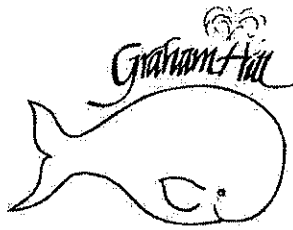


Whales Tales



Elementary School NEWS Winter 2008

5149 S. Graham Street
Seattle, WA 98118

EDITORS

Anna McCartney
anna@mccartneyfamily.com

Celia Weisman
celiayw@comcast.net

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Kiri Schultz

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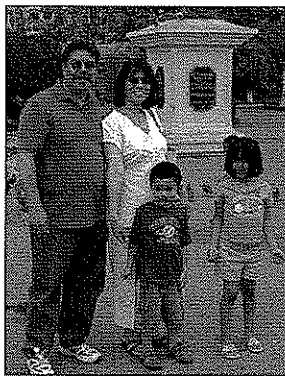
From Winter Into Spring

on Behalf of the PTA Board

Hi! My name is **Lena Louie** and I am one of the co-presidents of the PTA this year. My husband and I have three children who have attended Graham Hill. We found this gem of a school when our son Bradley was in 3rd grade. He is now a freshman at the University of Washington. Our daughter Kristin is an 8th grader at Meany Middle School and our daughter Lauren is a 4th grader in Ms. Jordan's class. We love this school because of its diversity, its strong parent involvement, a magnificent principal (finally!) and its fabulous staff and teachers. The education and experiences that my children have had are priceless!



I felt very honored when I got nominated for the co-president position. There are so many people in this school community who possess many, many skills, talents, knowledge and resources that I feel privileged to be chosen to work with such a great team of people to serve Graham Hill in this capacity. My goals this year are to reach out to everyone to get them involved and for everyone to feel welcomed and appreciated. I look forward to working with all of you to make this school year a great one for our children.



Hello everyone, my name is **Ana Schoenecker**. I was elected PTA's co-president for this school year. Our family comes originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. We speak and read Spanish at home. I work at the King County Finance Office.

I have two beautiful children at Graham Hill: David, a pre-schooler in Ms. Libby's class and Naomi, who is a first grader in Ms. Shenas' class. This is my third year at Graham Hill. We love the festive and welcoming environment at school. The staff is great and helpful, parents creative and resourceful.

I want every family to feel welcome and valued, and that is the reason I decided to accept the position on the PTA board. Help us work towards our goal of 100% participation.

From the editors' Desk

As the new co-editors for Graham Hill's newsletter, we are excited to finally present the first issue of Whales Tales for the 2007-08 school year! We salute all who make Graham Hill a nurturing place where children grow and learn with joy, acceptance and enthusiasm. This special spirit, along with the impressive gains our students have made in reading and mathematics, inspired the State Superintendent to give Graham Hill a Learning Improvement Award, which recognized our school in October 2007 as a "School of Distinction." Congratulations to everyone who believed in Graham Hill and worked so hard just two years ago to keep its doors open. After the award was announced, and the phrase "from closure to exposure" buzzed throughout the school, many had reason to feel proud.

We hope this newsletter reflects the dynamism, creativity and sincerity that reside at the heart of Graham Hill. We envision Whales Tales as a vehicle to inform, and to catalyze ongoing dialogue and engagement within the Graham Hill community.

Let us know what you're thinking about and contact us to discuss how "Whales Tales" can be improved, if you have story ideas for the next issue, or to publicize an important project. Perhaps you might consider joining our editorial team? Our three collective children are in Graham Hill's Montessori program; because we'd like this newsletter to represent the incredible diversity of our school and community, we would welcome a parent from the traditional program joining us. Please contact Anna (anna@mccartneyfamily.com) or Celia (celiayw@comcast.net) to discuss these matters.

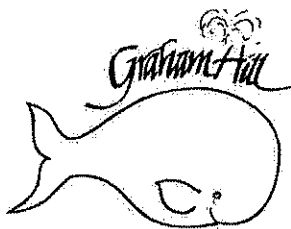
Thank you for your interest, support and involvement. Please enjoy reading this issue. We look forward to hearing from you! And finally, we wish you and your loved ones a new season full of growth, learning, wonder, and fun.

Anna and Celia (Anna's son, Ewan, is in first grade (Room 108) and her daughter Olivia is a pre-schooler (Room 101). Celia's daughter, Dena, is a preschooler in Room 201.)

