

## NEXT GENERATION

"Next Generation" features the talents of our local students and school news and updates. All schools in the Applegate Valley are encouraged to submit art, writing, photography and any other creative pieces to [gater@applegater.org](mailto:gater@applegater.org).

### RUCH SCHOOL

## It takes a village

"Giddyup, giddyup," I urged my imaginary horse as I bounced along holding the reins.

"Giddyup, giddyup," repeated 35 fifth through seventh graders, four student interns from Southern Oregon University (SOU), a student aid, the classroom teacher, a digital artist/teacher, a retired elementary school principal, and a parent volunteer, as they urged their imaginary horses along after me.

The old adage that "it takes a village to raise a child" can be modified to "it takes a village to educate a child." I discovered this recently when my wife, Peggy, and I attended Cindy McDonald's language arts class at Ruch Community School to learn about the Digital Storytelling Project. The school is all about community involvement. I was there because I had been asked to write an article on the project. Peggy, a former elementary school principal, was along because I wanted her expertise in education.

I first became aware of the project when I attended the Parent-Teacher Organization's (PTO) annual community fund-raiser last June, a critical event in supporting the school's art, music, and sports programs—programs that have been lost in so many schools because of tight budgets. There I learned about PTO's special projects—field trips, first-grade book-publishing, sustainability, and classroom smart boards where students or the teacher can write on their computers with the results showing up on the board.

As a writer, I was particularly attracted to the Digital Storytelling Project. Communication, the ability to share information and persuade people through written and oral presentations, is one of the most important skills we can teach our children. The digital project adds another dimension: the use of technology as an aid. Not only were the students learning how to present well-thought-out, one- to three-minute arguments supporting something they were passionate about, but they were also learning to use digital media to strengthen their cases. They were making short movies where visual images, either developed by the students or pulled off the web, would support their arguments.

The students were preparing for their future in the Digital Age. But they were also dealing with the now.

They had been asked to develop their individual projects around something they wanted to change—something personal, in the community, or in the world. The student interns told me that the projects

ranged from dealing with family matters to conserving environmental resources. I read one student's piece, a summary of a family issue she wanted to address. It was personal and important. It was also powerfully written.

Abram Katz, the digital artist who is teaching the class, believes deeply in the transformative power of writing. "In order for this to happen," Mr. Katz told me, "the students need a safe environment where they feel free to express their concerns." They also need to know how to protect themselves when sharing personal information. Mr. Katz and his team work hard to create the kind of environment that encourages self-expression and to give the students the skills they need to be successful. When it comes to communication, Mr. Katz practices what he preaches. "Teachers are as effective as their ability to communicate with others. You can have great ideas, but it's the sharing and *exchanging* of ideas that actually makes things interesting," he said.

The exercise at the beginning of the class was a form of communication. Students and staff had been asked to select a sound that reflected their weekend. When finished, the students turned toward us. We were not to be spared. My giddyup had reflected the writing projects I had been trying to complete on Saturday: Giddyup, Curt!

My concluding thought: Wow—what a win-win opportunity. Obviously the students were winning. They were excited, engaged and learning valuable skills. But others were winning as well. The project came about because of a close partnership between Ruch Community School, SOU, and the Oregon Writing Project. The school gains because it has access to the expertise of the university—and the interns. The university gains because what it is teaching is being grounded and tested in actual classroom experience and because of the opportunity it provides for student interns. And finally, the community wins. Its children are receiving an excellent education. The dollars and other support it contributes are being well utilized.

Julie Barry, Ruch School principal, and Cindy McDonald, the classroom teacher, deserve commendation for their willingness to invite this innovative program into their school and classroom. They have totally embraced the project. As Julie notes, "The class is amazing. The students truly benefit."

Curtis and Peggy Mekemson  
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Students in the Digital Storytelling class focus on developing their personal stories.

## APPLEGATE SCHOOL

## Garden club update

In the fall of 2014, the new garden club cleaned up its gardening beds, harvested the remaining vegetables, and made smoothies with kale from the garden. This was a great example of a healthy way to use greens, fruits and berries.

The club also met with Fred Hall, a "grandparent volunteer," and planted spring flower bulbs next to the classroom stairs and garlic in one of the vegetable beds. The garlic is now reaching out with green leaves and the bulbs have broken through the soil getting ready for their spring show.

More activity is on the way with landscaping planned for next to the old brick building. Though it may be a longer process it will be worth the wait. As we all know, volunteer time, funding and actual work take time.

The garden club is seeking help. If you would like to help the kindergarten through third grade garden club with supplies or monetary donations, please call the Applegate School at 541-846-6280 to get a message to the PTSG (Parent-Teacher-Student Group). A big thank you



Applegate School Garden Club at work.  
Photo: Julianna Thompson.

goes out to Fred Hall and all the other volunteers who help make this garden possible for these children.

Linda Kappen • 541-846-6280  
Schoolwide Education Assistant  
Applegate School

## Applegate School Robotics Team held its own in its first tournament

On December 6, 2014, the Applegate School Robotics Team competed for the first time in the Southern Oregon Regional LEGO Robotics Tournament held at North Middle School in Grants Pass. There were twenty-one teams from our region, including Roseburg, that participated in the daylong event.

Our Applegate team, whose members were between 9 and 13 years old, competed with 20 other teams in three robot obstacle challenges. We are so proud of the way our kids handled the pressure and how they responded to the inherent complications of software programming and robot mechanics. Their robot didn't always do what they wanted it to do, but they approached each new round with a team solution and a positive outlook.

Our team also presented a research project that they had worked on for several weeks prior to the competition and participated in a Teamwork Challenge—in front of a panel of judges.

This was an invaluable educational and personal experience for our students. Most of our team members had never participated in a competition or program



Applegate School's first robotics team competed in the Southern Oregon Regional LEGO Robotics Tournament.  
Photo: Kathy Kliever.

of this magnitude or scope. Our students really shone in the Teamwork Challenge. It was fun to watch them work together toward a common goal, making sure each team member succeeded. This was our team's inaugural year, and all of our team members hope to return next year.

The team's participation fees as well as purchase of the required robot was made possible by a generous donation from The Friends of Applegate School. A big thank you to our community for making this and other enrichment programs available to our kids.

Seana Hodge  
Applegate School Robotics Coach  
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## Fund-raising concert for Applegate School

**Sunday, April 26, at 2 pm**  
**950 Kubli Road, Grants Pass**  
(between the fire station and Schmidt Family Vineyards)

Don't miss the "Concert in the Barn" to help support and expand the art program at Applegate School. Admission is by donation.

The Carr Family Band has generously offered to provide the entertainment. To get a taste of their music, visit their website at [http://www.kevincarr.org/carr\\_family\\_band/](http://www.kevincarr.org/carr_family_band/).

There will also be a **silent auction** for pieces of art donated by members of the community.

If you are an artist or know one who would be willing to **donate an art piece** for the event, please call Jean and Fred Hall at 541-846-6953.