

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
March 18, 2008

PTSA co-President **Sarah Koines** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and announced this month's Exceptional Viking Volunteers: (1) **Maryam Hedayati**, who organized the well-attended International Night, with great food and entertainment; (2) **Tyler Whitmore** and **Karen Finucan Clarkson**, who produce the PTSA newsletter, *The Viking Voice*, and **Elizabeth Seibel** and **Vicki Dorman**, who are in charge of preparing the mailing. She also acknowledged Whitman dad **Peter Dressner**, who has so far refurbished four laptops (using the Linux operating system), which were given to Whitman families who would not otherwise have computers at home. Additional laptops for this program are still appreciated.

Sarah reported on behalf of Whitman's MCCPTA representative, **Mary Staley**, that the resolution originally suggested by Dr. Goodwin regarding the PSAT passed. Starting next year, the county will pay for 10th and 11th graders (instead of 9th and 10th graders, as is done currently) to take the PSAT, while 9th graders will be given a practice test that is graded in-house.

Student Government Association

Eve Rosenbaum, president of the Student Government Association, reported on many recent and forthcoming events. For more details, check the SGA link on the Whitman website.

- Pennies for Patients (aka Penny Wars) is under way through March 20. The money raised will go to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Each grade is filling its class jug with pennies, while sabotaging other classes' jugs with other coins. The winning class will have the greatest value of pennies minus the value of other coins.
- SGA made major improvements in its recycling by creating recycling centers on all three floors and in Whittier Woods. As a result, the school's recycling grade went from a D- to a B-.
- April 16 will be Whitman Night at Ledo Pizza to raise money for the Whitman Journal of Psychology.
- The spring blood drive, open to parents and to students who are least 17 years old and 110 pounds, will be held April 21. A voter registration drive for students who will turn 18 by Election Day will also be held on April 21.
- Campaigning for the SGA executive board will take place that week and the beginning of the next week.
- Voting for the SMOB (student member of the Montgomery County Board of Education) will be held during English classes in late April, via fancy voting machines.
- Festival of the Arts (a major event not run by the SGA) will be held May 14-15.
- The Mr. Whitman contest will be held Saturday, May 17, to raise money for charity.
- HSAs will be held the weeks of May 19 (allowing students who don't have exams on a particular day to sleep late)
- A new event this year, Spring Fair, will be on Wednesday, May 21. It will feature a moon bounce, rock wall carnival games, dunk tank, temporary tattoos, etc. It will be expensive, so sponsors are being sought; their names can appear on the waterproof wristbands, banners, and flyers. Details are still being worked out. Information about

sponsorship will be posted on whitnet. Pyle and the feeder elementary schools will be invited.

- Class officers will campaign the day before Memorial Day, and elections will be May 30.
- May 30 is the prom, then graduation, then the end of the year.

Principal **Alan Goodwin** commented on how excited he was about Spring Fair. He noted one additional event: the Faculty Talent Show on May 20.

Financial Literacy for Teens, Lori Weinstein, Guest Speaker

Sarah Koines introduced **Lori Weinstein**, mother of a current Whitman student (Emma), last year's SGA president (Chloe), and a son who graduated from Whitman earlier. Lori described how she translated her parental interests into a job. As Executive Director of JWI, she addresses issues related to safe homes, healthy relationships and strong women. Her organization offers a 4- to 6-hour course about financial literacy over 2 days for college graduates entering the workforce; the ideas apply to high school students as well.

She finds that many of today's college graduates don't know much about savings, credit cards, and negotiations. She gives them the example of someone who borrows \$1,000 at 19% interest and pays back \$25 a month; at that rate it will take 13 years to pay off that one loan.

Our children are influenced by affluence, peer pressure, and the media. Children are huge consumers: in 2003, Americans aged 13-19 spent \$94 billion.

Lori noted the important parental role in teaching financial literacy, by their behavior as well as directly. As parents, we want our children to be competent, caring adults, who have rewarding work and find ways to give back to others. A poll of parents found that they believed parents, not the school, should teach their children about money, but it's not happening – the three tough topics are sex, drugs, and money.

Parents should begin the financial literacy conversation when their kids are young. At age 18, they will be inundated with credit card solicitations; this is the only group that can get credit (with a \$5,000 credit limit) without an income or a co-signer. An allowance, with associated family responsibilities and the obligation to record their expenses, is important. Similarly, checking accounts, savings accounts, Visa debit cards, and prepaid Visa cards can be important parts of developing financial literacy.

