

## SETTLING IN

*In print, and online,  
Travis-Echo interview  
covers major topics*

**EDITORS' NOTE** — As he prepared for his first year at Mount Greylock Regional High School, Supt. William Travis sat down at his office roundtable on Aug. 22 for an hour interview with Greylock Echo staffers Isa St. Clair, Carl Kubler and Rachel Payne. Echo advisor Bill Densmore also asked a couple of questions during the session, which was videotaped for cablecast on WilliNet and for distribution in Lanesborough. **ONLINE:** You can listen to the full interview at [http://www.newshare.com/echo/travis\\_interview.mp3](http://www.newshare.com/echo/travis_interview.mp3), or read and print the full text at [http://www.newshare.com/echo/travis\\_text.html](http://www.newshare.com/echo/travis_text.html). The interview will also be cablecast in Williamstown on WilliNet and made available on VHS tape at the Lanesborough library. Topics covered in the full interview included: school-day length, extended learning, military recruitment, the union role, involving alumni, elementary-curriculum coordination, activity fees, financial outlook and taxation, the water system, the building's future and global-knowledge competition. A small portion of highlights follows:

**Q: What about Mount Greylock has surprised you?**

A: I don't know about surprised, but I've met with the School Building Needs Commission and I've attended the presentation that the Williams College students did about the short-comings of the building. And so I guess I was focused on some of the deficits of the building. Over the summer I had the chance to...confirm [the need for] renovation or a new building...But I'm also surprised by how sturdy and appropriate some of the space is in the building, and that's been a pleasant surprise.

**Q: What in the new school year are you looking forward to?**

A: I think there are a lot of things that I want to



William Travis, in his office Aug. 22

get a lot of information about. Part of it is what excites students about the school, what excites faculty about teaching, and to try to find ways to support and encourage those activities...One of the things I hear repeatedly and that I have my own impressions of is that the rotating schedule presents a problem. One of the positives that I hear goes in the direction of a faculty member can see a student and a student can see a faculty member at a different time of the day and students and faculty are day people or afternoon

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Deb Dane, left, and Evan Dethier, in the WilliNet studio on Spring Street in Williamstown last week.

## WilliNet to offer a monthly MGRHS show

By Isa St. Clair

Mt. Greylock may seem an unlikely place for students to earn their 15 minutes of fame, but this fall everyone here will be able to do exactly that every month. A monthly news show, as of yet unnamed, is projected to begin early this October, that will act as a complement to *The Echo*, a source of school news, and a great opportunity for students of all ages and experiences to get involved in something fun.

The impetus for this newscast comes mainly from 11<sup>th</sup>-grade student Evan Dethier, who has hoped to create this for several years. He has also been making short movies since seventh grade. When asked why he had gotten involved in this, Evan replied that "I've started this because I think there should be an outlet for students interested in filmmaking to show their work to the public. I think that *The Echo* is great but that it could be supplemented with a more color-

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## CHINA VIEW

*An Echo editor views class, environment and culture in the world's most populace nation*

**EDITOR'S NOTE** — Greylock Echo co-editor Kejia Tang spent most of the summer in China, traveling with an aunt, and visiting his grandparents. Because he speaks Mandarin, he was able to easily converse with relatives, shopowners and tour guides. His account, more than just a travelogue, offers some surprising insights into Chinese environmental, political, sociological and class realities. He was based in Nanjing, (population 6.4 million) the capital of East China's Jiangsu Province, surrounded by mountains and the Yangtze River. Nanjing has always been one of the most important cities in China. Apart from having been the capital of China for six ancient dynasties and the Republic of China, Nanjing has also served as a hub for education, research, transportation and tourism throughout history. It is also the second largest commercial center in the East China region, behind only Shanghai. The climate is subtropical and it rains an average of 120 days a year. Its industry is electronics, cars, petrochemical, iron and steel, and power, and Nanjing is increasingly a locus for foreign investment.

By Kejia Tang

Dawn. Four o'clock a.m. I was suffering from jetlag and couldn't sleep, but to my surprise, the city was already wide-awake. Vendors hawking their wares. People calling for taxis. Horns honking, motors running. Street-side cooks calling the newly awakened to breakfast.

