

SECTION

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Sunday
June 15, 1997

GREENWICH **NEIGHBORS**®

Greenwich Time.



Victoria Taylor Allen and Ed Hare look over the auction program at the "Cinco de Mayo" benefit at Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich.

continued

Sunday, June 15, 1997
continuation



Andy Senatore plays mariachi music on his trumpet; at right, student All Gilbert holds a golden labrador retriever that was auctioned off that evening.

Photos by Helen Neafsey

Getting
in on
the

Auction action

Trips, dinners, school-related offerings sold in Sacred Heart auction



There were the usual vacations, dinners and evenings-on-the-town sold at the annual benefit auction at Convent of the Sacred Heart in May.

And then there were the offerings only a Sacred Heart parent could love.

Like the sleepover at Sacred Heart for more than 30 third- and fourth-graders. Or six front-row seats at graduation this past Friday. Or operating a backhoe at the ground-breaking for a new science building at the school. Or how about reserved student parking for the next school year?

These were some of the more unusual items up for bid this year to benefit the all-girl Catholic school in Greenwich.

The 24th-annual gala, held May 3, had a "Cinco de Mayo" theme with hand-made Mexican kites and hand-cut paper banners fluttering in the breeze, a mariachi band strolling among guests and other features that transformed the school's grounds into a Mexican plaza for the night.

The evening included cocktails, dinner, silent and live auctions and a raffle for a 1997 BMW convertible.

COMMUNITY LIFE

'Cinco de Mayo' theme of Sacred Heart gala

Greenwich Time.

Picture hand-made Mexican kites and hand-cut paper banners fluttering in the breeze, strings of rodeo lights illuminating the night, a mariachi band strolling among the guests.

All this will combine to create a festive mood Saturday for "Cinco de Mayo," the annual auction gala at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, 1177 King St.

The school grounds will be transformed into a Mexican Plaza for the 24th-annual benefit, co-chaired by parents Cynthia Guest of Norwalk and Sharon Phillips of Greenwich.

The fiesta will start at 6 p.m. with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and a silent auction. Dinner and a live auction will follow at 7 p.m. featuring Brendan Cahill of William Doyle Galleries as the auctioneer. Dancing to the music of Alex Donner will begin at 9:30 p.m. A raffle for a 1997 BMW Z3 convertible roadster on the school green will take place at 11 p.m. Only 600 tickets at \$100 each will be sold.

Among the auction items are a week on Seabrook Island in South Carolina; 10 days on Nantucket in a nine-bedroom home overlooking the water; a Disney vacation in Orlando, Fla., at Disney's Yacht and Beach Club Resort; a complete father/son spring wardrobe by award-winning designer and Sacred Heart dad Tommy Hilfiger.

Also featured will be a trip for two to Bombay, India, at the famed Taj Mahal Hotel; a tour of Washington, D.C., with Sacred Heart alumna Cokie



Sharon Phillips, seated, co-chair of Saturday's auction gala at Convent of the Sacred Heart, with committee members, from left, Carol Angliolillo, Ann Quick, Huguette Banker, Olivia Griffiths, Deilla Namy and Janet Raske. Absent from the photo is gala co-chair Cynthia Guest.

Contributed photo

Roberts and overnight at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel; a stay at the St. James Court Hotel in London in July and tickets to an equestrian pageant celebrating the 50th wedding anniversary of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip; a two-night stay at Opyland; a four-

day stay at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Fla.; a chance to sit in the audience of the "Rosie O'Donnell Show," and a hand-decorated trunk signed by the senior class filled with Laura Ashley sheets, towels, a telephone and other fun items.

The cost of the gala is \$160 per person, which includes cocktails, the auctions and dinner. The cost for cocktails and the silent auction only is \$35 each.

For further information, call the school at 532-3512.

Greenwich Time.

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Holly Fairbank, above, asks her students at Convent of the Sacred Heart to interpret a free-form design on the blackboard during a dance/movement class, below, she recently led. Mel Greer/Staff photo

Teaching culture through dance

continued next page

Students learn from instructor's China expertise

By Sally O'Dowd
Staff Writer

Emily MacFarquhar, a young woman living in Taipei, was struggling to bend her body in a classical Chinese dance class, while she watched in amazement her 10-year-old classmate.

Recently recalling a dance class she took more than 30 years ago, MacFarquhar said the twists and turns she tried to make with her body seemed all the more difficult given the "unself-conscious grace" of young Holly Fairbank.

"I was 25 and creaking. For her it was so easy and natural," she said.

MacFarquhar, now 58 and a contributing editor at U.S. News & World Report, recalled a 1964 dance class with Fairbank, daughter of John King Fairbank, the pioneer of Chinese studies in this country. For Fairbank, the excursion into dance was a decision that would affect the rest of her life.

"It just felt so right to me," said Fairbank, now 43. "It gave me power. It's like being mute and all of sudden you realize you can communicate."

Cambridge, Mass. resident MacFarquhar, who studied under John King Fairbank at Harvard University, still maintains a personal relationship with his daughter, who lives in New York City.

Since her childhood, Holly Fairbank has remained impassioned for connecting with the rest of the globe. Her first dance course would lead to a life's work of exploring culture through dance, examining how creative movement, like language a system of symbols, reflects the way a people see themselves and their world.

"On a selfish level, it's my effort to understand people and communicate with people," she said. "It makes me feel closer to humanity."

Fairbank teaches a dance/movement class at Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich, gives arts education classes to teachers and students as a "teaching artist" at the Lincoln Center Institute at the Lincoln Center for Performing Arts in New York and is developing an Asian studies curriculum for the Elizabeth, N.J., school system in conjunction with New Jersey-based Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. Her extensive dancing and teaching career also includes stints as guest choreographer at the Beijing, Hunan and Guangdong dance academies.

