



➔ *Mon Valley Learns was bigger and better than ever this year. Steel Valley School District joined the program (left photo) and so did Steel Center Area Vocational-Technical School.*

➔ *One of the Consortium's longest-running and most popular initiatives, Great Idea Grants, is alive and well and still providing memorable learning experiences for kids (right photo).*

## 'Real-World Instruction'

*The Future is Mine initiative expanding to offer flexible curriculum strategy to MVEC's middle school teachers, students*

"Why are we learning this?"

Teachers field that question many times over during the school year. Now, through The Future is Mine initiative, middle school teachers will have an opportunity to work together and think about how they can use authentic, "real-world" instruction to make learning more relevant — to show youngsters that algebra may someday, indeed, be important to their "real life."

The Future is Mine is the Consortium's student leadership initiative designed to empower students with the information and opportunities they need to make wise decisions about their future careers. The new curriculum enhancement project tailors this message to sixth, seventh and eighth graders who struggle with the connection between abstract concepts (i.e. math and science) and their real-world application.

Aimee LeFevers, who coordinates this new project, stresses that it's not a new curriculum or another add-on program. Rather, it's designed to be integrated into existing curriculum to enhance it. "It's a systemic, flexible approach that can be modified to meet the changing needs of students," she said.

Districts that join the project must commit to a team-planning process in the first year and a team-teaching plan in the second that would bring business people into the classroom.

*(Continued on Page 2)*



**Great Idea Grant  
Spring Round Deadline  
Friday, Feb. 7, 2003**

*Great Idea Grant applications and how-to booklets are available in school offices and from the Consortium. Information also can be found on the MVEC website: [www.mvec.org](http://www.mvec.org).*

**For the Love of Books  
February 3-16, 2003**

*The Consortium, Borders and WQED again are joining to sponsor this event at the three Borders stores in the Pittsburgh area.*

**MVEC's Annual Leadership Retreat  
Friday-Saturday, March 28-29, 2003  
Four Points Hotel, Greensburg**

*Watch for information and registration details in early 2003.*



**FOR  
THE  
LOVE  
OF  
BOOKS**



**Feb. 3-16,  
2003  
at Borders  
Stores**

Buy a book or bring a book.

You can help the Consortium by doing either (or both) during the two-week For the Love of Books event at the Borders stores in the Pittsburgh area (North Hills, South Hills, Monroeville) in February.

The Consortium, Borders and WQED are partnering again to provide a series of special in-store activities and programs for youngsters who visit the three stores. At the same time, the Consortium will be collecting gently used children's books in conjunction with its Literacy for Life initiative.

If book-buying Borders patrons use the special certificates that will be available through a variety of sources, the Consortium will receive a percentage of the sales made during the promotion.

Sponsors are being sought now to underwrite the cost of buses to take MVEC students to Borders. Last year, nearly 1,000 students were able to visit and select a book of their own to take home. Approximately 30,000 new and/or used children's books were collected and redistributed to families through area food banks, where they're offered as "the fifth food group: food for the mind." More details on the 2003 observance of For the Love of Books will be coming soon.



**Mon Valley Reads  
April 28-May 2, 2003**

*This year's region-wide celebration of reading is set for April 28-May 2, with **Mon Valley Reads Day** falling on Wednesday, April 30. The photo above is from last year's very successful Poetry Breakfast at West Junior High (Woodland Hills S.D.), when students shared the Haiku and Cinquain poems they wrote with their peers at breakfast in the library. Students also had a chance to meet with a poet throughout the year to discuss the medium and refine their writing skills. **There's still time to sign up for Mon Valley Reads 2003 and demonstrate your school's commitment to literacy. Call Patti Hoke at the MVEC office (412/678-9215).***



**HERE'S TO  
OUR HEROES!**

*Westinghouse Elementary School (East Allegheny S.D.) observed the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America with A Day of Remembrance on Sept. 11, 2002. Students saluted their hometown heroes — fire, police and EMTs — and planted a Tree of Remembrance during the ceremony. The East Allegheny Leadership Design Team provided funding for the event, which drew many community members and veterans.*

## THE VIEW FROM HERE

*Using a tax referendum to support the public schools is unacceptable*

By Linda L. Croushore, Ed.D., Executive Director



On October 23, I was asked by Sustainable Pittsburgh and WDUQ, Pittsburgh's National Public Radio station, to be part of a panel on Property Tax and School Reform. Leading the discussion was Ron Cowell, president of the Educational Policy & Leadership Center, and joining me on the panel were State Sen. Jack Wagner and Sandra Zelno from the Pennsylvania School Reform Network.

I tell you this only because I spent a lot of time considering what to say and this is what I chose to share.