The first thing I sensed coming out of my grandpa's apartment my first morning in Nanjing was an indescribable aroma of . . . crispy flour and sesame balls stuffed with sweet and sticky red bean paste, kabobs dabbled with red pepper sauce slow roasted over an open spit, razor-thin slices of beef cooked with near transparent strands of glittering rice noodles; pan-fried dumplings, wonton soup, sticky rice, fresh steamed meat buns, and . . . garbage.

Maggot infested pieces of meat, sticky, moldy bread, and wet, brown, rotten vegetables all around the street side vendors and outside the many cook shops lining the street. Two thin streams of putrid green-black water flow underfoot next to each sidewalk. A few people in bright orange uniforms were walking around with picking up the mess and sighing all the while. Even if they worked 'til next dawn, there would still be almost no difference.

The air was starting to get stuffy. I looked up, but there was no blue sky or white clouds, just a fog-like layer of yellow dust blocking out everything except the heat. Humid, suffocating heat. No wonder why Nanjing is called the "Oven City." Everywhere there's

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## write now!

(actually, Sept. 20)

The Greylock Echo's annual recruitment meeting is coming up on Tuesday, Sept. 20 at 2:30 p.m. in the back of the Carleson Library. Have some cookies and juice and learn about opportunities to write for the paper, about new online information resources and about public-affairs programming on WilliNet. All students welcome!



# ANOTHER CULTURE: China

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construction. Newer apartments, bigger malls, grander hotels, taller offices, all day and all night. It's a competition, my cousin told me. Chinese people want "face" and have to compete for it. Each province, each city, each borough and district wants to be wealthier, better educated, higher achieving, more cultured, and more modern than the next. For that, said an angry taxi driver, billions of yuan (the Chinese currency) are wasted uselessly while the common people toil and the homeless beg on the street. "People like me risk their lives for cash while fat officials live off stolen government funding," the driver observed. A road that took two months to build in the old days now takes two years! Officials that used to farm in the fields with peasants now sit in air-conditioned offices while complaining city-residents are barred from entering the first floor! And boy, do those offices scrape the sky.

"Haha," my cousin laughed when I told him. "That's capitalism," he said. "You should understand. You're from America, the wealthiest nation in the world! Bankers, CEO's, and celebrities are earning millions to trillions each year yet there are still people sleeping in subways, picking through trash for food, and searching for bottles to recycle for money! We're the same, and we're just a developing country. We are now having the same problem you did during your industrial revolution, only 100 years late. The rich get filthy rich, the poor get horribly poor, and the middle class gets stuck paying all the bills, driven on by the illusion of power and mobility hung like carrots in front of an ass; that's capitalism and 'free' market economy, learned from Americans!"

Later on, my cousin brought me to a museum celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWII, and more importantly, the end of Japanese occupation. People still hold a grudge. "The Japanese said they were giving us money to modernize and sending troops to protect our interests," I said.

"Money, with the condition of being slaves to it," he replied. "Most countries would probably be more grateful if they had kept their money to themselves and especially their soldiers. The same is true today. That's why our country doesn't have quite as many enemies as others our size. But it's also kind of stupid. We're always giving things away with little or no strings attached and without troops everywhere, nothing really protects our interests in other nations."

The history nut that he is, he then proceeded to describe every person and event in every picture, their role in the war, and what ultimately happened to them. Ironically, he told me, most of these people portrayed here as national heroes during the war were disgraced and made to suffer to death during the Cultural Revolution.

Funny how people are never really appreciated until they're dead. "You're quite a cynic," I told him.

"It's because the country's problems are weighing on my mind," he replied.

"Is everyone as weighed down as you?" I asked.

"Yep, because everyone knows what problems this country is facing." He continued: "In a way we're probably the most open country in the world. All of our limitations are out in the open. Sure, when we search for Falun Gong nothing comes up, and yes, central or local governments run all of the media, but at least we know."

He smiled wryly.

