

the
Independent

Volume 9 Number 3

June 2015

Barbara Harrison, Editor

**Congratulations
to OPIS Class of 2015**

Short Summer!



Oak Park Unified School District has adopted a new calendar for the 2015-2016 school year. The new school year will begin on August 11, 2015 for students and end on May 27, 2016. These new dates will align with many college and university schedules. The calendar was implemented with faculty, community and administrative input. One advantage of the new calendar is that the first semester will be completed before winter break so that students can enjoy their vacation without having to study over their break. **Be sure to mark August 11 as the first day of the new school year!** To see the entire calendar, follow this link:

[OPUSD 2015-2016 Calendar](#)

Oak Park Independent School's forty-three seniors represent our largest graduating class yet. We wish them success and fulfillment as they pursue college and careers. Keep in touch, seniors. We want to hear from you as your futures unfold!

Save the Date!

Beach Day

June 2

Join your OPIS classmates and staff at an all-school beach party, Zuma #12 11:00 – 3:00

Culmination

June 4

8th Grade

Registration

August 3

1st day of School

August 11

Graduation

June 11

OPIS seniors will participate in the graduation ceremony at Oak Park High School



**Fall
Registration
Mon. August 3
1st Day of
School Tues.
Aug. 11**



Message from the Principal, Stew McGugan

I want to congratulate all of the seniors who are graduating this year. This is our biggest class to graduate since the opening of OPIS. Our staff is so proud of you and we feel fortunate to have developed relationships with you and your families over this year. Most of our seniors are participating in the graduation ceremony, which we share with Oak Park High School. This ceremony's setting is absolutely stunning with its beautiful mountain backdrop. If you have never attended a graduation at Oak Park High School, I highly suggest that you attend. You will not regret it.

I also want to thank the staff of OPIS for a tremendous year. We are now finally settled in on our new campus and it is very nice to have our own site. Both of our middle school and high school OPIS Student Body classes were strong and successful in supporting our troops and contributing to other philanthropic programs.

For the upcoming year, I am looking forward to our new Creative Writing course, additional labs and meeting all of our new students.

I am so honored to be the principal of OPIS and I take great pride in working with our students, staff and family members. I wish you all a great summer break and cannot wait to see you next year. To our senior class, best of luck in all of your endeavors.

Stew McGugan



*OPIS mascot, Sir Anthony Knight,
salutes our 2015 graduates!*



Registration has begun for the 2015-16 school year! Go to www.oakparkusd.org/opisreenrollment and complete all mandatory forms indicated in red and return to the OPIS Administration Office in Room R5, email to csanchez@oakparkusd.org, or fax to 818-991-4754 by **June 11, 2015**.

Mark your calendars for Mandatory Registration Day on Aug. 3, 2015

9th – 12th grades - 8:00 AM – 11:30 AM

K – 8th grades - 1:00 PM – 2:30 P M

Middle School OSB News

Thanks to Carolyn Purkey and DJ Cook for a great job in establishing the Middle School OSB. Their group of 6th-8th graders has been busy all year with fun and philanthropic activities. Here they are seen at their luau and their end-of-the-year dance. At this writing they are busy planning their version of Hunger Games, called OPIS Games, which will be played at the Zuma Beach party on June 2. Don't miss it!



Ryan Russell 4th Grade Gardener

Hello! My name is Ryan Russell. I love gardening with my family. I have a garden at my house and a garden at the Community Garden in Thousand Oaks. My garden is a 10' X 20' plot where I can grow corn, peas, and flowers, including sunflowers. My favorite plant to grow is corn because it is good to eat and it grows as tall as me. I have a white avocado tree growing that my dad helped me grow from a seed. The most fun part about gardening is getting to eat the plants at harvest.



Attention New Families

Incoming middle and high school students who are new to OPUSD must take a math placement test. The tests will be offered Wednesday, July 29 from 9:00 – 12:00 in room R-4 with Lori Glazer.