In just a few months I will complete my 35th year in public education. All of that work has been done in poor schools and poor communities. I have watched schools and districts struggle between buying new textbooks and fixing a leaking roof, between wiring a building for future technology installation and hiring the counselor their at-risk students so badly need.

The importance of quality public schools for every child seems to me to be as important to America's future as a strong national defense, an effective transportation system or quality health care. By making the conversation about education a conversation about money — as it increasingly has become with the drumbeat for property tax reform — we suggest that public schools are arbitrary, not necessary.

If we choose to educate only the children in this nation who learn easily, we are not going to save our taxpayers money. We are going to fail many students and then be forced to increase the budgets of human services, welfare, the court systems and the jails to respond to their lack of self confidence, negative behavior, and inability to find work that pays a fair wage. I suggest that this strategy does not result in the chance for a democratic or civil society but moves us further than ever from achieving the dream.

Separating school funding from the "essential" infrastructure components of what makes America great is dangerous. If every taxpay-

er had to receive and pay a bill for human services, transportation or the justice system as separate taxable activities, there would be as much outcry over each of them as there currently is over our schools.

Suggesting that each local community use a referendum to support schools is unacceptable. Just last week in Ridgefield, Conn., we see a glaring example of the problems inherent in referenda. In the primary the Ridgefield community supported a bond issue to build a much-needed new school because of disrepair and overcrowding. In the general election yesterday, the next steps of the project failed. How can we plan and meet the needs of our future work force in these situations?

The idea of referendum would be interesting — if we lived in an ideal world where everyone is community conscious, exercises the right to vote regularly and is informed with facts and figures. Unfortunately this is not our world as we presently know it. The public does not vote in large numbers, and political infighting often obscures the real issues. In Connecticut last week, only 15% of the registered voters went to the polls.

So, how can we say that referendum would work here? This is not to say that we encourage a fiscal free-for-all. We do advocate for a much more concentrated effort at thoughtful, strategic work by school

boards who have been elected by the citizenry to make the best decisions.

What children need is a variety of opportunities to learn. If they all are expected to achieve to the same high standards, then they all need to be provided with the resources to do so. All-day kindergarten, early intervention, safe and clean schools, a compact with parents to be intimately involved with their children's learning, up-to-date learning materials, technology, and qualified teachers are just some of the things that seem obvious and should be available to every child, not just some children.

As we study the No Child Left Behind legislation and worry about how we will meet the many demands of this reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we need to ask ourselves: Why was this act created? My guess is because we have allowed such an incredible gap to grow between the haves and have-nots, between rich schools and poor ones, between isolated schools and their communities.

If we look only at the letter of the law and do not spend time thinking about it in depth, we will find that the same children who are at the very heart of the act's intent continue to be "left behind."

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*The panel discussion will be broadcast at Dec. 8 on WDUQ (90.5 FM).*

## Future is Mine expanding to middle schools

(Continued From Page 1)

During the first year, teacher teams will analyze data including grades, standardized test scores, PSSA results, etc., to identify areas for improvement in the curriculum and in teaching. Once that's been done, the teams will work on methods to teach these concepts, methods that will make teaching and learning as authentic as possible. Teams in the project will include representatives from local businesses and from area career and technology centers. The first year will be devoted to planning; the second, to implementation.

A second component to the project is a focus on career awareness that will help prepare students to make wise course selections when they go on to high school and post-secondary education.

Ms. LeFevers is looking for three to five middle school teams to join her in this effort. To date, McKeesport Area and South Allegheny have signed on.

## MVEC is WQED's education partner

The Mon Valley Education Consortium recently was named WQED's education partner, and this new arrangement is providing exciting professional development opportunities for teachers throughout southwestern Pennsylvania.

One of these is PBS TeacherLine. This year WQED Pittsburgh joined 16 other PBS stations selected to launch PBS TeacherLine, which is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. PBS TeacherLine is an innovative model of online professional development that uses the latest Internet and video technology to provide online learning opportunities and access to exemplary resources.

TeacherLine's unique model allows K-12 teachers to receive professional development customized to meet state and local standards. The modules guide educators toward integrating technology into their learning and teaching. Learning modules are a series of media-rich online mini-courses, developed by professional producers who are recognized as experts in their fields. The modules are led by trained online facilitators and emphasize learning-by-doing.

In addition to the modules, participating teachers can access an online Community Center that provides teachers with a forum to share ideas and dialogue beyond school or district boundaries. Teachers from across the nation, representing all grade levels and disciplines can access live chats with experts, discussion boards, articles, and links to resources through the Community Center.

TeacherLine is free to participating teachers for a limited time. All participants who complete modules receive Act 48 credit. New modules will be offered soon.

