

2-3 teachers may be gone: Hearing on Tuesday

By The Echo Staff

At least two or three teachers are likely to lose their jobs at Mount Greylock over the summer if spending at the school is held to an increase of only 4.1 percent in assessments to Williamstown and Lanesborough. That's the key impact of budget figures, which will be the subject of a public hearing on Tuesday at 7 p.m. in the school library.

The budget figures were unveiled by the school board at a first public hearing on March 13 in Lanesborough.

The fiscal year starts each July 1. The budget proposes spending just \$47,000 more in fiscal 2008 over 2007 – a total of \$9.4 million. But the total taxes assessed on Lanesborough and Williamstown would rise by 4.12% to \$6.4 million – a \$254,392 increase. That's because the amount of money the school got in 2007 from three key sources will drop by almost \$290,000:

- Tuition received from out-of-district students is projected to drop by \$46,775 over the current year.
- Charter-school reimbursements will drop by \$43,335.
- The school will stop taking money from its "rainy-day" fund – called the Excess & Deficiency account. It used \$206,800 from this fund – like a savings account – to balance the budget in 2007.

Under state law, laid off teachers must learn about their status by June 15. However, Supt. William Travis says he hopes to identify and notify the affected teachers before that. Layoffs will be based upon seniority in an affected subject area, not overall longevity at the school.

While things are still tentative, here is what school officials say is the situation right now, speaking in terms of "fulltime-equivalent" staff. A loss of one FTE, might mean the loss or transfer of two part-time teachers, for example. So it may be inaccurate to equate "FTE" changes with specific people. The approximate losses:

- Half an FTE in "world languages".
- Half an FTE in math
- One FTE in science
- One and one half FTE in English
- One FTE in social studies

Fractional increases in FTE staffing in other areas should hold the layoffs to the two- or three-person figure in what is still a fluid situation, said Travis. The fractional increases would come in visual arts, music, and business/computer, among other places.

Travis said the \$254,392 tax increase to fund the local share of Mount Greylock spending was a figure worked out in negotiation with the finance committees of Lanesborough and Williamstown. If the current figures hold, Lanesborough will contribute \$2,137,753 – a 5.47% increase of fiscal 2007, and Williamstown will contribute \$4,285,355 – a 3.46% increase over the current year. The reason Lanesborough's figure would be up by more than Williamstown is because Lanesborough's share of the school's shrinking student body is rising.

INSIDE:

TRAVEL

From Peru, to Costa Rica to South Carolina, MGRHS students fanned out for fun and charity during February break. Pages 2 and 4.

OPINION

A appeal for French -- and for the environment. Page 3

Wanted: Writers, photographers, editors: Join The Echo team . . . recruitment meeting Wed, March 21, 2:30 p.m. in the library.

Appreciation



Teachers treated to a meal — courtesy of community

Paraprofessional Kris Trites, standing left, organized the second annual "appreciation day" for MGRHS faculty and staff, who gathered on Wednesday for a buffet lunch in the library. Entrees and deserts donated by parents and the community were served by Parent Teacher Organization volunteers Diane Glick and John MacDonald. Trites thanked donors of nearly 40 food items.

Eight MG students to join 120 peers on April 11 to hash out pros/cons of life

By Gina Iannitelli and Sean Peltier

Some 120 grade 9-12 students from Berkshire County -- including up to eight from Mount Greylock RHS -- will get a day off from school on Wednesday, May 11, to spend with their peers at Shakespeare & Co. in Lenox in discussions about what is right and what's wrong with living as a teen in Berkshire County -- and how to change it. As a senior project, Greylock student Jen Kodela has been part of the planning group for the "Berkshire County Youth Development Conference."

The intent: Giving teens confidence in their decisions and everyday lives. Kodela belongs to the committee along

It's about what is great and what isn't about growing up here and thinking about changing those things that they want to change.

with Rudi Bach, Ashleigh Carr, Kate Merrigan, and Dahlia Bousaid. The Echo interviewed Jen to get some information on why the conference interested her.

ECHO: "What is the main topic of this conference? Drugs and alcohol?"

