



# COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY NEWS

DECEMBER 2010  
2010-2011, VOLUME I

## C/A Welcomes Eight Lower Schoolers

Commonwealth Academy first opened its doors with a handful of high school students in the fall of 1997. By 1999, it grew to approximately 25 students with both middle and high school classes. Fast-forward 11 years and C/A now houses a lower, middle, and high school and is home to 115 students. **Maria Brinza** and **Jane Furey** comprise the Lower School faculty for eight students in Grades 3-5. Together with Head of School Dr. Johnson, they developed the rich curriculum that has proven both exciting and inspiring for our youngest learners. As children learn new skills and strategies in their core academics, art, motor, and computers, their teachers introduce creative ways to tie-in relevant themes to help connect learning across subjects and to daily life. For example, Halloween provided ample opportunity for academic exploration and fun. Students concluded the first quarter by generating Halloween writing through paragraphs, poems, and sentences that incorporated detail and sensory words. In math, students constructed cubes out of four parallelograms using right angles and perpendicular line segments... and designed the faces of the cube with geometric Halloween shapes. And in science, students enjoyed a unit of Halloween Chemistry in which they reviewed the atomic structure, learned about matter, acids and bases, mixtures, compounds, and chemical reactions... and then conducted five experiments centered around Halloween themes such as Frankenstein's Hand, Milk Stones, Rubber Bones, and Kitchen Chemistry, making Halloween Treats.

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Halloween themes provide exciting learning opportunities as lower schoolers explore chemistry with Frankenstein's Hand and apply their understanding of angles and line segments to construct wood-framed cubes. Painted and lit, the cubes later provided dramatic decorations for C/A's Halloween celebrations.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO...

Spanish teacher **Mary Chamberlain** and husband Alex Collery on the birth of their son, Ethan James Collery, on August 2.

Dean of Students **Chris Hathaway** and wife Erin who were married on September 25.

High School Director **David Roth** and wife Alison on the birth of their son, Kevin Michael Roth, on October 25.



Head of School Dr. Susan Johnson (front row, far right) with other attendees at the Distinguished Educational Leadership Awards Seminar.

## Dr. Johnson Attends Distinguished Educational Leadership Awards Seminar

As a recipient of the *Washington Post* Distinguished Educational Leadership Award in 2010, Head of School **Dr. Susan Johnson** was invited to join fellow “principals of excellence” in Florida for a two-day seminar hosted by the Washington Post and designed specifically for the awardees. The keynote address, “Reframing the Path to School Leadership” was delivered by Lee Bolman, author, scholar, consultant, and Marion Bloch Missouri Chair in Leadership, University of Missouri-Kansas City. Seminar topics focused on media and education including “Understanding the Media and Role of the Press,” “Broadcast Media Coverage,” “Crisis Communications Response,” and “Using Facebook and Twitter to Benefit the Classroom.”

When asked about the award, Dr. Johnson commented that it “... truly was an award. You felt like you were being recognized for your work. The week-end seminar was an extension of the awards ceremony and a unique experience with training I couldn’t have gotten anywhere else.” As the only educator from a private school selected to receive this award in 2010, Dr. Johnson also noted that she enjoyed the group cohesion and the time with a group of “very special, professional, dedicated educators discussing educational issues.”



NEW C/A FACULTY AND STAFF: Back row, l-r: Case Anderson, Melissa Pollack, Evan Fistere, Adam Lewis. Front row, l-r: Jane Hanson, Jeff Brown, Jane Furey, Maria Brinza. Not pictured: Gena Fitzgerald.

