



# COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY NEWS

MARCH 2011  
2010–2011, VOLUME II

## CARE AWARD DINNER WILL HONOR THINKFUN COFOUNDERS

ThinkFun cofounders Bill Ritchie and Andrea Barthello will receive the 2011 Leadership Award at the CARE Awards on Thursday, March 31. This husband and wife team have been celebrated for their “addictively fun games” that ignite minds and sharpen skills since they developed their first product in their basement over two decades ago. Perhaps best known for their game RushHour, Mr. Ritchie and Ms. Barthello are committed to developing games that “naturally inspire learning, spark creativity, and build problem solving skills through play.”

ThinkFun games have long been enjoyed at C/A, employed as some of the many tools used to strengthen skills in our Visual Thinking and Strategy Lab for lower and middle schoolers. In February, and again this month, lower school students and teachers were excited to welcome Bill Ritchie to their classroom for what we hope will be an ongoing collaboration. Lower School teacher Maria Brinza explained how the lab supports the C/A math program by developing logical reasoning and visual thinking.

“Math is a higher level academic skill based on underlying thinking abilities and conceptual understanding,” says Ms. Brinza. “The lab provides a developmental foundation for math, building the scaffolding that supports mathematical reasoning.

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## C/A SUMMER 2011

Information about this year’s summer camp offerings is now on the web at [www.CommonwealthAcademy.org](http://www.CommonwealthAcademy.org). Follow the link on our home page and register today!

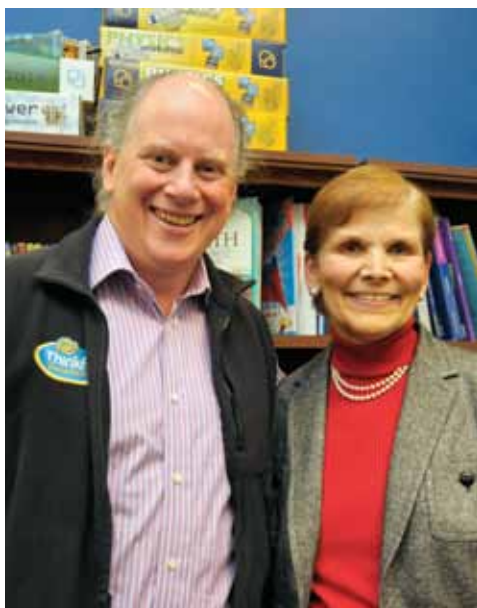
### CONGRATULATIONS TO...

Geography Bee champion **Ryan Lucas '15** (see page 2).

SAT superstar **Cole Miller '15** (see page 3).

All Star basketball players **Maria Bayzie '13**, **Maurice Meadows '12**, and **Marina Pharis '11** (see pg 6).

The forty-one students who earned honor roll, or higher during the second quarter (see page 8).



ThinkFun cofounder Bill Ritchie with Head of School Susan Johnson and C/A lower schoolers during his first visit to Commonwealth Academy in February.

Playing Think-Fun games supports the procedural and conceptual understanding of math so students can apply sequencing, visual thinking skills, and problem solving strategies to solve everyday math problems. Another by-product is that self-confidence grows because students are using their own intelligence to solve problems.”

Mr. Ritchie was surprised to find that visual perceptual training had been elevated to the importance of a daily class in C/A’s Lower School and excited that his games were used as part of our unique curriculum.

The lower schoolers clamored to ask Mr. Ritchie questions and get his autograph, which he provided for each student. He told the children that he earned his master’s from Harvard University in city planning, but that his passion had always been puzzles and games. “Always go with your passion!” he told the students as he explained how much he has enjoyed his career.

In addition to honoring Mr. Ritchie and Ms. Barthello, the CARE Awards will honor a local Alexandria teacher, C/A’s Teacher of the Year, and C/A alumni who have recently graduated from college. Please join us at this important event (see page 8 for details).



Middle schoolers enjoy using ThinkFun games to sharpen visual perceptual abilities.