Justin Lamb Star Scholar



OPIS is proud to announce the 2014-2015 Star Scholar, **Justin Lamb**. The Ventura County Star newspaper honors Ventura County's top seniors in the graduating class of 2015 with this award. Justin earned this distinction by maintaining a grade point average of 3.85 in addition to participating in several school activities both at OPIS and Oak Park High School. He is the senior drum major in the OPHS Marching Band, the team leader on the Electric Vehicle Idea to Impact Team, the head librarian for the OPHS Concert Band, and is an office assistant to Cristina Sanchez at OPIS.

In addition to school activities, Justin also contributes to a number of community activities. He was the host and coordinator of the Electric Driveway Party and was a contributor to What is the Electric Car. Justin is a stable boy at Castle Rock Farms and a model at Abercrombie & Fitch.

Justin will spend his \$500 scholarship money on his education at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo where he will study Environmental Management and Protection, Environmental Studies and Physics. Congratulations to Justin for earning this distinguished award.

OPIS Writers Take Top Honors at Rotary Essay Contest



*Top: Jackson Gann, Haley Gilchrist, Terrell Ransom
Bottom: Eliot Cox, Bianca Hofstatter, Alexa Solomon*

On Wednesday, April 15, six Oak Park Independent School students were honored at a luncheon sponsored by Rotary International at the North Ranch Country Club. The 6th – 8th grade students were selected from a field of nearly 90 students throughout the Conejo Valley for writing exemplary essays on the topic of Rotary's Four Way Test. This test embodies the guiding principles of Rotary members and answers the questions: Of the things we think, say or do

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Subjects of the students' essays included friendship, autism, schoolwork, gymnastics, death, and getting along in a complex world. The winners in the 1st-6th grade division were Haley Gilchrist (6th grade) first place, and Eliot Cox (6th grade) 3rd place. OPIS students swept the field in the 7th-8th grade division. Seventh graders Jackson Gann and Terrell Ransom, Jr. took first and second places. Eighth graders Bianca Hofstatter and Alexa Solomon took third place and honorable mention. The first, second, and third place winners in each division brought home cash prizes. All the winners are students in Barbara Harrison's Writers' Workshop.



National Disaster Search Dog Foundation

In February, OPIS families had the rare opportunity to tour the only search and rescue dog training facility in the nation. Located on 125 beautiful acres in Santa Paula, the facility is currently home to eleven dogs.

These dogs come from shelters across the nation, chosen for their high energy and strong desire to work. They will remain at the facility for eight to nine months of intense training. Here they will be paired with handlers, usually from fire or police departments, who will have to train longer than the dogs!

The facility is the result of the vision of Wilma Melville, a retired PE teacher who trained a rescue dog as a hobby in the early 1990's. She and her dog were called to perform rescues at the Oklahoma City bombing site in 1995. To her dismay, she learned that there were only 15 certified FEMA dog handlers in the nation at that time. She vowed to change that. Today there are 250. They have been called to perform their unique services at locations all over the world including the tsunami and earthquakes in Japan, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, the World Trade Center, and the Haiti earthquake. Locally they have worked in train derailments, car accident rescues, and lost hiker rescues among many other circumstances.

The mission of the Search Dog Foundation is to strengthen disaster relief in the United States. To that end, the facility is currently constructing an 11,000 square foot building that will house 20 dogs, four classrooms, a vet facility, a dog run and accommodations for handlers who are in training.

Our group toured the grounds and observed how the dogs are trained. In an enormous pile of rubble

representing a collapsed building, a trainer hid among the debris. We watched as a dog searched for the body, stayed in place, and begin barking as soon as it discovered the body. The dog was rewarded with a toy for its discovery. We also toured "Search City" which is a collection of buildings that can be configured to simulate hurricane and earthquake disasters. There is also a simulated motel with several doors leading off a main hallway. Dogs have to determine which room has a live body in it.