Bilingual Instructional Assistants at Graham Hill

Graham Hill is pleased to have hired two new bilingual instructional assistants: **Halima Abdule**, who works with our schools' Somali community, and **Graziella Gioscia** who works with our school's Hispanic community. As ever, thanks go to **Justin Le** for his ongoing dedication to working with those students and families who speak Vietnamese.

Thanks also to Halima for a great performance at Heritage Night!



Do you know the origins of the Graham Hill whale? If so, please contact the Editors!

Graham Hill Welcomes New Faculty

Jeanette Hagen: School Librarian



Jeanette Hagen has been a librarian in the Seattle School District for 23 years. Currently, she serves half time both at Graham Hill and Arbor Heights Schools, having previously worked at Whitworth and Lowell Elementary Schools. She also taught reading and math to grades 1-8 in the Title I Migrant Education Program in Manson, Washington, as well as reading to grades 1-12 in Kahlotus, Washington.

Before working in these schools, Ms. Hagen worked for the Seattle Public Library, at both the Ballard and Greenwood Branches. She lives in the Rainier Beach area with husband, Ken, and granddaughter, Lanee, age 10. They enjoy swimming, camping, music, and attending Lanee's school performances. Ms. Hagen also has three grown children as well as two other grandchildren.

She believes that being a librarian is the most wonderful job in the world, because as Ms. Hagen says, "I get to work with every child and teacher in the school. I have enjoyed getting to know the students and teachers here at Graham Hill."

Rebecca Larson: First Grade

Rebecca Larson is glad to be back and a part of the Graham Hill community! Graham Hill has been a place where Ms. Larson learned a lot, and now she puts that knowledge to use by teaching. In 2004 she completed her student teaching at Graham Hill, and the following academic year was lucky enough to teach the first grade here. After a year of teaching in a different school she is very pleased to be back among our culturally rich community.



Ms. Larson herself is a product of the Seattle Public Schools and has always believed in the benefits of a diverse education. She attended Western Washington University and earned a BA in psychology as well as a K-8 teaching certificate. During her spare time she enjoys reading, golfing with her dad, and going to the Pike Place Market. Ms. Larson hopes to see you around the building!

Kathy Langhans: Kindergarten

This is **Kathy Langhans'** first year teaching at Graham Hill Elementary. Though she always knew she wanted to be a teacher, she took a detour for about ten years through the medical field working as a medical assistant. Then one day she just decided that she really wanted to work with children. That was 18 years ago and Ms. Langhans still wakes up each day with a smile on her face knowing that she will be seeing our children very soon for a fun day of learning. She has been fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach every grade from Kindergarten to eighth, but her heart is with K-2.



Ms. Langhans' career started in a small county

school down by the Columbia River, but being a city girl she knew she would ultimately return to Seattle. Born and raised in the University District, she was part of a large family (three boys and three girls), and various pets. Both of Ms. Langhans' parents hail from New York City, yet she is the only one of their six children to speak with a New York accent. (So "ar" words can be a little difficult for Ms. Langhans to pronounce. She obviously has also inherited a great NYC sense of humor, too.) Ms. Langhans is enjoying her first year at Graham Hill, has felt very accepted by the staff and families, and would like to say "thank you" to everyone.

A Dialogue on Powerful Schools

by Celia Weisman

Fionnuala O'Sullivan has two children attending Graham Hill Elementary and a 7th grader studying at Asa Mercer Middle School. She's also a successful real estate agent, and a dedicated community and school volunteer. For two years now, Fionnuala has also made time to serve on the board of directors for the non-profit organization, Powerful Schools.

Celia: So what exactly is Powerful Schools and how does it have an impact on Graham Hill families?

Fionnuala: Powerful Schools engages children in high need Southeast Seattle public elementary schools by providing literacy and arts programs. The organization also works to build communities that encourage student achievement. Collaborating with school communities, Powerful Schools improves student achievement in reading, writing and the arts through in-class and after school learning and enrichment opportunities. These successes have garnered local and national recognition. In 2007-2008, Powerful Schools programs are reaching 2,361 students across seven elementary schools. These schools are Beacon Hill, Dunlap, Hawthorne, John Muir, Orca, The New School and, of course, Graham Hill. Students from any school are welcome to register for after-school classes at any campus. At Graham Hill we see Powerful Writers (a project of Powerful Schools) in action, through teaching in the course of a school day by **Susan Moscrip** ("Ms. M.").

