

## Gifted Resource Council Volunteers Making a Difference

With a modest budget and a lean staff of four part-time and two full-time employees, Gifted Resource Council enriches the lives of 2,500 children ages 3-14 each year. Part-time teachers staff our Saturday Learning Labs and Summer Academies. But it is our volunteers who make it possible for GRC to offer the programs that have so positively impacted the lives of 45,000 children over the past three decades. This issue of *mindwonders* features some of those talented and dedicated people whose generosity of spirit makes such a difference.

### Committed School Volunteer Takes Advantage of GRC Program

**Greg Zink-Duda** has been the coach and organizer for the math portion (Equations) of GRC's Academic Challenge Cup for 12 years at Christ the King School. Since Zink-Duda is an architectural engineer, not a teacher, he runs Equations as an after-school math club assisted by 10 other parent volunteers. Typically each year, 50-60 Christ the King Equations players in grades 3-8 meet one night a week for an hour for 20 weeks prior to the competition each March.

A few of the coaches are former players. Greg's son and daughter both coached while they were high school and college students. Here's what Zink-Duda says about the Equations experience:

"One of my strongest goals for our Equations club is to provide a positive, math-based experience for the children," he said. "In my experience, the game of Equations improves children's math skills as well as critical thinking skills and creative problem-solving skills. Equations is a very fast-paced game, and children are required to develop multiple equations that equal a set goal under a set of rapidly changing requirements. Equations players certainly get extra practice at math skills. After one year of Equations, our third graders have multiplication and division skills that are superior to their other classmates. Older

### High School Volunteers Assist, Inspire Summer Campers

Each summer several high school alums of GRC programs return as volunteers with GRC's Summer Academies. They provide hands-on assistance for young astronauts attempting to build and launch their first rockets. High school volunteers help GRC paleontologists construct fossils, explore dinosaur teeth and "safari" in tropical rainforests. In the process, they serve as positive role models for talented children who participate in high-

interest, hands-on activities at GRC's two-week-long academic day camps.

"I had a great time volunteering in high school and thought it would be a fun and rewarding experience for both myself and the students," said **Eliot Prokop**. "I volunteered to try to give back to the program that made my summers so amazing when I was younger. Hopefully, I helped show the kids that it was okay to be smart, okay to dare to pursue their interests, and that they weren't alone—because it is extremely easy to feel different from all the other kids at school. GRC gave me an environment where I could feel comfortable and was actually surrounded by other kids interested in learning."



*Students from throughout the metro area concentrate on their Equations game.*

## Dialogue with the Director

Some years ago one of GRC's premier volunteers designed a "thank you" card with the image of a child on a bicycle that said: "Volunteers keep our wheels turning..." The card was meant to be used to write notes of appreciation to those who had volunteered with Gifted Resource Council in any capacity. While those cards have long ago been used up, the sentiment is still exceedingly important.

Indeed, Gifted Resource Council could not accomplish as much as it does without the dedicated spirit of volunteerism that is evidenced by so many – a few of whom we have highlighted in this edition of *mindwonders*. There are truly many more people who have enthusiastically given of their time and talents through the years. To each and every one we extend our sincerest thanks.

GRC and the children that we serve are the beneficiaries of the many hours of willing service that have been given to children from throughout the metropolitan community through this small, but dedicated organization. Whether time has been extended to assist with Academic Challenge Cup or Saturday Learning Labs or GRC's Summer Academies, many benefits have been received by the children participating in these varied academic activities.

Behind the scenes though is another dedicated group of volunteers who have shared many hours with Gifted Resource Council. Their work is not always recognized with applause – as are the volunteers at Academic Challenge Cup. Nor do the children, teachers and parents

see these folks each Saturday or during the summer. Yet they provide a foundation for all that Gifted Resource Council is and does.

This group of dedicated individuals is the Board of Directors of Gifted Resource Council.

They are people who represent a broad range of the St. Louis community – business people, accountants, lawyers, psychologists, former teachers – and yes, parents. They believe strongly in the mission of GRC – that of bringing together the resources of the community, the schools and parents to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.

Whether they have served on GRC's Board of Directors for a year – or for more than twenty years – each one of them brings an area of expertise and a commitment to GRC and gifted children that is uniquely important to the success of this organization. The hours

that they spend in contemplation, discussion and decision-making affect the people and programs of Gifted Resource Council in innumerable ways.

Yes, they are volunteers who should be recognized with gratitude and words of thanks for all that they do for GRC and the entire community. So too do I extend my sincerest thanks to each and every person who has volunteered with Gifted Resource Council at any time during the past thirty-one years of its proud history.

