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Homestead Collaborative College High School challenges students to explore

STORY AND PHOTOS BY FRED STABBERT III

Walking around the Homestead Collaborative College High School campus in downtown Hurleyville is an exciting experience. Few students can be caught behind their desks as the school is abuzz with experiments, hands-on activities and planning for upcoming events. “The Homestead School integrates a lot of different things [into its curriculum],” Andrew Faust, a Regenerative Planetary Studies teacher, said. “It places value in learning practical skills as well as the business world.” One such project which



Addie, Adrien and Juniper harvest mushrooms in the Fruiting Room.



At left, Art Teacher Lizza Wright oversees a table construction from an old wire spool.

Above, Students carry a wood post on campus in preparation for building the outdoor classroom.



the sun, the outdoor, open air classroom needed to be constructed with a southern exposure,” he explained. To do this, students spent time in the courtyard with a compass to perform a solar analysis to determine where due south was and to see just how much sun was available each day in the area where they wanted to build the structure.

Once they had the location determined, the students dug holes where the support posts would be placed. “We just got our lumber delivered yesterday from a local mill owned by Brian Fraser,” Andrew said. “We decided to use hemlock because it has better rot resistance than pine.” The students in that class also learned teamwork as they had to carry the pile of lumber from the parking lot to the courtyard where

exemplifies this practical approach to skill building is the new outdoor classroom/kitchen which is being constructed by the students in his class. The first step was, of course, to design the project. Students drafted their layout plans on 24-inch by 36-inch pieces of paper, refining each drawing as the class progressed. An important part of the design was the sun, Andrew said. “Students learned that to get the best available light from

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School Scene

‘A look inside The Homestead School’

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Homestead's first graduating class talks about their experience

This year will mark the first time that The Homestead School | Collaborative College High School graduates a senior class.

In tribute to the 12 hard-working students, we have asked them to reflect on their time at Homestead and how it has changed their life.



Ayana Banks: My time at CCHS was a journey of self-discovery and personal growth. Over the last 3 years, Homestead allowed me to explore my passion for acting and my love for the theater arts, allowing me to flourish in ways I never imagined. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities I received and deeply honored to have worked with and learned from such amazing professors.



Alex Goldberg: Being at CCHS has changed my life for the better, introducing me to people I can rely on and teaching me valuable lessons. Their hard work with providing a welcoming space helped me get out of my shell, discover passions, and make memories I'll never forget.



them at The George Washington University in DC!

Alex Lopez: Hi, my name is Alex Lopez. I'm 18 years old and proud to have been a student here since 9th grade. As I graduate, I plan to begin working with my dad's construction company while continuing to learn more about mechanics as a hobby. My time at this school has helped shape who I am today, and I'm grateful for the experiences, challenges, and friendships that came with it.



Alyssa Williams: This school has given me an opportunity that I could only dream of. Starting a cooking club and making a cookbook for it, were things that never crossed my mind happening at any school. I can never ask for better friends, because they are already perfect.



Paul Kura: As my academic year comes to an end, I reflect on how these last few years have shaped me. I have explored countless opportunities that this school has offered me and I was taught many skills that will help me in the future. When I first came to this school, I was unsure if it was a good fit for me but in my time here I have evolved and grown, making myself proud of who I have become. CCHS challenged me in many ways, bringing forth many new interests, such as my interest in technology, electronics, and mathematics.



Tina Rodriguez: My last 3 years at CCHS have turned into my most formative years as an adolescent. I have been able to explore my different academic interests and I am excited to continue to explore



Natalie Westergreen: My time at the Homestead school has truly shaped me into the person I am today, both academically and socially. I have discovered unlikely passions, made lifelong friendships, learned to always challenge myself, and created unforgettable memories during my 10 years at the Homestead. I am immensely grateful for each and every opportunity that the Homestead has given me and am excited to take these memories with me as I continue my education at Bates College!



Kabir Jabrane: After living abroad for three years filled with

nonstop movement, coming to CCHS in 11th was a huge shift. It took me time to slow down and find my place but this school and its people gave me the support I needed to grow in ways I never expected. I'm not only leaving with memories, but new found growth, gratitude and some wisdom sprinkled onto me by the wonderful CCHS staff.



Jason Gebhardt: As the end of my time at CCHS draws near, I am apt to look back at the journey that brought me here. Graduating this year, not only as a high-schooler, but as a college student, majoring in mathematics from SUNY, is something that brings me much pride. The years I have spent here I will not soon forget, as I go through the motions of life. I will look back in remembrance of my time here, and I will look back with joy on my time playing soccer.



Colin Kinney: CCHS has given me amazing friends, memories, and stories I will take with me for the rest of my life. My teachers have provided me with an education for which I feel immense gratitude. Graduating with my high school diploma and associate's degree from SUNY Sullivan will be a moment of great fulfillment and satisfaction. I will forever remember my time here with sincere appreciation.



Sindhu Villareal: Being a part of the first graduating class of CCHS has been a unique experience. My

time here has been marked by a lot of laughter, exploration, and some truly amazing classes. Seeing my hard work pay off has been so gratifying, and I'll always cherish the memories I made here.



