

AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

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UA biologist gives Akron middle school tools to start first hands-on mission

CALL SENDS PUPILS INTO ACTION

By John Higgins
Beacon Journal staff writer

After the students at the new National Inventors Hall of Fame School had a few weeks to settle in, the principal and teachers were ready to present the project they had spent months planning.

This was a crucial step in project-based learning, the teaching method driving the middle school's mission of fostering creative and inventive thinkers.

It was something like Christmas morning for the educators, who were eager to see the kids unwrap what they had put together for them, but nervous, too, that they might shove it aside like socks from grandma.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your classes," principal Traci Buckner said over the public-address system. She explained that she had just received an urgent videotaped request from the University of Akron that she needed to show them immediately.

"They need help solving a problem," she said. "I'm going to need for the learners to make their way to the lower level of the building."

The fifth-graders gathered in the cafeteria to watch the video of Jessica Hopkins, a biologist at the University of Akron.

"Hello, I'm Dr. Hopkins and I am out at one of my field sites today on the Bath Nature Preserve. I'm standing in Bath Creek at one of our study sites and I've been studying this ecosystem here because there are some very important changes going on in this habitat."

She went on to explain how a ditch had been straightened in the 1920s to drain water off the land quickly so that it could be turned

Please see **STEM, A5**



Principal Traci Buckner introduces the video of University of Akron biologist Jessica Hopkins at the National Inventors Hall of Fame School. Hopkins asked for the students' help with a wetland project.

MIKE CARDEW/Akron Beacon Journal

AKRON PUBLIC SCHOOLS spent five years designing a \$14.5 million math and science middle school where students will learn in ways dramatically different from traditional classrooms. Years of planning, millions of tax dollars and the contributions of practically every significant

public and private institution in Akron are riding on the effectiveness of these methods. Akron Beacon Journal reporter John Higgins spent time with students and teachers as they experienced this new school.

TODAY: Teachers sink the hook, engage the students.

WEDNESDAY: Slimy things, bugs, birds, mud, rain and carrots – the students' eyes are opened.

Obama pledging to bolster security

Airline plot called a reminder of the need to remain vigilant as threats continue to change

By Philip Elliott
Associated Press

HONOLULU: President Barack Obama on Monday vowed to use "every element of our national power" to keep Americans safe and said the failed Christmas Day plot to blow up a Detroit-bound airliner was "a serious reminder" of the need to continually adapt security measures against changing terrorist threats.

But even as Obama spoke, word came that a State Department warning had failed to trigger an effort to revoke the alleged attacker's visa. And officials in Yemen confirmed that the would-be bomber had been living in that country, where terrorist elements quickly sought to take credit for his actions.

The incident prompted stiffer airport boarding measures and authorities warned holiday travelers to expect extra delays as they return home this week and beyond.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, 23, charged with trying to destroy an aircraft, is being held at the federal prison in Milan, Mich. A court hearing that had been scheduled for Monday to determine whether the government can get DNA from him was postponed until Jan. 8. No reason was given.

Calling Abdulmutallab's action an "attempted act of terrorism" Obama vowed to

Please see **Obama, A4**

Confusion fills sky in wake of attempted jet bombing on flight to Detroit. **A4**



KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

Denisha Anderson, 35, who works for Interim Home Health Care, recounts how she saved a West Akron woman from a fire.

Health-care aide rescues woman from burning bed

Multiple sclerosis patient dragged to safety as flames destroy house

By Bill Lilley
Beacon Journal staff writer

Denisha Anderson has always believed in showing up early for work.

Anderson's diligence helped save a life Monday.

After the health-care aide arrived five minutes early to the West Akron apartment where her client lives, she was just in time to avert tragedy.

Authorities say Anderson, 35, rushed to pull invalid patient Marchell Pritchett, who is in her 50s and has multiple sclerosis, from her burning bed to safety.

"This was the scariest thing that's ever happened to me," Anderson said. "It's a couple hours after, and I'm still shaking."

"And I'm still praying. Praying for her [Pritchett's] health, her life and my life. What happened in that burning house was something that I never want to see again in my life. I'm just thankful we both got out alive."

Anderson isn't sure where she summoned the strength to pull the woman from the burning room.

"I had to drag her to save her because she couldn't move out of her bed," she said. "I

Please see **Fire, A5**

Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! Nudes exposed to Akron's cold in name of art

Photographer builds his reputation for revealing shots in public places

By Katie Byard
Beacon Journal staff writer

Roger Marble gingerly climbed the snow-covered rubble overlooking downtown Akron.