She links her work at Sacred Heart to the dance classes she took as a child in Taipei and Cambridge. "A teacher can liberate your imagination," she said. "In that sense, I can identify with those girls and hope in



"On a selfish level, it's my effort to understand people and communicate with people. It makes me feel closer to humanity."

Holly Fairbank
dance/movement class teacher

some way I'm recreating the opportunity for them ... I'm hoping to share the liberation I found."

Fairbank grew up in a house located on the campus of Harvard University, where her late father was a professor of history. The eminent historian of modern China, he was the author of several books on the country, including "The Great Chinese Revolution 1800-1895" and "Chinabound: A Fifty-Year Memoir." Named in his honor is the university's Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, whose walls are decorated with watercolor paintings by his wife, Wilma Fairbank.

Wilma Fairbank is also an author of "Liang and Lin: Partners in Exploring China's Architectural Past," a book on a married Chinese couple who located and examined historical structures, including a ninth-century wooden temple in the Wutai Mountains. A film based on the romantic story is in early stages of production in China.

Holly Fairbank and her sister, Laura Fairbank Haynes, both adopted, traveled with their parents during sabbaticals from Harvard in 1960 and 1964 which took the family around the world, with stops in England, Burma, Cambodia, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

While living at Harvard, "Chinese people were coming and going all the time," Holly Fairbank recalled, noting that every Thursday, her father would have a tea in their home for Chinese visitors and American graduate students.

Fairbank had another inspiration as well — interpretive dancer Isadora Duncan, whose natural movements and rhythms helped free dance from its dependence on rigid formulas, paving the way for modern dance. Fairbank's paternal grandmother had numerous books on Duncan. "She was just wild about her," Fairbank recalled.

Fairbank made a connection between Asian culture and dance while studying at Sarah Lawrence College and while pursuing a master's degree in dance and dance education at New York University.

She was invited to China by the Ministry of Culture to do research for her master's thesis in dance anthropology in 1983. She interviewed dozens of people at Chinese dance academies to learn how the Communist regime before and after the Cultural Revolution preserved the dances of ethnic minorities as a propaganda tool; by staging the dances, the government tried to make the country's 55 minorities feel part of the Han majority, she said.

While dance in this sense was used as a political tool, it can also be a reflection of culture, she said. "It has to do with very complex, social, cul-

tural and cosmological connections ... (Dances) aren't just lovely artifacts, they have deep meaning."

To analyze a dance, one must understand the culture of people who created it, knowing how they perceive their bodies in relation to space, time, humanity and the spiritual world, she said.

In an interview during a Chinese dance performance at Sacred Heart, Fairbank said dance movements draw from Taoist and Confucian philosophy. Taoism, a mystical Chinese philosophy dating back to the sixth century, stresses the importance of harmony between opposing forces in life, calling for a balance not only between men and women but between what is up and what is down, what is in and what is out, and other relationships. The philosophy of the whole explains why the dancers move in circles, executing symmetrical motions on their left and right sides, she said.

Confucian philosophy calls for spiritual purity and proper behavior, manifested in structured dance movements. For example, while women often form an orchid with outstretched fingers, men form a large space between their thumbs and fingers to symbolize the mouth of a lion, she said.

As an American, Fairbank serves as a bridge between the United States and Asia, said Andrew Chiang, executive director of the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, who has known Fairbank for more than 10 years. He recalled seeing her perform several years ago in New York, using movements inspired by the positions of the terra cotta warriors, ancient Chinese burial figures that have been unearthed in northern China.

"I know her as a person, as someone who has experienced different cultures and has respect for different cultures," Chiang said. "She's humble in learning about them."

She is working with the dance company to develop an arts education program at a public school in Elizabeth, N.J., he said. In the fall, she will help teachers integrate Asian studies into their courses. For example, social studies courses could include a section on current events in China while a math class could calculate how much food is needed to feed the Chinese people, he said.

"We're trying to make everybody (be) like Holly, make sure the school's programs devote a certain amount of time to culture," he said. "Most teachers have little background in Asian culture."

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Culture

Continued from Page A3

At Sacred Heart, Fairbank tailors dance classes to complement other courses. In recent weeks, she has been working with a group of second-graders who are learning about directions in a social studies class. The girls drew maps of rivers, lakes and mountains, using symbols to indicate the movements a person must follow to get to an imaginary treasure.

In another recent class, as the music of Chopin played on a boom box, girls exchanged their maps. They interpreted the symbols, jumping, twirling, leaping and rolling to find the mystery objects. Like Fairbank 33 years ago, the girls danced freely, without inhibition.

"This map has turned into a ballet. This is unbelievable," she said, as a girl with long, brown hair rhythmically

moved her shoulders, torso and legs up and down.

Colleen Van Hoven, head of Sacred Heart's lower school, said she invited Fairbank to teach at the school after attending a workshop on arts education last summer at the Lincoln Center Institute. Fairbank provided instruction as a "teaching artist" and then gave a dance performance. "We came away from that so impressed with Holly," Van Hoven said. "It got us thinking about how we can relate and enhance our curriculum with dance."

Kinesthetic courses, which use movement to teach concepts, are especially valuable for students who are athletically and musically oriented, Van Hoven. "Children who aren't the high verbal ones get a chance to shine."