"Do people wish for an American style of democracy, free press, and human rights," I asked. "Do people still want to go to America so much?"

"Yeah," he said. "Because America is rich, and it still has the best educational facilities anywhere. Everyone wants to learn more, achieve more, and receive more. Nowadays though, most people come back because they can do fine here.



Echo co-editor Kejia Tang, outside Nanjing, China

Everyone wants more freedom, more rights. But this is a time of economic expansion. Who isn't willing to give up some freedoms for more money and more security? And besides, after reading about those Guantanamo prisoners, the retracted Quran toilet story, and those journalists put to jail because they didn't reveal sources, most people have decided they'd rather live somewhere where they actually know the cause and effect of their actions."

I smiled too. Wryly. Not long after, I went with two of my aunts traveling to Sichuan Province in southwest China, on the border with Tibet. There is large, diverse population of minorities here, I was told, and I certainly believed it after passing the enormous facilities of the Sichuan University for Ethnic Minorities in the provincial seat of Chengdu. We first went by bus to Emei Mountain, one of the five Buddhist holy mountains on the mainland. The temple there was over a thousand years old and built like a royal palace.

My aunts took me to burn incense. We were all very surprised. Each set of incense cost 180 yuan. "Wow, monks are rich," my aunt commented. There were thousands of people there. Tens of thousands visit each day. Millions each year. Monks also get government funding. A lot of it. To put things in perspective, a middle-class wage is a few thousand yuan a month and living wage only a few hundred since necessities are so cheap.

After burning incense and visiting some famous sights, we went to a monkey reserve. Those monkeys were not afraid of people. People were afraid of them. Monkeys were everywhere. Big monkeys, small monkeys, old monkeys, young monkeys. Their preferred way of travel is jumping from tree to tree and head to head. They were all very fat from constantly being fed. There were many interesting rules for visitors in the reserve. For instance, you can't take things out of your bag in front of a monkey. All cameras and foods must be taken out before entering the reserve because monkey see, monkey do. They'll start to help you.

Also, keep things tightly held because monkeys like to steal. And if they hang your bag or camera on a tree limb on the side of the mountain, no one can help you. Also, don't wear skirts. Monkeys like flowing objects and will most likely lift it up and take a peek. Lastly, when you feed a monkey, don't pull your hand back after extending. The monkey will think you're a cheapskate and grab it from you. I had several bags of food sto-

much all this costs," he said. We started guessing. A few hundred yuan? No? A few thousand? Ten thousand?? "You can't even buy the boots with only 10,000. Let me give you a hint. The belt is the most expensive. It's solid gold and silver studded with real gems." Whoa, we said. That belt was huge. And the belt buckle was the size of a chess board. "One million," he said. "I have six sets."

"Is everyone here as rich as you," someone asked. "No. I'm nobility. Even though after the 'liberation,' everyone was supposed to be equal, old traditions die hard. The clergy is still the wealthiest and most powerful class. Nobility is second, and still has some benefits. I studied at the Sichuan University for Ethnic Minorities for six years as a mandarin Chinese major. Now I have a job as a tour guide." So what, we were thinking. Only nobility is allowed to go to that university. "Our customs limit commoners to a much smaller and poorer school in the middle of nowhere." And, someone whispered, a tour guide here can earn up to three hundred thousand a year! Scary. Especially seeing how the commoners lived, watering plants by the roadside and serving as waiters and waitresses in hotels.

The place we were visiting is called the nine-village valley because nine Zhang villages occupy the surrounding mountains, most of which are not open to the public. The valley itself is actually made up of three valleys connected together in a Y shape. The mountainsides are a peaceful green, filled with rare trees and flowers. The valleys are famous for its lakes, each a deep, calming blue, bluer than even the sea. Not a hint of pollution mars their mirror-like serenity. A few also had shades of green from the shadows of surrounding forests, or yellow, red and orange from mineral deposits. They say that in the fall when the leaves turn color, each lake catches on fire with a rainbow of color. All the buses that travel there are of the tree-hugging type. Anyone caught smoking or picking wildflowers is immediately fined 500 yuan. Only 10,000 visitors are allowed in each day. Wild pandas live in the forests.

