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Drum Line Brings More Rhythm to Acalanes Sports

By Jean Follmer



Photo Robin Schoettler Fox

Acalanes High School has a new athletic club this year. The Drum Line has literally brought a new rhythm to the sports programs at Acalanes. The Athletic Department was looking for ways to further boost school spirit at games and the Drum Line seems to have accomplished that goal.

Drum Line is the brainchild of Acalanes math teacher Vicki Zalewski. When she's not teaching math, Zalewski

plays the drums semi-professionally for Community Women's Orchestra, Oakland Community Orchestra, San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band, San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus, and local church ensembles. "I've been playing the drums for 37 years. I was a drummer in the University of Wisconsin marching band and I was the first woman snare drummer there," says Zalewski. Zalewski says the Drum

Line Club began soliciting members at Club Day. The Club has grown from 17 to 21 members over the course of the year. She was pleased to have two freshmen join the Drum Line last week. Only five of the Drum Line members play an instrument in the band or at home: the rest have learned this year. "The Drum Line gives students a chance to participate that may not normally participate actively. I'm working with

them on their technique. Some of them are surprised by how hard the drums are to play," explains Zalewski. She says that the Drum Line plays some pieces that are written by students. During the Acalanes-Campolindo game, the Drum Line played "Flight of the Bumble G" written by student drummer Will Prinzi. The Drum Line Club practices Monday after school and Friday during lunch. The equipment has been

paid for by the Athletic Department with funds that were set aside specifically for clubs.

Junior Clark Kami joined the Drum Line this year and is really enjoying the experience. "I've been playing drum kit at home for two years. I'm definitely continuing with it (Drum Line) next year," said Kami, adding that he believes the Drum Line has increased attendance at games. He says he has friends who didn't attend games

in the past that do now just to listen to the Drum Line.

Senior Danielle Burnstein is an experienced drummer. "I've been playing drums since the 3rd grade. I played drums in the Jazz Ensemble in middle school," she says. She agrees that the Drum Line has had a positive impact on athletics at Acalanes. "It's been great. People come to the games now just to hear the Drum Line. Also, it's just fun. We want high school to be fun," adds Burnstein.

New Contractor for Lamorinda School Bus Program

By Jean Follmer

The Lamorinda School Bus Program's (LSBP) contract with Durham School Services will expire at the end of this school year. LSBP recently went out for bid and selected First Student to replace Durham effective August, 2009.

"First Student is a very experienced company with a great reputation and they do this all over the United States," says LSBP Program Director Juliet Hansen. First Student provided a significantly lower bid than the incumbent. They were able to offer the lower bid because they gave a simultaneous bid to the San Ramon Valley School District. San Ramon has tentatively accepted the First Student bid.

Hansen said LSBP is facing a 20-25% decline in Measure J revenue and sought competitive bids in an effort to preserve routes. Hansen says Lamorinda parents only pay about 33% of the cost to operate the buses. Had LSBP not

gone to bid, five routes would have been lost. Even with the savings from First Student, LSBP is going to have to cut one route and Hansen said they don't know which route will be eliminated.

In addition to the financial benefits of the First Student contract, Hansen says the new buses will be more environmentally friendly than the current buses and will be equipped with seatbelts. "The new clean diesel buses will meet the new 2007 emissions requirements and actually burn cleaner than our older model 1996 CNG buses," explains Hansen, adding that the newer CNG buses are both cost prohibitive and don't burn significantly cleaner than clean diesel buses do.

The buses will be equipped with lap-shoulder belts from Safeguard. California is currently the only state to require lap-shoulder belts on new buses; Texas will follow in 2010. The current school

buses adhere to compartmentalization standards established by the Federal Government in 1977. Safeguard says the current buses have "heavily padded seat backs that are designed to deform and absorb energy in frontal impacts. This passive protection works in frontal collisions, but does not protect children in rollovers or side impacts. Another limitation of compartmentalization is it does not offer adequate frontal impact protection for the third child in a school bus seat sitting in the aisle position, or if sitting improperly on the seat."

The current Durham drivers will have the opportunity to interview with First Student. In a written statement, Hansen said "We have been fortunate to have so many wonderful Durham drivers and hope that many of them will join First Student next year." For additional information, visit www.lamorindaschoolbus.org or call (925)299-3216.

Ask Doctor Harold:

Learning Disabilities

By Dr. Harold Jules Hoyle, Ph.D.

I was recently at Amoroma and a nice lady came up to me and asked me, "My daughter is having difficulty reading and my school recommended having her tested for a learning disability. What am I getting into?"

There is a lot of information out on the internet about learning disabilities and learning problems, so it is difficult to know where to go and what to believe. I will attempt to provide a framework for understanding the world of learning disabilities.

Technically, learning disabilities did not exist until the law that created Special Education was enacted in the early 70s. A Specific Learning Disability (SLD) is a legal definition. Special education law is in the same historical line as the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education law; it is about legal access to appropriate education. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975, SLD as a legal category was born. Special education law not only covers services for learning disabilities but also speech, gifted and talented, deaf education and many other categories.

But what does IDEA and learning disability mean for my child?

It means the school believes that there is a disconnect between how smart your daughter

is and how she is reading or learning to read. She is reading below her potential. Although there are mathematics, processing (memory and sequencing), and writing disorders, in this case the SLD would be a reading disorder. The medical term for a reading disorder is dyslexia and is different than a Specific Learning Disability.

In order for your daughter to get a SLD, a team of people that includes you would need to make that decision at a meeting called an Individual Education Plan meeting. This decision would state that your daughter "qualifies" for special education services. Once this decision is made, the team would come up with educational goals and educational services to meet those goals.

Just as the school is required to provide a ramp and orthopedic help to those students who need it, they are legally responsible to aid your daughter in getting the help she needs to learn the process of reading. Just as we would not give a failing grade to the child in the wheel chair because they couldn't make it around the track, your daughter shouldn't get a failing grade in a content course because of her difficulty in reading.

The good news is that with the right interventions many people with SLDs can learn and go

far in education. I have several people with learning disabilities in my classes every year at Santa Clara University who are getting their Masters degree. I have worked with many law students and executives who also qualified for services when younger. The key is getting good interventions and keeping a positive identity around learning.

Here is a list of helpful hints from people that I have worked with; 1) Know your rights and work with the school, 2) Fight for a strength based approach-this means that your child should be doing a lot of what they are good at during the school day. They need to feel successful and be in a well-structured reading program, 3) Understand that school takes a lot more energy for your daughter than for other kids. Imagine trying to thread a needle with a piece of yarn from 8:15 to 2:15 every day. That is how one kid I worked with described reading. 4) Get help! Whether it is friends, family, or professionals, this is a time to reach out and let people help you. If you are thinking about web resources the Council for Exceptional Children is the leading resource in the field.

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Non-pool members are welcome to join our team. You'll love our sense of community and our new pool!
In addition to swim team (ages 5-18) we also have a Pre-Team program for ages 4-5. We are also offering a pre-season stroke clinic coached by the Cal Women's Swim Team.
Clinic is open to all swim teams.
Swim team registration is Sunday, March 15th 12-2pm at Sun Valley Pool (1000 Leland Drive, Lafayette)
For more information, check out www.SwimSunValley.com or contact BVE parent Tracy Broback at GoRays@SwimSunValley.com.