## REPTILES VISIT C/A

Lower schoolers enjoyed learning about turtles, snakes, and other reptiles “up-close-and-personal” when Reptiles Alive visited C/A for a morning assembly and presented a wildly exciting show with many interesting facts about the creatures. It was a great start to the week and gave students a lot to talk and write about. Here are just a few things they had to say:

“I got to touch the boa constrictor. It felt like a hard, slick tile floor.”

“I liked seeing and learning about the colors of the snakes, for example the boa constrictor was yellow with white patches. We learned that is because it was an albino snake and that they are usually brown.”

“The snakes were very cool and I liked seeing the skink. The crocodile was neat to see too.”

“I liked seeing the turtle—I liked his eyes and how he was formed.”

“I liked seeing the water turtle that had a smooth part of its shell and a hard part of its shell.”

“I thought the reptiles were awesome and I got to touch every one.”

“I liked seeing the leatherback turtle. At first I thought it was a leaf. It was fun to touch because it was so rubbery.”

## SGA SKI TRIP

The SGA coordinated a late-February trip to Wintergreen for a bus load of enthusiastic skiers, snowboarders, and tubers. Every student, whether a beginner or expert, enjoyed a great day outdoors with C/A friends. Friends rallied behind a student who injured his ankle, cheering him with a “get well soon” card. Adonis Salcedo ’13 and Tre Sutherland ’13 won a lively game of Yellow Car on the trip to Wintergreen. Matt Johns and Chris Hathaway for chaperoned the event.



## SENIOR/ALUMNI BRUNCH

In December, C/A welcomed back 12 alumni for brunch and conversation with the Class of 2011. This annual tradition is designed with minimal adult presence, moderated only by Ed Conroy, to ensure a relaxed setting for students to openly ask alumni about their experiences in college and about “life after C/A.” This year’s discussion, although covering many facets of college life and preparation, delivered an overwhelming message: C/A does a great job in preparing students to write. Thank you to all the parents who provided a fabulous feast, and to Dr. Johnson, for once again cooking her famous scrambled eggs.



## GEOGRAPHY BEE

Congratulations to Ryan Lucas ’15 (right), this year’s school champion in the National Geographic Geography Bee. Colin Zack ’17 (left) was the runner up in this test of knowledge about world geography and key landmarks in the US. Ten middle school students from world geography and civics classes participated in this year’s geography bee. As school champion, Ryan participated in the Regional Geography Bee in late January.



### 8TH GRADER EARNS PERFECT SAT SCORES

Congratulations to **Cole Miller '15** who recently scored a perfect 800 on both the written and critical reading sections of the SAT. This places him in the 99th percentile of all high school seniors who take the standardized test. Although typically taken by high school juniors and seniors for college admissions, Cole took the test as part of the admission process to the Johns Hopkins Center for Gifted and Talented Youth.



### Solar Math

6th–8th graders in Foundations for Algebra applied their understanding of proportions and their computational skills to build correctly scaled models of the Solar System. Two groups of students scaled the size of planets. Using the actual diameter of each planet, they set up proportions, cross-multiplied to set up an algebraic equation, and solved for the variable to determine the scaled size of the model planets. They then used rulers to measure the diameter of the model planets and cut them out. Meanwhile, using the actual distance of each planet from the sun, two other groups of students scaled the distance on a 200cm long sheet of paper, marking the location of the planets. Students then presented and displayed their scaled models in class.



### PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Just as seniors had a chance to talk to C/A alumni about life after Commonwealth, 8th graders enjoyed the opportunity to talk to high school students at a pancake breakfast in February. **Natalie Giordano '13, Alex Marnell '14, Joey Keller '13, Connor Powell '13, Brendan McAuliffe '13, and Julia Ziegler '12** discussed what student life is like in high school, what they appreciated about the differences between middle school and high school, and gave 8th graders things to consider as they transition into 9th grade. Earl Harris-Nicholls facilitating the discussion and Matt Johns served up the pancakes.

