



# takenote

WINTER 2007

## Oak Park Education Foundation

### Putting the cool in school

I recently had the opportunity to visit a meeting of one of our Vex Robotics after-school clubs. It was so cool! The kids were totally engaged. To see 25 middle school students working in teams, pouring their creativity and brainpower into their robots, was inspiring.

Vex Robotics is just one of the programs funded by the Oak Park Education Foundation. This edition of our newsletter highlights Vex Robotics along with Architecture Adventure, the two newest programs sponsored by the Oak Park Education Foundation. These programs embody the ideals of the Foundation: They are hands-on. They get kids excited about learning. They bring talented professionals into classrooms. Along with Art Start and Global Village, these programs tap into the incredible resources we have in Oak Park in terms of architects, artists, scientists and technology experts.

For 18 years, with the support of neighbors like you, the Oak Park Education Foundation has brought cool into our schools. We work with District 97 to design programs; we fund the programs through private, non-tax donations, and we work with our volunteer network to manage these programs.

As we have reached more students and teachers in more classrooms with more exciting programs, the community has responded. Our support from parents, community members, and District 97 employees has increased dramatically. The number of Friends of the Foundation, people who have made a three-year financial commitment to us, has grown 53% in the last year. Together we are inspiring young minds.

I feel so proud when I see children energetically collaborating during one of our projects, and when a middle school girl in Vex Robotics tells me, "I try things like this to see what my future will bring."

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### Coming Events

#### Annual Staszak Dinner April 14, 2007

Mark your calendar for this year's dinner at the Oak Park Country Club. Keynote speaker is retiring District 200 Superintendent and Principal of Oak Park & River Forest High School, **Dr. Susan Bridge**.

Special host will be **Peter Sagal**, host of NPR's "Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!"



In only its second year, the Vex Robotics Teams at Brooks and Julian have captured the imagination of a growing number of Oak Park middle school students.

## Vex Robotics Teams Double in Size

Last year 22 Oak Park students participated in this worldwide program; this year 55 kids are in on the excitement of this after-school club. Students are grouped into teams which design, build and program robots, and then compete with other teams of students in robot games.

Vex Robotics unlocks the power of imagination while increasing knowledge of physics, engineering, and computer programming. Students also develop life skills such as teamwork, persistence, and self-confidence as they take their robots from concept to reality.

Vex Robotics coordinator Mark Pickus, who leads the Brooks program with Pat Williams says, "I get excited seeing students express their creativity in their designs and struggle to make them work. I like helping but I also like to challenge them to figure it out themselves." Students agree. As one young designer put it, "You have in your mind what you want to make, and its fun to see it actually work."

The Vex Robotics program is fully funded by the Oak Park Education Foundation, in partnership with District 97 schools. ■

## Robots Invade Wisconsin! Oak Park Next!!



Middle school students on Vex Robotics Teams traveled to Milwaukee on December 3 to observe the 2006 WIRED (Wisconsin Institute for Robotics in Education) Robotics Challenge, where more than 24 high school teams competed with

robots they designed and built. Participating students learned robotics in a setting designed to make science, math and engineering as cool for kids as sports.

Oak Park students were inspired. One student remarked, "It was awesome. They had lots of cool robots that gave us lots of ideas. We asked lots of questions about their strategies and how they made things work."

The Brooks and Julian Vex Robotics students put their inspiration into action during the two schools' head-to-head robot competition on February 21. Ten project teams from Brooks and Julian designed and built robots that battled in an arena built by the teams. Tim Walsh, science teacher who leads the Julian program with Bob Parks, says, "The kids love it. They are very enthusiastic. They are having a lot of fun as they get ready for the competition." ■



## Architecture in the Classroom: Why and How

Excerpts from a speech **by Kelly Baird**, District 97 Coordinator for Teaching & Learning, at the Architecture Adventure kick-off event last October at Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple

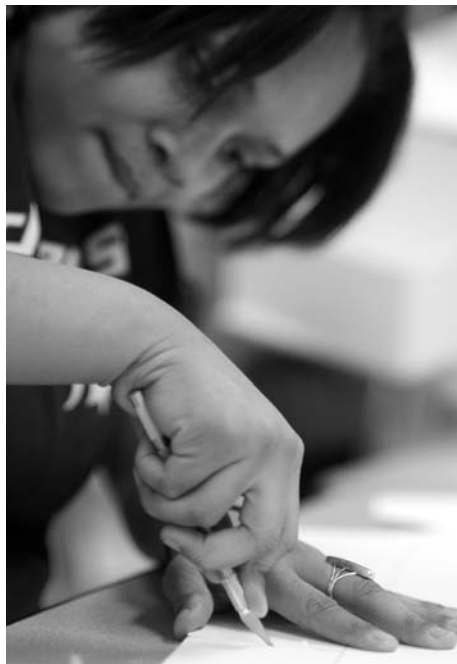
The existence of exemplary architecture is a draw for both residents and visitors. For our community's students, the study and celebration of architecture created by some of the preeminent architects of the day is one of the most important educational opportunities that District 97 can provide. It is a wonderful way to improve the vocabulary of our children, and research tells us there is a direct correlation between intelligence (logical-mathematical) and vocabulary.

