



# THE LEONA FAMILY TIMES

Volume 3 • 2009

## An amazing experience



Wildwood Environmental Academy grade 3 teacher Laura Schetter brought some extra special things to school with her this year - new ideas for science inquiry, new methods for exploration, first-hand experiences in conservationism and her enduring passion for environmental sciences.

Schetter is one of 150 U.S. and international educators accepted to the first year of the Global Field Program (GFP) from Project Dragonfly at Miami University. The masters students engage with international colleagues and scientists, working together to bring about local and global change.



This summer, Schetter was among 20 U.S. educators who travelled to Belize to study conservation and marine ecology. The group explored diverse terrestrial, coastal and coral reef communities at the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center, Gales Point and Tobacco Caye. "It was an amazing experience in so many ways - personally, professionally and socially" said Schetter in a recent interview.



Because of established partnerships, the group was able to experience Belize from a local perspective. "Some nights we slept in forest cabanas. The director of the education center arranged a lot of behind-the-scenes opportunities for the group," said Schetter. "We visited two different schools and were able to interview the principal and other teachers in the village. A parade of children followed our bus."

Ms. Schetter brought something extra special with her to Belize, too. Through Project Wild, her grade 3 students created art work last spring to share with Belize what an American summer looks like. She was also able to bring school supplies.

This innovative teacher is already known by many for her creative lessons on the Leatherback Sea Turtle migration. Sea turtles are her favorite animal. Her most memorable experience? A night hike to search for sea turtles nesting at remote Gales Point, where a man who has dedicated his life to protecting manatees and green sea turtles took the group on a rare adventure. "At 8 p.m., we went on two rickety motor boats to a remote, uninhabited beach that is safe for turtles. We hiked by moonlight for six hours through high tide, water to our knees, in search of sea turtles coming up to lay eggs. It gave me a whole new sense of appreciation for how majestic they are."

**"It was quite possibly the best 10 days of my life."**

**"To see a school in a third world country is a humbling experience - 100 degrees, 100% humidity, barely any windows - a fresh set of pencils was a big deal for them."**

**"The whole experience was just - majestic - amazing."**

MEXICO



BELIZE

Guatemala

Honduras

El Salvador

Nicaragua



## A Note from our CEO

Dr. William Coats,  
Chief Executive Officer  
for The Leona Group

### Whatever it takes

It may seem a bit turbulent on the education front as states slice their budgets and charters Race to the Top of the national landscape. Though education is making headlines, the recent attention does not change the fabric of who we are or what we do. The Leona Group has been doing whatever it takes to provide great schools in urban areas for 13 years. Your work as dedicated, innovative team members will carry on as we continue educating and reaching every child.

*William Coats*

## One-third of Detroit's best schools are charters

As the new school year begins, public charter schools are being recognized for excellence and will receive grants of up to \$50,000 per school from the Skillman Foundation. These schools make up one-third of the highest-performing schools in Detroit, according to the foundation's "Good Schools: Making the Grade" program. Of the seven charters operated by Leona Group in Detroit, congratulations to those who received Skillman Grant awards:

- Allen Academy, middle school
- César Chávez Academy, elementary & high schools
- George Crockett Academy, elementary & middle schools
- Hope of Detroit Academy, elementary & middle schools
- Joy Preparatory Academy, elementary & middle schools
- Pierre Toussaint Academy, middle school

# ACHIEVING MY DREAM

### My name is Darius Journigan.

Ever since I became a student at the Academy for Business & Technology I have been inspired and encouraged by my teachers and peers to become a leader. They have pushed me to succeed and have not once given up on me and my dreams.