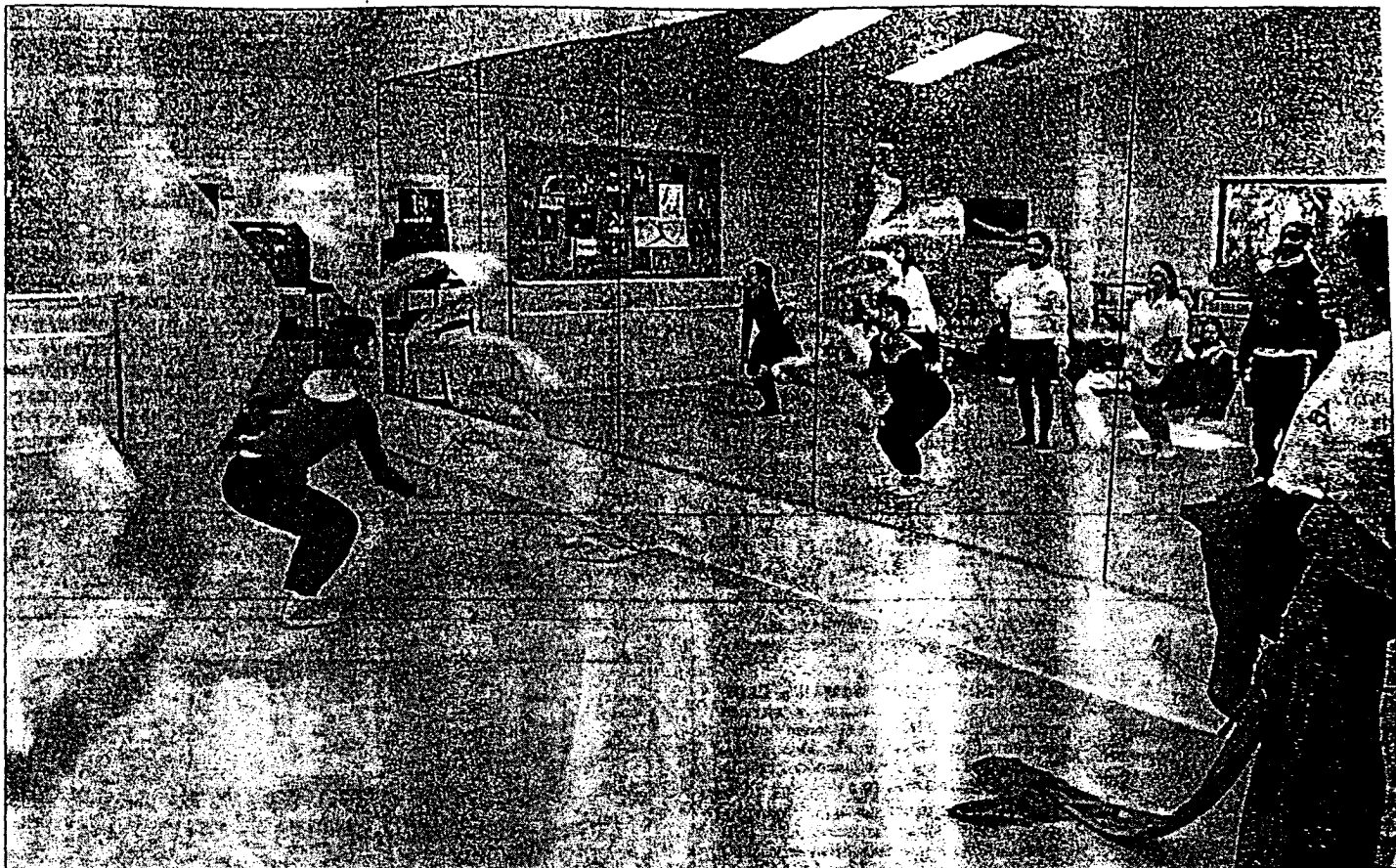
Movement is an innovative teaching tool, she went on to say, recalling a class in which Fairbank's students used their bodies to mimic the workings of pulleys and other machines. Students have also learned about con-

cepts such as symmetry and asymmetry by moving their left and right sides, she said. "The body is an important learning modality that is frequently overlooked," she said. "You can use it to transmit experiences that you can't just get at in other ways."

Van Hoven likes Fairbank's creative dance/movement class so much that she is restructuring the school's physical education program. Instead of taking three gym classes a week, girls next year will take two gym classes and one dance/movement class, she said.

Fairbank is resigning after this school year because of family and other professional commitments, but her influence will remain, Van Hoven said, adding that in the future, she would like the school's dance program to include performances for fellow students and parents.

"We're sorry to lose her but I think she's started us off on a new direction," Van Hoven said. "We hope to continue what she helped start."



Mel Greer/Staff photos

Dancers bring steps from the Far East

By Sally O'Dowd
Staff Writer

GREENWICH — Caroline Voldstad, a second-grade student at Convent of the Sacred Heart school, yesterday silently expressed her fascination with two Chinese dancers waving turquoise-blue fans on the school stage to the sound of rhythmic flutes and bells.

As she watched the two women dance delicately in circles, stretching their arms up and down and all around, Caroline, 7, gently took hold of her classmate's brown hair, twirling two thick clumps like fans that she moved in perfect time.

Giggling, Caroline said she created her little dance "because

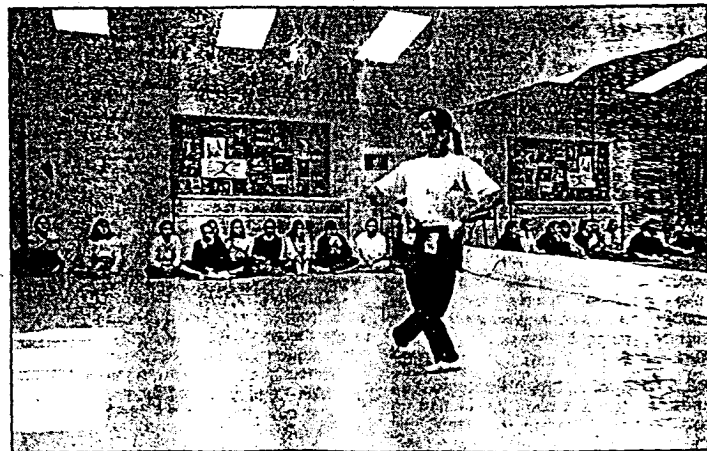
I like the rhythm that went to it."