The last day of my stay in China I decided to take off and spend tasting the street-side snacks and checking out pirated disks. I was eating breakfast inside what seemed like a lean-to when the owner, who was serving the customers sitting outside, rushed in, bringing all of her tables, chairs, steamed meat buns and cauldrons of hot soy milk. "Inspectors from the Ministry of Health are here," she said, winking.

"How do you know," I asked.

"Once they appear at the top of the street," she replied, "everyone knows." Just as I was finishing my meal, all the tables, chairs, and foods went back out.

After breakfast, I took a taxi to my cousin's house. I was scared witless when the driver, horns blaring, rushed three red lights through busy intersections, cut off a semi-truck, almost crushed a horde of pedestrians, and nearly knocked out several bikers when he drove into the bicycle lane. After reaching our destination, he smiled at me and said, "See? Fast, safe, and satisfaction guaranteed." I told him I was going to take the subway next time.

My cousin took me to buy pirated disks on a road famous for them. Every few steps was a vendor with a few disks in her hand hawking her wares. "Pirated disks, cheap, quality guaranteed," they yelled.

"Those are really nice robes," one of the visitors commented. "And especially that belt. Can I buy a set somewhere?"

Our tour guide laughed. "Guess how

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# TRAVIS INTERVIEW

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people... [Students] may present themselves better or do better in class at a different time of the day. I think that it's far outweighed by the inconvenience that it presents to students who may want to have opportunities beyond the four corners of the room... With a schedule that rotates, it would be tough to say that 'I'm going to take a class at ten o'clock in the morning at MCLA or Berkshire Community College or Williams and return and know that I'm going to get English class in the afternoon.' So, I really want to see how the rotating schedule works and really learn if there are more advantages to it than meets the eye.

**Q: And you've made the decision to keep the rotating schedule for this year?**

A: We are rotating, and that is because of the teachers' contract and the way that the workday is defined by the contract.

**Q: What is your experience with and opinion of block scheduling?**

A: We've looked at it on a number of occasions in my previous job, and we've gone to a number of districts and observed a whole variety of block schedules. In some cases, the entire day is a block schedule, and in others one or two courses are blocked. So you might have an hour and a half in science class or in a math module, but everything else in the course of the day would then divert to a typical forty-five or fifty-minute period. There are advantages and disadvantages of that; obviously, with a longer time, in science class in particular, you get in the lab, make sure you have time to set up an experiment, actually do it, take things apart, and put things away, safely... there are real advantages there. What happens, though, is classes in social studies and English feel [that they] could use a writing lab for an extended period. So, what courses are you going to put into a block? So I think that there are some attractive features about a block [schedule], but I don't know whether it advantages or disadvantages some departments. So, the smaller the school, in terms of number of students, the fewer options you have. I don't want to get into a block [schedule] before finding out that if you get into a block, you cut out electives. But there are some real advantages to giving kids extended time to think and work.

**Q: How do you plan to interact with students on a daily basis?**

A: Well, I'm going to be right by that front door in the morning. It's sort of like welcoming a new guest to your house: I think you have to be out there and introduce yourself and get to know people, and after that it would be like having another brother or sister in the house... I treat this as a home. I ought to be out there, really getting to know students as a routine, and as time goes on, how I will interact with students will change. I'd like to be in a lot of classrooms, observing what's going on so I can find out... about the things that really work and don't work about the school. So, whether that's in the morning, or at lunch in the cafeteria, or after school for activities... I would really like to get out there and see kids. A school is more than just what goes on in a class. It's how the kids interact with each other in the hall, what they want to do for the school in terms of school spirit and other activities. If you don't see the things that go on in the afternoon or the evenings or the weekends, you don't really know the whole student. So, I want to get out there and see those things.

**Q: What do you see as the role of the teachers' union?**



Supt. William Travis, interviewed Aug. 22 in his office by Greylock Echo staffers, from left, Carl Kubler, Isa St. Clair and Rachel Payne.