**For more information contact:**

Consortium staff member Jackie Foor  
at [jfoor@mvec.org](mailto:jfoor@mvec.org) or 412-678-9215

or

Laura Seliy at [LSeliy@WQED.org](mailto:LSeliy@WQED.org)  
or 412-622-1557

You can also learn more about  
TeacherLine on the website:

[www.wqed.org/erc/teacherline/index.html](http://www.wqed.org/erc/teacherline/index.html)



## WANTED: Nominees from western half of Pennsylvania for Teacher of the Year



The Consortium always has believed there's great talent in the teaching ranks of Mon Valley schools.

Cathy Trombetta believes it, too, and that's why she's beating the drums for the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year program. She just became president for the group that oversees the competition and she wants to see more teachers from western Pennsylvania in the mix.

Ms. Trombetta, who teaches fifth grade at Jefferson Elementary School in the West Jefferson Hills district, was a finalist herself in 1996, coming in second to the winner.

As president, she's working hard to make the Teacher of the Year program more visible across Pennsylvania but especially on this side of the state. Representatives from eastern Pennsylvania districts have dominated the process, although there have been a few winners and finalists from this area. Most recently, from within the Consortium, art teachers

Joy Gazi of Bentworth and Suzan Mohny, formerly of Charleroi Area, were finalists in the elementary division.

Ms. Trombetta and Ms. Mohny worked together with Dr. Stephen A. Pavlak, formerly of California State University of Pennsylvania and now with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (SSHE), to establish a mentoring program that pairs Teacher of the Year finalists and winners with college students in the 14 SSHE schools.

They each team up with a promising junior education student, selected by the school, and work with him/her for two years. Those who complete the pre-service experience successfully receive a special certificate documenting their involvement with the Teacher of the Year finalist.

"We hope that this mentoring program helps with the retention of our new teachers.

*Cathy Trombetta of West Jefferson Hills, others from Consortium are working to increase awareness of teaching profession, annual competition*

So many opt out of the profession after four or five years. This gives them a chance to work with, and be advised by, the best and most committed in our profession. We see it as a way to give back to the Pennsylvania's public education system," Ms. Trombetta said.

Nomination packets are available now for the 2004 competition; deadline for submission is Jan. 31, 2003.

The person selected as the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year serves as a spokesperson for teachers across the state and has an opportunity to represent the best in teaching and the field of education.

Twelve finalists are selected from the Pennsylvania applicants. One Elementary Teacher of the Year and one Secondary Elementary Teacher of the Year receive special recognition, and the person with the highest score is nominated for the National Teacher of the Year award.

There is no charge to apply for the state award, but there is a strict timetable to the application process. "It's not too early to begin," Ms. Trombetta advises. Applications are available from:

Cathy Trombetta, 224 Orchard Dr., Pittsburgh, PA 15228  
Or at [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us) (go to PDE Top Picks list)

# GRANTS PROGRAM: STILL A GREAT IDEA

When the Consortium began 15 years ago, so did its Great Idea Grants initiative. It was an opportunity for educators to access funds directly for innovative learning projects that otherwise would have remained just "ideas." Now, many of those ideas have become permanent parts of the curriculum. Others live on in students' memory as the time when learning came alive for them. To date, the Consortium has channeled nearly \$920,000 to its member schools via the grants program. Some of that money, for the larger school and district awards, comes to the Consortium in a grant from The Grable Foundation. School Action Committees, the Consortium's grassroots community groups, raise money for teacher-level grants in a variety of ways. Yough School District's fund got a boost recently when Yough Committee member Dee Taylor, a State Farm agent, obtained a \$4,000 donation from the State Farm Companies Foundation.



Dee Taylor presents the State Farm check to Patricia E. Hoke, MVEC's Great Idea Grants coordinator, while Yough Superintendent Paul Rach looks on at right.



## TADPOLES AND FROGS AND SNAKES, OH, MY!



Envirothon 2002 at Monongahela Elementary Center Ringgold School District



More than 800 Ringgold elementary students took to the outdoors in a big way in May for an environmental science education unit centered on the nature trail at Monongahela Elementary Center. Education major students from California University of Pennsylvania joined Ringgold staff in providing instruction at "stations" along the trail and in the classroom. In the top photo, students get a close-up look at tadpoles. Directly below, at the "snake station," there was a chance for some careful hands-on examination. The \$300 grant for Envirothon 2002 came from funds provided by Dominion Peoples through its partnership with the Consortium. Envirothon is an ongoing program at Ringgold. Rosemary Bucchianeri, the Monongahela teacher who applied for the grant, called it "one of the most rewarding endeavors we've ever undertaken."



## GOLFING FOR GRANTS

Brownsville Area's School Action Committee joins with the Sons of Italy each year to sponsor a golf tournament in May to raise money for that school district's Great Idea Grant fund. That's Brownsville Area committee member Gary Seelye behind the wheel of the golf cart at left, waiting his turn to tee off at Carmichaels Golf Club in Greene County.

