

Cornelia Connelly Center

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATING GIRLS SINCE 1993

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Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe that we are already at the end of the school year. This year's high school seniors, the CMS class of 2007, is a very special group of girls for me. They began 5th grade the same year I joined our staff (2003). With them, I've witnessed the full impact of our 8 year program – a rigorous middle school education followed by strong support through high school. Through it all, this class has exemplified the CCC pillars of courage, confidence, cheerfulness and leadership. Now, thanks to friends and donors like you, these girls stand on the cusp of a very exciting future – and college is just the beginning for this crew!

In this issue, you'll see where the CMS classes of '07 and '11 are headed! We put the spotlight on one of our volunteers, Mary Benjamin, who is our librarian and an invaluable member of our team. You'll also see photos from our Theater Benefit. It was a pleasure to spend time with so many of you that night. Amore Opera put on an exuberant production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* – I'm still singing "what never?...well, hardly ever." Thanks to those who bought tickets, sponsored students and participated in the silent and online auctions, we raised over \$60,000!

Finally, many of you know that Connie Bush, our co-founder, has been out on medical leave since December. I know she is very much on everyone's minds and in our prayers. We have deeply missed her daily presence on 4th Street, but thanks to the strong foundations she built here over 18 years, her work continues. She faces a tough battle, but does so with faith, strength and an inimitable sense of humor. Please continue to keep her in your prayers.

In hope and gratitude,

Heather

Heather L. Raftery
Interim Director

Spring Theater Benefit

On Monday, May 23rd, 80 friends and supporters enjoyed an evening of cocktails and opera at the Connelly Theater to benefit the Cornelia Connelly Center. *See page 5 to read more about this successful event!*





Mary Benjamin with sixth graders Lesley Siri and Nicole Fernandez

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Mary Benjamin

Almost two years ago, Mary Benjamin was looking for a volunteer opportunity in the city. Through her parish, she discovered the Ignatian Volunteer Corp (IVC), an organization that matches volunteers with organizations addressing issues of social injustice. IVC steered her to the Cornelia Connelly Center. Mary visited and immediately fell in love with our students and our mission. She has been dedicating her time and boundless energy as our school librarian ever since. Mary spends two days a week at CCC. She works to make the library more vibrant and accessible to students and teachers.

What is your favorite part of the day at CCC?

I love the mornings when the girls are first coming into the building. I'm usually on the fourth floor in the quiet of the library, and as they start making their way up the stairs I can hear a gradual build of laughter and chatter. It's the sound of an empty building suddenly filling up with joy. Of course, I also love when the girls come into the library.

How do the library periods usually take shape?

I have each group of girls for a 45- or 60-minute period every week. We always start with a few relaxing moments on the bean bags in the reading nook. I give the students the opportunity to share what they are reading with their classmates. Sometimes the girls read something aloud to one another, or they present a synopsis or critique of a book. Time permitting, I try to read aloud to them for a few minutes as well. Then they have the opportunity to browse the shelves and pick out their next read with guidance from me and other students. I always make sure to set out some "recommended reads" as well.

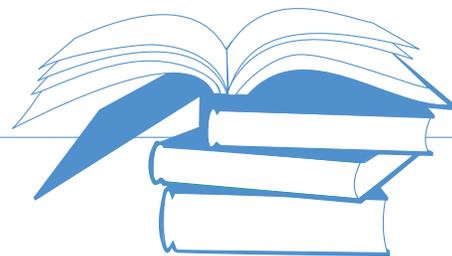


What new projects are you tackling in the library?

My next big project is to computerize our card catalog. I think a searchable database of our books would help the girls develop their research skills as they move on to use their public, high school and college libraries. It would also make it easier for teachers to pull books from the library that complement their lessons.

What is your favorite book?

Well, my favorite book of all time is *The Count of Monte Cristo*. It's got it all: love, murder, greed, revenge. My favorite children's books – and the ones I recommend most often to the girls – are: *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *The Hundred Dresses* and *Pippi Longstocking*.



Step right up and read!

Each year, the Scholastic Book Fair comes to CCC, giving students and teachers the chance to stock up on some summer reads. This year's carnival-themed "Your Ticket to Read" was a great success. 16 students made up the "Book Crew" and organized fun activities to draw students and families into the book fair. They coordinated a bake sale, had a face painting station and a funny photo booth.