Last year Powerful Writers provided professional development in writing instruction for 130 teachers at participating schools, and served over 1,600 students who published multiple pieces of writing across several genres. Schools participating in Powerful Writers saw an increase of 9%-35% in WASL scores. End of year students' reflections show that after experiencing Powerful Writers in the classroom, more than 90% of students identify themselves as writers and *like* to write, and more than 80% of students see improvement in their writing. See for yourself...stop by the Columbia City Starbucks on open mic night the last Wednesday of every month and hear these kids read their own books!

Celia: This year, **Fionnuala** co-chaired the Annual Powerful Schools breakfast fundraiser which was held at the downtown Sheraton on March 4th, 2008. Fionnuala thanks the Graham Hill families and staff who supported this event, since so many of our students have benefited from their wonderful programs. To contact Fionnuala regarding Powerful Schools, email her at eirefos@comcast.net. Hats off to Fionnuala and Powerful School for inspiring and nurturing the young writers of Graham Hill!

Open Mic Night at Starbucks

All of our students are writers when they put their minds to it, and you can encourage your student's self-confidence by joining Powerful Writers at **Open Mic Night** on the last Wednesday of each month.

Open Mic Night is held at the Starbucks at 4824 Rainier Ave. South. Sign-ups start at 6:00 p.m., and the microphone is turned on at 6:30. Free hot chocolate is provided to student readers.

For more information, contact peggy@powerfulschools.org, or at 206-722-5543, ext. 111.

Powerful Writer Sophia Orlando

As well as reading her story *The Ten Dollar Frenzy* at Open Mic Night in January, Graham Hill 5th grader **Sophia Orlando** was featured in the February 12th issue of the *Beacon Hill News & South District Journal*. Congratulations, Sophia!

PTA updates from February 2nd General Meeting

The 3rd Annual Heritage Night was held on February 29th, with a huge crowd and fabulous performances. Thank you to those who organized it, especially **Sean Rolloson**. This couldn't have been held without a *great* deal of volunteer effort. Thank you once again to the amazing Graham Hill volunteers who make this happen (not to mention those brave and willing dancers among the staff)! And speaking of volunteers

Wondering how best to put your skills to work as a volunteer? Keep an eye on the **Very Important Volunteer Opportunities** board, opposite the office, updated regularly by Volunteer Coordinator Extraordinaire, **Christine King**.

Math Coach **Shauna Oswald** is planning a **Family Math Night**, on March 13th from 6-8 pm. Come and support your child's growing mathematical abilities, while re-activating dormant math cells in your own brain!

Graham Hill 4th and 5th grade students are preparing for their **Outdoor Education Opportunity**, in partnership with the Wilderness Awareness School in Duvall.

PTA Board positions, including Co-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Volunteer Coordinator, will be opening up for the following school year (terms are for two years). If you're interested in a Board position or would like to nominate someone—or if you would like to serve on the Nominating Committee—contact Stacey Pitts at mrspitts1@msn.com. The committee hopes to have a new Board in place by the end of this school year, so step up to the plate!

Multicultural Inclusion Project (MIP)

New Project Celebrates Multicultural Families & Strengthens School

by Celia Y. Weisman

In Fall 2007 Graham Hill launched an exciting new project designed to more deeply connect and engage under represented families in the life of our school and community. Spearheaded by Graham Hill's Unity Team, a PTA subcommittee, this effort advances that team's vitally important mission: to work towards inclusion and equity throughout Graham Hill programs and among all of the school's populations. This two-year pilot project has been funded by a generous grant from Seattle's innovative **Department of Neighborhoods**.

Free evening computer classes and other workshops, such as resume development, tax preparation, legal advice and homework assistance will be offered to participating families, along with child care, interpretation and transportation services. Several larger scale fun special events will also be presented, featuring the food and cultural arts (such as story telling, dance and music) of various groups that make up the brilliant mosaic that is Graham Hill. People of all ages will come together, become better acquainted, and develop greater understanding of cultural differences, as the rich traditions of Graham Hill families from Mexican, Somali, Laotian, Vietnamese and other backgrounds are shared and explored.

A core planning subcommittee—including principal **Christina Morningstar**, guidance counselor **Sean Rolloson**, project coordinator **Stacey Pitts** and parent **Ruth Bell**—has been meeting regularly to determine the project's specifics. Participants themselves will have a key influence in ultimately determining the type and range of classes and special events to be offered. An initial meeting with a small group of representative families was held in early December, which primarily involved listening to the families' needs and visions for how to move forward with this cutting-edge endeavor. And just before the winter holiday break, a fun evening was held at school that included sharing favorite December desserts made by Graham Hill families.

