph and Lois have 4 children: Jack, Jeff, Jana, and Julia. Rolph and Lois spend their winters enjoying the sun in Phoenix, Arizona. They enjoy their

time as snowbirds playing bocce ball and card games, watching movies, swimming, and sightseeing. ❖

Welcome to MSDB ELISHYA (LACE) KONKLER

My name is Elishya Konkler; however, everyone calls me Lace. I am a new Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at MSDB. I recently moved to Great Falls from Bozeman, Montana where I spent most of my life growing up. Being a teacher has been a dream of mine since the fourth grade. However, I never



imagined my dream would actually come true.

Growing up I did not think a deaf or hard of hearing individual could become a teacher. I was gravely wrong!

I was born hearing and began losing

my hearing at the age of 7 for no reason. I wore hearing aids until the age of 21, when I then chose to receive bilateral cochlear implants.

After graduating High School, I immediately began my college education to become a Secondary English Education Teacher. In 2014, I graduated with my Bachelor's degree from Montana State University. After taking a summer off and carefully considering graduate school, I began working towards my Graduate Degree in Deaf Education online through the University of Northern Colorado. I graduated in May of 2016. During this time I continued to work as a substitute teacher in the Belgrade School District.

During my short time here, I have never felt more connected to students and enjoyed my profession as a teacher. I cannot wait for the next year to build relationships and teach students, as well as become a role model for them. During my free time I greatly enjoy photography (both scenery and special events), hiking and spending time with my family and I enjoy our animals at home. I cannot thank the administration, staff and students enough for their encouragement and warm welcomes to me as a new teacher here at MSDB! ❖

Get to Know the Class of 2016

Kyle and Mikayla were each asked a few questions and their responses were as follows....



FULL NAME: KYLE HOTZEL

Where are you from? Laurel, MT

What was your favorite subject in school? English & Math

Did you have a job while you were in high school?

Yes, I had 2 jobs in high school. I worked for the on campus job program doing light maintenance and I also worked for Johnson Lumber Company driving to make deliveries for them. I liked working for Bob Corwin, it was fun.

What do plan to do after you graduate from high school? I am going to work after high school.

What do you think you will be doing in 5 years?

In 5 years I will work and have fun.

Please share a favorite memory of school or of your family growing up: My favorite memory is going to Fort Peck to go fishing.

FULL NAME: MIKAYLA N. ELLERMANN

Where are you from? California

What was your favorite subject in school? English & Math

Did you have a job while you were in high school? Yes, I had 3 jobs in high school but they were only during the summer breaks. I liked all of my jobs cause I got to work with food, money, and people.

What do plan to do after you graduate from high school?

I plan on getting a summer job at the Boys and Girls Club in Polson. Then go to college in Missoula at the University of Montana and get a Hospitality and Culinary Arts degree.

What do you think you will be doing in 5 years?

Hopefully in 5 years I'll have graduated from college and start living on my own.

Please share a favorite memory of school or of your family growing up: My favorite memory, although I do not remember everything, would have to be when my mom, older brother, and I went to California. Thanks to Make-a-Wish Foundation we got to go to Disneyland and Sea World.



PRESCHOOL PEEPS



LEFT: All who attended preschool graduation had the joy of seeing Charlee and Lucia excitedly receive their Bear Hug Awards! Lucia was the only preschool graduate in the deaf and hard of hearing department and is pictured here with her proud parents.

FAR LEFT: In the department for the visually impaired, Paisley is pictured sitting between the two preschool graduates, Henry (left) and Eli (right). All were very excited to also receive their Bear Hug Awards.



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Family Learning Weekends Celebrate Milestones

By Jim Kelly, Dean of Students

The summer kicked off with the Family Learning Weekend for Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. The event was held on the MSDB Campus, June 3-5. This was a special weekend for the organizers as we celebrated the 20th year of the Family Learning Weekend. The first weekend (back in 1997) was a first of its kind in Montana. Sarah Eyer and I have been pleased with the growth of the event since that first weekend when we had about eight families. Now, we have between 25-30 families in attendance. Throughout the years we have had different presenters and many different workshops. The one thing that has remained constant is the focus has always been on the audience – families. This year was by far the largest in attendance with 184 parents, grandparents, professionals,



children and staff in attendance. Parents attended various workshops and presentations on such topics as IEP's (Individualized Education Plans), Audiology 101, American Sign Language, as well as separate moms, dads, and grandparents/other caregivers discussion groups. As the weekend came to a close many of the families commented on how wonderful the weekend was and were looking forward to returning next year!

The next weekend, June 10-12, was the Family Learning Weekend for Families of Students with Visual

Impairments. This was the 16th annual event and while the attendance of 113 was about average; it was said to be one of the best weekends! There were several MSDB alumni and other people with visual impairments who shared their failures and success with the families. For so many of the parents listening to the stories of the presenters and panel members gave them a sense of empowerment and encouragement. Also, parents had the opportunity to experience a "sighted guide" and do some basic household chores while under a blindfold. All told, it was another successful weekend for the families and other participants.

The Family Learning Weekends are sponsored by the MSDB Foundation Inc., the Montana Office of Public Instruction, Gallaudet University Regional Center - West at Ohlone College and the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. ■■



ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION

The Arbor Day Program was on April 22nd. The students of MSDB had a great performance, which was followed by Kyle and Mikayla planting the 2016 Senior tree on the grounds of MSDB. Every year, the Senior Class plants one tree in their honor. Retirees plant another tree in their honor.

BACK TO SCHOOL: MSDB - AUG.29, 2016 • GFPS - AUG. 31, 2016

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