

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER  
2011

# Barlow Focus

NEWSLETTER OF THE JOEL BARLOW HIGH SCHOOL PTSA

## ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE:

Please join the staff and faculty of Joel Barlow High School at the Open House! The evening begins promptly at 7:00pm and will run through the eight periods of the school day.

There will be a break at 8:05pm to enjoy refreshments and view tables of interest from various school clubs and athletic teams near the cafeteria and in the upper gym. Parents should park in the front or rear of the building, with families urged to come in one car.

Open House is your opportunity to learn about the community and curricula at Joel Barlow. See you there!

## Principal's Points

*From Tom McMorran, Head of School*

This is an exciting time to be a high school student. It is also a demanding time, and often anxiety-producing, and exhilarating and consequential and time-consuming. As we work together to help our students navigate the alphabet soup of CMT, CAPT, ACT, PSAT, SAT, and AP, let's remember a few of the equally important mile markers of adolescence: Playing on a sports team, singing in the musical, arguing in debate, "hangin' out" with good friends in the cafeteria, grabbing a bite at the Ridge, emailing and twittering and

facebooking and NOT doing chores and squabbling with siblings over who owns that pair of jeans, and cringing when the Interim Progress Report shows up, and fist-pumping when that big, juicy A+ adorns a test.

When we ask students why they need a good high school education, they tell us they need to be prepared for post-high school training, college, the military, or the workforce. When we push a bit more, and ask them why those things are important, they tell us that they want

choices in their adult lives. They want meaningful relationships and some leisure, but mostly what they want are careers, not just jobs, but opportunities to define themselves as creative, innovative, and responsible adults. Put away your notions from Happy Days or Welcome Back, Kotter -- students don't want to avoid hard work; they want to see the value of their investment.

More than 100 years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote two influential essays: "The American Scholar" and "Self-

*Continued on Page 2*

## Jottings from Jen

This might be a sweeping generalization, but I imagine that if you are reading this, the fall issue of the FOCUS, you are interested. Interested in your child's school and, perhaps, interested in parents' roles at the school. If that's the case, you've come to the right place.

Joel Barlow High School is a mighty impressive place. Recently ranked by

Newsweek magazine as the 6<sup>th</sup> best in the state, in fact. But we don't have a retail Main Street to back up our budget. We just have a top notch administrative team leading a dedicated group of teachers, with a community of kids who care. And, a PTSA that believes in all of the above.

so, welcome. And Thank You. And if you'd like to help – in

person, or with a paint brush, or a plate of brownies, or a \$30 membership - we'd be ever so grateful. So would the school and, believe it or not, so would your kids.

My email is [jwastrom@optonline.net](mailto:jwastrom@optonline.net). I'm happy to help get your foot in the door.

Here's to a Terrific Year!

*Jen Wastrom,  
President, JBHS PTSA*

# Principal's Points (continued from Page 1)

Reliance." In the former, Emerson argued that Americans should not be looking to Europe for examples of scholarship -- the vigor of American thought was sufficient in itself. In the latter, Emerson argued that American virtue should be built upon each individual's ability to stand on his or her own two feet. In a 2011 book by Boykin and Noguera, *Creating the Opportunity to Learn*, the authors extended this notion to what they call the self-determination theory of education. They wrote, "...accomplishing a challenging task and causing a desired effect to occur are inherently enjoyable. The logic follows that the more self-determined the act, the more a sense of competence ensues. Being guided by self-determination, while engaged in an activity, results in optimal motivation levels" (p. 84). If we accept this account of motivation, then we adults have to agree to a few action items:

1. As a child advances through the years, consciously give him or her more responsibility.
2. Let your child fail (a little bit)

on his or her own. Obviously, if the student digs a big hole, you should be there with a ladder to help him/her out. But if it is a life-lesson, let your child learn it.

3. Don't do your child's homework. Really. I mean it. If you are just looking it over, then you will end up revising it. If you wanted your child to grow strong physically, would you lift weights for him/her? Nope, so don't do their intellectual work either.

4. Rather than give your child a financial incentive for performance, "If you earn an A, I will give you \$50," give your child an unanticipated after-the-fact bonus. "Here's a Benjamin that you didn't expect." When we offer incentives, we leach away the student's responsibility.