A: A union has a responsibility to look at the needs of the teachers in terms of their workday, their work expectations. [Along with that] there's the right to organize and to discuss issues. [The teachers' union] is a group that the administration and the school committee can deal with in order to work issues out. I think the union is an appropriate way to... work with officers on issues about school policy, about the school day, and those things that are closer to someone's heart, such as their salary. So there's an important role for the union.

**Q: In the past, you've mentioned that you are opposed to user fees. Do you still hold that position?**

A: Well, if all things were equal, I would like to see the regular school budget cover those expenses, but when it comes between some user fees and keeping activities versus no user fees and only those activities that can pay for themselves, I would rather see a universal activity fee... and there's a procedure where anyone who feels that they can't afford the activity is given a reduced cost or no cost. So, there are some protections... Having experienced user fees now for several years, I think there's a sense of ownership. Because I know, at least in my experience, that a number of students take that money from summer jobs or some other services provided in the family in order to come up with the money, and I think that might help them invest a little into the activity that they're in. So, while I would like to see them go away, I think they are reasonably priced right now and there are precautions for people who can't afford it.

**Q: What are the latest developments in the water crisis?**

A: There have been a number of meetings over the summer looking at a possible solution and right now the most likely arrangement would be using wells on the property owned by the nursing home and we're exploring the mechanics of getting water to the school, how to monitor the quality of the water, and making arrangements to make sure that if we were to have this arrangement with the nursing home, that they have all the water for their current and future needs so that this isn't something where you invest a lot of money and get started for a year or two and then find that you have to undo it. So, I think we have in concept something that the nursing home... is willing to work out an arrangement. The school committee is willing to use the money

that we got from the state to help come up with a permanent solution for the water problem, and now we're looking at how does that... guarantee the protections of the school committee side... and for the nursing home and the hospital [and ensure] that they have adequate resources for the future. I hope that those talks are coming to a good conclusion very quickly. That means that by the end of September, there may be a permanent solution in place.

**Q: What with all its problems, why were you drawn to Mount Greylock?**

A: Well, you know when you put all those problems aside and as you get to live in a community, you learn that there are problems of different types. Then you start looking at the strengths and one of the things that I have wanted to do for a very long time is to get in closer touch with faculty and students. I couldn't think of a better place than Greylock, given both its size and I was a junior high school and high school teacher, so it fits my background as opposed to an elementary school. So it has a lot of things that attracted me. I can get closer in touch with the program of studies... and I have the advantages of getting back in touch with faculty and students.

**Q: On that note, where do you see the picture of extended learning?**

A: Right now the ext learning minutes when you add it up come up with the 990 minutes. So my own thought is that the first thing we ought to look at is converting that extended time into the time for the current seventh periods. I like the concept of an extended learning period, but I don't know that it serves students or faculty well the way it rotates. Students can take advantage of it for additional help or studying as they choose, but I'm not sure if that use, as opposed to academic instruction under the direction of a faculty member is the best use of the time... I'd love to see the library used at the end of school for homework help and maybe staff and students are willing to help other students and use email or the internet to post homework assignments for the students who came in there and needed the extra help, and make sure they have their work. Whoever was going to tutor could see the assignments as well and help out. If that were built into the day and if we could get students home (with transportation and so on) that would be a wonderful extension of the day.

**Q: What do you consider to be Mount Greylock's fiscal challenges, and how do you plan to face them?**

A: I attended the summer superintendents' conference and there were some encouraging signs. There will be a slight increase in the Chapter 70 money that is distributed, probably on the order of about \$50 dollars per student... So that may change some of the projections that seemed right on target a year ago or 18 months ago when the state was still finding itself with a structural deficit. It may in fact be finding its way out of it.

The other thing that's changing will be the way the state has borrowed lots of money for school projects... One percent of the sales tax will be set aside for school renovation projects and so the state won't find itself borrowing literally billions of dollars for school projects; those will be paid off and now there will be another system in place for school aid. If the state doesn't have to borrow money it has more money, then, to put into education. This is really the most positive way of looking at change. It's got to come from state and federal resources. The property tax is a very regressive way of trying to fund education.