## NEW FACES

C/A is happy to introduce nine new members of its faculty and administrative team:

### **Case Anderson**

*High School English, SAT/Writing*

B.A. English, Sewanee: The University of the South

### **Maria Brinza**

*Lower School Mathematics, Science, Visual Thinking*

B.A. Psychology, Brown University; M.S.W. Child Social Work, Catholic University; Pursuing M.A. Special Education, University of Virginia

### **Jeff Brown**

*Physical Education*

B.A. Sports Management/Communications, University of California, Santa Barbara

### **Evan Fistere**

*Department Chair, Mathematics; High School Mathematics*

B.S. Mathematics, University of Maryland; B.A. Philosophy, University of Maryland; M.Ed., University of Maryland

### **Gena Fitzgerald**

*Director of Development*

B.A. Communications, American University

### **Jane Furey**

*Lower School English, Writing, Social Studies*

B.A. Elementary Education, Curry College; M.Ed., George Washington University

### **Jane Hanson**

*Middle School Writing*

B.S. German & Linguistics, Georgetown University; M.A. Human Resource Development, Marymount University; Certified Academic Language Therapist

### **Adam Lewis**

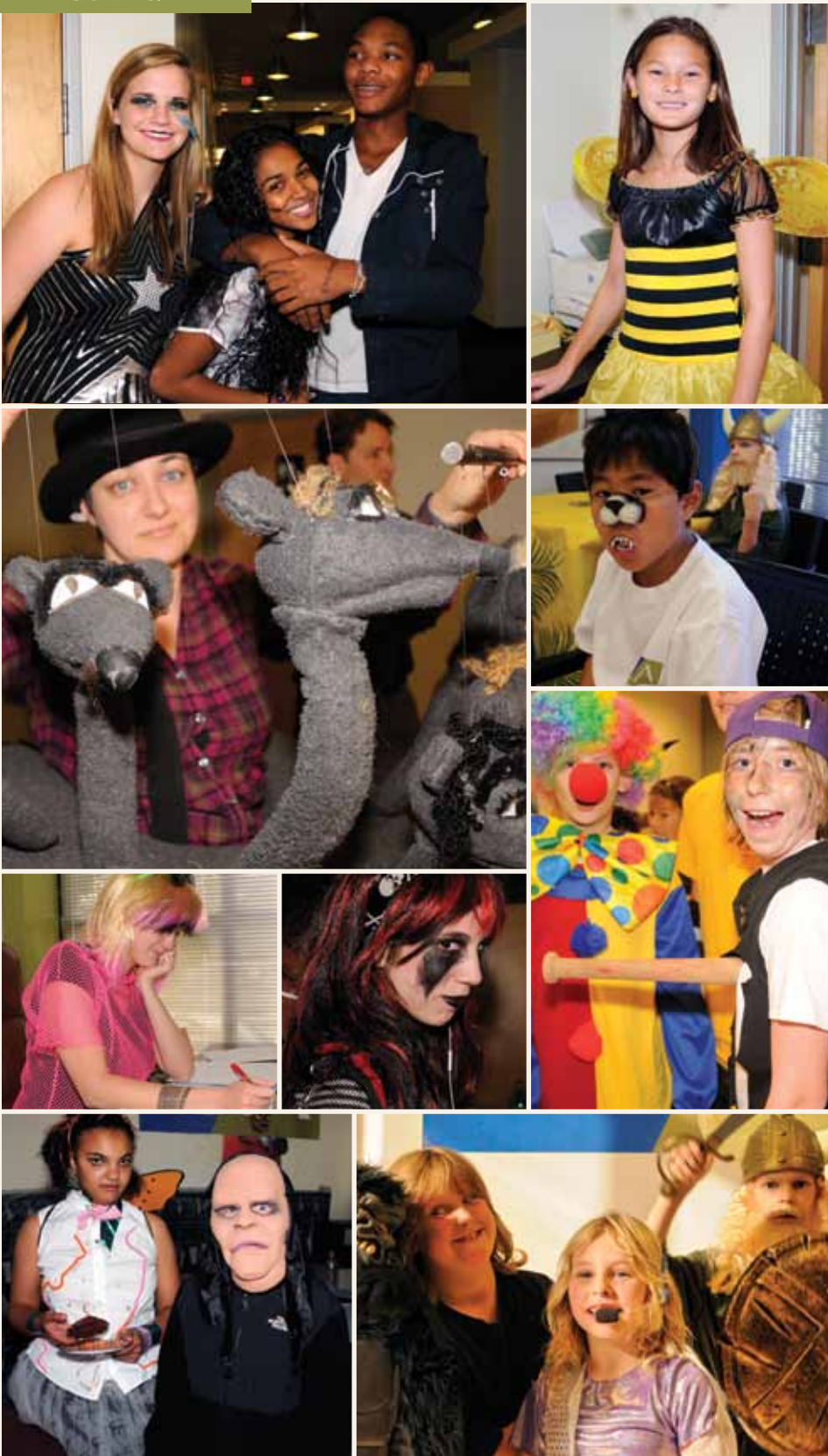
*High School Writing*

B.A. Political Science & Religion, Haverford College

### **Melissa Pollack**

*Middle School Science*

B.S. Environmental Science, Colorado College; M.A. Teaching, Colorado College



## HALLOWEEN 2010

Students and faculty got into the Halloween spirit, with fantastic costumes, food, contests, prizes and yes, learning. The middle school ended the day with the annual Ghost Walk, an hour lamp-lit guided tour of Old Town Alexandria. It was an evening of yore and gore as guides told a variety of haunting stories about Old Town landmarks and residents while students and faculty wound their way through the city.

## SGA ELECTIONS

Congratulations to the new SGA officers and representatives. Since their election, they have been busy with SGA events, including Halloween festivities, and sponsorships.



**Middle School SGA:** Back row, l-r: Jordan Wright, Collin Lyle, Lwazi Rennert, Cole Miller. Front row l-r: Gabrielle Stevenson, Juliet Landeck, Sam Greulich.

### MIDDLE SCHOOL

Collin Lyle '15, *President*

Lwazi Rennert '14, *Vice President*