5. Lend them your frontal lobe: According to MRI scans, an adolescent brain is least developed in the executive functioning area. When you give your child responsibility and authority, don't make the mistake of thinking that teenage logic is ready for the wisdom that comes with greater experience. Approach this as though

your child had a limited partnership in your company. Retain your 51% voting right, but see that your son or daughter is an active member of the Board of Directors.

Having said all of this, I think it is important that we use grade level as an indica-

tor of where a child should be, but ultimately we as parents have to decide how mature our kids are. If they are biologically 18 but emotionally 12, we shouldn't turn all decision-making over to them.

We began this year being lashed and inconvenienced by Hurricane Irene. I hope that was the one wallop we will get. "Irene" comes from the Latin for "peace." It is my hope that this school year will be metaphorically a hurricane of activity, growth, and learning, but with peacefulness, too.

*"Put away your notions from Happy Days or Welcome Back, Kotter — students don't want to avoid hard work; they want to see the value of their investment"*

## Remember: October 12, 2011

**PSAT Testing Day for Sophomores and Juniors**

Late Arrival Day for Freshmen and Seniors

Day 6

Order of Classes 1,7,2, and 8

(periods 3,4, and 5 are dropped)

# Barlow Homecoming Activities Are Set

After many hours of hard work and planning the Joel Barlow Student Council and FalcoNation have released the schedule for this year’s Homecoming and Spirit Week.

Beginning on October 11 and running all week, Spirit Week will involve students dressing in school colors, competitions between classes, and other activities that capture the Barlow spirit. FalcoNation, which heads up Spirit Week, is also set to sell “Homecoming Week 2011” t-shirts during the school day.

Spirit Week culminates with an all-school pep rally on Friday during Barlow’s X period, complete with the schools athletic teams, cheerleaders, and team captains. “FalcoNation is dedicated to making the pep rally the best in years.” said Ryan Swift, FalcoNation’s faculty adviser. “We will have ‘minute-to-win-it’ type games, a frozen t-shirt contest, a pie eating contest, and even giveaways.”

The Homecoming Football Game will take place on Saturday, October 15 at Joel Barlow

High School Stadium, with a start time of 1:30pm. The Falcons will take on SWC rival Immaculate High of Danbury, seeking redemption after their 2009 loss to the Mustangs.

On Saturday evening, from 8:00 -11:00pm, the Homecoming Dance, put on by the Student Council, will have an 80’s theme this year. Students are encouraged to wear clothing from 80’s such as parachute pants, thin ties, and over-size jackets. “Last year’s Homecoming Dance had nearly 400 students in attendance and this year we are looking to eclipse that mark and hope to see more than half of the Joel Barlow High School student population in attendance.” said Sheila Salko-Peddle, faculty advisor for Barlow Student Council.

An important change for students and parents to note is that tickets for the Homecoming Dance will not be sold at the door. Advanced ticket sales, at \$8.00 per ticket, will be held during all three lunch periods during Spirit Week. Students can purchase tickets with cash or checks made out to “Joel

Barlow High School.”

Tickets to the Homecoming Football Game will be sold at the gate for \$4.00 for adults, \$3.00 for students, \$2.00 for Barlow seniors, with senior citizens and children under 6 free. The Snack Shed, run by the Joel Barlow Football Booster Club, will be open during the game.

## Homecoming Activities

**Football Game**  
Versus Immaculate  
1:30 PM

**80’s Themed Dance**  
8:00 PM to 11:00 PM

# Take Five

“Taking 5” this month is Dean of Students and Director of Student Activities, **Patrick Higgins**, who joined the Barlow community this past August.

*1: What does the Dean of Students and Director of Student Life do? (because it sounds like a great job)*

Higgins: (chuckling) “Well, it is a great job. It is sort of two roles, really. The Director of Student Activities side serves as a conduit between the studentbody and the administration with a lot of the questions and concerns that come up with the studentbody. If you look at purely the Dean of Students side, it largely makes sure the students are on the right course. One of my colleagues described me as ‘the counselor with teeth,’ meaning that I don’t just hand out disciplinary actions. I am here to guide the student if they have done something wrong and to show them that there are consequences, and put them on the path right path to not doing that again. I am also a hub in the school, keeping in touch with faculty, the rest of the administration and parents; keeping information going between various points in the school community.”