Byron Pratt: "CCHS has given me an incredible opportunity to slingshot my career into the right direction. By enrolling me in SUNY Sullivan, I was able to learn the college experience in high school and was able to get a great education out of CCHS. My favorite class was the computer programming class that taught me 5 programming languages."

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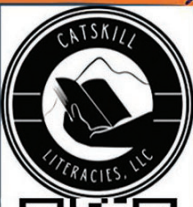
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the building will be constructed.

Another class was busy building outdoor tables and chairs for the project. "We are repurposing this spool for a table," Art teacher Lizzie Wright said. "We used a more earth-friendly concrete called hypertufa to build the table and now we are constructing the chairs."

Tom Desiderio, who teaches Science, had his team of students in a climate-controlled room, checking on how their culinary mushrooms were growing.

"We are growing food as part of school microeconomy and we have to provide 10 pounds of mushrooms each week to fill the shares for families and teachers." Tom explained that students learn science deeply through this applied approach to learning. From the climate controlled room, fungus are taken to the fruiting room inside the outdoor hothouse where the mushrooms really take off. After about four



Jack Comstock helps a student with her grant proposal.

weeks, students can begin cutting mushrooms from the cluster – or troop – and putting them in bags. Adrien, a 7th-grade student, said the class has about 12 new mushroom troops ready to harvest each week.

A big history

This year will also mark the first time in 46 years that Homestead School will have a graduating

12th-grade class. The Montessori, permaculture school was founded by Marsha and Peter Comstock in 1978 on an 85-acre homestead of the Mackenzie family in Glen Spey. Recently, the Comstock's son, Jack and his wife Nisha, have taken over the operation of the school and expanded it to 12 grades with students ages 3 to 18. "This school is building on a great legacy," Andrew said. "It's so powerful and so needed."



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Students collaborate to document their science project at Homestead School, Hurleyville campus.



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SANITATION



'Every day is an adventure'

BY FRED STABBERT III

Whether it's taking a trip to the moon, learning how to grow vegetables, or understanding the ecosystem of a pond, elementary students at Homestead School always have a full day of education in front of them.

"We offer student driven, hands-on learning," Nisha Gupta, who along with her husband Jack Comstock, run the school.



Students start their day enjoying the fresh air and exercising.

The school's tropical greenhouse dome features fish of all colors.

"We support and encourage our students to take the time to learn deeply, to internalize what they are studying as they develop their world view," Gupta said.

Whether it's taking a net to the pond to study insects, frogs, or pollywogs, or jumping aboard a "rocketship" to take a trip to the moon, students are always being challenged to learn about new things.

"Experiential learning, research, and experiments are a regular part of learning here," Gupta said. "Recently our early childhood students went to the 'moon.'"

By hopping aboard their home-made rocketship – which looked just like Homestead School's Founder, Pete Comstock's, pickup truck – the students took a ride around campus, finally 'landing' on the moon and exploring its features and [pretending there was] anti-gravity," Cera Alber, Manager of Development, Grant, and

Family Engagement, said.

This experiment was especially meaningful as the United States was trying to return two astronauts who had their trip to the International Space Station turn into a nine-month stay when it was only supposed to last a week.

"We celebrated when the astronauts returned home," Alber said.

"We love to see our students grow by allowing them to take risks," Gupta said. "We encourage them to try and do things they are challenged by."

"It brings out the best in them and we tell them, 'It is our mistakes that we learn the most from, the lessons that we really remember, so we don't have to be afraid to try something new,'" she said.

An example of required risk taking was the recent STEM Fair that Upper Elementary Class presented to students and families.

Students learned about the scientific method, chose a question



Students use plants in their Fiber Arts Program to fashion woven baskets. Below, a pineapple grows at Homestead.



they wished to answer, designed an experiment, performed it, and shared their results with the community. Projects included discriminating between AI vs real photography, understanding forces such as gravity, drag and the impact of surface on movement, creating bath bombs, finding what determines the color of a flame, determining best water filtration methods, finding the best sports drink based on sugar and electrolyte value, finding simple sources of energy, and more.

"By developing safe relationships and a shared set of expectations between educators and students, we are able to take our students to the next level," Gupta said. "And we are always trying to de-

velop better ways to help students learn."

The Homestead School has an outdoor education program in which students plant spinach, tomatoes, radishes and many varieties of flowers, from marigolds to broom corn to sunflowers.

"The flowers were used in their Fiber Arts Program to dye cloth, and job's tears were features in the students' woven baskets. create fiber arts," Art Teacher, Linda Coss, said. "After growing vegetables, the students had a full farm to table experience, turning spinach into spinach dip, making salsa from tomatoes, garlic, and onions. The students learned about nutrition from the vegetables – and that they even liked radishes."

The students also learn how maple syrup is made annually as well as how to make compost to help plants grow.

"We give our students a sense of belonging and a sense of place in this world. We connect understanding your personal strengths, understanding nature, and understanding world cultures and geography to support our students in offering peace and healing to themselves, the world around them, and the people in their world," Gupta said. "By giving them a caring environment they are better able to learn and make a positive impact."

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