You have kept "our wheels turning" in many ways and many directions. THANK YOU!



*Sue Flesch, GRC executive director*

*Susan C. Flesch*



*First and second graders in GRC's Space Academy pose following their class's summer assembly presentation.*

*Committed Volunteer, continued from page 1*

children are advanced in exponents and roots.

“However, I think one of the major benefits the children gain from Equations is growth in problem-solving skills. Children are challenged to solve math problems with as creative and as many solutions as they can. So they develop the ability to analyze a set of tools and figure out various ways to combine those tools to solve problems.

“Gifted Resource Council’s ACC Equations competition itself is my favorite experience for our Equations players. The competition has a festive atmosphere which helps create the positive experience. The children truly enjoy GRC’s Equations competition, and that positive experience with math helps the children maintain a real interest in math. Some of these children will certainly continue in math-based fields in the future.

“Because GRC’s ACC Equations competition hosts schools from all over the St. Louis area, our children also learn that they are part of a larger group of students who are good at math and enjoy math. Although some of the children are nervous before the competition, I have seen many players gain incredible confidence in their abilities as a result of playing Equations.

“Any parent with children that have an aptitude for math or enjoy playing thinking games will benefit from the ACC experience. Gifted Resource Council has created a wonderful, unique math competition that provides fun memories for our students. I say to them, ‘Keep up the good work!’”

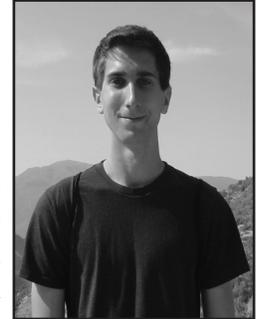
Christ the King Principal Susan Hooker summed it up like this: “Under Greg’s direction and guidance, Equations has empowered our students to excel in math, to be more confident and to enjoy math.”



*GRC’s Space Academy cadets enjoy playing a solar system game.*

## Washington University Student Volunteers Enrich GRC’s Learning Labs

Each fall and winter 10-15 Washington University students assist teachers at GRC’s high-interest 90-minute Saturday classes for children in grades preK-8. For 30 years Wash U students have provided hands-on assistance for children who may be using LEGOS® to build working robots, designing the next big superhighway or “participating in an archaeological dig” in ancient Egypt. They also escort young children enrolled in two Learning Labs from one class to another. This allows parents three hours for errands and time to attend GRC’s parenting classes. It also provides an additional opportunity for their children to function independently of them.



*Noah Eby has volunteered with Learning Lab for two years.*

“I first got involved with Learning Labs because I wanted to work with children and was interested in teaching, and I quickly fell in love with the program,” said Noah Eby, a sophomore majoring in psychology who has volunteered with GRC for two years. This year he served as the coordinator for the college volunteers through Washington University’s Campus Y.

“Being able to work closely with the kids on creative, hands-on activities has been incredibly fun and rewarding,” Noah said. “It’s great to see how excited the children are about learning. It always impresses me how much they grow over the course of the six-week program.

“I decided to take on more leadership in coordinating the volunteers because I thought it was a great opportunity for Wash U students to serve the community and share their enthusiasm for learning with the kids.”

GRC Executive Director Susan Flesch is most appreciative. “The help of Washington University volunteers like Noah has enriched the Learning Lab experience for GRC students for thirty years! We are very grateful to all of them,” she said.

**Thanks to...**

...the following individuals who made financial contributions to Gifted Resource Council from May 2013 through April 2014. We apologize for any names which may have been inadvertently omitted or misspelled.

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*Participants in GRC's Creative Convention describe their version of an "Olympics float".*



*LEGO® Mindstorms® NXT robotics provide a challenge for GRC's Advanced Space Academy cadets.*

### BECOME A MEMBER OF GIFTED RESOURCE COUNCIL

Now *you* can participate in shaping America's future by becoming a member of **Gifted Resource Council**, a not-for-profit agency serving bright and talented young people. Your tax-deductible contribution will enable us to improve existing programs, extend offerings and reach more children. Your membership will not only benefit gifted children, but also entitle you to receive the following:

**Gifted Member:** \$60

- ▶ Priority registration for all programs
- ▶ *FREE* parenting classes (\$160 value)
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- ▶ All of the above, *plus*
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- ▶ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy

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- ▶ Additional \$25 discount off a Summer Academy (\$50 total)

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## Parents Ask: How can we motivate our child to keep trying when success doesn't come easily at first?

By Dennis O'Brien

This is one of the most important questions parents can ask. Gifted children often give up when they don't enjoy immediate success, and this can lead to a lifetime of under-achieving. Two special circumstances can make it difficult for them to develop the grit they need to be resilient and persistent achievers.

