



# The Independent

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2  
BARBARA HARRISON, EDITOR



## In Memory of Kate Edwards

*OPIS lost this popular teacher, friend, and colleague along with her mother in a tragic car accident in October.*

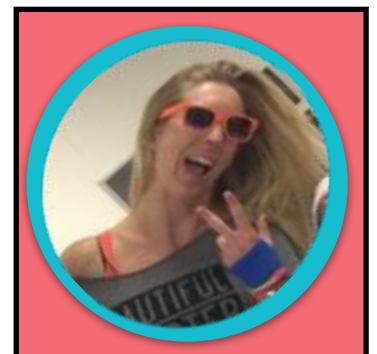
by Kate Thompson

I first met Kate when she came in for her interview to teach at OPIS. We were looking for an energetic, independent study teacher who would have high expectations, compassion, and love for students. I walked Kate Edwards. I remember thinking, "Holy cow! She's tall and beautiful." And then she spoke. She was even more impressive when she spoke. She was prepared, intelligent and confident.

Kate did LOVE teaching at OPIS. She was a phenomenal teacher. She went above and beyond. I can't tell you how many times Kate sat students down to discuss life. Not just math and English, but real life. She helped students decide what type of car was safest and most economical, how to factor in the cost of insurance, benefits of college, and just day to day life. She was my partner teacher. A majority of her students were kids on Disney and Nickelodeon shows. She treated ALL of her students with love and respect and kept them centered and focused on being contributing members to society.

Kate also served as my partner as student council advisor. She was very dedicated to having students give back to their community through philanthropic activities. She loved working with Casa Pacifica, a shelter for neglected and abused children. She had a magical way of helping students realize that they too had a responsibility to help others.

In closing, I am going to do my best to have more smiles and laughs than tears. I keep saying, I would rather hurt this badly, than not to have had Kate in my life. When trying to find an academic quote to read, I found myself thinking, what would Kate want? So, to quote Winnie the Pooh, "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard. If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart, I'll stay forever."



## Happy New Year to our students and parents!



Due to our new district schedule, which allowed for the semester to end before the break, all students did not have homework or assignments to complete over the holiday. I hope you all had a relaxing time and were able to enjoy and celebrate with friends and family. I know you will enjoy reading the winter edition of our amazing newsletter. I am constantly in awe of our wonderful students. I cannot say enough about the hard work and strong efforts I see on a daily basis. I also want to acknowledge the news about our beautiful Kate, provide an introduction to our new staff members, and mention recent field trips and upcoming events.

I want to remind all parents and students that we have our California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in April 2016. ALL OPIS staff members encourage our students to take these exams. This is how our school receives its overall school scores. On our website, we provide a link to our testing calendar. Please plan accordingly to be able to take these exams. These exams are a great review on how your student is doing compared to other students in the state and the results help us gauge our curriculum and how it works for students and our staff.

We are looking forward to a fabulous and healthy new year. See you all on campus.

Sincerely,

*Mr. McGugan*



**February 18** [Anacapa Island](#) - travel with Island Packers to Frenchy's Cove to explore the tide pools, \$43 donation, deadline Feb. 4 Family members welcome.

**March 23** [Chumash Indian Museum](#), Thousand Oaks, \$8 per person includes guided tour of the grounds, the museum, and a craft

**April 11-27** **CAASSP Testing**- Go to <http://www.oakparkusd.org/Page/7804> for details

**April 14** [Tree People](#), Beverly Hills, \$5 students, adults free. Take this hiking tour through 45 acres of the Center for Community Forestry

**May 17** [Zuma Beach Party!](#) Celebrate the end of the year at this annual event.

Did you know that OPIS sends out a weekly eNewsletter? If you are not on the list, please let Sue Meskis know. Her email address is [smeskis@opusd.org](mailto:smeskis@opusd.org). Keep abreast of what's happening! Don't miss out on important information about classes, field trips, graduation deadlines, etc.

# OPIS Student Body News

## High School

The high school OSB is a small but active group of high school students who meet weekly on Mondays in R-4 with Kate and Lori. This has been a busy, fun, and productive semester for them. Below you will see the students enjoying a Thanksgiving feast, and see some of the books and toys they collected for families at Casa Pacifica. Please consider joining them for second semester fun, socializing, and philanthropic events.