Caroline's friend Jaclyn Veneziano, 8, said she was so caught up in the dance itself she hardly noticed her hair being touched.

Caroline and Jaclyn were among dozens of students yesterday who watched performances by Gennevieve Lam and Ya-Chih Chuang, performers with the Nai-Ni Chen dance company in Fort Lee, N.J. Lam, 37, a native of Hong Kong, moved to New York City and settled with her family in Chinatown when she was 11, she said. Chuang, originally from Taiwan, studied dance in Hong Kong and came to the United States a year ago.

Holly Fairbank, head of the

Gennevieve Lam, left, leads a Convent of the Sacred Heart ninth-grade history and dance class yesterday in a Chinese movement that uses long flowing material. Her partner, Ya-Chih Chuang, stands at the right and, below, performs.



school's Dance Department, told a group of seniors that dance, like language, reflects one's culture.

"Its structures and its meaning

come in accordance with the belief systems of its people," she said.

No stranger to Asian affairs. Please turn to DANCE, Page A5

Dance

■ Continued from Page A3

Fairbank is the daughter of the late John King Fairbank, a noted Chinese scholar who taught Asian history for more than 40 years at Harvard University. She invited the dancers to the school to complement a 12th-grade Asian history course and observe the Chinese new year, which began Friday, she said.

"They need more exposure to dance in general and certainly to different cultures."

Chinese dance movements draw from Taoist and Confucian philosophy, said Fairbank, who received dance training at the Beijing Dance Academy. Taoism, a mystical Chinese philosophy dating back to the sixth century, stresses the importance of harmony between opposing forces in life,

calling for a balance not only between men and women but between what is up and what is down, what is in and what is out, and other relationships, Fairbank said. The philosophy of the whole explains why the dancers move in circles, executing symmetrical motions on their left and right sides, she said.

Confucian philosophy calls for spiritual purity and proper behavior, manifested in structured dance movements, Fairbank said. For example, women often make small steps, placing their heel, followed by the ball of their foot and then their toes on the floor. Men take wider, more aggressive steps in the same pattern, she said.

While women often form an orchid with outstretched fingers, men form a large space between their thumbs and fingers to sym-

bolize the mouth of a lion, she said.

In a presentation to seniors, Lam and Chuang used movements with bright yellow and fuchsia ribbons to symbolize nature's elements, such as clouds, rainbows, waterfalls and ocean waves. Chuang also performed a Mongolian dance reflecting life on the plains, moving her shoulders as if she were a Mongol riding a horse.

Students Mary Jo Ruilova and Tina Paschenko, both 18, with considerable dance experience, said the Chinese movements were elegant and soft.

"It was beautiful," said Ruilova, who saw a Chinese dance performance for the first time four years ago in a Paris cabaret. "They're so elegant and sensitive and virgin-like, but they're so strong and firm."

Greenwich Time

SERVING THE COMMUNITY SINCE 1877 • SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 1997

'A dream' lives on



Agnes Florek, 15, left, leads the choir during a celebration in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Convent of the Sacred Heart yesterday. In right photo, Marcia Ann Gillespie, editor-in-chief of Ms. Magazine, addresses Convent of the Sacred Heart students at the school's celebration. Gillespie highlighted the celebration with comments on how King affected her life and how his influence can still be felt. "We can do great things," Gillespie said. "He made it possible to see ourselves in the our very best light." The celebration also included a dance by sixth-grader Catherine Phipps, and singing by Silence Dessure, a soloist at Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills, N.Y. Story on Page A3.

Bob Luckey Jr./Staff photos



King's influence

Editor remembers civil rights leader

By Kenneth Chang
Staff Writer

Marcia Ann Gillespie was a student at Lake Forest College in Illinois when Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus. Later, she volunteered her help to the civil rights movement in the South. Several times, she heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak in person.

"I'm just going to tell how Dr. King impacted on my life and how he still impacts on your lives," Gillespie, 52, told the 480 students, preschool through eighth grade, at Convent of the Sacred Heart during a celebration yesterday morning in honor of King's birthday.

"What he gave us was a sense of hope," Gillespie said. "It is the sense of 'I can make a difference.'"

Gillespie, who is black, has been the top editor at Ms. magazine since 1993. From 1971 to 1980, she was editor-in-chief of Essence magazine, a publication for black women, as its circulation grew from 50,000 to more than two million.

Although King died before the rise of the women's movement, Gillespie said she felt sure King would have supported it.

"I'm a feminist, which some people say bad things about, but it's just because they're confused," Gillespie told the girls. "Never underestimate the power of a girl, and never underestimate what you can do as a woman."

Gillespie said she tries to speak to young people about King each year when the holiday rolls around.

"This is a people's holiday because Dr. King was not talking about black people and white



Bob Luckery Jr./Staff photo

Convent of the Sacred Heart students Nardia Daley, 14, left, and Roxana Maffel, 15, hold hands during the school's celebration honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. yesterday.

people, about tall people and short people," Gillespie said. "He was talking about people."

King exhorted people to work for positive change, Gillespie said.

"We can do great things," she said. "He made it possible to see ourselves in the our very best light."

Because people often lose sight of the underlying meaning of national holidays — "It seems real distant except you all get a day off from school," she said — Gillespie asked the students to do three things to commemorate King's legacy:

- "Smile."
- "Find something nice to say about someone else," Gillespie said, complimenting one girl's hair band and another's pink shoelaces.
- "Give something back to the world."