*2: You’ve been here a couple of months now. How’s it going?*

PH: “It’s going excellent! It’s very good, thank you. I came in the first week of August and started getting to know the faculty who were arriving. This is a warm, wonderful, caring environment. Kudos to the administration, and especially Dr. McMorrان, for creating this

culture. The students, by and large, are very respectful, hard-working. I have visited classrooms and it’s just a wonderful school.”

*3: What are your goals for the students of Barlow this year?*

PH: “My goals are to help students best I can to be involved with student activities and other parts of high school, to get involved with student activities and to just enjoy the parts of high school that are often overlooked in the rush to get things done. Academics, obviously, are very important, but also in this very busy world we live in we need to take five and say ‘hey, I like poetry, I like robotics, or music or sports, etc. and I need to take time for those things too.’ Barlow is one of very few schools in Connecticut that actually allows for activities to take place during the school day. We recognize that this is a good thing and important to the school culture.”

*4. In your previous position in Ridgefield you were the SAT, ACT, and PSAT coordinator. It’s now test season for many students. Any advice for students and parents about all of this?*

PH: “For 18 of my 20 years in the Ridgefield district, I was the test coordinator, so I know all of the nooks and corners of this kind of testing. One of the things I would suggest to parents and students is that it’s a joint effort, so both of you be aware of what test you are registered for, how you are getting to the test center that day, and also be sure to have a photo i.d. with them. I’m not going to bore you with stories of making

phone calls home, with students literally in tears, because they did not have the photo i.d. with them. But it happens. It is the real deal. Also, now with respect to parents, students need to step up and take responsibility for knowing what test they are taking and how long they are going to be there. Students need to speak up and ask questions with their guidance counse-

lors, read the materials that come in the mail, take the sample test. This is very important and it shouldn’t be that the parents do all the work

and just drop them off at the door. Students are offered, and should take, the PSAT. The PSAT is a great indicator in the junior year as to what strengths, and possibly weaknesses, may exist for the student prior to taking the SAT.”

*5. What is your fondest memory of high school?*

PH: “My gosh! Fond memories of those days. I would say my fondest memory of high school is probably in the fall. When we would have homecoming and there would be a football game and a dance. And the whole thing started out with a bonfire the night before. Faculty and students all went and helped out. The leaves were in full color, the air was cool. You really felt the school spirit. It was great.”

*In this column, members of the Barlow faculty and staff will “Take 5.” Five quick questions that are on the minds of the Barlow community and will give insight into their role here and how Barlow operates.*

**Upcoming Events:**

**October**

- 5th Open House
- 10th No School Columbus Day
- 11th-14th Spirit Week
- 12th PSAT for Grades 10 & 11;  
Late Arrival for Grades 9 & 12
- 15th Homecoming Football
- 15th Homecoming Dance
- 20th Undergraduate Photo Re-takes
- 20th Tri-M Music Honor Society  
Induction Ceremony
- 21st Grade 8 Transition Dance
- 25th NHS Volleyball Game
- 25th Winter Sports  
Organizational Meeting

**November**

- 3rd Financial Aid Presentation
- 4th Coffee House
- 6th Major Work Concert
- 8th Senior Portraits
- 9th Professional Development –  
Late Arrival for all grades
- 17th-19th Fall Musical

# What Do They Do?

O.k., so we are all aware that at Joel Barlow High School there is a myriad of activities, clubs, and just stuff that goes on. But did you ever wonder about what that club, that group or that person on the PTSA does actually do? Hopefully it'll get answered here! In this issue of FOCUS we will discover the Class Council Liaison.

The class council liaison is a new post created this year within the PTSA. Filled by a parent volunteer for each grade, the class council liaison works with the student council of their grade

to offer assistance on student council projects.

11<sup>th</sup> grade liaison Patti Cortina said "I'm excited to take on this new PTSA position and work with the student council since they are a great bunch of kids." And 12<sup>th</sup> grade liaison Robin Pantalena added "My work with the senior class council will be whatever is necessary to help them make their final year at Barlow a memorable one."