## Middle School

Samantha Lyons and Amy Kobayashi are enthusiastic about taking over the direction of the OPIS Middle School OSB following the departure of DJ Cook. They are planning a Valentine event for Casa Pacifica in partnership with the high school group. If you are in grades 6-8, please check out this wonderful social, philanthropic, and leadership-building group which meets Mondays from 10:30 - 11:30 in room R-1.

Here is what 6th grader **Mason Wareing** had to say about OSB - "OSB is a fantastic program! Everyone there is so inviting and nice. When we organize a program, we all share our ideas and vote which idea is the best. We make the middle school parties fun with our random and outlandish ideas. Whenever there isn't a fundraiser or party to be planned, we play games or trivia. It is a very fun program and I look forward to it every week." **Jasmine Alveran** shared, "The Halloween party was so much fun! We had food, games, and prizes for the best costumes. I was really happy when I won Best Overall in the costume category and won a Taco Bell gift card. In OSB, we always have a lot of laughs and it teaches us planning skills, leadership and teamwork."



*Kylie Rogers and Skylar Keesee are all dressed up for the Middle School OSB Halloween party. Skylar won the Scariest Costume Award for her Schoolgirl Zombie look. Note the pencil penetrating her arm!*



# Field Trip News

## Food Share of Ventura County



What an education our families got while attending Ventura County's food bank in Oxnard! Not only did we learn about hunger locally, but we learned how extensive the hunger problem is worldwide. Nationally there are 49 million people, including 16 million children, who are "food insecure." This means that at times there is insufficient food for all household members to have active, healthy lives. We learned of the sacrifices people have to make due to a lack of access to food. In fact, 69% have to choose between buying food and paying utilities, and 66% have to choose between obtaining food or medical care. Unbelievably *a child dies from malnutrition or a preventable disease every 9 seconds*. That is over 9500 children a day!

Surprisingly, 49% of Ventura County's population may receive free food assistance. A staggering 21.5% of the children in Ventura County don't know when they will have their next meal. Fortunately, Food Share of Ventura County helps nearly 75,000 receive food assistance. On our tour of Food Share's enormous warehouses, we saw hundreds of pallets filled with food that will be distributed through 190 pantry locations and programs. Food is donated by local grocery stores, supermarket chains, food manufacturers and distributors, the government, foundations, local farmers, and food drives. **Our group alone donated 200 pounds of food to the effort!**

Food share depends on hundreds of volunteers to help carry out its mission to feed, nourish and educate the hungry in Ventura County. Volunteers can donate food, work in gardens on the property, box food at the warehouse, pick fruit at local orchards, etc. This trip was an eye-opener for our students and taught them how they can help those who are less fortunate.



**Top:** Our group congregates in the lobby of Food Share. **Middle:** Standing in the demonstration garden, we pose with orange spoons which are the symbols embraced by **Feeding America** to urge Americans to take action to fight hunger in their communities. **Bottom:** Girls pose with a container of donated bread.

# Ventura County Hunger Banquet

As a follow up to the trip to Food Share, many OPIS students participated in the **Ventura County Hunger Banquet**. This was an amazing hands-on experience that illustrated how the unequal distribution of food and other resources affects individuals and communities. Here, seventh grader, **Haley Gilchrist**, shares her experience at the banquet.



## The Hunger Banquet

Today, I learned many things about people, their economic and social backgrounds, and how their social class affects the food which they consume. There are many different social-economic groups in this world. There are low income families; the average they make is \$20,000 per year. There are average income families who make an average of \$70,000 per year, and there are high income families who can make \$100,000 to \$300,000 per year or more. The type of family that you are born into is not your choice. Therefore, the type of food that you typically eat is also not usually your choice since it is based on what you can afford.

I feel we can help these people by giving back. Even though the stories the class read today are just written on a piece of paper, the stories are all real and apply to people that live in the world today. People, like me, should be grateful. We don't go to bed hungry every night like some less fortunate people. When we see someone in need we should give back and try to help. It may not be much, but maybe you just show them kindness. Your kindness will make their day and, I believe, you will receive kindness in return from someone else.

The things that Miss Meg and Miss Christina shared with us today make me so thankful for everything that I have. I could not believe it when I heard a child dies every nine seconds of starvation! With all the amazing inventors and technology in this world, it's unbelievable that we cannot find a way to feed all these starving people that are suffering and dying every day. This really affected me. I will always think twice before I waste another piece of food or complain that it is not what I wanted to eat.