### Acid Rain Simulation



Students in World Geography and Cultures simulated the effects of acid rain on statues and buildings (pictured left) by placing ordinary chalk in a container of vinegar. While they read about and discussed acid rain, and engaged in SmartBoard activities, the vinegar went to work on the chalk. (To

create a control for this experiment, they also placed a piece of chalk in a container of water.) At the end of class, the students observed both containers, noting that the chalk in the water had been affected very little, while the chalk in the vinegar had degraded substantially. The vinegar had stripped the chalk of many layers, similar to the corrosion acid rain causes in buildings, statues, and other outdoor structures.

# Poetry Exploration

Ninth and tenth graders spent the third quarter exploring a wide variety of poetry, spanning Shakespeare's sonnets, Mark Twain's humorous odes, Edgar Allan Poe's macabre musings, and Daniel Beaty's contemporary spoken word. Over the course of the unit, students read and analyzed these and other great works, emulated them, and experimented with their own writing. The unit culminated with the creation of portfolios in which the students selected some of their favorite compositions, polished them, and presented them in a creative anthology. The poetry unit also provided the opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge in live media: 9th graders used cutting edge graphic technology to create a video in which an avatar performs one of their favorite poems and 10th graders explored the complex relationship between poetry, music, and performance in a live slam, presenting a spoken word poem.

Tenth graders will also read noteworthy poetry from WWI as they transition into an interdisciplinary historical fiction unit in which they write as characters from the WWI era. Students will work on these projects in both Writing 10 and World History II with the two pronged goal of: 1) historically considering in what ways WWI was different than any war humanity had ever experienced and in what ways it was the same; and 2) gaining an appreciation for the value of historical fiction in helping a reader understand a significant historical period.

**Who is John Deere?**  
John Deere is a brand of tractors and other farm equipment. It is one of the most well-known brands in the world. The company was founded in 1852 by John Deere, a blacksmith from Moline, Illinois. The company's first product was a cast-iron plow, which was a major improvement over the wooden plows of the time. Deere's plow was so successful that it led to the founding of the John Deere Tractor Company in 1887. Today, John Deere is a global leader in the production of agricultural machinery, including tractors, combines, and harvesters.

**Why settle with a Ford?**  
Ford Motor Company is a leading manufacturer of automobiles. The company was founded in 1903 by Henry Ford. Ford's Model T was the first mass-produced automobile, which revolutionized the industry. Ford's commitment to innovation and quality has made the company a household name. Today, Ford produces a wide range of vehicles, including cars, trucks, and SUVs.

**When you can get a GMC (Great Motor Car)**  
GMC is a brand of trucks and SUVs. The company was founded in 1912 by William C. Durant. GMC's trucks and SUVs are known for their durability and reliability. The company's Silverado and Sierra are among the most popular models. GMC's commitment to innovation and quality has made the company a leader in the industry.

**Valentine's Day Messacre!**  
**Seven Killed by Mobsters!**  
**In Chicago!**  
On February 14, 1929, two men dressed as policemen came into the back of a building that was owned by the notorious Morgan Gang, who controls many racketeering and alcohol schemes on the north side of Chicago. The men entered through the back of the building that was a stock house for alcohol. They then got all of the gangsters in there to line up against a wall. At that point, one gangster (Log) went and opened the front door to let in two more gangsters who were dressed in plain clothes. They both were carrying "Tommy's". The two plain-clothes gangsters gunned down all seven men. To finish the job, the two dressed up policemen/gangsters shot two shotgun shells into the pile of death. The gunmen escaped the scene. So far, Chicago P.D. has arrested no one for the murders.

**THE BEST IN RELIABILITY!**  
**Letters To The Editor**  
Got to Love Technology! Got to Hate Rebellious

**Entertainment Review**

**Amelia Earhart Soaring to New Heights:**  
July 17, 1928, a *Fokker F-7* piloted by three American ladies in Wales. The flight was the first time a woman had piloted a plane. Amelia Earhart was one of the first women to fly across the Atlantic Ocean by plane in the great distance. She had set out to fly across the Atlantic Ocean by plane in the great distance. She had set out to fly across the Atlantic Ocean by plane in the great distance. She had set out to fly across the Atlantic Ocean by plane in the great distance.