Stacey Pitts, a Graham Hill parent, has been hired to coordinate both the classes/workshops, and the cultural celebrations. Ruth Bell, who wrote the award winning grant proposal to the Department of Neighborhoods last spring, recently said of Stacey, "She is invested in community and knowledgeable about how to reach out to under-served communities. Stacey will be a great asset in helping Graham Hill families who are not represented by the PTA become involved with, and even leaders of our school." Stacey's work will also entail building bridges and partnerships with other neighborhood organizations that support families who are new immigrants, bilingual, or face other social and economic challenges. Eventually, as the project grows, neighborhood residents who may not have children attending Graham Hill will also join in the classes and cultural gatherings.

We are fortunate to live, raise, and educate children in an extraordinary locale boasting scores of different ethnic affiliations, linguistic traditions and cultural expressions. With this project Graham Hill has a unique opportunity to take the lead in developing cross-cultural understanding, thereby strengthening community relationships and our school itself. Through this initiative, Graham Hill is now well on its way to becoming a model community nexus. The visionary parents and staff who are making this project happen deserve major kudos. Watch for important updates on this effort, and for more information or to join, please call **Stacey Pitts** at **206-760-1800**, or email her at mrspitts1@msn.com.

Update: Stacey is actively looking for volunteers interested in teaching ESL and Computer Skills classes in the evening. She is also welcoming ideas for other classes that you might be interested in teaching. So what are you waiting for? Contact her!

The Graham Hill Way

by Sean Rollosso, Graham Hill School Counselor

By now you have hopefully received a copy of *The Graham Hill Way*, our **Code of Conduct** that was distributed during parent-teacher conferences. This document is a key component to our mission statement, "Graham Hill students will become lifelong learners and problem solvers. They will work to get along with others and respect differences." This document is a how-to for getting along and embodies the core values that tie the Graham Hill community together.

The cover page begins with Graham Hill's five core values:

- 1) I will respect myself and make responsible choices.
- 2) I will respect others.
- 3) I will respect my school.
- 4) I will make Graham Hill a great place to learn.
- 5) I will make Graham Hill a safe and healthy place.

All of Graham Hill's rules are derived from the above list. Having well established core values is crucial to creating a positive, safe and scholarly environment in a school. Bullying is less likely to occur in schools where these values are embraced by all stakeholders—students, staff and families. As you review the **Graham Hill Code of Conduct**, you will see talking points for each value. The first value, I will respect myself, has our **Peace Pledge**. This is recited daily in Ms. Jeffery's PE class and weekly as an entire school in our Monday assembly. For each value there are also questions in italics that you can discuss with your child. For example, under "I will respect others," it says, "Think of ways that you are different than others. How do you want to be treated?"

Inside the Graham Hill Way, you will find a variety of problem-solving techniques. These are taught using our **Kelso's Choice, 2nd Step**, and **Steps to Respect** curricula. They are not only taught but are reinforced in our daily practice with students. Students learn to resolve the inevitable conflicts that come up when you have around 400 students studying and playing together 5 days a week.

As you may know, Graham Hill is a **Positive Discipline** school. Classroom meetings are an important component to Positive Discipline. Students take ownership in creating a mutually respectful classroom environment by solving problems, giving compliments and making plans in classroom meetings. Many of the skills covered in our Code of Conduct are taught and practiced during classroom meetings.

It's impossible to always agree with each other. As in all schools, problems will arise at Graham Hill. Having a shared vocabulary and structures by which to resolve conflict teaches us that we can work and play together in a mutually respectful environment. Sit down with your child and test your vocabulary on the final page of the Code of Conduct.

If you need a copy of the Code of Conduct, ask at the front office!

Food Drive for Northwest Community Services Food Bank

We'd like to express big thanks to all Graham Hill families who generously gave non-perishable food items and toys for the **South End Food Bank** (which is run by **Northwest Community Services**) during the holiday season.

And mega thanks to *Fionnuala O'Sullivan* for spearheading this effort, and for transporting many car loads full of food and toys. Way to go everybody!

If you didn't get a chance to help out during the holidays, don't worry. Graham Hill families can continue to give non-perishable food items to the South End Food Bank throughout the year. The big purple bucket will remain at the front entry of our school for this purpose. Let's keep on helping our neighbors and community members for many more seasons to come!