The other piece about that is that the state is playing with a formula which will look at the average income of a town as opposed to the average wealth of real estate. All you have to do is pick up a newspaper; there was an article today about somebody who just bought 60 acres of land in Williamstown for \$1.5 million and wants to develop several houses which will be very expensive. So, the value of property in Williamstown and Lanesborough and Hancock is very high, but that doesn't match the income of the people who have lived there for 10, 20, 30 or more years. Their salaries don't match the value of their property, if they were to sell and move. So, now we look at how much money Mount Greylock would be entitled to based on the average income in the communities, and then there would be more state aid coming to the district. And, there was also talk today, there's going to be a constitutional convention in Massachusetts to address healthcare, and so the projections of 12-14 percent increases in the price of healthcare may dramatically be affected by another type of insurance.



Before classes begin, runners, punters practice, play



Photos taken on Sept. 3 by Rosana Zarza



WilliNet

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ful/more in depth multimedia presentation produced by students for students."

Assisting Dethier with this undertaking is Debbie Dane, a part-time executive director at WilliNet, Williamstown's cable public-access channel. Dane has always striven to use WilliNet as a resource for young people to learn about filmmaking, air performances, or advertise. She views her role mainly as a "taskmaster," helping organize the production, but still allowing it to be a student-run show. Dane, a former National Public Radio producer, sees this newscast not only as a source of information, but also as a chance for students to become involved in broadcasting.

Dethier plans that the newscast "will cover everything from sports and theater to general school news and student interest." According to Dane, the show would not only boast original stories, but also follow-ups and more in-depth coverage of some *Echo* news.

Both Dethier and Dane are eager to get more people involved in the newscast. They are looking for students from all grades to act, anchor, film, report, and edit for the show, with no experience necessary. Dane hopes to have rotating hosts for the show and also wants to get students involved behind the scenes, too. Dane can be reached at WilliNet at 458-9100, or by email at DebbyDane@willinet.org.

The Greylock Echo

The Mount Greylock Echo is the student newspaper of Mt. Greylock Regional High School in Williamstown, Mass. Published monthly during the academic year, each issue is developed and edited by a team of editors and writers. Any Mt. Greylock student may join the staff, attend meetings and submit articles.

**Recruitment meeting:** Tues., Sept. 20

**Next issue:** Fri., October 14

**Deadline:** Friday, Oct. 7

**Editors-in-Chief:** Carl Kubler, Kejia Tang

**This month's Staff:** Rachel Payne, Isa St. Clair, Kejia Tang, Shan Wang, Rosanna Zarza.

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College destinations online

On Tuesday, the guidance office made available a list of 2005 graduating seniors' college destinations. The list, too late for this month's deadline, is online at: <http://www.newshare.com/echo/list.html> and may be printed in the Oct. 14 edition.

China

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"Don't buy from them," my cousin said, as he brought me into a dank alleyway and then into a person's home. In the storage room were boxes and boxes of disks, from movies to television shows to anime to video games. I bought a bunch. "Why hide," I asked the seller.

"So the police don't come and confiscate everything," she replied. "Street vendors can run. My home isn't mobile."

We then stopped by my cousin's dorm and from there he took me on his motorbike back to grandpa's apartment. "If you see a policeman, get off," he warned. "This is not a real motorcycle but only a motorbike. I'm not supposed to take people."

We did see several policeman, but I didn't get off and they didn't stop us. Too many people were riding two, or even three to a bike. Thinking back to breakfast and to the pirated disk vendors I asked my cousin: "Don't the police know these people are breaking the law?"

"Yes," he replied. "But there are over 1.6 billion people living in the country. Laws here are really just suggestions. Individuals can pretty much do whatever they want, as long as they don't get other people to follow along. Every once in a while the police will break a smuggling or crime ring, or execute a corrupt, high-profile official who stole a ton of money. But those are only to set examples. Unless you become a really big problem, nobody really cares about you."

He pointed to the throngs of people around us. "Who knows what all these people are thinking, or doing, or planning," he said. And then, looking up, he continued. "But as long as the buildings grow higher, the malls get bigger, and the girls dress prettier, who really cares?"