## RATING THE RISKS

Seventh graders at Francis McClure Middle School take a close look at the environment and its impact on public health issues.



McKeesport Area life science teacher Marla Hayes, above, guided her students through an environmental health study that stretched from the London cholera epidemic of the 1840s to a test (for pesticide residues) of black-eyed peas grown in the American South today. Along the way they sharpened their data collection and problem-solving skills. It all was made possible by a \$300 grant from funds provided by Dominion Peoples.



Students in Ray J. Beard's Economics Plus class at McKeesport Area High School created a life-size consumer economics game to teach basic economic concepts to the district's fifth graders. Modeled on the popular "Life" game, the students' version features a board measuring 20-by-30-feet, giant-size spinner and die, play money, label cards and other materials. "Life-size" students are the "game pieces." This grant was funded by alumni of McKeesport Area High School.

## THAT'S LIFE



## BENTWORTH NATURE TRAIL

Students in the environmental science class at Bentworth High School designed and are building a Nature Trail on the school campus with a \$2,296.21 school-level grant won by teacher Neal Baker. The trail will be open to the community.

## SCIENCE IN 'REAL TIME'

A school-level Great Idea Grant enabled Yough High School science teachers to acquire computer software and other lab equipment for "real-time" experiments (left photo). Using computer interfaces and probes, students perform experiments, observe the results, and hypothesize the reasons for processes that are occurring. They observe real-time data being collected and graphed on the computer screen as they do the experiment. "This is discovery learning at its best," wrote chemistry teacher Jeanne Suehr in applying for the grant.





## MON VALLEY LEARNS 2002

Another successful Mon Valley Learns experience on Friday, Oct. 4, saw more than 2,000 Consortium educators sharing their best practices with colleagues across the region. This year's program featured 128 "chat room" sessions in 40-plus Consortium schools and, for the first time, at Steel Center Vocational-Technical School. Visitors there got a close-up look at Steel Center's labs and high-tech shops. Ten Consortium districts were part of this professional education experience for "the people who make the public schools work."

At left, Leonard Tena and Malena Mazurek of Elizabeth Forward High School test their soldering skills in the "Tool Time" for Educators chat room at East Allegheny Jr./Sr. High School. At right, presenter Renalda Arndt of the Elizabeth Forward High School Foreign Language Department, oversees some hands-on training in a chat room on *Incorporating Technology into the Foreign Language Curriculum*.



Anthony C. Luciw of Yough High School takes his chat room group through the steps necessary to create a classroom website.



At Steel Center Area Vocational-Technical School, visitors donned aprons for a mini baking class with instructor Gary Goldian, who explained some of the skills his students must master.



Robert Eagleston, at right above, who teaches electrical construction at Steel Center, gave his group a souvenir to take home — pieces of coaxial cable.



The Douglas Education Center display on special effects and makeup (left photo) drew many interested students to Douglas recruitment coordinator Apryl Kadish's table. Luke Nadzadi, admissions counselor at Bethany College (right photo), talks with Frazier High School students about the merits of attending the small liberal arts school in West Virginia.



### COLLEGE/CAREER MINI FAIR

Representatives from more than 50 colleges, universities, the military and career and technical schools visited 17 Mon Valley Education Consortium high schools as part of MVEC's annual College/Career Mini Fair. The admissions officials met and talked with juniors and seniors over a two-week period in September to encourage them to think about their post-high school options.

### MVEC SHORT TAKES

#### Limited number of '30 Things' brochures still available

The Mon Valley Education Consortium still has a limited supply of its brochure entitled, "30 Things You Can Do to Support Your Schools."

It's available free of charge to MVEC schools, to parent-teacher groups throughout the Mon Valley and to other community organizations working in concert with their public schools.

Contact the Consortium office and ask for "30 Things" via the phone (412-678-9215), fax (412-678-1698) or email ([mvec@mvec.org](mailto:mvec@mvec.org)). Be sure to give your name, the name of your organization and a mailing address. Brochures also may be picked up at the Consortium office at 336 Shaw Avenue in McKeesport.

#### Mattress Discounters collects books for MVEC's literacy initiative

Thanks go out to Mattress Discounters, which joined forces with the Consortium and several major radio stations in western Pennsylvania in late summer to sponsor a three-week drive to collect "gently used" and new children's books.

The drive is in support of the Consortium's Literacy for Life initiative, part of which seeks to put books in the hands of children and their families through the area's food bank network. Books were collected at Mattress Discounters' 12 regional stores. The company publicized the book collections through tag lines on its radio spots.

Stay up to date on all of the Consortium's activities and opportunities by visiting the website at [www.mvec.org](http://www.mvec.org). Make sure you sign up for electronic news from MVEC. Send a blank email to: [mvec\\_news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:mvec_news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)



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