Academy for Business  
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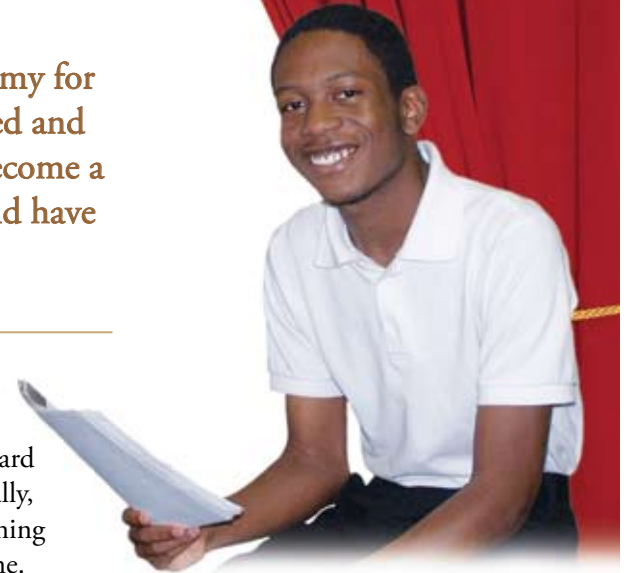
In the summer of 2008 I moved from Casa Grande, AZ, to Detroit. It was hard for me to adjust to the move. Thankfully, after only a couple of days, the welcoming atmosphere made me feel right at home.

The teachers were very encouraging and lead us to think about our futures after high school. Leadership was mixed right into the curriculum, opening my eyes to the many opportunities that ABT held for me.

I have always had a passion for theatre and took every chance I could to involve myself with it. When I noticed that ABT didn't have a drama club, I took it upon myself to start one. With the support of my teachers and ABT staff, I was able to attend Drama Day at Eastern Michigan University, direct a Black History Month festival and get a part in a local television show!

This year, I am taking leadership to an entirely different level. With the help of teachers and staff I am directing a full-length play in December to raise money for an HIV/AIDS charity. This is a big task but I believe that I have been properly equipped by my teachers here at ABT.

ABT's main focus is to help us to become leaders and encourage us to shoot for the stars. Thank you to all of my teachers and to Mr. Kirk for educating me in the fields of leadership and entrepreneurship.



## 401(k) information

November is 401(k) open enrollment month for Arizona, Indiana, Florida, and Michigan employees with one year of employment (750 hours or more) and who are age 18. Leona matches contributions up to six percent, and employees are 100% vested upon enrollment. Ohio employees are required to participate in their state's retirement system.

### For more information contact:

Lisa Smith, benefits coordinator (IN, MI, OH)  
Kim Greene, benefits coordinator (AZ, FL)



## DESERT HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

Desert Hills High School was recently featured in the Chandler-Gilbert Good News as "our community's best kept secret." Parent J. James Estrada of Gilbert, AZ, nominated the school, stating that "Gilbert's Desert Hills High School has been a bright light in the education of my children."

Estrada's son Timothy, now serving in Iraq, was the first of his children to graduate, followed by Joslyn. Daughter Julie is now a sophomore.

"Principal Art Madden is a hard-working professional educator and administrator. All of the teachers and office staff are also very professional and friendly."

Best kept secret!



# Northridge unveils remarkable new programs



It is back-to-school time at Northridge Academy, Flint, MI, and families are thrilled with the school's new lineup of classes and activities. The academy has expanded its programming to meet head-on the needs of children and families during tough economic times.

"We know that these are difficult times and we are rising to the challenge," explained Dr. Nat Burtley, the school's leader and former superintendent of Flint Public Schools. The community has responded well; enrollment is growing beyond expectations as new families join our Northridge Family.

New equipment, technology, activities and programs are generating a lot of excitement at the school. A state-of-the-art computer lab, library program, free after-school enrichment and athletics are being unveiled this year. Science exploration, robotics, tutoring, character education, math and money, reading with a purpose, golf, basketball, track, swimming, volleyball and flag football are just a few of the offerings provided as part of the school's 21st Century Grant award.



*"Parents know they can count on us to provide for their children - beyond a quality education, our children are here because they are part of a family."*  
- Dr. Nat Burtley, school leader

Students receive nutritious meals, before- and after-school care and the attention they need to achieve in academics and develop their individual characteristics and learning abilities. The expanded offerings complement the school's program, which promises an exciting learning environment that utilizes the entire community as its classroom. The academy has achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for three years and is poised for continued success.