Juliet Landeck '15, *Secretary*

Cole Miller '15, *Treasurer*

#### Representatives:

Jordan Wright '15 (*8th Grade*)

Harry Coward '16 (*7th Grade*)

Gabby Stevenson '17 (*6th Grade*)



**High School SGA President Lawrence Hayes and Vice President Sam Laane**

### HIGH SCHOOL

Lawrence Hayes '11, *President*

Sam Laane '11, *Vice President*

Connor Marley '13, *Secretary*

Taylor Lavelle '13, *Treasurer*

Michael Williams '13, *Communications & Technology Officer*

#### Representatives:

Trey Sutherland '13 (*10th Grade*)

Maurice Meadows '12 (*11th Grade*)

Caitin Moore '11 (*12th Grade*)

## Outdoor Adventures Usher in the New School Year

After a great first day of classes, adjusting to new routines and procedures, and meeting new friends, the entire school participated in an action-packed, two-day adventure.

Lower school students spent one day at Calleva, working with their classmates for the first time in team-building activities. Day two began with a scavenger hunt around C/A to help acquaint the children with the “geography” of their new surroundings and culminated with a pool party at the YMCA.

Middle school students embarked on a whitewater raft trip with wilderness activities led by the wonderful staff at Calleva, and guided by helping hands of the middle school faculty. Most of the activities, including a variety of high and low rope challenges, centered around team-building concepts as students worked together to complete a specific goal.

Ninth and tenth graders camped out at Calleva’s Adventure Island where they kayaked across the Potomac, rode the rapids, struck camp, and participated in outdoor exercises designed to build self-confidence and promote teamwork. They also enjoyed typical camp-out fun: swimming, playing Capture the Flag, singing songs, telling ghost stories and eating S’mores. Juniors and seniors enjoyed a similar overnight trip at Camp Horizons, welcoming new friends, and reflecting on previous years of high school.



## Pumpkin Picking and Farm Adventures

The Lower School program includes monthly field trips that bring to life classroom learning and put skills to work. In October students enjoyed a packed day of outdoor fun and learning at Cox Farms in Centerville, Virginia. They had lots to remember and talk and write about when they returned...