Lori suggested teaching the Principle of 3: spend 1/3; save 1/3; give 1/3 away. Giving is a muscle that when exercised young never goes away. Parents can encourage their children to save for a goal by offering to match their share – e.g., half the cost of an iPod or half of auto insurance.

To illustrate the importance of negotiating, she gave the example of an equally qualified man and woman who were offered a starting salary of \$25,000 at age 22; the woman accepted and the man negotiated a \$30,000 salary; that difference compounded over the course of their careers.

Principal's Report

Principal **Alan Goodwin** had a lot of celebrations to report:

- The Senior Banquet was well attended and safe (no drinking or drugs), and the students looked beautiful. However, the banquet is becoming prohibitively expensive and alternatives will be investigated.
- Sonja Maroni did a great job of International Night, restaurants contributed wonderful food, and it was a treat to see kids performing on stage who might not have performed in other Whitman events.
- Chief Justice John Roberts (law school roommate of Whitman parent Richard Lazarus) was unavailable as graduation speaker but offered to come at a different time. Accompanied by secret service and bomb-sniffing dogs, he met with the NSL students and was broadcast throughout the school.
- Seven Japanese students are visiting the school for 2 weeks, and a group of 30 Japanese students are visiting for the day.
- Students participating in Model UN went to Columbia University.
- There are a lot of music events, including an instrumental concert at BCC today.
- There was a tremendous amount of parent and student involvement in the mulch sale.

On the down side, the county budget is too tight this year to expect staffing reductions to be rescinded, and Whitman is losing the equivalent of 5.5 staff members (generally the most junior teachers are involuntarily transferred, and some positions are reduced to part-time). Professional leave was frozen for the rest of the semester. Ms. Eagan, Mr. O'Brien, and Ms. Olden-Stahl were asked to grade AP exams, but the combined 6 professional days they would need are affected by the freeze. Similarly affected are the annual math and ESOL conferences that Mrs. Maroni and Mrs. Wildstrom normally attend. Dr. Goodwin asked if the PTSA could contribute about \$400 for substitute teachers. Lisa Bernhard said that the money was available but that she would have to make sure that substitute teachers were not a prohibited expense.

When Arabic is offered at Whitman for the first time next year, there will be two classes; 50 students signed up for the class. The Japanese teacher is full time this year, but in the past she split her time between two schools and will do so again next year.

PTSA Committee Reports

The minutes of the January PTSA meeting were approved.

Treasurer Lise Bernhard reported that the PTSA gave a \$200 grant each to Sonja Maroni and Linda Galloway to attend a conference for Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages; they were the only teachers in the county invited to make presentations. The budget still includes a lot of money for professional development that has not been spent yet. The website account will also have extra money.

An auditing committee of three volunteer parents is needed to review the PTSA accounts; the only requirement is comfort with numbers. Willing parents should contact Laura Cecala or Sarah Koines.

Beth Isen reported that the regular **Guidance Advisory Committee** meeting will be the next afternoon, with counselor Peg Cothorn talking about Advanced Placement. On April 3 at 7 pm, there will be a meeting to discuss the Gap Year option (a year off between high school and college). The final meeting for juniors and their parents is scheduled for April 29, with representations from Bowdoin, Virginia Tech, Carnegie Mellon, and one other college. On May 22 at 7:30, seniors and parents are invited to meet in the auditorium for a program on the transition to college, with a panel of returning Whitman graduates.

Corresponding Secretary John Floyd reminded parents of the whitnet guidelines: write the subject line in the form you want posted; include “posted by [name]” at the bottom of the message. Whitnet has 1, 319 subscribers (about 83.11% of Whitman families, John guessed), and there was a round of applause for **Craig Katz**, who manages the subscriber list but cannot attend PTSA meetings because he works at night.

New Business

A parent expressed concern that the county’s survey of parents about the “climate” at schools was going to be dropped as a budget-saving measure. Dr. Goodwin noted two motifs that recur from year to year: the school could be cleaner, and there is some use of drugs and alcohol; everything else is considered good at Whitman. Lise noted that when a serious problem emerges in a school, the survey is one of the few ways to call attention to it.

A parent of a graduating senior commented on how wonderful the Whitman experience was – including getting an award at senior banquet; he was thrilled, even though the title was not what everyone might consider a compliment.

With thanks to Dr. Goodwin on behalf of parents, Sarah Koines adjourned the meeting at 8:50 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Janice Mehler, Recording Secretary*