

CONCORD ACADEMY

Seniors share stories in oral history project

By Amy Carboneau
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Kim Frederick had struggled with this lesson for years. Trying to teach oral history to Concord Academy sophomores who would go out, find a "willing victim" — a senior to tell them their story — only for the kids to return to the classroom and write something mediocre at best, said Frederick.

So when Elly Katz wrote to her with a better idea, she listened. Katz is the mastermind behind a program called Sages and Seekers, which works to unite community elders with students to form inter-generational relationships and promote learning.

"Most people with white hair and a cane are really invisible to younger kids," said Katz. "I've always been a little annoyed and angry at that fact."

Best-case scenario, she figured teens would at least tolerate the idea.

"But they loove it," said the Natick resident who has already sold the idea to other area private schools, such as Wellesley's Dana Hall, Natick's Walnut Hill, Weston's The Rivers School, and Noble and Greenough School in Dedham. (It is a tough program to get going in the public schools, said Katz, because of stricter state regulations and tests.)

The idea sparked on a morning commute when Katz, now 60, was driving with her son and listening to NPR. Everyone needed to do their part, the interviewer was saying — "If everyone in the world did something they were passionate about... we could turn the world around," recalled Katz.

"I don't know why but I



Ishihara talks with Concord Academy student Andy Zou about his time in Vietnam during the Sages and Seekers program where seniors discuss their experiences at the school Tuesday. WICKED LOCAL PHOTO BY ORLANDO CLAFFEY

really took that to heart," she added.

The program has been successful in several arenas, such as English classrooms and theater productions. Now, Frederick offers the program through two of her U.S. History classes at CA, where "sages" hand-picked by Katz help sophomore "seekers" bring the past to life through oral stories of what real people went through.

"Their mission is to share their life story," says Catherine Hunter, assistant director for programs at Newbury Court, where several of the sages travel from for the 40-minute classes each week — not an easy feat, says Hunter.

The class follows a curriculum, as students learn about Civil Rights, Vietnam and World War II. Then they meet up with their sages to bring it all to life. Not all sages have a story to tell from each of those eras. But each has a story to tell.

"Once the conversation starts, the conversation becomes a catalyst for memories," says Hunter. "You could never just walk into the room and ask, 'what's your favorite song from the 1920s?'"

But the truth comes out if you sit and listen. Hunter once ran a similar program at Newbury Court, where one woman was nearly brought to tears as she recalled a time she once disappointed her parents. The obvious question followed — what did you do? Her eyes lit up like a teenager, said Hunter — she had skipped school to see Frank Sinatra.

"The stories are great," said Hunter, of what the seniors have to offer. "And after six weeks, they really have a relationship."

Forming relationships

The program runs eight weeks in total. First they are introduced to the group: 15 sages for each of the 15 seekers. Then after a speed dating trial, the pairs

are matched, stories begin, and often, similarities are unearthed.

Sage Janet Johnson, from Newbury Court, said she realized through this program just how much of a story she had to tell during the Vietnam War.

"I thought, well, I was just home with little kids," said Johnson. "But then I thought, no, I was pretty involved."

As a den mother during the war, she had her Boy Scout troops write letters to soldiers, and many wrote back. Johnson flips through a scrapbook of clippings that holds letters and photographs of her troop and of the men who wrote back.

There is an obituary of a soldier who once responded. Later, Johnson saw his obituary in the paper. Johnson's "seeker" partner, Steph Wong, recognizes in the obituary that the soldier's two brothers had also been sent to war. "This is interesting," said Wong, who

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Catherine Hunter
assistant director for programs at Newbury Court

remembered from her history books that the Army stopped sending entire families to the same camps, because often none made it home.

"We're supposed to be imparting our great wisdom to them," said Johnson. "They're just as wise as we are. We've just lived a little longer."

Wong is a boarding student from Chelmsford and class president who says she enjoys the opportunity for history to come alive.

"We read the history books and we read about Vietnam and then we come here and talk to you; it's so different," says Wong to Johnson. "It just puts it all into perspective. We're not just reading from a page."

That's the point, says her teacher.

"So they get to make the historical connection but they also get this relationship," said Frederick, which is important particularly to the boarding students who don't have grandparents in their lives. And for the sages who participate, the program offers a vibrant atmosphere through the kids.

"I just feel like it's a win, win," said Frederick.

The eight-week session finishes May 17 and 18, with both of Frederick's classes sharing an oral history of their sage as a final class project: history brought to life through their stories.

CONCORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Pollution controls on buses

Building on the Patrick-Murray Administration's efforts to promote clean energy, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has announced that seven bus owners have installed pollution controls on 76 diesel school buses, under the "MASSCLEANDIESEL: Clean Air for Kids" program.

Among the participants in this round of MASSCLEANDIESEL school bus retrofits is Concord Public Schools.

Under the program, state and federal funds pay for the installation of free diesel retrofit pollution controls on eligible diesel school buses.

"Each school bus that receives a retrofit under this free program helps to protect students and the health of our local communities," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr.

Concord Public Schools received retrofits on 24 buses servicing 3,500 students who attend the Concord Public Schools and Concord Carlisle Regional School District.

"The buses are all running so much cleaner now; you can't smell them anymore. I would absolutely recommend this program to others," said Concord Transportation Manager Wayne Busa.

There are now 45 participating bus owners who have retrofitted 977 school buses, providing cleaner air benefits to more than 122,000 students across 196 municipalities.

For more information on school bus diesel retrofits, visit www.mass.gov/dep/air/masscleandiesel, email program officials at massean.diesel@state.ma.us, or call the MASSCLEANDIESEL Help Line at 617-292-5809.

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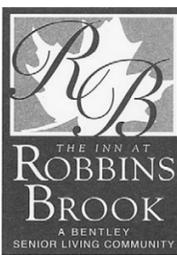
A Day of Remembrance

Sunday, May 1st @ 2:00PM

At

The Inn at Robbins Brook Assisted living Community

10 Devon Drive, Acton, MA



Roosevelt and the Holocaust

One of the many issues the Roosevelt Administration faced was the plight of the European Jews. As early as 1942, validated reports of the Nazi Campaign to exterminate the Jews were widely known in Washington. Yet, a "paper wall" of bureaucratic red tape, anti-Semitism and general indifference obstructed the emigration of Jewish refugees to America and other parts of the world. While a War Refugee War Board was finally created in 1944, it was too little and too late.

What followed was a tragedy for all humankind.

Please join Professor Gary Hylander for this special presentation and discussion. He is a Professor of American History at Stonehill College where he specializes as a Presidential Historian.

Following this presentation, there will be a moment of remembrance and candle lighting.

Please call 978-264-4666 or

mcapriccio@theinnatrobbsbrook.com to reserve a seat.