### Success Comes Too Easily

Some gifted children fail to learn to be persistent because academic success comes so easily for them. If they excel without having to work at it, they don't learn what it means to make an effort at all, much less to persist through adversity. As long as children remain solely in their comfort zone, they won't learn resilience. Tragically, this will cause them to be unprepared for the challenges we all face in life.

### Paralyzed by Perfectionism

Some gifted children fail to develop grit because their self-esteem gets tangled with "being the best." An unhealthy emphasis on being the smartest causes them to narrow their focus to academic venues in which they excel, to avoid participating in many healthy age-appropriate activities, and to feel badly about themselves if they cannot achieve their self-imposed perfectionistic goals.

### Strategies for Success

- Review the messages—spoken and unspoken—that you communicate to your child about success. Do the unspoken norms of your family require perfection? Do you prize being the best over having fun or simply making a good enough effort for a task? Do you praise your child excessively—or exclusively—for her academic achievements? To what extent are you inflicting success-at-all-costs values on your child by the way you lead your own life, plan activities or communicate? Do your child's behavior and values reflect this shortsightedness?

If this describes your parenting, you may have unwittingly taught your child to expect perfection from himself. He instinctively pulls back when he fears falling short. It's so much easier for a perfectionist to maintain the pretext that he could have succeeded if he had bothered to try. By quitting early—or failing to try at all—he can maintain the face-saving fiction that he could have done it perfectly if he wanted to.

- Provide structure and limits. Gifted children need the security of knowing what the boundaries and family routines are—including their chores and schedule. This sense of security helps them work to achieve something that, if not difficult, at least requires effort.

- Make your values explicit. Explain that learning to work hard and continuing to try when success does not come instantly are important for success in school and in life.

- Establish other academic challenges for your child if success comes too easily. Build on resources like Gifted Resource Council programs. You can also create a challeng-

ing enrichment curriculum of your own, including specific projects and schedules that hold him accountable.

- Involve your child in a variety of activities, including team sports, where he won't be the best. Because it helps a child become more well-rounded, this is important for all gifted children, not just those to whom academic success comes too easily. Explain that you value being well-rounded, having fun, taking risks and learning to cooperate with others. Make it clear that you want him to have these growthful experiences.

- Empathize and listen. Ask how your child feels when he is not rewarded with the success he had hoped for. Reflect back to him the disappointment, hurt, confusion or anger he feels. Then ask if he wants to improve. How could he do so if he wants to? Encourage him to explore options and come up with his own plan—and to stick with it. Then help him evaluate and adjust it, if need be going forward.

- Teach your child to view "failures" as learning experiences en route to ultimate success. Encourage her to put setbacks into perspective and to try harder if her "failure" was due to a lack of effort rather than talent or ability.

- Help your child set reasonable goals and develop a practical plan to achieve them. Help her redefine success in terms of making a reasonable effort, not perfection. "Not perfect" should not mean failure or lead to not trying. The real failure is staying on the sidelines of life and not trying at all.

- Model grit. Use dinnertime conversations to mention challenges you face—and how you need to just keep trying. Don't lecture. Keep it matter-of-fact and conversational. If you are transparent about how you persist when things are tough, your child will come to value persistence as you do.

- Praise and encourage your child for trying, always keeping the focus on the effort he makes rather than ability or results. My father, a surgeon with three doctoral degrees, always stressed persistence and being well-rounded rather than extraordinary talent as keys to success. "Hammer, hammer, hammer in the hard, hard way," he told us. When my children get frustrated and think they are falling short, I encourage them to "keep hammering." Simple, appropriate parental messages have so much power.

- Enable your child to recognize when it is really important to do her best and when "good enough" is good enough. Never say, "Just do your best" unless the circumstances really call for it. This will allow your child to do well—or poorly—enough to succeed and still have a life. When should a child "do her best"? That depends on priorities and circumstances. The take-home message is that not everything a child engages in can be a top priority. Help your

*Parents Ask, continued on page 7*

*Parents Ask, continued from page 6*

child sort out the particulars.

Bottom line: adjusting your parenting style—and following through consistently—can help your child develop the strong work ethic and grit that are so important for success—and happiness—in life.