Jen: "The grant, which is \$7,500, came from a drug/alcohol organization, but the actual conference is not targeted on drugs and alcohol. It is both involving and informing youth throughout Berkshire County on topics such as healthy relationships."

ECHO: What made you get interested in this project?

"Well I worked for the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition as the unity intern and when the money came to me we had \$7500 to use in some way. We suggested doing a conference to allow for connecting of the county so I got involved like that and turned it into my senior project also."

ECHO: Do you feel like it's worthwhile?

Yes, very much so. Its actually coming together really nicely. There are a lot of Williams College people doing workshops, and representatives of the UN have gotten involved with running workshops, and all different people are helping out.

The Lenox campus of Shakespeare & Co. is the location and featured keynote speaker is freshman state Sen. Ben Downing, D-Pittsfield.

The goal, according to Kate Merrigan, United Neighboring Interdependent Trusted Youth (UNITY) program coordinator in North Adams, is to; "Create a unique opportunity for students form across the county to come together or share their hopes, frustrations, passions and concerns as teen-agers, specifically in Berkshire County. It's about what is great and what isn't about growing up here and thinking about changing those things that they want to change."



Senior Jen Kodela

OPINION

MG seniors fly eight hours to Peru, find similar teens

By Gustavo Landaeta
and Justin Ryan

During the much needed February break, a group of six people had the opportunity to go to Lima, Peru, a city located on the west coast of South America. Among the six were three of Mt. Greylock's seniors: Benjamin Coons, Gustavo Landaeta, and Justin Ryan. The purpose of this Mission trip was to make a difference in children's lives while giving them the chance to learn English in a fun environment.

The trip began the day before vacation with a three-hour car drive followed by an eight-hour flight straight to Peru. Mixed emotions of excitement and nervousness ran through our minds. Once we arrived, the change in weather and culture was overwhelming. Not too long after we landed, we met the missionary family that would be helping us throughout the week. As the nerves finally began to settle, we were able to take in the reality of our goals for the trip.

Some of the activities we participated in included games with the children, songs, and English classes with a Bible lesson accompanied by craft and snack time. The event was held at the local evangelical Free Church, "El Redentor," which in English means "The Redeemer." For the duration of the trip we were housed at the church, which enabled us to become part of its everyday attendees. We quickly built relationships not only with the families of the church, but also with all of the children and teens around us. They welcomed us with open arms, and showed us how God had been working in their lives every day. Everyone was very thankful for all of the things we were willing to help with in addition to our efforts to plan out successful English lessons that would be taught each day. The teens' interests were similar to our own, which allowed for all of us to build friendships. The language barrier did not limit us. Most of the older kids knew some English and were able to communicate quite well. Overall, the experience was incredible for every member of the group, but we were each impacted in a different way.

Here are notes from each of us:

Notes from Gustavo Landaeta

When I first arrived, I was quite nervous because I did not know what to expect. This would be my first missions trip, and all I had to go on were stories of the past trip that my church had gone on a few years ago. I knew that we would be in an environment where I would be put in a position I might be uncomfortable in and would be forced to adapt quickly. Shockingly, I was more than able to accomplish the task at hand.

BOOKS

A tour of Constantinople in AD 802 tells captivating history of Turkey

Reviewed by Drew Gibson

**The Book of Gold, by Cecilian Holland.
Random House Books, 1984**

What was it like to live in Constantinople in AD 802? If you are like me, this is probably not a recurring question for most of you. But what if you could somehow have the experience of walking through a market square in the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, or watch a race in the Hippodrome, or see the emperor or empress (literally encrusted with gold and jewels)-- wouldn't that be sick? (Okay, I apologize; I do not have authorization to use such terms.) The point is that if you enjoy stepping into a totally different world- whether your preferred genre is sci-fi, fantasy or historical fiction- you will enjoy stepping into the world of the Byzantine Empire so remarkably re-created by Cecelia Holland in her book, *The Belt of Gold*.