I want to thank Miss Meg and Miss Christina for coming to our classroom today. I was amazed to hear how many people in this world are starving and have to deal with hunger every day. It seems that food supply is based on a person's level of opportunity and I don't believe that is fair. The Hunger Banquet was very eye-opening and helped me understand just how fortunate I am. When I sit down for Thanksgiving dinner this year, I will truly understand why we give thanks and I hope that people will remember to help those that do not have a turkey dinner on their table.



*The author is pictured above on the right.*





## October - Make Meaning

Whether painting, creating candles, or making soap, our students had the opportunity to display their creative sides while visiting *Make Meaning* at the Oaks Mall on October 14. It was a great trip for elementary through high school students who each left with an original piece of art.



## November - The Gentle Barn



Even **Dr. Tony Knight**, OPUSD Superintendent, got into the action at **The Gentle Barn** in Santa Clarita. He is shown at left with Earl the Emu whom he arranged to sponsor immediately after our trip. The Gentle Barn is home to over 170 abused and mistreated farm animals on six beautiful acres. Its mission is to teach people kindness and compassion to animals, each other and our planet. Students were taught how to interpret and respect the animals' body language and were able to pet the cows, feed carrots to the horses and donkeys, and visit with the pigs, goats, turkeys, llama, emu, and sheep. This was one of the most popular field trips we have ever had. The children loved being able to interact so closely with the animals and showed great empathy and kindness to them. Thank you to founder Ellie Laks for her vision to help heal the planet.



## The Gentle Barn



## December - Page Museum, La Brea Tar Pits



Thinking about the **La Brea Tar Pits** conjures up images of large saber toothed tigers, dire wolves, and giant woolly mammoths. Whereas we did see skeletons of these beasts, our docent introduced us to a much smaller and seemingly insignificant member of the pre-historic food chain - the lowly insect. He explained that many of the larger mammals not only lived in the area surrounding the tar pits, but their habitat spanned a much greater area. Not so with the insects, he explained. In fact, the insects found at the tar pits today may not be much different from the insects found in days past and are likely to be much more specific to the area than the larger animals found there. Understanding them can help scientists learn what the area was like long ago.

Our students were given nets and the task of capturing, drawing, and identifying a variety of small bugs and insects in the area surrounding the museum. Following that activity we watched an informative video about climate change. The trip ended with a fun visit to the museum gift shop.



**2016 has brought several changes to the OPIS staff. We would like to welcome the following people into the OPIS community:**

### **Sue Meskis**

has been with us since November when she replaced Cristina Sanchez, who was able to obtain a job working from home. We will miss Cristina, but we are extremely lucky to have Sue with us. Sue has worked as an office manager for several years in the business sector and most recently was a teacher's aide at Brookside Elementary School.

### **Samantha Lyons**

graduated from Newbury Park High School and attended UC Berkeley, where she graduated with honors in Sociology. She went on to earn her Master's and teaching credential from UC Santa Barbara. She has worked overseas on several different occasions as a teacher or teacher's assistant. So she will bring a lot to the table. She has lived in Hawaii, California, Hungary, Japan, the Netherlands and South Africa. Samantha has also worked as an independent school teacher for the Academy of Arts and Sciences, Opportunities for Learning and also in Oakland at an elementary school. Samantha will most likely be teaching some of our 10th, 11th and 12th graders.

### **Alyssa Del Sesto**

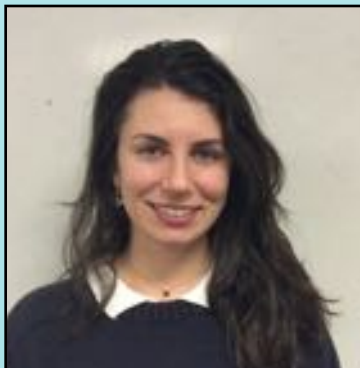
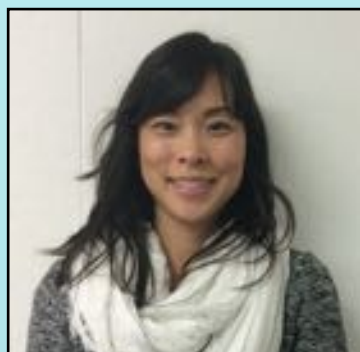
graduated from Oak Park High School. She graduated from Cal State, Northridge with a Liberal Studies degree and received her teaching credential from California Lutheran University. She most recently was working as a long-term substitute teacher at MCMS in 7th grade Humanities. She has also worked in the independent study program at Opportunities for Learning and has worked for several years at OPHS as an Instructional Aide in Special Education. Alyssa will most likely be working with some of our 7th, 8th and 9th graders.