- Using map skills to navigate through a scary corn maze
- Milking cows
- Feeding goats (and learning they will jump up on you to get your food!)
- Flying down gigantic slides
- Identifying lots of book and movie characters on a hay ride
- Using listening and observing skills to stay together all day
- Mining for coins (and finding some!)
- Completing an obstacle course, and
- Picking their very own pumpkins

## Scavenger Hunt at the Zoo

Picture-perfect weather greeted students and teachers when the Middle School visited the National Zoo in October. A scavenger hunt exercised their knowledge about species classifications and characteristics learned in science class and guided the way to explore the entire zoo. Students identified real life situations in which classifying species is beneficial and important to the scientific community. And they learned new terminology as they looked for physical definitions through the actual zoo animals. Students and teachers alike had a truly wonderful time; favorite exhibits included the panda, reptile, big cats, and Amazonian exhibits.

## Arcimboldo Exhibit

Middle schoolers visited the National Gallery of Art where they saw an exhibit displaying the work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, a 16th century painter who used plants, animals, and objects to form human portraits. The field trip was part of a cross-curricular activity. Using the detailed notes they took about their favorite painting, they wrote a paragraph describing “how Arcimboldo would paint me” and then constructed portraits with acrylic and colored pencils.



MEMBERS OF C/A'S FIRST CROSS COUNTRY TEAM: (l-r) Will Heppner '12, Colin Zack '17, Camron Saffarinia '14, and Katie Wood '13

## CROSS-COUNTRY

C/A's inaugural cross-country team made an impressive showing at the Rock Creek Park Cross-Country Meet in October. After weeks of hard work during Clubs and outside of school, the four-member team ran the long track, which was three miles in total. Our runners finished with strong times; Will Heppner finished first overall. Proud of the team, Coach Henneberg said, "Each runner worked hard during practice and it showed out there on the course." Players, fans, and coaches are excited to see how next year's team builds off the strong foundation established this year.



## SOCCER

While this year's soccer season was cut short by the weather, the games against Kingsbury, The Capitol City Charter School, and The New School were filled with amazing plays and impressive teamwork and unity. Coaches Brown, Pollack and Roth were very proud of the team's dedication and heart saying, "We played with determination, passion, and respect for the game which is a great testament to the character of our players and the quality of people they are. As coaches, we could not have asked for more from our players because they gave us everything they had."

*Defensively the Cougars were led by:*

Maria Bayzie '13  
Chris Donilon '14  
Mitchell Hazard '13  
Alex Kurmoyarov '12 (goalie)  
Sam Laane '11 (co-captain)  
Jeremy Miller '14  
Kyle Pizzini '13

*The midfielders were led by:*

James Cooper '12 (co-captain)  
Ned Goodnow '15  
Ryan Lucas '15  
Conor Powell '13  
Alison Rowan '15  
Danny Wang '13

*The forwards leading the charge were:*

Harry Coward '16  
Lwazi Rennert '16.

The work ethic and effort with which this team played will definitely lead to future success for the Cougars next year.

## BASKETBALL

Basketball action is back! The season was kicked off with both the girls and high school boys teams playing the Lab School on December 1. The first middle school boys game is on December 8. Check under "activities" on Edline for up-to-date schedules for all basketball teams and come out to a game to cheer on the Cougars!



Four educational workshops and presentations for education professionals and parents were hosted at C/A in October and November, including CHADD's seven-part Parent-to-Parent training. In December, we turn our attention to middle and high school students and their teachers, hosting The Great American Energy Debate Leadership Training Workshop. The series then continues in February with the following presentations. Please visit [www.CommonwealthAcademy.org/speakers](http://www.CommonwealthAcademy.org/speakers) for details and registration information.

#### Medication Options for Children with AD/HD

*Bruce Pfeiffer, MD, Developmental Pediatrician*  
Tuesday, Feb. 8, 7:30–9:00 p.m.

#### Motivation and Resiliency for Children of All Ages

*Lance D. Clawson, MD, FAACAP, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist*  
Wednesday, Feb. 16, 8:30–9:30 a.m.