For the fourth year, Jenelyn Haye, director of diversity and associate director of admissions

Yesterday's celebration also included a dance by sixth-grader Catherine Phipps, and singing by

the people in the group were "completely devastated" when they heard the news, Laurence said. "We heard white people celebrating the death of Dr. King, because he had caused a lot of trouble for them."

Fourth-grader Calista Quintah read a poem she had written, which begins:

*Martin Luther King Jr. is a name
that everybody knows.
He was a man who believed in
the dream that he proposed.
He was a man who did all
that he could.
He gave speeches.
He led marches.
He laid down his life.
He inspired for good.*

"I feel better," Antioch pastor Rufus Strother said to the students at the end of the program. "I feel a little more determined to make that dream a reality."

**"What he gave us was
a sense of hope. It
is the sense of
'I can make a difference.'"**

Marcia Ann Gillespie
King Day speaker

at Sacred Heart, organized a commemoration of King.

"He's my idol," said Haye, who is black, hoping to convey to the students King's philosophy — "not only bringing people together, but also peace, equality and justice for all."

Silence Dessaure, a soloist at Antioch Baptist Church in Bedford Hills, N.Y.

Sacred Heart music teacher Eileen Laurence told of how she was with a singing group in Oxford, Miss., when King was assassinated April 4, 1968. Though

April 8, 1997

Priest creates karma for students

By Kenneth Chang
Staff Writer

Mixing in references from popular culture, Zen Buddhist priest Sohaku Flagg tried to explain his religion and philosophy to students at Convent of the Sacred Heart yesterday.

"Do you know what karma means?" Flagg asked students in a religion class. "Is it a Martha Stewart thing?"

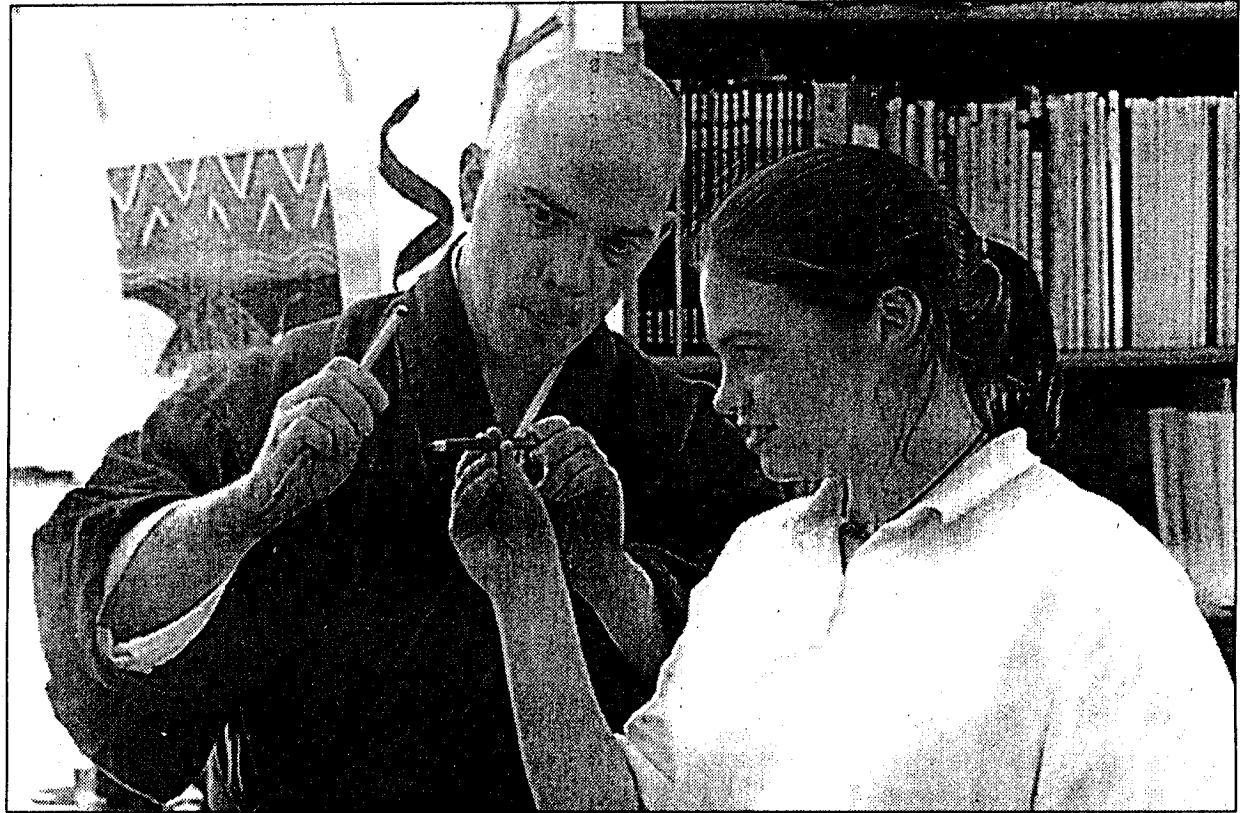
His invited visit to Sacred Heart classes was to help spread "a sense of cultural understanding," said Flagg, who wore traditional Buddhist robes and sandals.

To the religion class students, he said "Karma means action. Just remember that," and, "No matter what kind of action, there is a response."

"What kind of restrictions do you have on your life?" asked senior Kristina Tobin.

"It's about the same" as Christian priests, Flagg said. "No stealing, no lying, no bearing false witness."

In all, there were 240 restrictions while he was training at a Buddhist monastery in Japan, Flagg said,



Mel Greer/Staff photo

Zen Buddhist priest Sohaku Flagg shows Meg Lavin the proper technique for holding a brush before instructing her and other Convent of the Sacred Heart students in calligraphy yesterday.

including not leaning against doors or desks.