**Dear Editor:**  
I would like to talk about the technology that is springing up here and there. Some of this new technology includes the mobile phone, the internet, and the computer. These things are changing the way we live and work. They are making our lives easier and more convenient. They are also making our lives more interesting and fun. I think that this is a very good thing. I hope that we can continue to use this technology to make our lives even better.

**The Daily News**

**Crime & Punishment**  
Al Capone, one of Chicago's best mobsters, is wanted for the illegal possession and distribution of booze. He is an Italian American. He and his gang members are trying to keep the government from letting people have their rights to liquor. They are selling bootlegged bottles of liquor all around the place. I'm sure everyone agrees when we say that he is known as a good evil. Capone is a criminal who has made a fortune for himself in Chicago where most of his crime originates. Everyone should stay alert. He might not be the most dangerous to some, but to the law he is.

**Entertainment**  
Bessie Smith, one of today's best jazz singers, started her career in 1912. She was a leading artist in black shows on the Tin Pan circuit and at the 81 Theatre in Atlanta. Her first recording, "Down-Hearted Blues," put her at the top of the list of black artists as of right now. "Her voice" is amazing. I've never heard anything like it before. Her music and spirit has spoken to other people all around the US. Bessie Smith and Louis Armstrong have been making their debut together as duet singers with the accompaniment from Louis Smith. She is most definitely one of the most talented jazz singers around town!

# THE ROARING 20s AT C/A

The Roaring 20s served as the perfect opportunity for a cross-curricular activity for juniors in their writing, American Lit, and US/VA History. In writing, students researched and wrote about a famous figure from the popular culture of the era, including icons such as Charlie Chaplin, Langston Hughes, and Charles Lindbergh as well as lesser known but very important figures such as Bessie Smith, Jim Thorpe, and Gertrude Ederle. Meanwhile as they prepared to read *The Great Gatsby* in American Lit, they learned more about the era in US/VA History. Students traveled among classrooms to interview a traditionalist and a modernist about their opinions of the 1920s, to experience the decadence of 1920s party culture, and to preview the possible tragic consequences of that culture. Students used these experiences, their historical knowledge, and their research papers to design 1920s magazine spreads, including letters to the editor, entertainment reviews, crime reports, and advertisements to supplement their biographical lead articles. The end results were aesthetically pleasing, academically impressive, and provided solid background for in depth discussions of *The Great Gatsby*.

## Art & New Media College Portfolios

Whether students come to C/A because of our outstanding art and new media courses, or whether they find their passion once they are here is hard to say. But last year, two seniors matriculated to acclaimed art schools (Corcoran School of Art and Cleveland Institute of Art). In the past several years, acceptances have also included SCAD—Savannah College of Art and Design, Kendall School of Art and Design, and Columbus School of Art and Design, with eight students choosing to either attend an art school or major in art. Others have received or are pursuing degrees in new media.

Ksenya Litvak, art teacher and Alex Downs, new media teacher, help students develop their passion and talent in visual art and digital media throughout their life at C/A, and also help upperclassmen prepare admission portfolios to set them apart in these competitive fields.

Ms. Litvak offers a special advance program within her regular art class to 11th and 12th graders who are interested in continuing their study of art after high school. With a clear understanding of what colleges are looking for in a portfolio, Ms. Litvak helps students create 8–12 pieces of

art from observation (academic still life, landscapes, and other works) and another 8–12 pieces of creative composition, using different media and techniques. She will discuss and evaluate the pieces with the student, helping him or her select the best 16, and then help the student create a digital portfolio. This year, five juniors have made a portfolio and Ms. Litvak will continue to follow each one through the admission and acceptance process.

Similarly, Mr. Downs assists students with the production of traditional and electronic portfolios and reels, as well as with the design and development of their personal brands. Concept, craft, and clarity of communication are emphasized. Students gain a deeper understanding of their personal brand by defining its personality and voice; designing either a static and/or animated logo; selecting typefaces and type treatments; and creating a range of visual elements which support the brand across multiple mediums. Projects culminate with a rigorous design discussion and critique. Business design strategy is also presented in an effort to illustrate its importance and relationship to the creative process of extraordinary and meaningful design.