In 802, the Frankish warrior Hagen has made a pilgrimage with his brother to Jerusalem in fulfillment of a vow. On their return journey, as they reach the western end of Asia Minor, they become witnesses, then participants, and then victims of intrigue, plots and violence that is truly Byzantine. The charming, passionate and beautiful Empress Irene is desperately trying to save her throne and, as she sees it, the Empire. The background to all of the schemes and counter-scheming is the strange spectacle of the chariot races and hold it has over the entire city.

We ended up meeting the group of people made up of teens and adults that would be helping with all of the week's activities. The kids that came would be split up into groups depending on age, ranging from about three to eleven. Justin and I had the privilege of teaching the seven year olds. Our group had eight kids in it and all of their personalities varied from extremely quiet to outrageously loud. All of them were willing to learn anything and everything we had for them.



The teens' interests were similar to our own . . . [t]he language barrier did not limit us. Most of the older kids new some English and were able to communicate quite well . . . There isn't really a middle class. You either have a good life or work very hard just to get by.

At the beginning of the week we handed out flyers in the city. As I walked through the Peruvian streets, I saw the condition of the country: every single car had an alarm; every house, no matter how rundown it may have seemed, had a wall with some type of security device,

The Empress Irene was a very real person. There was some talk about putting the Roman Empire back together by having her marry the Frankish king, Charlemagne (remember him from 9th-grade world history?). Nothing came of that plan, but she did gain a certain notoriety as she was the empress who ruled as regent for her young son and when he came of age to take over as Emperor, had his eyes put out so she could keep control.

So, I've never thought of the Empress Irene as a sympathetic character until I saw her through this author's eyes. Everything in the book was consistent with the main facts of history as I am aware of them, but Irene comes across as much more three-dimensional than simply being a jealous, over-bearing mother. She had good reasons for her ruthlessness and it wasn't long before I was rooting for her to win against the faction plotting to overthrow her.

If you like a good story, you will be captivated. As a history guy, I was enchanted to gain a better sense of that particular time and place. The book was so good, that I immediately read two more of Ms. Holland's novels (set in entirely different times and places), and they were equally good!

Here's the scorecard for interesting plot: B+; for interesting characters: A-; for action/fight scenes: B; for plot twists: A+; for authenticity of time and place: A+!; for holds-your-attention style: A; for realism: A. Overall: highly recommended.

The reviewer teaches social studies and Spanish at MGRHS.

such as broken pieces of glass that covered the top of the wall, spikes that covered gates, and electric wires.

The crime rate in Peru is one of the highest in the world. The first thing I thought about was the children of Peru.

While I was there, I was impacted by every child that attended our classes and activities. They were each going to hear the story of how God could work in their lives and possibly change them for their whole lives. Knowing that I helped contribute to changing the future of all of these kids for the better and see how God was able to use me to do it changed my perspective on a lot of things.

Notes from Justin Ryan

I had the opportunity to go to Lima, Peru before entering my freshman year of high school. It was during their winter, which is our summer time. I was able to be at the same church we were at during this trip, so though I knew a little more of what to expect, I was still somewhat anxious. I enjoy learning about other cultures and getting to know people that come from a totally different lifestyle. When I first arrived I remembered certain areas and restaurants and little shops; even the smells brought back memories. I was like a little child with my face glued to the window, taking it all in.

Last time I was there we did construction for an addition that was being put on the church, did English lessons, and talked with and helped people on the streets. We have talked about how we have helped and changed lives in Peru, which is true; however, they have also changed me very much. The culture is very different and there is a very high crime rate; many people have almost nothing. There isn't really a middle class. You either have a good life or work very hard just to get by. It was encouraging to speak with people in the church and see how they still have a positive outlook on even in the midst of hardship. That is something I thought I could learn from them. I also found them to be accepting and friendly. There were people there that I met last time that I had maintained close bonds with and it was great to see them after almost four years. It was incredible to make such close friendships in such a short time, especially with people that were so different from me, but at the same time, not different at all. Many of the experiences with the children and teenagers and other people in the church can't really be described.