*Dennis O'Brien is a licensed clinical social worker, experienced educator and therapist. In addition to writing educational materials used by the Washington University School of Medicine Dept. of Psychiatry and weekly columns on parenting for the Suburban Journals, he writes monthly columns for St. Louis Moms and Dads, and regular columns for CHARACTERplus, Family Connection (Mo. Dept. of Mental Health) and Gifted Association of Missouri. O'Brien's April 6 column, "Prevent teen suicide by addressing it," won the 2010 Missouri Institute of Mental Health award for outstanding reporting on suicide.*

## Hundreds of Volunteers Support GRC's Academic Challenge Cup

More than 200 adult volunteers provide coaching, transportation and support services for GRC's Academic Challenge Cup. Some also serve as judges for Creative Convention competitions. All volunteer coaches and judges are recruited and trained by GRC staff in order to maximize their effectiveness and to enhance the experiences of children participating in ACC.

In addition, several volunteers have brought highly specialized skills to the mix.

**Connie Burkhardt** has been running the LinquiSHTIK competition for 30 years, a remarkable example of commitment to GRC and the children it serves. She also conducts training sessions for the coaches each year. What's behind this remarkable dedication? "The kids are so amazing," she said. "Every time I'm with them I learn something new. I believe with all my heart that Gifted Resource Council is offering something to children that can't be found elsewhere. We need GRC in our community. GRC is always positive - building knowledge AND developing character. Finally, volunteering with GRC makes me feel useful and needed!"

**Tom Campbell** identified the need for a database and computer program to route players and computerize the scoring process for Equations and LinquiSHTIK competitions when he was serving as a coach for his children's teams in 1994. With assistance from Chris Dadian, he created the programs which have enabled GRC's Academic Challenge Cup to expand from 30 teams to 300 and from 150 child participants to more than 1,500!

While Campbell's own children have long since graduated from college, Tom has continued to provide volunteer support each year for ACC – routing hundreds of teams and players, pre-printing table and player score sheets, and being on-site each day of the competitions to "trouble-shoot" as needed and oversee the computerized scoring of both Equations and LinquiSHTIK. "Tom has made major contributions

both to GRC's Academic Challenge Cup and to thousands of young people who have participated over these past 20 years," said Executive Director Susan Flesch.

**Bob Coulter** and **Chris Dadian** have been GRC's "Equations gurus" for more than a decade. They each have immersed themselves in the finer points of Equations' strategies and have contributed their talents to revisions of the rules that GRC uses for this friendly competition. They also conduct workshops in the fall for teachers and adults who wish to coach teams of students, as well as volunteering to emcee the actual competitions in the spring of the year.

**Kathy Hilgeman** serves as a "creativity expert", holding workshops sponsored by GRC which prepare volunteer coaches who wish to organize and train teams of second and third graders for Creative Convention.

**Sandy Kalin** has coordinated the volunteer judges on every morning of Creative Convention for more than two decades. She also serves as a member of Gifted Resource Council's Board of Directors.

Beyond these individual volunteers, there is a group of retired teachers who each year help to design and implement the unique "problems" for GRC's Creative Convention competition.

Additionally, hundreds of parents and teachers volunteer their time and expertise to provide coaching, transportation and support for the teams of students who participate in ACC from more than 80 different schools. Executive Director Susan Flesch states that "GRC's Academic Challenge Cup would not be possible without all of the amazing people who volunteer their talents every year. They have truly made ACC the inspiring and challenging competition that it is today."

## Administrative Support Extends GRC Resources

Two long-term volunteers provide technical services that most organizations would hire staff to provide. Their dedication and specialized skills enable GRC to funnel more resources directly into programs for children.

**Mary Angert** has maintained GRC's website since she created it in 1996—18 years and counting. Beyond maintaining the website, Mary is also GRC's "go-to person" for anything related to GRC's office computers. "Mary's technical expertise is invaluable to GRC as an organization," said Executive Director Susan Flesch.

**Linda Sher** has laid out every issue of GRC's *mindwonders* and program brochures since 1991. "As our volunteer graphic designer, Linda has provided a huge service to GRC by her extraordinary commitment to helping us generate five important mailings each year for nearly 25 years," said Executive Director Susan Flesch. "She never fails to finish well ahead of deadlines. I know I can always count on Linda."

## mindwonders

informs the public about activities of Gifted Resource Council and about issues relevant to the development of bright and talented children and youth.

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St. Louis, MO 63119  
314-962-5920  
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Susan C. Flesch  
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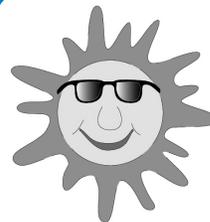
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**Still a few openings!**

**GRC's Summer Academies**  
**June 16 – July 25**  
**will be held at**



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Gifted Resource Council is a not-for-profit education agency serving the greater St. Louis Metropolitan area.  
Its purpose is to bring together the resources of the community, the schools and parents  
to help bright and talented children achieve their potential.