### CAREER DAY

A very successful Career Day was held on February 25, followed by a reception where students and staff continued conversations with our guest speakers. High school students participated in interactive presentations from counterterrorist specialist Tim Deere; Steven Dalton, a child labor law compliance officer with the Virginia Department of Labor; John Milewski, a broadcast journalist with “Dialogue”; and a number of C/A parents: filmmaker Lauren Cardillo; pediatric nurse practitioner Denise Noland; veterinarian and lawyer Jeannie Perron; Deana Herbert, president of Thomas & Herbert Consulting; healthcare lobbyist Susan Hildebrandt; and paleontologist Kay Behrensmeyer. Many thanks to all of our guest speakers and to the many parents, teachers, and students who made the event possible.



Upperclassmen who are interested in continuing their study of art after high school may work with Ms. Litvak in an advance program to prepare a portfolio for college admissions.



## BASKETBALL

### BOYS VARSITY

Despite the loss of six seniors and two other starters from 2009–10, the Boys Varsity team did well this year. They received a huge boost from the time, effort, and basketball knowledge offered by C/A alumni Terrell Bates who volunteered as an assistant coach. With ten out of the thirteen players on the team being freshmen or sophomores, these young student-athletes were encouraged by the wisdom Coach Bates brought to the bench. Together with Coaches Henneberg and Lewis, Bates led the team to a hard fought victory in their first playoff game against the Siena School. The team subsequently lost to Chelsea in the playoffs. Congratulations to **Maurice Meadows '12** who received an All Star Award.

*(Editor's Note: Coach Bates also joined the faculty's adult rec league basketball team, helping the older Cougars go undefeated so far this season. C/A is very grateful to the time and commitment Coach Bates has given to his alma mater.)*

### GIRLS BASKETBALL

Rattling off a number of consecutive wins, Coaches Conroy and Pollack led the team to a third place finish in the Independent Small Schools Athletic Conference. Despite beating Kingsbury Day School twice during regular season, the girls team lost to them in the playoffs. Congratulations to **Maria Bayzie '13** and **Marina Pharis '11** who were honored as League All Stars.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Congratulations to the Middle School Boys basketball teams for a great showing this season with wins against the New School and the British School. The team continued to build a strong foundation under new coaches Brown and Anderson.



## SPRING SPORTS

Spring season kicks off at the end of March. Depending on student interest, C/A looks to again have clubs for tennis and golf, and, for the first time, flag football. If the golf club gains enough support this spring, it could become an official league sport in the fall. Good luck Cougars in all of your spring sports.



## American Visionary Art Museum

Middle schoolers enjoyed art “from the soul” during their visit to the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore. The featured collection entitled “What Makes Us Smile,” challenged students to look at art from a different perspective. The exhibit is a “playful celebration of human joy” curated by Matt Groening (*The Simpsons*), Gary Panter (Pee Wee Herman), and the museum’s founder Rebecca Hoffberger. The museum housed the “Fart Cushion Couch,” an entire sofa made of self-inflating fart cushions. Needless to say, it was a hit with our students. Even the museum workers were laughing.

Students also made “Sock Monster Puppets” during a hands-on workshop using a dress sock, a variety of buttons, an extensive selection of fabric, and multiple random pieces of flair. Everyone loved it, and most students received their first sewing lesson.



## Science, Government, and Ice Skating

Sixth and seventh graders visited the “Written in Bone” exhibit at the Natural History Museum as a preview activity for their Life Science class. The students toured the interactive exhibit, witnessing models of skeletons from the original Jamestown Colony, and learned fascinating stories related to the various archeological expeditions around the globe.

Meanwhile, eighth graders toured the Capitol of the United States. They watched a video introducing the Congress and what it’s purpose is, took a tour of the Crypt, looked at the statues in the old House chamber, and toured the rotunda and Exhibition Hall at the visitor center.

After their respective tours, everyone met for lunch in the Sculpture Garden and spent the afternoon ice skating on the National Mall.