The whole experience was too amazing to put into words. I made relationships and saw things that I will never forget. It was neat to learn more about the culture and see what else was in the city. I plan to go back again if I can. If you get the chance to do something like this, I recommend that you take the opportunity. It was an experience that I will never forget and I will never forget the people I met. We will be showing a slide show of our trip in the near future and we encourage anyone who wants to come to join us and we will talk more about what we did and some of the funny, sad, and amazing experiences that we had.

The authors are seniors at MGRHS.

The Greylock Echo

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OPINION

Can we save the French program at Mount Greylock?

By Dakota Garrity

EDITOR'S NOTE -- In the ebb and flow of budget discussions, officials have considered eliminating or reducing the teaching of French. The situation was not finally settled as of March 13.

Mt. Greylock is looking to cut back on classes for budget reasons. One of the proposed cuts is phasing out the French program. As a French student for five years, I feel the school is making a poor choice. I have enjoyed the language since seventh grade. I think that it would be a shame to see incoming seventh graders faced with only two options for language.

As I discussed this with peers, many had similar views. It has been pushed aside in matters of importance with concerns to scheduling. Jonayah Jackson, a junior at Mt. Greylock, had to leave French because it was at the same time as her math class. She thinks that the removal of the program is not fair to students who wish to take this language.

Freshman Isabel Kaufman states that she is angered: "I can't imagine the school without the French program—to only have Latin and Spanish would be incredibly limiting. The French program has been really shortchanged through the years, and it deserves so much more."

In losing the Mt. Greylock French Program, we risk losing our ties to our region's strong Québécois heritage.

Williams College Prof. Brian Martin, in a letter to a Mt. Greylock teacher, says, "In losing the Mt. Greylock French program, we risk losing our ties to our region's strong Québécois heritage and the economic advantages of welcoming Québécois dollars into our local economy. Further, it would be a shame to lose a French program which has so much regional support, in local institutions where French students can seek out Francophone culture: from the French painting collections of the Clarke, to the frequent French films at Images Cinema, to our Department of Romance Languages at Williams College, which offers programs like our ongoing French Film Festival free and open to the greater Berkshire Community. Amid a proud Francophone regional heritage, the potential for Francophone regional tourist income, and the regional Francophone resources of many local institutions, it would be a great loss and indeed disgrace to lose one of the centers of French instruction here in the northern Berkshires"

Some students feel that French should be improved upon, and especially with the new option of AP French why should it be taken away? French is an important part of American culture, we wouldn't be who we are if it weren't for the French. French is more than just learning the language; it is a class where you can learn about the culture too.

If the school got rid of the French program, students coming to Mt. Greylock may shy away from the school. One student said, "My little sister is taking French and if she can't take it when she comes to Greylock next year, then she might go to another school." This causes more problems because one of the concerns brought up in the school committee meeting March 6th was that enrollment is declining and students are opting for other schools.

If they take French away, this number will only increase, leaving Greylock with fewer students. Miller states, "French is spoken in multifarious countries within Europe, Africa, Asia, and even in North America. Eliminating such an important language from the Mt. Greylock curriculum is most objectionable."

Signing on the line: Sending a plea for environmental sanity

By Rachel Payne

"YES" – The Youth Environmental Squad – is one of the newest student groups at Mt. Greylock. They are working to slow global warming by changing habits at Mt. Greylock and using the high school as a base for political action in the environmental cause. Over the coming weeks, representatives of YES will be stationed in the cafeteria at all three lunches distributing this letter. Students who are looking to take action against global warming will be asked to sign letters like these, possibly several times over, so that they can be sent to leaders in Massachusetts, like Representative John Olver, Senators Edward Kennedy and John Kerry, and Gov. Deval Patrick. Read over this letter carefully and consider adding your support: a sincere and unified demand for action from the youth community will powerfully affect the actions of our leaders.

Dear _____,

I am writing to you today because I value the environment more than low taxes, more than my car, and more than all the other comforts of the current American lifestyle. Too often, politicians assume that the citizens they represent are too selfish or materialistic to accept legislation against global warming. In this, they assume that we prefer our possessions and our habits to the survival of millions: indeed, radical legislative action against this impending disaster would save millions of lives.