From this backdrop of fine architecture and educating beyond the classroom, the Oak Park Education Foundation along with architects and educators, have crafted courses that will infuse the precepts of architecture into the fabric of District 97 curriculum, beginning first in our middle school Applied Arts program and later into our K-5 classrooms. Some of the activities the students will be engaged in include developing plans, drawing elevations, making models with different types of material, designing landscapes and exploring shapes other than rectilinear.

You might ask, "Why Architecture?" There are several answers. First, a successful life is founded upon persistence. Persistence is a by-product of learning how to problem-solve and make skillful decisions. The study of architecture is a natural conduit for teaching children strategies pertinent to problem solving as they engage in hands-on design and construction activities.

Secondly, through the study of architecture, students not only learn about buildings, but other elements of the built environment, as well as what architecture can reveal to us about community, history and culture — our own and others.

Third, Architecture Adventure will bring community architects, engineers, designers, landscapers and city planners into the classroom. Exposing students to this wealth of career opportunities will broaden students' sense of life possibilities.



Last, through architecture, teachers will be better supported in their efforts to meet the needs of all students in our open and diverse community.

Fantastic new programs aren't born in a day. The Oak Park Education Foundation assembled an incredible

team of folks who volunteered countless hours, energies and insights to help us make Architecture Adventure a reality for District 97 students. They include:

**Deb Abrahamson:** Oak Park Education Foundation Executive Director and Art Start Coordinator

**Kelly Baird:** District 97 Middle School Coordinator for Teaching and Learning

**Joe Berton:** Julian Middle School Applied Arts teacher, D97 parent

**Carol Dudzik:** Oak Park Education Foundation Board member and former Lincoln Principal

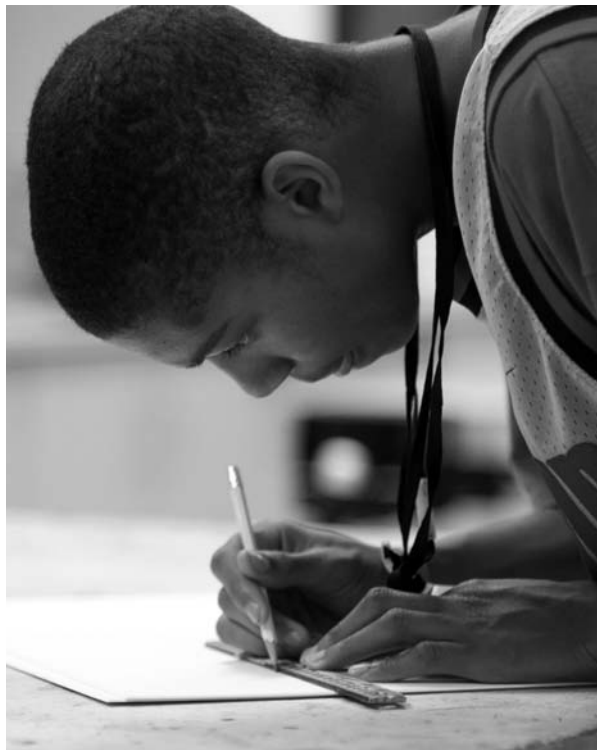
**Frank Heitzman:** Architect, Founder of Heitzman Architects of Oak Park, Preservationist, and Professor of Architecture at Triton College

**Todd Leban:** Brooks Middle School Applied Arts teacher

**Adrienne McMullen:** Oak Park Education Foundation Board member, Architect, Architecture Adventure Coordinator, D97 parent

**Drew Nelson:** Architect and owner of WDN Architecture of Oak Park, D97 parent

**Ade Onayemi:** Oak Park Education Foundation Board member, Architect and owner of Urban Resource Inc., Architects and Planners and former District 97 School Board President



## A Beach House in Winter

In a terrific example of Architecture Adventure in action, some of Mr. Berton's eighth grade students at Julian Middle School just completed building beach houses.

According to visiting architects Corinne Hara and Adrienne McMullen, "We wanted

students to experience making a plan, elevation and model. They had previously designed a room, so we engaged them in a more complex and sophisticated challenge. We required each house to include a room, a kitchenette, a bathroom, windows and an entrance. We asked students to think 'out of the box,' hence we had few rectilinear buildings.

Students focused on one aspect of the house and made it stand out." One student remarked, "We can do anything? I want a water park running through my house." Another said, "I want my building underground. How cool would that be?" The project transpired over three weeks, with some students continuing after winter break. The results were a dramatic variety of homes for the beach!



### Other Fabulous Architecture Adventure Partnerships underway:

- Pam Whitehead and Josephine Bellalta collaborate with Joe Berton and Julian students on a landscape design for a trellised vineyard
- Ken Floody and Todd Leban lead Brooks students in an engineering project
- Pam Whitehead and Laura Young assist Brooks students in designing a teen bedroom suite for a home in River Forest
- Whitehead and Jenny Raia work together with Longfellow kids to create Tudor City mural project

Don't miss the articles written about Architecture Adventure in the Wednesday Journal dated January 3, 2007.

## Architects, Designers, and Engineers Wanted!

We are looking for architects, engineers and designers interested in volunteering some time to implement projects in the middle schools and at the elementary level. Time commitment to be determined by your availability. Please e-mail **Adrienne McMullen at amcmullen2002@yahoo.com** for more information and to get involved in this **Architecture Adventure.**

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