### **Amy Kobayashi**

graduated from Pepperdine University with a Liberal Arts degree with a concentration in Japanese. She also earned her teaching credential from Pepperdine. She has worked in the Conejo Valley Unified School District at Sycamore Canyon Middle School and Westlake Elementary. Most recently, Amy has been teaching for a family in a homeschool setting. She has been teaching/mentoring the family's children from grades 6-12.

### **DJ Cook**

has transferred to Oak Park High School to teach AP Economics in place of Coach Kevin Smith. DJ is one of only a handful of teachers in our district who could step in immediately for Coach Smith. We wish him well. He will definitely be missed.







# Student Spotlight



**Skylar and Piper Keesee** (also known as *Madison Fayre*) were invited to perform over the weekend at the Will Meyers' Gift of Life Blood Drive to support The American Red Cross. They performed alongside many other talented musicians to encourage people to donate blood and to raise awareness about becoming a blood donor. *Madison Fayre* just released their first original single called *California Christmas*.

**Bianca Hofstatter** earned the title of Best Rhythmic Junior Gymnast this summer in both the State and National Championships and recently advanced to Level 7, earning a 3rd place All-Around medal at the San Diego Invitational Rhythmic Gymnastics Meet. At the 6th Annual Las Vegas Invitational Meet this month Bianca took home the Gold Medal for the Best All-Around Gymnast! Additionally, Bianca honed her dancing skills in performances of *The Nutcracker* this holiday season as Pierrot and Spun Sugar. However, Bianca's main goal is to participate in the 2020 and 2024 Olympics as a synchronized swimmer! She will soon be training with the acrobat coach of the US Synchronized Swimming Olympic Team.



**Kylie Rogers'** new film *Miracles From Heaven* hits theaters March 16th, just in time for Easter! *Miracles From Heaven* is based on the true story of 10-year-old Annabel Beam (Kylie Rogers), diagnosed with a rare, life threatening disease, that tests her family and everyone's faith. As Anna (Rogers) and mom Christy (Jennifer Garner) meet with doctor after doctor to find a cure, or at least some respite from her severe symptoms, it's not until she has a near death experience that a miracle

happens that changes their lives forever. The movie also stars Martin Henderson with Queen Latifah and Eugenio Derbez. Kylie Rogers also stars opposite Russell Crowe in upcoming, *Fathers And Daughters*, coming to the U.S. in April 2016. Other film credits include *Mojave* (Mark Wahlberg, Oscar Issac) and *Space Station 76* (Liv Tyler, Patrick Wilson). Kylie played Minx Lawrence in ABC's summer series *The Whispers* and has held recurring roles on television shows *Private Practice*, *Once Upon A Time in Wonderland* and *Mob City* as well as notable guest star, Molly Goodwin, on CBS's hit show *CSI*. In addition, Kylie has appeared on various other prime time network and cable television shows.



# Student Spotlight



**Blake Tingzon** was selected to join the United States Gymnastics Future Star program which identifies elite athletes throughout the nation. Blake qualified at both the state and regional levels and earned the right to compete and train at National Future Star Championships at the United States Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. Blake finished in the top ten and will be competing in the Junior Olympic season as a Level 9 Elite athlete. Blake trains at Gymnastics Olympica in Van Nuys, California.



**Chris Johnson and Gage Grant** recently returned from Florida where their football team, the Inland Empire Ducks, took a third place in the American Youth Football National Championships in the 12 and Under age group. Their team was undefeated in the California Conference where they won the Southern California Super Bowl.



**Andre McDonald and Jo Jo Collins** both play football for the Inland Empire Ducks in the Age 14 and Under Division. Their team was undefeated in California and went on to win the Super Bowl in Arizona. They recently took home 1st place trophies in Florida at the American Youth Football National Championship. Congratulations to all four of these promising football stars!



**Elisabeth Epperson**, OPIS class of 2015, has recently earned the honor of becoming a United States Marine! Congratulations to this accomplished OPIS graduate.