On a beautiful morning in August, I met up with two teachers from Macdonough School. Mrs. Lenehan and Mrs. Massey graciously allowed me to tag along. The teachers were out visiting students at their homes in the North End welcoming them back to school, the fifth year that this welcome has been done. The teachers wore their “I Love MAC” t-shirts to signify them as teachers at the school. Approximately 25 teachers fanned out by streets armed with addresses, books and newsletters for the families. The teachers highlighted the orientation for new parents, open house date and the first day of school. The students were invited to help pick an age appropriate book from the book bag if they were at home. A book was left with a newsletter if the student was not at home.

It was great to walk onto a street and hear squeals of delight. One student was excited and asked if they were coming to his house. Some students were a bit timid seeing one of their teachers at their door. Mrs. Lenehan would be able to coax them out to talk and Mrs. Massey would then help them pick a book to read, sometimes picking one for a sibling. Mrs. Lenehan seemed to know the names of the parents or grandparents and really relayed the excitement of starting a new year.
One of the bright spots in Middletown has been Keigwin Middle School. It has done a great job transitioning all of our elementary students to become middle school students. Due to the fact that it is a one-year school, it is strength and a challenge. The challenge is in taking 300 or more students and having them successful make the change from their once small schools to a larger school with so many new students. Dr. Mayo-Molina has been working on the students getting to know her and some of her staff during the last year by visiting schools, PTO’s and talking with students and having all grade 5 students visit Keigwin. The other major component is pupil services working with the staff at Keigwin to identify the needs of those students new to the school. The teacher and administrators will have plans in place to meet the needs of those students prior to the first day of school. This past June, all students were given the same book to read, Wonder, so that they could relate to each other at the beginning of the school year. Language Arts teachers have prepared lesson plans based on this book and the students could use that as their summer book report. All students therefore will have something in common to discuss about their summer reading.

During the first week of school, the students are given two days of instruction on what is expected of them. The school uses ROCKS and abides by the expectation of being an upstander not a bystander. The teachers put on a humorous skit pretending to be students who question school expectations and review these during an all school assembly. As the year progresses students are invited to write skits for assemblies as well. The students are split to 5 teams with 3 homerooms per team. The students travel with their homeroom group throughout the day and develop a rapport with those students. For the first week, the homeroom teachers will travel with the students to help them to learn their schedule. The weekly schedule is made of two Days. Day 1(odd days on the calendar) and Day 2(even days on the calendar) will rotate in order to give the students PE and music instruction. The core academic classes are each 80 minutes in length so that the travel between classes is minimized. The students are given advisory periods every two weeks. The advisory groups are between 12 and 15 students and they have a lesson plan to go over some of the challenges that are being faced by the students. The school holds an assembly each month to further that instruction and give out ROCKSTAR awards.

Keigwin’s faculty has always exhibited a positive energy with their students, and still remains focused on increasing student academic engagement and achievement. Dr. Mayo Molina’s goal is to continue to support teachers’ innovation and creativity for integrating technology in all classes at Keigwin so that all students participate in rich and interactive projects and performances. Her focus is to streamline all budget and fundraising towards technology at Keigwin.

Dr. Silvia Mayo-Molina is entering her third year as principal. She was an assistant principal at two previous schools before coming to Middletown. The biggest surprise to her was how much Keigwin is used for events and activities by the community in the evenings and on the weekends. Setting up a schedule for the school use, Parks and Recreation Use and other community organizations in addition to school activities requires a lot of coordination through the main office staff, custodians and facilities department.

Thanks to Middletown Schools, MSA, Donna Marino, Michael Stielau and Ava Hart. If you have any questions or wish to make a comment, please contact me at inspiratuseditor@gmail.com. I appreciate all comments and story ideas that I receive.

Kim Kennedy, Editor
Students Visit Farmer’s Market
By Michelle Currier

If you were to walk into Macdonough school on any hot summer day in July you would find a group of about 20 students busy at work. These students are part of a summer enrichment program and are given educational support for five weeks. Along with a certified teacher there are a handful of volunteers from the Pathways to Education Club at Middletown High.

Each Friday the students are given the opportunity to take a walking field trip to the North End Farmer’s Market on Main Street. Once there, they receive tokens that value $5.00. Students are encouraged to ask the vendors questions, sample produce, and try something new. One Friday a farmer had purple potatoes for sale, another day patty-pan squash. One student bought a bunch of carrots, greens and all, for her pet guinea pig, another student had purchased five apples to bring home and share with his family. Many times, the students are so excited about their purchases that they devour the fresh fruit once returning to school.