For those school families who may need their services, or to look into volunteer and direct donation yourself, the Food Bank is located at 4205 Rainier Ave. S. (206-723-4105). Food is distributed to those in need from 9:30 am-2:00 pm on Saturday and specifically to seniors and the disabled from 9:30 am-2:00 pm on Wednesdays.

Come summer time, also remember that kids who rely on free or reduced lunch during the school year can have a tough time—your direct donation during this time can have a very real impact on growing kids in the community.

Space for taking notes, doodling, and giving to your kids for creative purposes!

中文在 Graham Hill 小學 你們好嗎? 我們好!

The following is excerpted from the Graham Hill Elementary "Mandarin Monthly" (November 2007). Shan Steinmetz has been doing a wonderful job as our Mandarin Immersion Specialist—xie xie nin, Lin lao shi! The pilot program at Graham Hill, as well as John Muir and Beacon Hill Elementary Schools, has been a success and consequently, the school district has announced a permanent partial Mandarin immersion program at Beacon Hill Elementary School for the 2008 school year. The program will also feature a full Spanish language immersion program, and a program for learners of English as a second language, starting in Kindergarten.

Mandarin is spoken by possibly more people than any other language in the world: over one billion! The Chinese language has more than 400 dialects in continental China alone. The people of each province have a unique provincial dialect, and then the people of each city, town, and even village can have their own special dialect as well. However, standard Mandarin, also known as Standard Chinese, is the official modern Chinese spoken language used by China, Taiwan, and is also one of the four official languages of Singapore.

The phonology of Standard Mandarin is based on the Beijing dialect [*pu tong hua*], which in turn belongs to Mandarin [*guo yu*], a large and diverse group of Chinese dialects spoken across northern and southwestern China. Mandarin is used throughout China, in addition to the local dialect. Everyone learns Mandarin, as it is the main language of government, the media and education.

A Chinese character is a logogram used in writing Chinese, Japanese, and formerly Vietnamese. Each character represents a syllable of spoken Chinese and also has a meaning. Characters can be used on their own, in combination with other characters or as part of other characters. The number of Chinese characters is indefinite. It could be somewhere between 50,000 to 100,000, but a large number of these are rarely-used variants accumulated throughout history. Studies have shown that full literacy requires the knowledge of between about 3,000 and 4,000 characters.

**The heading translates as, "Chinese at Graham Hill Elementary/How are you?/We are fine!", reflecting the success of Mandarin Immersion pilots in the District.*

Kids Co. and Graham Hill

by Eli Warshal

Director, Kids Company Graham Hill

Kids Co. is a non-profit childcare organization, which has partnered with Graham Hill Elementary School for many years. Kids Co. has a very important mission: "to provide and advocate for quality childcare that enriches and nurtures all children, supporting their success in school and in life." We are part of the Seattle School District's **Community Alignment Initiative**, a program designed to strengthen the bonds between school and childcare providers.

Over the years Kids Co. and Graham Hill Elementary School have built and nurtured a close working relationship that has experienced many positive changes. Since the arrival of our wonderful principal, Ms. Morningstar, this reciprocity has blossomed. We are so thrilled to be a part of the larger Graham Hill family.

Together Graham Hill and Kids Co. have collaborated on structural, educational and family activities that bring our community closer. We have a thriving Preschool and School Age program serving the students of Graham Hill. We are open everyday, except the major holidays, providing care from 7:00 am–6:00 pm. Last year Kids Co. gave out over \$165,000 in subsidies and scholarships. We are committed to the children of this school and beyond.

As an educator, I am pleased with the fabulous staff at Kids Co. and take great delight in the amazing and wonderful children we serve. I am always eager to cooperate and collaborate with the teachers at Graham Hill. Ms. Morningstar and I continue to develop our relationship in efforts to provide great opportunities for children and their families. For further information, please feel free to contact me at 206-725-3540 or email me at eliw@kidscompany.org.