The Search Dog Foundation has partnered with the Cee Bees who are donating their time and materials to help with the construction. At the end of our visit, several of our families made donations so that the organization can continue in its important work. To learn more about this organization please visit

www.searchdogfoundation.org

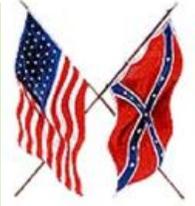


Leonis Adobe



A day at **Leonis Adobe** was like stepping back in history to the early California rancho days of the 1880's. Students experienced rancho life by pumping water, grinding corn and making tortillas, churning butter, roping cattle, doing laundry by hand, learning about livestock and touring the restored home of Miguel Leonis and his wife Espiritu Chijulla, the daughter of a Chumash chief. Fun Fact: The barn, which was first erected in 1912, has been moved twice to make way for the 101 freeway in Calabasas!

Civil War History Comes Alive at Riley's Farm



Students practice maneuvers in preparation for the afternoon battle.



From the moment OPIS students entered the **infirmary**, filled with the anguished cries of the injured, they were immediately caught up in the action and drama of a 19th Century battlefield. We learned that gunshot wounds to the head, extremities, and torsos proved almost always fatal to the unfortunate soldiers who visited the few surgeons available to tend to them, and who often used limited and unsterilized instruments to treat their wounds.



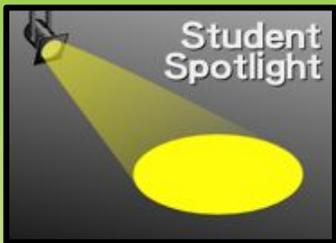
From the infirmary, students headed to the **School of the Soldier** where, led by Tyler Pearson, our group practiced marching maneuvers and learned to load and shoot muskets.

At the **War at Home** station, students gained an appreciation of all the chores required of those who stayed behind during the war. They did laundry with a washboard, swept, churned butter, rolled bandages, washed dishes, and made hardtack biscuits.

At a town meeting of the **Maryland State Assembly**, students debated the merits of remaining with the Union, joining the Confederacy, or staying neutral.

Following the debate, our group enjoyed a time-honored, primitive game of baseball and then a lunch of soldiers' rations. The culmination of the day was a mock battle with dozens of other students, where our Union soldiers were victorious, in spite of heavy casualties.

Eliot visits the infirmary with a head wound, Dominik churns butter and Taylor washes the dishes.



Michael Fichera

16-year-old Pilot

Many 16-year olds spend their birthdays at the DMV waiting to get their driver's license. Not so for **Michael Fichera**. Michael spent his 16th birthday on a solo flight from Camarillo Airport, a journey that was two years in the making. For the past two years Michael has been taking flight lessons at Channel Island Aviation. His goal was to take his first solo flight on his 16th birthday and he recently achieved that goal, witnessed by his proud parents and grandparents. His three takeoffs and landings were so smooth that even the operators in the tower couldn't believe a 16- year old pilot accomplished them. Michael flew a Cessna 172 four-seater plane.



At this point in his life, Michael flies planes for fun but he may turn his passion into a career. His goal in the next few months is to fly solo across the country. OPIS will be cheering Michael on as he pursues his dream to become a state licensed single engine pilot on his 17th birthday. Good luck and Congratulations, Michael!



John Monday pictured with Congresswoman Julia Brownley as he receives his award.

John Monday Receives Silver Congressional Award

Congresswoman Julie Brownley wrote on her Facebook page, "This week, I had the pleasure of awarding John Monday of Oak Park with the Silver Congressional Award. As he had previously achieved the Bronze Congressional Award, he is now working towards the Gold. The Congressional Award is the United States Congress' honor for young Americans that involves setting goals in four program areas: Volunteer Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness, and Expedition/Exploration. If any 14-23 year olds are interested in the program, please visit <http://congressionalaward.org>." OPIS congratulates John for earning this prestigious award and wishes him success as he "goes for the gold"!