As the 64-year-old neared the top, he shivered in the 18-degree weather.

He stopped. Then stripped naked.

"Ohhhhhh . . . it's windy and cold," Marble said as a man below took pictures, directing him where to stand.

The photographer was Spencer Tunick – an artist best known for his photographs of large groups of people in the nude in public spaces.

In 2004, 2,700 people stripped naked for a Tunick shoot near the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in downtown Cleveland.

Monday morning, Tunick, 42, of New York



Musician Jen Maurer of Akron poses in a wintry scene in downtown Akron for photographer Spencer Tunick. She likened the cold to going down in the Titanic.

KAREN SCHIELY/Akron Beacon Journal

state, took pictures of Marble, of Brimfield Township, and Jen Maurer, of Akron, for his series of nude individuals in public settings. Tunick is in town for the holidays with his wife, Akron native Kristin Bowler, a graphic designer.

Tunick shoots in the morning, when, he says, "the light is soft," and when there's less chance of creating a stir.

He enjoys shooting pictures of nude people in Akron and other industrial cities because they cre-

ate "a beautiful contrast of nature against the concrete world."

And he welcomed Monday's snow.

"This is a giant snow globe," he said, scanning the parking lot outside Luigi's restaurant just north of downtown Akron.

He had arranged to meet Marble and Maurer there.

Please see **Nude, A4**

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Fire

Extension cord sparks catch mattress on fire

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don't know where it came from, but it was courage that I never knew I had."

Anderson, a mother of two teenagers, took a bus from her residence off South Hawkins Avenue and arrived at the three-story home at 386 Wildwood Ave. about 9:45 a.m.

Anderson takes care of Pritchett every day except Sunday. She has been caring for her for six months.

"I got into the house and went back to her bedroom and gave her her medicine," she said. "Then the lights went out."

Anderson went downstairs and hit the switch on the fuse box. The lights went back on and Anderson returned to care for Pritchett.

Phone doesn't work

Anderson and Pritchett then saw sparks fly out of an extension cord that was plugged into the wall close to the side of Pritchett's bed. The cord was

hooked to a nearby lamp.

"It all happened so fast, we couldn't even think," said Anderson, who graduated from Buchtel High School in 1993. "The spark flew out and hit the mattress. That caught the entire bed on fire."

Anderson said she dragged Pritchett through the living area of the first-floor apartment and out the front door.

"I had pushed the fire button on her [Pritchett's] emergency phone, but it didn't work," Anderson said. "I was screaming for somebody to call 911 while I drug her out of the house."

Neighbors help

Anderson said she was met on the front porch by a "couple of men who lived upstairs."

"They carried Marchell across the street to a neighbor's house," she said.

Akron Fire Capt. James Case identified one of the men as Rodondo Jackson, who lives on the third floor of the house.

Anderson believes Pritchett had a second-degree burn on the back of one of her legs. She was taken to Akron Children's Hospital's burn unit for treatment.

Anderson suffered a small burn on a finger and inhaled some smoke. She declined to be taken to the hospital.



KAREN SCHEELY/Akron Beacon Journal

An Akron firefighter surveys damage Monday after a blaze damaged a house at 386 Wildwood Ave.

Case, who was working the final shift of his 33-year career, said all of the residents of the house managed to escape safely.

"We don't know how many people were in there," Case said, "but everybody got out of the

house OK."

Case confirmed that the fire started in the rear bedroom on the first floor occupied by Pritchett.

Investigator Matt Davello ruled the cause of the fire as un-

intentional electrical failure.

"The problem with the older homes like this is that the fire spreads quickly," Case said. "Once the fire gets into the walls, it climbs quickly up to the second and third floors because

of the bloom construction."

Although a ladder rescue unit and an engine truck arrived shortly after the Akron Fire Department received the first of multiple 911 calls, there wasn't much the firefighters could do to save the structure, Case said.

Total loss

Case said it took about an hour to get the fire under control. Firefighters spent another couple of hours making certain it didn't spread.

Case said the house was a total loss. He estimated its value at \$100,000.

Right before the blaze started, the home aide and her patient were counting their blessings.

"The really crazy thing is that we had just a couple minutes before the fire congratulated each other on making it to 2010," said Anderson, who works for Interim Home Health Care. "We even gave each other high-fives for making it to another year."

"I guess I learned again that you should never count your chickens before they hatch. We almost didn't make it to 2010. That's how scary this whole thing was."

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STEM

Students talk of need for research, samples

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into farmland.