"It seems kind of ridiculous, but it has to do with the discipline of the body. They say you cannot think clearly if you are slumped over."

Flagg also told them the story of Prince Siddhartha, the founder of Buddhism. Siddhartha lived a sheltered life in a kingdom near the borders of what are now India and

Nepal. He never left the palace until adulthood, when one day, for his birthday, his father allowed him out into the city, Flagg said.

Looking down an alley, Siddhartha spotted an old, shriveled man and then a sick one, and asked his friend about them. "His friend said, at some point, the body will succumb to sickness," Flagg said.

Siddhartha renounced the life of

royalty in search of religious understanding.

"He was a true seeker," Flagg said.

First, he lived for six years with a group of ascetics, who survived on only rain water and plants, hoping for transcendental enlightenment. One day, "he heard a story about this musician learning how to play," Flagg said. "The teacher said to him,

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next page*

Priest

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'if you tighten the string too tight, it will break. If you loosen it too loosely, it won't play.'"

From that advice, Flagg said, Siddhartha founded the "middle way" of Buddhism, which emphasizes balance between a worldly life and extremes of self-denial.

Flagg's own spiritual journey has been nearly as long and winding.

When he was 19, Flagg, a Chicago native whose first name used to be Robert, was traveling through Los Angeles. He stopped by a Zen Buddhism center there for a vegetarian meal. Intrigued by Buddhism, he talked to a priest who referred him to a Japanese couple — to learn about Japanese tea ceremonies.

One day, the couple told Flagg they were returning to Japan and he should go, too, to join a Buddhist monastery.

Flagg listened.

That was 1980.

Six and a half years later, he was ordained as Sohaku Flagg, a Zen Buddhist priest.

To a Sacred Heart history class, Flagg, now 36 and living in New York City, showed slides of the monastery.

"You have to give up, of all things, socks," Flagg said. "Once you give up the covering of your feet, you are exposed. Even in the winter. Especially in the winter."

Although the monastery imposed a strict regimen on his life, "there is a great amount of fun we used to have," Flagg said. With others who went through the same hardships, "you're able to make private jokes about it," he said.

In an art class, Flagg showed students some basic calligraphy strokes.

"Do you know what this is?" Flagg asked, holding up a brush. After a pause, he added, "I'll give you a big hint. It's a brush."

Then he held up a black stick, the size of a small candy bar. "What's this?" he said.

After more silence, Flagg explained it was ink made out of pine pitch. Grinding the bar in a small dish with water makes ink.

"Do you want to try?" he asked one of the students after he drew out some simple horizontal strokes on some old newspapers.

"Sure," said ninth-grader Kimberly Ward.

The students, though, had trouble duplicating Flagg's graceful lines.

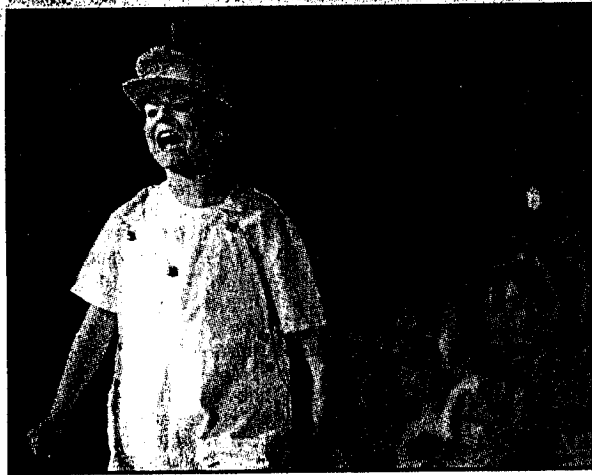
"They look so simple," Ward said. "They take so much work."

Flagg then showed them how to write the character for "sun," and how to paint pictures of wheat, bamboo and corn.

"Wasn't that just a bunch of fun to make?" Flagg said to one student.

Greenwich Time.