Alumni News from Lexi Harari

My name is Lexi Harari and I attended OPIS beginning in my sophomore year of high school all the way through my graduation in 2010. I made the decision to attend OPIS rather than a public high school because the intimate teaching style that OPIS offered suited my learning needs much better than a public school's distant environment. I recently graduated *summa cum laude* from California State University, Channel Islands with a Bachelor's in Sociology in addition to earning program honors. I plan on furthering my education by obtaining my doctorate in Sociology and going on to teach at a four-year university. OPIS played a key role in fostering my love and respect for education and helped shape my educational and career goals. Thank you, OPIS!



Orange Tree

A Short Story by Cameron Boyce, 10th Grade



You may recognize Cameron from the Disney show, Jessie, where he plays Luke Ross.

I sat motionless on my bed. This, the bed that I'm familiar, in the only house I've ever known; this is the house I grew up in. This house lies across the street from my best friend's, and depending on if I stop at my favorite candy store along the way, about a 10 to 15 minute walk to my elementary school. I gripped the comforter with all my might as my mom told me the bad news. My mom said she received a promotion at

her job. In a matter of weeks my family would have to move from Seattle, 960 miles south to Los Angeles, California. I tried to hold back my tears, but couldn't.

"I don't want to go!" I pleaded with her.

"Trust me Sienna, you're going to love Los Angeles! You'll make new friends and have amazing opportunities, I promise! It hardly rains in LA." She chuckled trying to make me feel better but the truth is I love the rain! I love everything about Seattle because Seattle is the only place I know. I begged my mom not to take the promotion, but my cries did me no good. A week later everything in our house was in boxes.

I thought to myself this isn't fair! Why do we have to move? This house is the best house in the world! All of my best friends live here, and now I have to start all over. I felt betrayed by my mom and dad. Both of them were excited for this new chapter; they didn't even acknowledge how great our time in Washington has been. How can they be so blind to the amazing times we've had here? Do all of our memories in this place mean nothing to them?

The next day I had to say goodbye to all of my friends. I cried with everyone, and told them I wish I didn't have to go. We drove to the airport, stood in what seemed like 18 different lines, and got on an airplane. I was super nervous; I'd never flown before. My mom tried to comfort me but I was still upset, so I didn't pay her any attention. It was a bad time to feel alone and misunderstood.

When we got to LA, my parents immediately began a house hunt. This lifted my spirits a bit. Maybe I could have some influence on which house we bought. I could ask for a bigger room, we could have a pool and maybe even a game room! My parents were more concerned about the location and the price. They told me that we weren't going to be able to get everything we wanted, and they were right. After a two-month search, my parents decided on a quaint house close to my mom's work. It didn't have a pool or a game room. My room was the same size, if not smaller than my old room! But what made me really angry was the reason my mom fell for the house. What really sold this house above all of the others we looked at was an orange tree in the backyard.

An *orange tree*? That's the reason we bought this house? I couldn't believe that we passed on houses with pools and swing sets and game rooms for a house with an orange tree! If she loved orange trees so much we could've just planted one at a nicer house!

I was miserable. I hated Los Angeles, our new house, and that orange tree. My room had a view of the tree, so I decided I'd always keep my blinds closed. I never wanted to see that tree again.

It's been two weeks since we've moved. Two weeks since I've looked at that dreaded citrus tree; my room hasn't seen light since we moved in. My mom came home around 5:30 today. The floors creaked as she collapsed on the couch after a long hard day at work.

"Sienna, can you go get me an orange from the orange tree?"

My heart started racing. My palms got sweaty. The last thing I wanted to do was pick fruit from the root of my anger.

"Do I have to?" I asked.

"Please Sienna? Mommy had a long day at work." she explained.