I write to you today because you must know that I am willing to accept any sacrifice to slow global climate change. I write because minds are changing in America, and you must take action that reflects our new consciousness. Your constituents are ready for radical policies that will redefine the American lifestyle, because they understand that human quality of life depends upon stewardship of the planet. Furthermore, they realize that action against global warming and climate change is now longer an option, but a moral imperative. To ignore the warnings of the scientific community, indeed, even to hesitate in creating change, is to aid in the spread of disease, the displacement of nations, and the death of millions.

I insist that you use your position to aid in the development and enactment of environmentally protective legislation and restrictions on individual carbon emissions: the passage of the McCain-Lieberman Climate Stewardship and Innovation Act and the Gilchrest-Olver Climate Stewardship Act is essential. Congress must escape its current paralysis on the issue of climate change. The old policy of merely encouraging fuel efficiency in industry through incentives is no longer sufficient. Habits will not change without government mandate.

I demand hard and fast laws prohibiting excessive emissions of carbon dioxide in all American industries. I demand government restrictions on the purchase of diesel and gasoline. I demand investments in public transportation and renewable energy.

I demand a resolution to cut national emissions by eighty percent by the year 2050; only through such radical restrictions can we hope to evade disaster. Finally, I demand that you exert pressure on President Bush to attend and cooperate in all future summits on global climate change. His decision to reject the Kyoto Protocol was both shortsighted and dangerous. You must use all your influence to see that he honors the agreement he made with the G8+5 Climate Change Dialogue and pursues the creation of an emissions reduction treaty as a successor to Kyoto.

As Achim Steiner of the UN Environment Program said, "the world cannot solve the climate change problem without the United States." Our country continues to be the single greatest source of carbon emissions in the world; we must redeem ourselves. This is the moral test of our times. At last, the citizenry is ready to engage in this struggle to preserve life on Earth. We need your immediate and radical action.

Sincerely,



First fair goes well

Cafeteria worker Lisa Spencer, right, stands beside the "legume-tasting" table at the end of Wednesday's "Wellness Fair," a first-ever event organized by the school wellness committee to showcase food and exercise options for health living. Organizer Judy Richardson, cafeteria manager, said units of the school and local businesses set up a total of 38 tables covering such things as food safety, massage, healing arts, physical therapy, running, yoga, skiing, bicycling, cardiovascular health -- and serving such treats as mixed fruit "smoothies" and healthy snacks.

'Habitaters' build houses in South Carolina . . . and

By Gina Iannitelli
with Alexa Hiley

On Feb. 17, fourteen Mount Greylock students and three adult chaperones boarded a train at Rennselaer, N.Y., Amtrak station, looking forward to a week of building houses with the Habitat for Humanity affiliate on John's Island in South Carolina. When we arrived in Charleston 26 hours later, we were exhausted, unwashed, and hungry, but still excited for the week.

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit, volunteer organization that was founded in 1976 by Linda and Millard Fuller, and works to provide simple, decent, and affordable housing for families that live in substandard housing situations. With the support of the First Congregational Church in Williamstown, a group of Greylock students is able to take an annual trip to a Habitat affiliate, where they devote a week of their time to working at a Habitat building site.

This year's group, led by chaperones Beth Davis, Lisa Hiley, and John MacDonald, traveled by train to John's Island, South Carolina over February vacation. Participating students were seniors Vi Wood and Khafa Tyrkba; juniors Lizzie Fox, Colin O'Neill, Davy Payne, Brittany Calderwood, Amanda Burdick, Mitch Galli, Sofie Brooks, Joni Hirsch, Alexa Hiley, and I; and sophomores Olivia Tousignant-Pienkos and Harris MacDonald.

After spending our first day recuperating from an Amtrak journey that included weather delays, plumbing malfunctions, electrical outages, and track repairs, we arrived for our first day of work not knowing what to expect.