Taking the lead

At CCC, we focus on the core values of “courage, confidence, cheerfulness and leadership.” Thus, we are so proud of two of our high school students, rising ninth grader Gabby Sanchez and rising twelfth grader Yerlyn Rojas, who exercised courage and confidence in deciding to spend time developing their leadership skills over the summer. Gabby will spend a week at Dana Hall’s inaugural Girls Summer Leadership Institute, and Yerlyn will travel to Johns Hopkins University for the Center for Talented Youth’s Civic Leadership Institute.

Gabby found out about the Dana Hall’s program through CCC Trustee Susan Restler and Graduate Support Director Justina Kaminskaite. “I decided to apply because when I get to high school next year, I want show leadership, especially in my extracurricular activities.” Gabby is currently an eighth grade class representative on the Connelly Middle School Leadership Council, and she hopes to serve on the student council next year at Saint Saviour High School in Brooklyn.

Over the course of the three week Civic Leadership Institute, Yerlyn will join high school juniors and seniors from around the country to study the social challenges affecting our communities. The students will live in the Johns Hopkins dorms, participate in service projects in Baltimore and get a preview of what college



GSP Director Justina Kaminskaite, Yerlyn Rojas and Gabby Sanchez

might be like. “I want to attend the Civic Leadership Institute because I feel that I have had so many opportunities in my life. I really want to do something that helps other people get the same opportunities, and I think this is a good way to start.” Yerlyn received a full scholarship to attend this summer program, and is eager to immerse herself in issues of social reform as she prepares to make her impact on the world. After this summer, Yerlyn will enter her final year at St. Vincent Ferrer High School and hopes to be accepted to Georgetown University.

Class of 2011 High Schools

Katie Ann Casado

Phillips Exeter Academy

Mary Jane Coraizaca

Mother Cabrini High School

Lenniece Garcia

Notre Dame School

Damaris Hammonds

St. Joseph High School

Jillian Hernandez

Saint George Academy

Monique Lawton

St. Joseph High School

Wendy Li

Bard High School Early College

Aylin Martinez

St. Joseph High School

Ayisha Mendez

St. Joseph High School

Lyana Mendez

Saint Jean Baptiste High School

Giselle Montesino

Blair Academy

Jaleen Rodriguez

St. Joseph High School

Yairin Rodriguez

Pace High School

Syrene Samuel

St. Joseph High School

Gabriela Sanchez

Saint Saviour High School

Mabel Sanchez

Cristo Rey New York High School

Anayah Vargas

St. Joseph High School

Chelsea Wilson

University Neighborhood High School

Class of 2007 Colleges

Natalie Arias

Cabrini College

Brittany Baez

Syracuse University

Calla Boyce

Hunter College

Adriana Espinal

City College of New York

Amanda Mediavilla

City College of New York

Melina Montesino

Beloit College

Sonia Rivas

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Euporria Roberson

SUNY Binghamton

Melissa Romero

New York City College of Technology

Stephanie Tavarez

Le Moyne College

Brenda Velasquez

St. John’s University

Spring fling:

THE COLLEGE EDITION

After a grueling school year of homework, quizzes, group projects and standardized tests, the CCC staff decided that students needed a boost to power them through the final weeks of school. So on Monday, May 23rd, the student body divided into groups and headed off East 4th Street for our annual Spring Fling! This year, our fling mission was to give students a glimpse of collegiate life.

Groups of 12 students accompanied by staff members ventured to different college campuses around New York. Our students headed to Fordham University, New York University, Queens College, Long Island University and Hunter College. The students toured the campuses, browsed the bookstores and enjoyed a cultural experience in the college neighborhoods – visiting museums, zoos and historical sites.

As many of our students are the first in their families to go to college, we hope to expose our girls to higher education and have them establish college attendance as an expectation for themselves. This Spring Fling truly succeeded in this purpose. The girls came back talking about what majors they might choose, the clubs they could join and debating the merits of going away to school versus staying close to home. We look forward to sharing with all of you the college lists for the CMS classes of 2011-2014 in the years to come!



It all adds up!