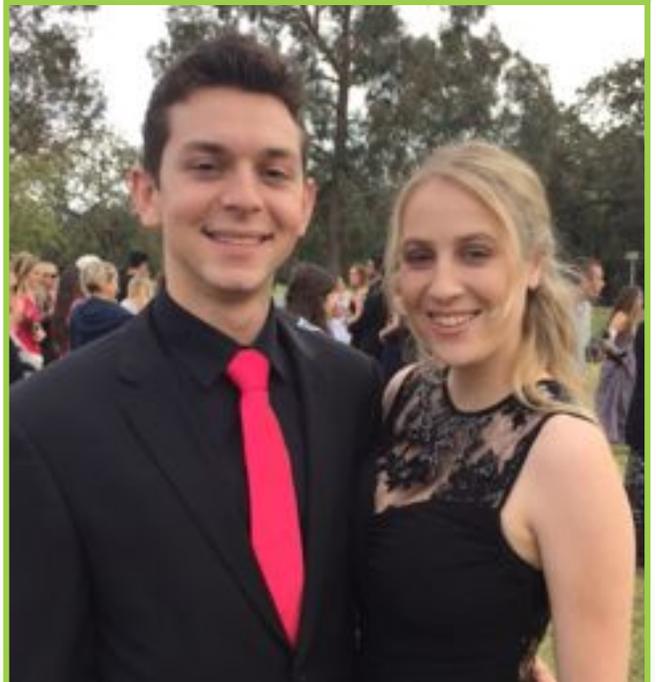
I really didn't want to, but I realized that I couldn't hide from this tree forever. I couldn't let it taunt me like it has. I agreed to get her an orange. I went outside determined. I stared at the tree as if I was trying to intimidate it. I looked up at its branches. It was a magnificent tree, that I couldn't deny. I was always so angry that this was the reason my mom loved our new house so much that I had never stopped to admire its beauty. Then I remembered what I was out there to do. There was a bright ripe orange hanging right in front of my nose. I reached out to pick it, but decided I could find an even better one. I walked under the tree and looked up as if I was a second trunk. I wrapped my hands around the stalk, placed my right foot in an opening in the trunk and pushed up. I continued to climb the tree until I was about seven feet off of the ground. My whole body was engulfed by sweet scented orange blossoms and bright oranges, most of which were paired with another, just as pristine. I was blinded by rays of sunlight pouring through the leaves. Then I saw the orange I knew I could find. It was separate from the others. A lone fruit surrounded only by the branch that held on to it as if the orange was it's child. I had to stretch as far as I could to get my hand on it. I wrapped my fingers around it and tugged down as gently as I could, graduating the fruit from protected to independent. The orange was a beautiful color, but slightly dirty and disfigured. I pinned it close to my chest and jumped out of the tree.

My mom washed the orange and cut it in two. She placed it on her plate as if it was an orange out of a painting. I ran to my room and threw my blinds open.

I realized what my mom had seen in the tree the day she saw it. It was a special tree. The tree represented our move from Seattle to Los Angeles and helped me cope with all of the changes that are occurring in this new chapter. I was devastated by my uprooting from Washington, and when I first arrived in Los Angeles I was hurt. I was blind to the new soil, which had been presented to me. It's time I planted a new seed. It won't grow over night but in time my life will mature in this new place. The branches and the blossoms I will grow represent the opportunities I will have in Los Angeles. The fruit, the most important, and the reason the tree is there in the first place represent the people I will learn to love. No wonder I was drawn to the orange I picked, I was looking into a mirror. The tree in the backyard has seen many people come and go, and somehow grown fruit for everyone it has learned to love. That orange was all alone, just like me. It was dirty and misshapen, but on the inside it was still as strong as any of the other oranges hanging high above the ground.

I'm going to make friends in my new school, and find a candy shop to stop at on the way home. I'm going to make new memories here that I'll cherish just as much as the memories I made in Seattle. I'm planting my roots in this Californian soil. Citrus grows better in Mediterranean climates anyway.

OPIS Seniors Enjoy OPHS Senior Prom



Justin Lamb, Jake Walker, Vanessa and Veronica Merrell, Katelin Herdigen, and Annie Smith were among the OPIS students attending the Oak Park High School Senior Prom. They are pictured here with their dates at a pre-prom photo event at the park. The prom was held May 16 at Arbat Banquet Hall in Burbank. Thanks to Carolyn Purkey for the pictures!

Scenes From Open House