Troy, our site manager, gave us a brief lesson on the basics of constructing a support tee, and then set us loose on the task. We were paired up, given a tool belt full of nails, and tackled the project with enthusiasm. To our left, Alexa and I saw Davy and Colin construct their tee with minimal effort. To our right, Vi and Harris were already working on their second tee. Every time we saw one of the others pound in another nail, we responded by mangling our nail with our spastic swings. After just under an hour and a half, we drove the last nail into the wood. I launched into a celebratory dance while Alexa posed for a commemorative photograph with the tee.

Lizzie attested to a similarly rewarding experience, explaining that "it was really, really hard at first. We were all sore after



Top row, from left: Sofie Brooks, Vi Wood, Olivia Tousignant-Pienkos, Harris MacDonald, Alexa Hiley, Joni Hirsch, Davy Payne, Lizzie Fox, Khafa Tyrkba, and Gina Iannitelli. Bottom Row, from left: Brittany Calderwood, Mitch Galli, Colin O'Neill, and Amanda Burdick.

our first day at work but as the week progressed, hammering and lifting and enduring the long hours became easier. I was eager to go to work and hammer and show off my manpower strength and I felt rejuvenated after every work day." Mitch agrees: he wrote in our journal at the end of the week "hammering has become second nature to me." Each swing of the hammer was easier than the last, though none of us ever managed to sink a nail in four swings the way Troy could.

Working alongside a group from Canada's McMaster College, we worked on three different houses. The first house, which included our stubborn tee, was part of the "house in a box" project—we pre-assembled the walls and packed it up to be sent down to Louisiana.

Using enormous platforms, we framed the other two houses, before tearing them down and loading them into storage containers so that they could be transported to another construction site, where they would be assembled.

Of the week of fast-faced construction work, Joni said "I think it's really great the affiliate lets us come in and build even though none of us know how to build houses."

Though few of us had built a house before, and a many of us were clumsy and unsure at first, we still managed to frame three houses, under the direction of our patient site leaders, who never complained when we stopped to pull out our eighth bent nail in as many minutes. "All the site managers were skillful in their areas of carpentry," says Harris.

After we returned to Williamstown, I spoke to the other members of the group, interested to hear their impressions of the trip. "My favorite part," says Sofie, "was getting to build the houses because I've never gotten a chance to build construction. It was really hands on." Alexa agrees: "It was a life-changing experience, and I think that more people should try to get involved because it's a worthwhile investment of your time."

Despite some tense moments—like when we found returned to the house after a day of sweating in the South Carolina sun and found that the water to our showers had been cut off—but when I asked the group to list some of the worse parts of the trip, their reply was unanimous: "what bad parts?"

As to the question of whether or not they felt as though they had made a difference, Brittany said, "Yes, because it's the first time I've actually gone and volunteered to help a family." Amanda agreed, adding, "I think that the Habitat trip is more than the one obvious rewarding feeling you get from helping people; it's just a much deeper level and you become a group by the end of the trip."

After our return, several people complained that "all I hear about is the Habitat trip." Aside from working the expressions "So Good!" and "smooth as pie" into our everyday conversation, we had to share some of the funnier moments of the trip with the friends who had stayed in Williamstown. Though Olivia squealed "you can't do that! There are just so many!" when asked to describe

the funniest incident of the week, Sofie immediately asked for the microphone:

"Despite what everyone else thinks, only one truly funny thing happened on the trip. We're driving in the van, and Olivia—I'm not really sure how this came up—but Olivia starts talking about the bar of soap in the Port-a-Potty and how it was dry when she went to pick it up. She thought that it was some really weird kind of soap, and that she didn't know how to use it or the sink it was in. And then it turns out that the sink that Olivia wanted to use was actually the *urinal* and the soap was actually the "urinal cake." I guess it's called, which is what people pee on."

After the retelling of the episode, I was unable to extract anything coherent from amid the shouts of "so good!" and hysterical laughter, so I turned to the chaperones, wanting to know their impression of the trip had been. "I think the Habitat people in South Carolina were very appreciative of our work—we accomplished everything they asked us to," said John MacDonald. He added that "the food was great—we went through much more food than I ever thought we would." Lisa Hiley laughed that she "felt like the old woman who lived in the shoe" with so many kids to feed. As John puts it, "they worked hard, they played well, and they ate a lot." Beth Davis agreed with John's assessment, explaining that "I always try to turn over how much gets accomplished to them, and that way all I have to worry about is safety and teaching them how to do a quality job."