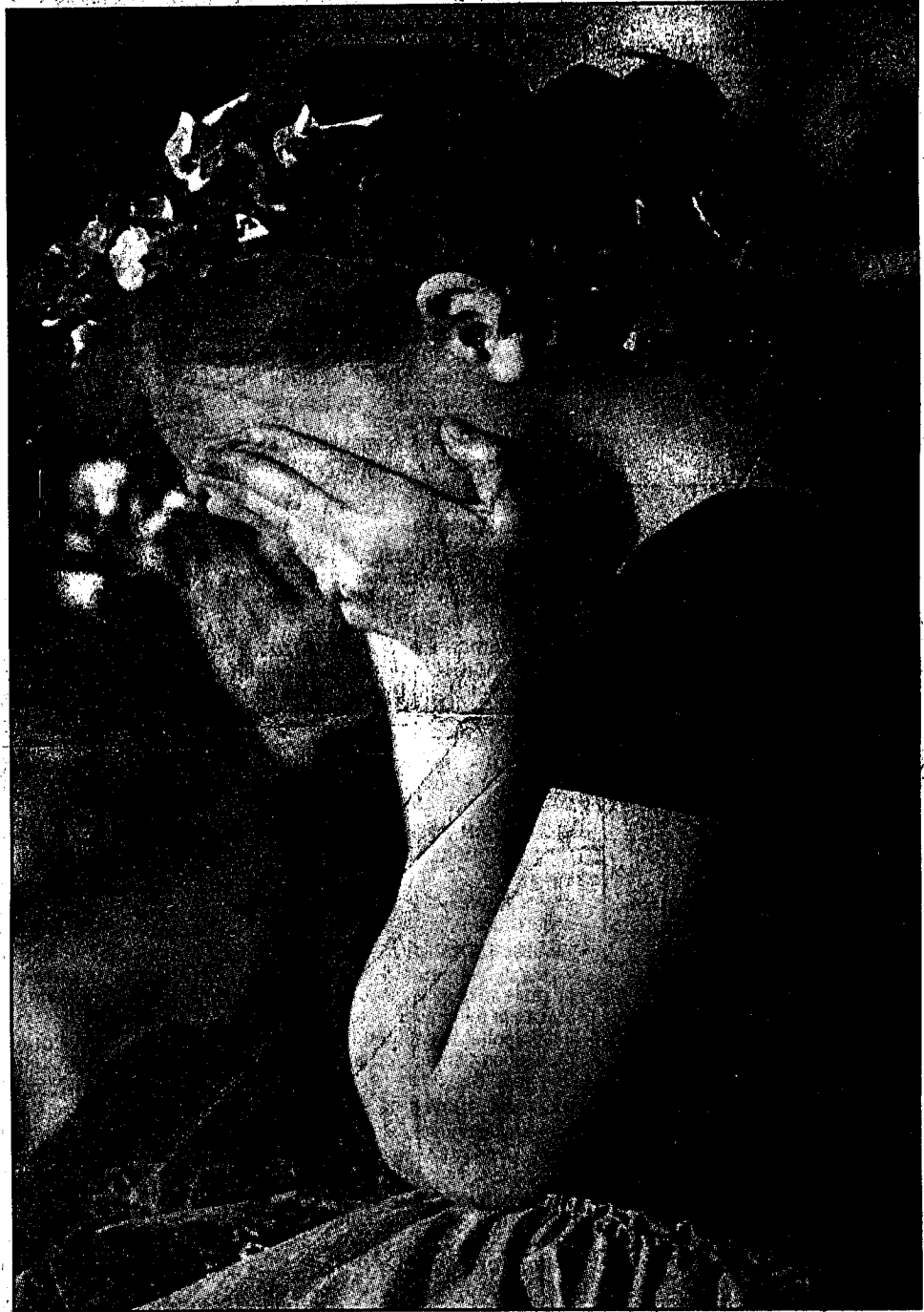
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 1997



Awaken to spring

Convent of the Sacred Heart third-grader Caroline Peterson awaits her cue during a performance of the beginning of "Creation" by Lower School students at the King Street school's Spring Festival of the Arts last night. Above, student Melissa Fraioli appears as a rooster in a rendition of "Cock-a-Doodle Dandy." Middle and Upper School students will celebrate The Spring Festival of the Arts from 7 to 9 tonight in the school's auditorium. Festival events and displays include African art, wood block prints, renditions of Broadway songs, bell choirs, madrigals and a selection from "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Admission to the celebration is free.

Paul Desmarais
Staff photos





"It took everything we saw in a textbook and put it into reality."

Michelle Valdonis, left, and Cassandra Lyons, 17, an 11th-grader at Convent of the Sacred Heart, share a laugh during a tutoring session at the Carver Center in Port Chester while Marcus Bracey, 8, tries to concentrate on his homework. Paul Deemarais Staff photo

Education beyond the ABCs

School's service program teaches real-life lessons

By Lisa Pierce Breunig
Staff Writer

To many, the distance separating Convent of the Sacred Heart's 110-acre campus from St. Luke's LifeWorks Center for Single Adults in Stamford's South End may seem vast — as vast as the gap between wealth and poverty, privilege and hardship, promise and despair.

But for Jacky Gillis and Elizabeth Sartori, freshmen at the elite all-girls school, and center resident Earlene Irvine, it is a distance no greater than the length of a dinner table; no more uncomfortable than a brief pause in a friendly conversation.

"I'm certainly going to miss these young ladies," Irvine said, smiling at Gillis and Sartori during a recent dinner hosted by CSH students at the center. Irvine explained to her dinner companions that she would soon be leaving the program for single adults to move into The Colony Apartments, a permanent supportive housing program run by St. Luke's Community Services. "I'll miss their lovely company."

"I'll miss you," Sartori, a 14-year-old Greenwich resident, replied.

As Sartori and Gillis conversed with Irvine and a fellow resident, five of their classmates served pasta, salad, bread and soda to about 20 residents from the women's housing program and an adjacent men's residence. Three students scooped out servings while another politely recited beverage choices and another

fetched extra napkins for the guests.

Each month during the school year, CSH students host a dinner here, one of several ongoing public service projects which make up thousands of service hours required of all CSH students, from preschool to Upper School, said Sister Rosemary Sheehan, who is director of Outreach. Each student must complete 100 hours of service work over four years to graduate from the Upper School.

Many local private schools have active public service programs. "We're not unique," Sheehan acknowledges of the program at the independent Catholic school run by sisters of the Religious of the Sacred Heart order.

What differentiates Sacred Heart's program is that it is less about what the students give the needy than what the needy give the students.

Sacred Heart teachers and administrators hope these activities will be the link between the real world and a religious curriculum which emphasizes social justice issues.

"It took everything we saw in a textbook and put it into reality," Tara Varbao, a 17-year-old junior, said of a recent service project. "It wasn't just pictures in a book."

Of the school's 480 students, 65 percent are Roman Catholic and 25 percent Protestant with the remainder coming from Hindu, Jewish and agnostic families. Given the varied religious backgrounds of the students and an educational approach which encourages students to question, many students are skeptical about the program at first.



Paul Deemarais/Staff photo: If 13-year-old Erin Higgins, left, felt out of place at the Carver Center, the Convent of the Sacred Heart eighth-grader didn't show it as she tried to get Brandon Hall, 6, to focus on his homework.

"I hated religion class," Molly Nix, a 17-year-old senior, said of her earlier years at Sacred Heart. "I didn't want to do community service work."