Teachers Go To Summer School
By Kim Kennedy

Teachers from Middletown schools ranging in grades from Kindergarten to Eighth grade took part in a ten-day intensive math course. The group learned new concepts and ideas to teach the new common core math syllabus with the understanding that not all students learn or process information the same way. In all, the teacher completed 80 hours of intensive math training. There is additional training that will take place during the school year.

The course is offered through PIMMS, Project To Increase Mastery Of Mathematics And Science. It is a partnership of Wesleyan University and Green Street Arts Center. The program has been in existence for 35 years. Christopher Rasmussen, assistant professor of mathematics and Sharon Heyman, math education specialist, leads it. PIMMS hopes to offer “more integrative teaching and learning opportunities in art, math and science for the youth and educators”.

The courses are offered Green Street Arts Center, a 12,000 square foot facility that offers recording studios, black box theatre, computer and media labs, and dance and art studios. The classes are offered to youth and educators. Last year, the project offered Green Energy and STEM education for High School Teachers. This year the project will offer the following courses: Science Lab Safety and Liability on 9/11, Globally Harmonized Systems on 10/02, Hazardous Chemical Management with a stronger focus on Chemical Storage on 10/23, Chemical Hygiene Plan 11/13, Chemical Hygiene Officer Training 12/11, STEM Safety (a new workshop with focus on technology education) 02/12/15, Safety In The Arts 3/05/15 and Science Safety for Special Education Teachers on 03/19/15. You can register for those classes at Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency website under Training & Education Programs.
Meet Mr. Conroy, New Principal At WWMS
By Kim Kennedy

Mr. Conroy graciously agreed to give me an interview. I had not met him prior to the meeting but had heard some of his reports at PTO meetings. He seemed humbled by the challenge of his new position and eager to do a great job. Mr. Conroy pointed out that he has had a great mentor in Principal Joe Cassella the past 2 years while he served as the school’s Assistant Principal.

Mr. Conroy taught at WWMS for 8 years prior to moving to Keigwin as the Assistant Principal in 2005. While a teacher at WWMS and Keigwin he taught Science, Language Arts, Reading, Physical Education, Health, and Social Studies. He was also the Science Department Chair for 1 year and assistant administrator during his last 5 years at WWMS.

He has two major goals for this year. He would like to institute a Positive Behavioral Support system that would help create common actions and language for students and staff. He is also working to create an Instructional Support Team that will be based in a newly created teacher resource center. It would allow teachers and administration to work together to guide and develop professional development. The staff could share information such as books, websites and other materials. There would be a conference room, media tools and a data wall. The wall would better utilize the data for the teachers to prepare lesson plans. A new data collection system (NWEA) is being put into place. The instructional support team can help new teachers develop their skills and set up peer coaching.

Mr. Conroy hopes to increase the already high participation rate by students in the various extracurricular activities offered at the school. He believes there is a club or activity that appeals to every student. He began a club called X-Men last year at WWMS. There were about 100 male students involved and had many staff volunteers to mentor the students. This X-Men program was created by Mark Fong and Kevin Duran at Keigwin several years ago and has assisted many students in making the transition into middle school. Mr. Conroy hopes to have a program for girls in the fall at WWMS.

Mr. Conroy would like parents to be part of the learning team for the students. Try to work with the teachers, attend conferences, PTO meetings and talk with your child about their experiences. He would like parents to know that administration, support staff and teachers are available through email and phone calls, so don’t hesitate to contact them with questions or concerns.

UCONN People
Empowering People (PEP)
By Donna Marino

Do you want to feel more connected to your community, increase your income or earn a promotion, help improve the lives of children and your family? PEP can help. This training is for individuals that want to effect change to better the lives of children, family and their community. PEP consists of 10, two-hour classes, which meet once a week. Child-care and a light dinner is provided. Sample classes include: Understanding and Respecting Values, Communication, Problem Solving, Debt and Financial Independence, Child Development, Action Planning for your Future. These free classes start on Wednesday, September 24th at Farm Hill School from 6 pm to 8 pm. To register please call the parent leadership office at 860 638-1463 or email at plti@mpsct.org for more information. Classes are supported by the Middletown Public Schools, CT Parent Trust/PIRC/SERC, UCONN and the Liberty Bank Foundation.
Inspiratus, September 2014

Bookmobile Brings Smiles
By Donna Marino

Smiling faces waiting on front lawns and at neighborhood parking lots; are they expecting the ice cream truck? In Middletown, those excited children are on the lookout for the Middletown Schools Bookmobile! This summer, almost 2000 books were distributed to families throughout our community while visiting neighborhoods, Park and Recreation, YMCA and other camps. The bookmobile volunteers – comprised of school staff, administrators, parents and other community partners – have distributed nearly 10,000 books over the past 4 years.