Each year Connelly Middle School students participate in the Math-a-Thon to benefit St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. The Math-a-Thon gives elementary and middle school students across the country the chance to help children suffering with cancer and other catastrophic childhood diseases. Students ask teachers, family and friends to sponsor them, for as little as five cents a problem, as they tackle the St. Jude's Math Fun Book. Ms. Bush has always been a great proponent of the Math-a-Thon, and in her absence, the fifth grade pioneered the school's efforts.

The fifth graders challenged their school mates to raise more money than any CMS student body before them! They set the goal at \$2,000 and announced that our contribution to St. Jude's this year would be made in Ms. Bush's name. Sure enough, our students rose to the occasion and had a record-breaking year. In total, CMS students raised \$2,531.40 for the kids at St. Jude's. Ms. Bush couldn't be more proud!



Showing support

Our CCC family is certainly missing Ms. Bush, but we have been able to keep her with us at school with our snazzy new bracelets! The students voted on which color – the choices were hot pink and light pink; hot pink won by a landslide – and what phrase should be imprinted on the bracelets. After much debate the girls settled on "76 Reasons to Believe ♥ CB" to make sure that Ms. Bush knows that she has the 76 members of the student body on her side. Students, faculty and our extended Holy Child family members wear them with pride!





Spring Theater Benefit (continued)

This year's spring fundraiser was a great success, raising \$63,505 to support our programs. Throughout the cocktail hour, guests bid furiously on some fantastic auction items while having the opportunity to meet CCC high school students and mingle with our staff and board members. The lucky auction winners will be enjoying opera tickets, a round of golf, a personal chef for an evening and a luxurious vacation in St. Thomas – only to name a few! While competing for some great items for themselves, our donors also contributed over \$13,000 in student sponsorships.

After a competitive auction, guests were treated to the Amore Opera's wonderful performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. At the end of the night, our theater goers exited onto 4th Street smiling, singing and with their auction winnings in hand.

For the first time, we held an online auction leading up to the event. Using Bidding For Good, an online charity auction service, we offered seven items to individuals in our database and the larger Bidding For Good community. Now that we have gotten our feet wet, we hope to expand our online offerings in the future. Thank you to all of our supporters for helping to make this event a success!



Bright futures ahead

On Thursday, April 7th, NBC reporter Lynda Baquero stepped away from the news desk to share her personal story with our middle schoolers and kick off Career Day! Lynda grew up on the Lower East Side, and her childhood experiences closely resemble the lives of our students. She worked tirelessly through internships and less than desirable night shifts to arrive where she is today, an Emmy award-winning correspondent for NBC. Lynda spoke to the girls about working hard and taking advantage of every educational opportunity presented to them. Her message set the tone for what turned out to be a fantastic Career Day.



Lynda and 15 other professional women volunteered their time to share the stories of their career successes with our students. The women divided into three panels and met with groups of students to speak about their work and field questions. Panelists included the president of a PR firm, a sales executive at Verizon, a photo editor for *People* magazine, an immigration lawyer and a professional writer. While our panelists have different levels of experience within a range of sectors, each woman stressed the importance of education and hard work. The middle school students were truly impressed and excited by the career opportunities the women shared with them – our girls are dreaming big and working hard to make those dreams a reality!





In this issue:

<i>Interim Director's letter</i>	1
<i>Spring Theater Benefit</i>	1, 5
<i>Spotlight on Mary Benjamin</i>	2
<i>Book Fair</i>	2
<i>GSP leadership program participants</i>	3
<i>2011 high school/college acceptances</i>	3
<i>Spring Fling</i>	4
<i>Math-a-Thon</i>	4
<i>Career Day</i>	5

Working to transform lives

Cornelia Connelly Center was founded in 1993 to give girls from low-income families a uniquely effective educational foundation, encompassing a comprehensive middle school program, strong support through high school, planning for higher education, and a vibrant alumnae community, which together enable Connelly students to fulfill their potential and achieve productive roles in society.

This is our specific expression of the shared mission of the Holy Child Network of Schools: To endeavor, guided by the philosophy and spirituality of Cornelia Connelly, to develop mature persons capable of making choices which enrich their lives and contribute to the lives of others.

The Center relies almost entirely on individual and institutional donors to fund its programs. Its mission is sponsored by the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

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- Connelly Theater
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- Connelly Middle School of the Holy Child

Cornelia Connelly Center



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