Sheehan pointed out that it is healthy for adolescents to question the school's goals. Ultimately, she said, she hopes study and hands-on experience will translate into a lifetime faith in God expressed through a commitment to public service work.

"It's so important for our girls here to remember how much they have," said Assistant Headmistress Sister Ann Conroy, adding that this is why the school emphasizes "the importance of helping those in need and learning from them."

Service

■ Continued from Page A10

Skepticism and Service

With annual tuitions ranging from \$12,000 for Lower School students to \$15,000 to attend the Upper School, despite the school's efforts to increase diversity and the \$600,000 given out annually in student aid, many students enrolled at the school initially have little understanding or interest in the issues that make up the ninth- through 12th-grade religion curriculum.

To illustrate just how aggressively the school tackles controversial topics, one need look no further than the 11th-grade syllabus, which reads more like the outline for a college-level multiculturalism course than a traditional Catholic high school religion class.

"We will not safely or cautiously tiptoe around the topic of social justice," writes Mark Potter, who heads the upper school religion program, on a syllabus which includes topics such as "racism," "sexism," "homophobia," "global hunger" and "domestic violence."

Gwynne Tess, a 17-year-old junior from Armonk, N.Y., who had previously attended public schools, admitted to initial skepticism of the service hours requirement and the religious studies curriculum.

"I'm a stubborn person and I have my own views," Tess said.

She said she was surprised that she was allowed to express views which directly contradicted those of her instructor, Potter, and added that this taught her to be tolerant of those who disagree with her.

"It's nice to be able to talk about stuff freely," she said.

This sentiment was echoed by senior Elizabeth Sweeny, 18, of New Rochelle, N.Y., who said she enjoys her senior religion class because she and the other students often sit in a circle on the floor to discuss issues. "We're not talked at," she said.

Tess spoke of the impact public service work, including shopping and spending several hours a week with a blind woman, has had on her view of the world.

"When I went to St. Luke's, I was astounded by what I saw," she said. "I'd never been in a one-on-one conversation with someone who had no where to live."

Varbao spent five days participating in the Urban Plunge, a service program run out of the Urban Retreat Center in Bridgeport, as a way of fulfilling her service requirement, but, she said, "it turned out to be so much more."

Faith and Spirituality

Because of the student body's religious diversity, the religion curriculum focuses on Christian values, while at the same time

emphasizing universal themes in other religions and respect for other faiths and traditions, Conroy said.

"Therefore, that involves knowing something about other religions," she said. "We are not proselytizing."

Or as Sheehan once assured a nervous Protestant parent, "Don't worry. We've only had one conversion in 50 years."

The goal, instead, is to encourage students to see the workings of God across cultures and economic backgrounds.

"Now they pray to a God who is also the God of a drug dealer," Potter said of the students who had participated in the Urban Plunge and similar public service programs.

Many members of Potter's junior and senior classes said the merging of the text with their volunteer work had changed their social and religious views.

During the retreat, students, accompanied by Potter and Director of Community Service Kristina White, lived and worshiped with center staff members, fed homeless people under a bridge on John Street, met police officials and toured and worked at several social service agencies tackling issues ranging from domestic violence to drug addiction.

"It was the relationships with the people that made the experience special for me," said Kristina

Janowski, a 17-year-old junior from Stamford.

Janowski, who had previously attended Catholic schools which required her to do volunteer work, said the Urban Plunge was different because she lived in the community she was helping.

Sweeny, who also participated in the Urban Plunge, said she found the five days to be very spiritually enriching, not because of the misery she found among those she was helping but because of the joy.

"Places like Bridgeport are filled with hope and faith and love," she said.

Future Commitment

What Conroy and Sheehan said they are hoping to develop in each student is a lifelong relationship with God that is expressed through public works, particularly those aimed at rectifying social injustice. Conroy admitted that for many parents these may sound like radical concepts and that the curriculum may not be what every parent is seeking for their daughter.

As Potter explained, "This school does have an agenda and I think parents are made aware of that before they send their kids here."

Part of that agenda is making volunteering a natural part of each student's life during college and after.

Melanie Shanley, who was one

of the students to attend the Urban Plunge, said she was more skeptical about the effect the girls had on the lives of those they encountered, but still came away enriched by it.

Shanley, a 17-year-old senior from Larchmont, N.Y., said she initially felt as if the students' presence in Bridgeport at various social service agencies was somewhat "perfunctory."

"It seemed as if our purpose there was not to offer the same cup of soup some one else could offer," she said, describing the students' journey to the bridge in Bridgeport where they offered food to the many people who live there.

The purpose of the trip, she came to realize, seemed less about changing the lives of others than "to change our lives so that in the future we would have the necessary experiences to effect more profound change."

Potter underscored Shanley's point by paraphrasing *Matthew 19:21*: "With the poor I will make you rich."

Students in Potter's senior class reiterated a common theme — a journey that began with skepticism, followed by an awareness of the problems faced by those less fortunate and, finally, a desire to continue doing public service work after graduation.

Shanley summed up the junior-senior religion class curriculum

and its adjacent public service component this way: "This year focuses on what our faith requires us to do because we know what we learned last year."

Sweeny said she plans to continue her public service work next year when she attends Georgetown University.

"It's a natural part of my life," she said of her faith and volunteer activities. "I want it to continue to naturally be a part of my life."

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And what of Nix, the student who said she originally wanted no part of the religion curriculum or the public service requirement?

As a convenient way of fulfilling her required hours, the Port Chester resident said, she began going to the Carver Center on weekday afternoons. The center is a family enrichment facility in Port Chester which runs an after-school program staffed four afternoons a week by CSH students who read to children and help them with homework.

Nix found that she loved working with the children there. The former skeptic plans to major in elementary education next year at Boston College and hopes to someday teach disadvantaged children in an urban setting.