

Good Neighbors

Dexter & Southfield Schools Offer Unique Contributions

Along with their traditional community services, Dexter and Southfield Schools have two unique resources – the Clay Center and Briarwood – that extend an exceptional array of enrichment programs to their local communities and beyond.

The Clay Center for Science and Technology, on the campus in Brookline, is a state-of-the-art astronomical observatory and learning center. Briarwood is a field station for marine and environmental studies located in Monument Beach on Cape Cod.



The Clay Center

In addition to its classrooms and other student facilities, the five-story Clay Center building has seven research-grade telescopes – including a deep space telescope, sophisticated computer and science laboratories, a multi-media lecture hall and a solar- and wind-energy roof deck.

It also is a nationally recognized facility that has conducted research for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and hosts major conferences, many of which are open to the public. In recent years, these have ranged from a reunion of Expedition 14 from the International Space Station, to a re-enactment of the Great Pluto Debate, to the Planetary Society's first of many Town Halls, featuring Bill Nye the Science Guy.

"The Clay Center gives us the chance to give back to the community in a meaningful way," Center Director Robert Phinney said. The Center is open for Astronomy Nights during the spring and fall semesters and holds Astronomy Day in the spring. Both are free and open to the public, according to Phinney.

Every fall, the community also is invited to the Weather Festival, a family-oriented event with hands-on science activities. The festival is part of the Southern New England Weather Conference, which is run in partnership with the Blue Hill Weather Observatory and the National Weather Service.

The Clay Center Amateur Radio Club introduces students, summer campers and their families to radio electronics and the art of radio communications through HAM radio. The club has 96 members, including members of the community – and six astronauts.

Through a special arrangement with the town of Brookline, public school fifth and eighth graders take field trips to the observatory, where they view the Stars Court, lighted by fiber optics; learn about the phases of the moon in the Moon Court; step on scales that tell them what they would weigh on other planets, touch meteorites and more. The Clay Center also hosts local Scouts who are working on merit badges.

The students' faces light up when the Clay Center staff tells them about the Dexter and Southfield students who took part in NASA missions, such as the Southfield girl who flew over the North Pole gathering data and three Upper School students who participated in a NASA mission in Australia. They also show the students tires from the NASA Space Shuttle Atlantis and photos of the woman who commanded that mission.

"In a sense, we're trying to inspire them," Phinney said. "These examples encourage students to work hard and keep up their interest in math and science."

The facility also offers outreach programs to local schools and works in partnership with Brookline Adult and Community Education to offer classes in astronomy, music technology and amateur radio to area residents.



Briarwood

The two schools also operate the Briarwood Marine Science and Conference Center at Monument Beach in Bourne. In addition to its academic offerings for Dexter and Southfield students, the center provides summer marine science and sailing sessions for young people from area communities and beyond.

The Briarwood staff also provides programs for other schools and nonprofit organizations during the spring and fall.

Briarwood works with the Bourne Department of Natural Resources in the propagation of clams and oysters that eventually will be placed in the ocean nearby for the benefit of local clambers and oyster men. The department has installed its upweller technology, a key part of the aquaculture process, on a dock adjacent to the Briarwood pier.

Briarwood also volunteers its services for the Bourne Community Boating Program, teaching summer classes to local youths in boating, marine sciences and other subjects.

The Center staff works closely with local schools to offer affordable marine science programs for students during the school year.

Why provide all these externally focused services? "We wanted to have a presence in the community," Briarwood Director Jason Cassista said.

For more information about the Clay Center and Briarwood, go to www.dexter.org and www.southfield.org.

State Sen. Katherine Clark (cont. from pg. 2)

As a senator, one of her major priorities is improving children's reading skills at an early age and closing the achievement gap. She has filed legislation that would establish the Massachusetts Early Reading Council to advise state education departments on early-age language and literacy strategies.

The senator's other priorities are:

- Lowering healthcare costs
- Supporting small businesses and job creation
- Reforming the Massachusetts parole board and probation department

Professionally, Clark is an attorney who has served as a prosecutor and was general counsel for the Massachusetts Office of Child Care Services. She also worked as chief of the policy division for the Massachusetts Attorney General.