Our children know their books! Students ask for particular books and series such as Harry Potter, Divergent, Hunger Games, The Giver, Boxcar Children, Magic Tree House and Percy Jackson. Students know their reading levels; they use the “five finger rule test” to select books. Follow this link to learn more. Some children just sit down on the grass and start reading; others help their friends and siblings pick out a great read.

Staff enjoys driving the bookmobile and meeting families and our camp partners around the community. We also have the opportunity to distribute community resources and talk about the services available in the schools and the community. This summer, Russell Library often followed the route and met with families and children to story tell, do crafts and of course spread the love of reading!

Bookmobile work happens year-round with collection events, partnership development, lots of cleaning and sorting and of course the distribution of books. We also visit preschools and attend school and community events upon request.

The bookmobile is a grassroots effort started 4 years ago by a parent who is also a Parent Leadership graduate, Stephanie Alderman. Other initial partners were the Middletown Schools Association and the school principals. Their mission was to address the “summer slide” and to engage with families where they live. Over the years so many other partners emerged and deserve our thanks: Russell Library, Read to Grow, the Partnership and Parent Leadership office, Family Resource Centers, Family School Connection, Youth Services, our Teaching and Learning Center, PTA/O’s, Altrusa, Soroptimist, Civitan, Book Bower, the Hospital of Special Care, Rushford, Reading Well for Kids, Millard Group, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, YMCA, Park and Recreation, Central Connecticut State University, … and many individuals and staff members who love children and love to read and spread the joy of a great book!

To learn more about the bookmobile contact our office at 860-638-1463, email at plti@mpsct.org or visit the middletownschools.org website and go to “summer reading.” Thank you partners and volunteers.
VoAg Happenings
By VoAg Students at MHS

The Agriculture Department at Middletown High School holds a variety of events in the fall, from fundraisers to chapter gatherings. The chapter also brings their students on multiple agricultural field trips as close as Durham, Connecticut and as far away as Louisville, Kentucky.

First on the list of events is the bulb sale. This fundraiser is very important for the chapter. The money gained benefits every member through the year. Bulbs can be purchased for yourself, as gifts, or purchase daffodils for agriculture students to plant on LaRosa Lane.

The annual Welcome Back Picnic is a fun event for local FFA (The National FFA Organization) members, where students come together and have a great time playing games and getting to know each other.

In October, the chapter proudly sends qualifying students to the FFA National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky. Representing Connecticut’s state Agriscience winners, four Mattabeset members will be competing. This includes, Leianne Dolce, Kelli Knapp, Alex Fernandez, and Kara Greatsinger. The Agricultural Communications team, consisting of; Kara Greatsinger, Leianne Dolce, and Erika Hojda is competing as well. The chapter will also send Owen Andrew as the winner of the Jason Varrato/Erin Melzmuff Memorial Scholarship. This is an honor awarded at the annual Chapter Banquet in June. This award allows the student to attend National Convention on scholarship. The chapter is very proud to have so many students competing with them this year.

Inspiratus, September 2014

Freshman orientation at VoAG in August

invites the GAIT (Growing Agricultural Interest Together) mentors to guide children from Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown through the fair grounds. Freshman Agriculture students attend the Durham Fair on a guided field trip. Students learn the importance of agricultural fairs to the agricultural industry and manage to have fun too.

Later in September, students will compete with their Agriscience projects one last time at the Big E (Eastern States Exposition) before they go to nationals in Kentucky. Leianne Dolce (class of 2016) and Kelli Knapp (class of 2015) will be competing together with their Animal systems project, Alex Fernandez (class of 2016) with his Social Systems project, and Kara Greatsinger (class of 2016) with her Food Products and Processing Systems project. In addition the chapter has two 2014 graduates competing, Bailey Basiel for a State Star Award in Agricultural Placement and Morgan O’Sullivan for a State Star Award in Agricultural Research. Our third Big E event

GAIT Orientation At VoAG