Modeled after a similar system at Ridgefield High School, the class council liaison will help the logistics

of class-wide projects -- such as Snuggie sales -- move along, so that the student council faculty advisers can focus on the larger scope of student government.

If anyone wishes to help out with any class-wide projects, they should get in touch with their child's grade class council liaison.

**2011-20012 Class Council Liaisons:**

- Grade 12: Robin Pantalena
- Grade 11: Patti Cortina
- Grade 10: Kate Freeman
- Grade 9: Stephanie Gregory

## Did You Know?

\* The Counseling Department has their own section on the Barlow web site. All the dates and schedules for standardized tests, college admissions visits, and what students should be doing when, can be found there.

\* The Boards of Education meet *monthly*? The next

meeting dates are: October 11 for Easton BOE in the Library/Media Center of HKMS; October 18 for the Region 9 BOE in the Library/Media Center of JBHS; and November 1 for Redding BOE in the JRMS Community Room at 7:30pm.

\* Joel Barlow High School is the sixth best high school in Connecticut and ranks 312th in the country. This is according to recently released ranking information compiled by Newsweek magazine.

## From the Mark Twain Library ...

On Sunday, October 16, the Redding League of Women Voters is sponsoring "The Artists of Redding Studio Tour." From noon to 5 p.m. the studios of seven of Redding's artists will be open to the public, some for the first time. The artists will be on hand throughout the afternoon to talk about their workplaces--and their work. Studios on the tour

are those of Kathy Anderson, Babette Bloch, Hansi Engel, James Grashow, Marc Mellon, Erin Nazzaro and Victoria Wyndham. The medium and styles of the artists involved in the tour are as varied as the studios where they ply their art.

For more information and to order tickets (\$35/person), call (203) 938-0666 or e-mail

[reddingart@optonline.net](mailto:reddingart@optonline.net) with your name and address. Tickets will be mailed to you along with a brochure containing a brief biography of each artist and a map with the addresses of their studios. Tour goers can visit the studios in whatever order they choose and stay at each as long as they want. Tickets will also be available at each studio on the day of the event.

# The Barlow PTSA Needs You!

The Barlow PTSA has approximately 47 wonderful parent volunteers within its ranks this year. The entire studentbody – including the administration and the faculty – benefits from the efforts of these hard-working individuals, but there is something *every parent* can do to support the Barlow PTSA...and its easy. Join the Barlow PTSA!

So far this year the PTSA membership numbers are down, with only about half of the studentbody having joined. The membership committee would like to think it has been because of Hurricane Irene. That crunch time at the end of the summer when forms are being filled out and the focus is finally turning back to school – was turned into a week when

all of us were out of power and communication for the better part of seven days.

But now that the students are back in school with the lights on and the roads clear, and with plenty of homework, we are hopeful that families will take a minute to fill out the membership form. The deadline for joining the PTSA has been extended to October 5<sup>th</sup>, the same night of Barlow's Open House.

With the \$30 membership fee, parents will be included in and will receive a copy of the school directory, fondly known as The Buzz Book. "The Buzz Book," said Jen Wastrom, president of the PTSA, "is an invaluable

source for any parent. The Barlow community spreads across two towns and I know I'm constantly referring to the Buzz Book to stay in touch with who my kids are connected with."

So whether you do it for the Buzz Book or to help or in appreciation, please join and support the Barlow PTSA! Membership forms are available on the Barlow website.

<http://www.joelbarlowps.org/Communications/PTSA/PTSA2011-12/>

## Next PTSA Meeting

Don't miss the next PTSA meeting on Tuesday, October 11 at 9:15am in the Media Center. Members of the Counseling Department will present "Naviance," the on-line program designed for students to review goals for college and beyond, as well as track their school, community service, leadership, and sports activities. At this meeting parents will learn how to enter their high schoolers into the system and how to navigate and utilize this valuable program. Naviance is a great tool for remembering and keeping organized the many important aspects of the college application process. You don't want to miss this meeting!

## About this Newsletter

The FOCUS newsletter is a bimonthly publication of the JBHS PTSA. Email notification is sent to those who have registered to receive information from the PTSA. We welcome submissions from the JBHS community. Previous issues of FOCUS can be found on the JBHS website at [www.joelbarlowps.org/](http://www.joelbarlowps.org/)