Editor's note (CW)

At Kids Co. children are cared for by a highly qualified, professional, energetic and empathetic staff. I ought to know: my preschooler daughter's been a regular there since early October. Most evenings, she's having so much fun playing, singing and learning with the kids and caregivers/teachers of Kids Co., she balks when it's time to go home. Stop by sometime, and see Kids Co. in action: perhaps you'll spot Mr. Arnie playing his banjo, doing magic with the preschoolers, or leading them with Ms. Katie in an adventure involving yellow goo and cooking utensils. Witness Ms. Natasha with the school age kids doing homework assignments and other activities with abundant zest. And then there's the multi-talented Mr. Rob, second to Mr. Eli in command, who bridges the two realms (school age and preschool) of Kids Co., handling tasks so numerous that I'm beginning to break out in a cold sweat just thinking about all he does. Meet Mr. Eli, director, and you're in luck: his warmth, concern, eagerness to help, and humor can turn your day from darkness to light in a nanosecond. At Kids Co.'s helm, Mr. Eli sets the tone and capably orchestrates its happy creativity. (And this is an incomplete snap-shot of staff members, for there are others too, as equally talented and dedicated.)

Graham Hill families are indeed fortunate to have this marvelous childcare option, right on site at our school. It's been a pleasure to meet not only the staff, but also the children of Kids Co. and their parents. Kids Co. families truly reflect our neighborhood: coming together we comprise a brilliant rainbow of colors, shapes, sizes, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, religious beliefs and spirits. I for one am most grateful to Kids Co. and to Graham Hill, for ensuring that my little one is happy, safe, growing and learning in such a special, kid-friendly and supportive community.

More creative space for you
and your kids . . .

Mark your calendars!

Family Math Night
Thursday, March 13th
5:30-8:00 PM

Professional Development Day (No School)
Friday, March 21st

Discover Dance Performance
Saturday, March 22nd
2:00 PM
McCaw Hall

Report Cards sent home
Monday, March 24th

PTA General Meeting (featuring information on Autism Inclusion)
Tuesday, March 25th

Powerful Writers Open Mic Night
Wednesday, March 26th
6:00-8:00 PM
Columbia City Starbucks

Spring Break (No School)
March 31st-April 4th

Spring Sing Concert
April 10th
7:00 PM
Graham Hill Auditorium

WASL Testing
April 14th-May 2nd

Outdoor Education Opportunity (OEO) 4th and 5th Graders
May 7th- 9th

Teacher Appreciation Week
May 12th-16th

Early Dismissal
Wednesday, May 21st
1:15 PM

Young Author's Day
Thursday, May 22nd

Memorial Day (No School)
Monday, May 26th

Last Day of School
Tuesday, June 17th

Making Graham Hill More Beautiful

by Maura Whalen

The PTA's **Grounds and Facilities** committee is affectionately becoming known as the "Feng Shui" committee. Why? We have designs to energize our school and beautify its interior and exterior, so Graham Hill will be an even more welcoming place. Those of us "in" the community know how fabulous our school already is and that it needn't look pretty to be pretty, but...we've been told time and time again that first impressions make a difference and we're aiming to wow everyone who attends one of our kindergarten tours.

Before school began last fall a few parents took it upon themselves to weed the front gardens and even plant a few color spots. During summer 2007, parent **Suzanne Wolf** watered our newly planted specimens. In the beginning of November, parents **Bonnie Svejcar** and **Brett McCallum** put in their sweat equity weeding and planting some more. Hundreds of cheery daffodil bulbs have started to rear their heads, reminding us of all the work done during those cold, grey months.

Last year, the committee held two painting parties refreshing our main foyer and hallway. Teacher **Mark Leonard** is to be thanked again and again for his formidable overtime commitment. Parent **Anna Copley** took it upon herself to reproduce, enlarge and mount numerous black and white photographs of Graham Hill students and staff that now brighten our hallways. More than 50 other families participated in last year's beautification projects physically and financially. We have even greater plans and need more help for this year's projects. Please consider pitching in!

Editors' note

One wet weekend in early December, **Maura** led members of the PTA's Grounds and Facilities Committee, along with other enthusiastic volunteers, in efforts to make Graham Hill more beautiful. None were deterred from their indoor and outdoor projects, even when Seattle experienced a surprisingly early snowfall.

The entire school community has delighted in the artful and creative outcomes of that weekend. A large mobile hanging in the school's west corridor, and the new mural adorning the eastern steps, are especially awesome. Maura, her committee and volunteers deserve mega thanks for their incredible dedication and commitment to Graham Hill.

Now that Spring has sprung, we can't wait to see more flowers blooming, as well as the fruition of more plans that Maura and her hard-working team have hatched. If you're interested in helping with future projects, please contact Maura at mauraelizabeth@mac.com