#### Tools for Managing Adult AD/HD: 10 Strategies for Simple Living

*Abigail Levrini, PhD, Psych Ed Coaches, PLLC*  
Wednesday, March 16, 7:30–9:00 p.m.

#### 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, 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

## Commonwealth Academy Parents Association (CAPA) Welcomes New Officers

Welcome and many thanks to 2010-11 CAPA President **Lauren Szymanoski** (Peter '14) and her fellow officers for the enormous contribution they have already made to our community this year. Ms. Szymanoski is a lifelong educator who brings tremendous professionalism to her new role as CAPA President: she taught middle and high school for ten years and designed and managed educational programs for Smithsonian Institution for over 20 years. She also spent eight years serving on a national board for a nonprofit organization focused on supporting and educating parents and their adopted children.

**Ms. Szymanoski reports that there has been tremendous turnout at CAPA meetings and encourages all C/A parents to attend. She has two key goals for CAPA:**

- 1) To build strong connections for parents within the C/A community by increasing educational, informational, and parent-to-parent opportunities.
- 2) To grow parent support and involvement at Commonwealth in all of its activities and initiatives, at all levels, and with all other constituents—students, teachers, and administrators.

To help reach these goals, CAPA has:

- Introduced a full year of monthly CAPA meetings, posted on CAPA website.
- Included an opportunity to learn more about the inner workings and goals of the school at every CAPA meeting by inviting administrators to discuss their specific areas including community service, admissions, development, marketing.
- Created grade level parent liaisons to serve as a communication bridge to parents of students in each grade and in the new Lower School.
- Provided more information than ever before in the CAPA Connection about supplemental parent educational opportunities in the DC metropolitan area.
- Brought more value from C/A's membership in the Parents Council of Washington to current C/A parents through active participation and information exchange on topics of significant importance.

The team of committed parents helping Ms. Szymanoski lead CAPA includes:

**Allison Gurnitz, Terri O'Connor, Co- Vice Presidents**

**Kathy Lavelle, Secretary**

**Cathy Greulich, Treasurer**

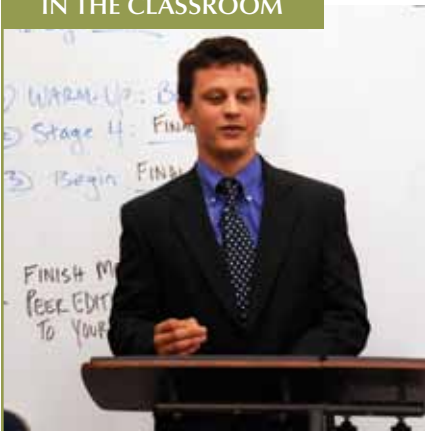
**Alethea Haas, Karen Keller, Hospitality Committee Co-Chairs**

**Vicki Coward, School Support Committee Chair**

**Allison Gurnitz, School Activities Committee Chair**

**LaVonne Shingler, Fundraising Task Force Chair**

For more information about CAPA, please contact any of these officers or committee chairs, or attend a monthly meeting.



## Pertinent Teen Topic Sparks Interest in Debate

Writing 10 students recently debated the legality of free online file sharing—specifically, in music piracy. Dressed to impress, students participated in a lively debate about a topic that impacts their generation more than any other before. In doing so, they gained firsthand debate etiquette experience with respectful but rigorous academic dialogue.

Working in teams, students developed persuasive oral arguments modeled after the structure of a five-paragraph essay. They gathered information to support their side of the argument, as well as their opponent's side. While preparing their statements they also learned about and utilized key principles for crafting a persuasive argument in speech and writing. The unit helped students understand the importance of developing and listening to compelling arguments that are based on solid evidence and expressed with clear and convincing rhetoric.

## Immigrant Interviews: Walking in their Shoes

In the sixth and seventh grade world geography and cultures class, students took on the roles of United States immigrants. Role-playing helped them identify and empathize with the push and pull factors of immigration, which they explained to their peers in video interviews. In making the videos, each student also had the opportunity to serve as a news anchor and interview another “immigrant.”



**THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD:** Melissa Pollack's middle school science class learns about the scientific method by testing the aerodynamics of various paper airplane designs.

## 1ST QUARTER HONOR ROLL

### High Honor Roll

Samuel Laane '11

### Merit Honor Roll

Jakob Coray '16, Harry Coward '16, Samuel Curtis '12, Jennifer George '12, James Gregory '17, Jason Hammerman '16, Hilary Kraus '15, Cole Miller '15, Catherine Nelson '16, Christopher Neureiter '17, Conor Powell '13, Rachel Skopp-Cardillo '16

### Regular Honor Roll

Ethan Abbe '13, Edward Goodnow '15, Samuel Gotter '16, Samuel Greulich '15, Ashley Haas '13, Alexander Halstead '11, Lawrence Hayes '11, Will Heppner '12, Catherine Higgins '17, John Hopkinson '12, Nathan Hornberger '15, Joseph Keller '13, Lee Keller '16, Sarah Keyser '15, Jared Kleiman '15, Susannah Laane '17, Juliet Landeck '15, Taylor Lavelle '13, Ryan Lucas '15, Maurice Meadows '12, Kathryn O'Connor '12, Lwazi Rennert '16, Alison Rowan '15, Kyle Schwartz '16, Gabrielle Stevenson '17, Roby Calvin Thompson '14, Elizabeth Wallace '13, Michael Williams '13, Christopher Wong '16, Patricia Wood '13, Jordan Wright '15, Colin Zack '17, Julia Zeigler '12

## Annual Fund Kick-off

*Co-Chairs:*

**Ed & Karen Keller** (Joey '13, Lee '16)  
**Karen & John Foley** (Chris '10)

The 2010-11 Annual Fund was launched in November, with letters and brochures mailed to current parents, alumni parents, faculty and staff, alumni, and friends of Commonwealth. Each of these constituencies plays an important role in the success of the Annual Fund, which in turn is a vital part of C/A's annual budget, supporting the day-to-day operations of the school not covered by tuition income. Gifts to the Annual Fund are a tax-deductible way to make a difference in our school. We give because we are motivated by our personal experiences and values—and because we want to make a difference in our community.

We know there are over 100 good reasons right here at 1321 Leslie Avenue to give to the C/A Annual fund—for the first time in the school's history, 115 students are enrolled. This year also marks two other major milestones. Including the 2011 commencement, 103 students will have graduated from C/A since 1997. And we opened this school year with a new Lower School for 3rd–5th grades.

The annual fund brochure addresses the most common questions about an annual fund: *If I pay tuition, why should I contribute? What's the “right” amount to contribute? When will I see where my donation goes?*

To contribute to the annual fund, just use the envelope provided in the mailing, or send your check to Commonwealth Academy to the attention of **Gena Fitzgerald**, Director of Development. If you'd like more information about the Annual Fund, or would like to talk about other ways to support Commonwealth Academy, please contact Ms. Fitzgerald at [Gena\\_Fitzgerald@commonwealthacademy.org](mailto:Gena_Fitzgerald@commonwealthacademy.org) or 703.548.6912, ext. 242.



## SIGHT NIGHT

C/A students trick-or-treated for a special treat this Halloween season, collecting eyewear for those in need as part of the Silent Night campaign, a national program sponsored by One Sight and the Lions Club International. Students collected glasses that will be cleaned and recycled for use by One Sight Global Clinics where they are hand-delivered to those in need.



## THANKSGIVING BASKETS

In the photo above, lower schoolers are busy sorting hundreds of canned and boxed goods donated to make Thanksgiving baskets for those in need. Nine middle and high school students, along with C/A parents Kathy Lavelle and Cathy Greulich, delivered over 419 pounds of food and \$350 in gift cards to Food for Others as part of the schoolwide community service project.