# ABT students join rally at State Capitol



More than 70 middle school students from the Academy for Business & Technology joined the 2,500 students, parents, teachers and education activists who rallied on the lawn of the Michigan State Capitol Building on Thursday, Sept. 24, in support of education reform.



*Students released over 1,000 "Kids Need Great Schools" balloons, each representing hundreds of minority and at-risk students who still need great schools.*



## Congratulations to César Chávez Academy

on the successful opening of its fourth campus in southwest Detroit! The school hosted a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on Friday, Sept. 4 - officially unveiling the upper elementary campus. The expansion has allowed César Chávez to meet increasing demand. Cindy Taraskiewicz, who celebrates 10 years with Leona Group this year, is the school leader at the new site.

César Chávez Academy opened in 1996. This impressive learning community now serves more than 1,800 students in grades K-12, maintains a waiting list of over 200 students and is the second largest K-12 charter school in Michigan. Of these students, 88% are Hispanic, 94% are economically disadvantaged and 35% are English Language Learners (ELL). Last year, all the existing campuses made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).



# ALL WORK & all play!



**COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE**  
RESPECT • READINESS • RESPONSIBILITY • "Expect Excellence"

What do you get when you add a bunch of really creative kids, a committed school leader and staff, over 200 parent and community volunteers, tasty food complements of Sweetbay, Chick-fil-A and McDonalds, supplies donated by Home Depot, a 40-by-62-foot area and KaBOOM?

A great place to play at the Community Charter School of Excellence in Tampa, Florida, of course! Thanks to a grant from KaBOOM, in partnership with The Home Depot, the school was awarded a new playground.

Preparations began with students drawing what they wanted in the playground. From there, the drawings were reviewed and a final design was created. The playground was constructed in just six hours on Thursday, September 17.



# THE LEONA FAMILY TIMES



## THE LEONA GROUP, L.L.C.

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East Lansing, MI 48823

- ★ **César Chávez Academy** is changing how educators educate - The school's RTi team will present at the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of Michigan Conference, at the all-day symposium: Educating ALL Students: Utilizing Instructional Technology for a Diverse Population.
- ★ A celebration dinner was held at **Eagle Academy** for students, parents, staff and stakeholders to join together in celebration of the school's last two years of significant achievement, success and AYP.
- ★ **Cincinnati Leadership Academy** has partnered with the Freestore Foodbank agency to provide the Power Pack program, a take-home weekend food program for children experiencing chronic hunger. Thanks to the program, which assembles and delivers food packs to schools serving low income children, 17 children from four families will receive food.
- ★ Congrats to Leigh Anne Carpenter-Porr, **South Ridge High School**, whose grant application was awarded \$3,500 for geography supplies. Leigh Ann was one of 19 Arizona educators to have won technology grants totaling \$100,000 from the Media In Education program of the Arizona Republic and azcentral.com. Way to go!
- ★ **Apache Trail High School's** Wolfpack is howling over its 5-0 start, tying for the top spot in the Class B Division of the Arizona Charter Athletic Association's eight-man tackle football. Owwooooo!
- ★ **Consortium College Preparatory High School's** Celebrating Sisterhood mentoring program will be Making Strides Against Breast Cancer at a walk on Oct. 10 on Belle Isle, Detroit.
- ★ **Allen, Francis Reh, George Crockett, Hope of Detroit, Joy Preparatory, New City, Northridge and Voyageur** academies received Shining Star awards for compliance from their authorizer, Ferris State University, with special acknowledgement going to *Esther Simpson Award* recipients: **George Crockett, Hope of Detroit and Francis Reh academies.**

In the  
Spotlight

## On the front panel

This month we feature Abdul Apata, grade 3, Natalie Alicea, grade 3 and Charles S. Malatesta, M.Ed, school leader at the Community Charter School of Excellence in Tampa, Florida.

## Contact us!

The **Leona Family Times** is a quarterly newsletter published throughout the school year for Leona Group employees. If you have comments, suggestions or story ideas, send them to:

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If you would like to receive an electronic version of **Family Times**, email your request to the e-mail address shown above.

## Making e-connections

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