## Middle School SGA Event: Zoo Lights

Just before the winter break, the Middle School student government rallied students and teachers to attend the National Zoo’s “Zoo Lights” exhibit. Participants toured the open reptile and monkey exhibits and drank plenty of hot chocolate as they sang holiday tunes and walked the decorated zoo.

## Sherwood Library

At the end of the second quarter, 9th and 10th graders spent the day at the Sherwood Library to become familiar with the resources available both at the physical library and through the Fairfax County Public Library’s online databases. Students participated in a scavenger hunt to locate some of the library’s key offerings, listened to a presentation by one of the local librarians, and then conducted research for individual essay projects. Tenth graders, who were working on literary critiques of Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, gathered books, articles, and other resources that helped better understand the context of the 1950s and 1960s, with particular regard to major themes that are explored in the book, such as racism, segregation, Black Nationalism, and the American Dream. Ninth graders, who were working on their “History of…” essays, gathered resources to help them write about a particular invention, event, or idea that they believed to be particularly important throughout human history. Researching lessons learned at the Library were reinforced with in-class lessons about resource gathering, proper citation, and writing effectively with sources. In addition to the specific skills and knowledge gained at the Library, some students used their brand new library cards to check out books for pleasure.

## 2ND QUARTER HONOR ROLL

**Merit Honor Roll**

Samuel Curtis '12, Tunc Edmonds '14, James Gregory '17, Hilary Kraus '15, Samuel Laane '11, Juliet Landeck '15, Rachel Skopp-Cardillo '16

**Regular Honor Roll**

Jakob Coray '16, Harry Coward '16, Ethan Ebbe '13, Jennifer George '12, Samuel Gotter '16, Alexander Halstead '11, Jason Hammerman '16, Laura Hanson '14, Lawrence Hayes '11, Catherine Higgins '17, John Hopkinson '12, Nathan Hornberger '15, Elliot Katz '12, Joseph Keller '13, Lee Keller '16, Sarah Keyser '15, Jared Kleiman '15, Susannah Laane '17, Ryan Lucas '15, Alexander Marnell '14, Cole Miller '15, Catherine Nelson '16, Meghan O'Donnell '16, Jana O'Neill '13, Conor Powell '13, Lwazi Rennert '16, Alison Rowan '15, Camron Saffarina '14, Gabrielle Stevenson '17, Elizabeth Wallace '13, Michael Williams '13, Christopher Wong '16, Jordan Wright '15, Julia Zeigler '12

## ADMISSION NEWS

## Admission Activity Continues at Record Level

Admissions activity—inquiries, interviews, tours, and applications—has been heavy throughout the months following winter break and exceeds last year's activity. The amount of interest in the program is in part due to the wonderful recommendations of our current students and parents. Please continue to refer friends and family to Commonwealth Academy! For the first time this year, High School Director David Roth led a special information session for 7th and 8th grade parents, explaining the high school program at our school. We received a lot of positive feedback about the presentation and thank David Roth, Cathy Feehan, Mari Foret, and Matt Johns for their help in developing it.

participate  
support community  
CARE

Please join us at the 11th Annual CARE Awards on March 31 at the Hilton Alexandria Old Town. You may purchase tickets at the front desk or call to arrange over the phone. Contact Kathleen O'Connor at 703.548.6912. Proceeds from the event will directly support C/A's program.



COMMONWEALTH  
ACADEMY

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CommonwealthAcademy.org

2010-11



Speaker Series

COMMONWEALTH  
ACADEMY

The 2010–11 Speaker Series has been a tremendous success. The final two workshops in the series are sponsored by Landmark College:

**Managing Social and Academic Transitions for the LD Older Teen**

*Linda Hecker, Lead Education*

*Specialist, Landmark College*

Thursday, March 31, 7:30–9:00  
p.m.

**Academic Assistive Technology for the LD Student—Overview and Demonstrations**

*Linda Hecker, Lead Education*

*Specialist, Landmark College*

Friday, April 1, 9:00 a.m.–2:00  
p.m.

## 2010–2011 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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