# FANNIE MAE WALK: Raising Awareness to Help the Homeless

Fannie Mae's Help the Homeless Walk has become an annual tradition at C/A. This year, all students participated in the walk on October 15, raising \$2,085. Just as important, students helped raise awareness in the Del Ray community about the homeless. Donning Help the Homeless t-shirts and carrying signs, students took five different routes around the area to ensure that as many streets as possible were covered. The money raised will benefit Food for Others, a food pantry that supports families in the Northern Virginia and strives to help reduce homelessness.



## New Highs in Enrollment

Admissions for the 2010-11 school year reflected unprecedented interest in Commonwealth Academy, reflective of the growing recognition of the success of our program in the community and among educational professionals. Highlights include:

- Began the school year with the highest opening enrollment (over 115 total students; 46 new students)
- Re-enrolled the highest percentage of students in five years, with 80% retention
- Opened the Lower School inaugural classes with eight students and two teachers, both of whom are certified to work with children with learning differences.
- Increased enrollment of students from Alexandria and Northern VA
- Car pool options continue to grow with students commuting from as far as Germantown, Ashburn, and Clifton.

## You've Got to See Our School!

As parents look for schools, they often start by asking friends or looking for information on the internet. But the best way to get to know a school—and C/A is no exception—is to take a personal tour or attend an Open House.

At C/A, we structure the admission process to help establish some clear expectations about how C/A's program can support a specific child's academic achievement...so that a parent can truly visualize their child at our school. The typical C/A student is intellectually capable of grade level content or above, but may wrestle with organizational skills or have difficulty producing large volumes of written material. He or she is ultimately capable of going onto college, given the right combination of strategies, accommodations, and system-wide structures. We assess each potential student's strengths and weaknesses to determine how closely the strategies, structures, and educational approaches provided at C/A match the needs of the student.

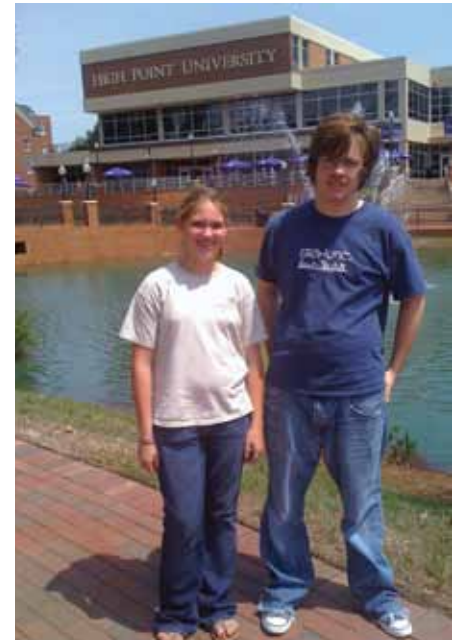
Whether the process begins with a phone call or email inquiry, parents start the conversation with Director of Admission **Josh Gwilliam** who outlines our program in detail. Touring the school with Mr. Gwilliam, parents get a clear picture about how our mission is realized. Because Mr. Gwilliam has been at C/A for seven years, teaches middle school students, and has a wonderful rapport with students and parents alike, he is the perfect guide to help families explore our school. Head of School **Dr. Susan Johnson**, who has spent over three decades working with students with learning differences, personally reviews each student's profile and is available to meet with parents or consultants to discuss how C/A can specifically facilitate academic growth.

Mr. Gwilliam reports that the 2010-11 admission season is already off to a strong start with personal visits from prospective families and educational professionals, and we hope to have a very busy Open House on January 30. Help us spread the word. Ask parents to come experience firsthand the energy of our program by attending the Open House or scheduling a personal tour.

Please ask friends and colleagues to join us at our next  
**Open House on  
Sunday, January 30 from 1-4 pm.  
Or, call for a personal tour at  
703.548.6912.**



ALUMNI NEWS



Thomas Nelson '10 arrives at High Point University in August, pictured here with his sister Katya '16.

### 2010-2011 BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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