Now the university wanted to restore the wetland by putting curves or "meander bends" back into the ditch where native plants could grow and support insect and animal life. The bends also would allow water to rise periodically and flood other areas that had once been wetlands.

Hopkins said she was excited to hear that they were studying wetland ecosystems this year and would be visiting the Panzner property.

"I'm very interested in seeing the results of your studies because I really want to know, want to be able to compare our wetland restoration project with that successful project on the Panzner property," she said.

"I'm really looking forward to hearing from the learners at the National Inventors Hall of Fame School and what they find out in their studies of the Panzner wetlands. So thanks in advance for your help and I'll hear from you soon."

Excitement builds

Then the fifth-graders moved to the gym where they could discuss more about what this project might entail.

"This is a really big deal and we should take it very seriously and help her out the best that we can," said fifth-grade math and science teacher Brenda Leighton.

"Does anyone else have any questions?"

Then Katrina Halasa walked into the gym, carrying some letters on official University of Akron stationery.

"Excuse me, excuse me. Is this the fifth-grade STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] school?" Halasa asked urgently.

"My name is Ms. Halasa. I'm in charge of the science for the entire district, K-12," she said. "What I'd like to do is hand you these two envelopes that also explain the problem even further and to welcome all of you guys to come and work on this project. Are you excited?"

A chorus of voices yelled "Yeah!" punctuated by a passionate "Oh yeah!"

Top secret

One boy wanted to know where they would be going and Halasa said it was a secret.

Then someone asked if they could go home and use Google to figure it out.

"If you Google where it is, can I stop you from that?"

"No," the students said.

"All right, well then Google it and check it out, but I'm not letting my surprise out," Halasa said. "How do you spell it? Oh, that's something that you'll have to figure out as well."

That was a good sign: They already wanted to start their research.

Halasa handed over the official letter requesting the students' help. She repeated her performance for the sixth-grade class.

Sixth-grade math and science teachers Sam Crews and Christine Justiss, known to the students as Coach Crews and Coach Justiss, hammed it up even more.

"They want us to go over there and take samples and check out the ecosystem, try and determine whether it's healthy or not, and that data is going to help her with her project at the Bath Nature Preserve," Crews said, reading from the letter.

"Wait wait wait, Coach Crews," Justiss interrupted. "Let me get this straight. You think she wants us to leave this building, go out in the woods, and



Left, fifth-graders Caitlyn Jarvis and Samantha Fairhead work on the field book for the Panzner wetland restoration project at the National Inventors Hall of Fame School in Akron. Right, sixth-grade math and science teacher Sam Crews circles "Tech Tornadoes" as the winning name of his advisory group.

evaluate that land and report to her?"

"I guess I could follow up with a phone call and make sure," Crews said. "I mean, we do have, you know, a bunch of 11- and 12-year-olds. Maybe they wouldn't be up for this."

Howls of protest erupted. They were up for it. They wanted to go. Was there a chance they might not get to go? How could they persuade the principal to let them?

"She's not just going to say 'hey, go out in the field and play around,'" Justiss said. "So what could we possibly tell her that would be so important for us to get out of, like, a day of school?"

They spoke about the need to research and take samples. One cutup said they could go if they all called off sick one day.

Definition of learning

Then Crews stood at a wipe board while they listed things they knew and things they needed to know.

Ecosystem, for example. What was an ecosystem?

Ryan Prickler was sitting toward the back and raised his hand: "An ecosystem is a community of animals and the area around it known as the land that it lives on that supports each other and needs everything to be working in order to survive."

He launched into an even more detailed answer before Justiss jumped in.

"You know, Ryan, I don't think I've ever had a student who gives as good a definition as you do. We need some kids to step up, maybe he could be the guy who does some vocabulary research for us. Would you be up to being in charge of that?"

"I can do it," he said.

Justiss read some more from the letter, which was asking for a site evaluation of the Panzner property "with special attention paid to aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna at the cellular

level," she quoted from the letter.

"Those are some weird words. Aquatic and terrestrial flora and fauna? Does anyone know what those words mean? I don't even know if I know what those words mean. Carlye?"

"Flora is plant life, especially flowers, and fauna is animal life," Carlye Mihailovich said confidently.

"Wow. Is that right, Mr. Crews?" Justiss asked.

"Yeah," he confirmed. "Let's put it up on the 'know'

side," Justiss said.

The need-to-know list was longer, but that was the point.

Instead of learning things "just in case" as in, "you have to know this just in case you need it one day," they would be learning things "just in time" that they

needed to solve the problem.

The teachers had hooked the students. Now the students would have to make the project their own.

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