Though it will be more than a year until our next trip, we are already looking forward to another Habitat mission. "I think Habitat is a good experience for people in Williamstown, because we generally don't have knowledge of less fortunate people," Vi said, when asked why Habitat was a valuable project. "Habitat is great not only because you have the opportunity to help out people in need but also you get to spend time with fellow students and make friends, not to mention the fact that we go cool places for our trips," Colin added. Harris agreed that "it was good. It was a...challenge".

"I just liked seeing Troy's face in the end when he was like 'you guys are a real good thang'," Olivia insisted, accurately mimicking Troy's southern drawl. Vi, however, had the last word: "The trip was *so good!*"

The author are MGRHS juniors.

. . . bonding with kids in Monte Verde, Costa Rica

By Kelsey Dudziak

As we pulled up in our bright orange MARVI tour bus, we all anxiously fought our way into the aisle in order to stand up and stretch our legs after spending the last five hours on the bus. We were going to take a break in a small town that was only a half hour from our true destination: Monte Verde, Costa Rica.

The center of this town consisted of a soccer field, a church, and a school, called Cabeceras, with few other buildings in sight. Upon stepping off the bus, our tour guide, Pablo, directed us towards the school house, where we were met by an American woman in her mid-twenties. Her name was Heidi Koester and she had been teaching at the school for the past year.

We filed into one of the classrooms and took seats in small chairs lined up against the walls. Koester announced to us that we were to see four performances that day which were put together by the kids in order to show us the traditional Costa Rican style dance.

The first group of performers hesitantly took the floor and began. It only

took a little encouragement from the crowd to make these kids open up to us. Their eyes lit up and smiles crept from their lips as they picked up their energy, giving us a show that would be hard to forget.

The following performances occurred in much the same fashion, and as our group showed more enthusiasm for the dances, little faces began to peep in through the schoolhouse windows to get a better look at us. The ice melted away completely when the children pulled members of our group onto the floor to take place in the dance.

After the show, the children introduced themselves, using it as a chance to practice their English. In coordination with their introductions, the children gave us cards that they had made, which were also written in English. And while none of the children were actually fluent in English, they did try their best to communicate with us, just as we all made our best efforts to communicate with them. Luckily, there are some things that don't require verbal communication.

Soccer, for example, was something that both the children and I understood. Of course, soccer for any child between the ages seven and ten equates to an every man for himself sort of style, and resulted in a mass of children chasing after the one ball. At times the game became quite aggressive, but these kids were tough.

During our game of soccer, it was revealed that their second-favorite pastime was chasing, or perhaps more accurately terrorizing, a cow that was free to roam the town. While I was nervous being within fifteen feet of the large, agitated-looking cow, there were children who were following closely at his heels, incessantly trying to slap his bottom.

After spending the afternoon in this town, it became apparent to me that the community was like one large family. The town was isolated by miles of mountainous terrain and the road conditions were terrible. It's safe to assume that not many of these children had seen much outside of their town, which is perhaps why, as a tourist, we received so great a reception.

Upon saying goodbye to the kids, we received a great departure. The group and myself was swarmed by small children tugging on our arms so that they could give us hugs, handshakes, and kisses on the cheek before we got back on the bus. The children then raced alongside the bus as we drove away, waving and yelling their goodbyes, making it one of the most satisfying days that nine Mount Greylock students enjoyed on their trip to Costa Rica.

About a week later, I received an e-mail from Koester thanking the group for our visit. In her e-mail, she gave a list of projects for anyone who is willing to help out on. So I now bring this to the whole Greylock community to offer anyone who would be interested in a chance to become a part of the lives of the children I have just written about. For anyone who is interested in any sort of project such as a pen-pal exchange, drawing exchange, photo contest, or story exchange, please contact Mrs. Murray or myself.

The author is a MGRHS senior.