

# ONTEORA

Fall 2015

## MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT AND BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESIDENT

### Dear Onteora Community,

The year is flying by as the seasons change in our beautiful District. As you drive around, you can't help but be struck by the magnificence of this area. The trees are displaying splendid colors across the mountains as we transition from fall to winter.

We had a smooth opening of school, with excited children returning to all of our buildings. Everyone has settled into the new routines for this school year. Afterschool programs are well under way at all levels, and the students have a vast array of offerings from which to choose.

Teachers and Board of Education members have been participating in professional development. Many of our teachers have participated in professional development related to reading and writing instruction, Response to Intervention strategies, the use of student data in instruction, Common Core math, and team collaboration. Several Board of Education trustees attended the New York State School Boards Association's annual conference in October.

There has been a lot of discussion in the news lately regarding the APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review) evaluation system and how it will soon be revamped Statewide. We have been collaborating with the Onteora Teachers Association and Onteora Administrators Association in order to work through these changes together. We are confident we can implement the new APPR rules with integrity and support for our administrators and faculty, while continuing to provide a well-rounded education for the students.

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## Bennett Students Learn About the Catskill Mountain Watershed

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, Matt Savatgy, an environmental educator for Cornell Cooperative Extension's Ashokan Stream Management Program, has been working closely with Bennett's Grade 4 Science teachers to help deliver a hands-on approach to Science.

With Mr. Savatgy's assistance, the students focus on many aspects of the Catskill Mountain Watershed, including streams and wetlands, flora and fauna, weather and the impacts of climate change and invasive species.

"My role is to provide engaging activities on a weekly basis that support the Science topics being discussed in class," explains Mr. Savatgy. "With all of the demands on today's teachers, they simply no longer have the time to deliver these types of activities on their own."

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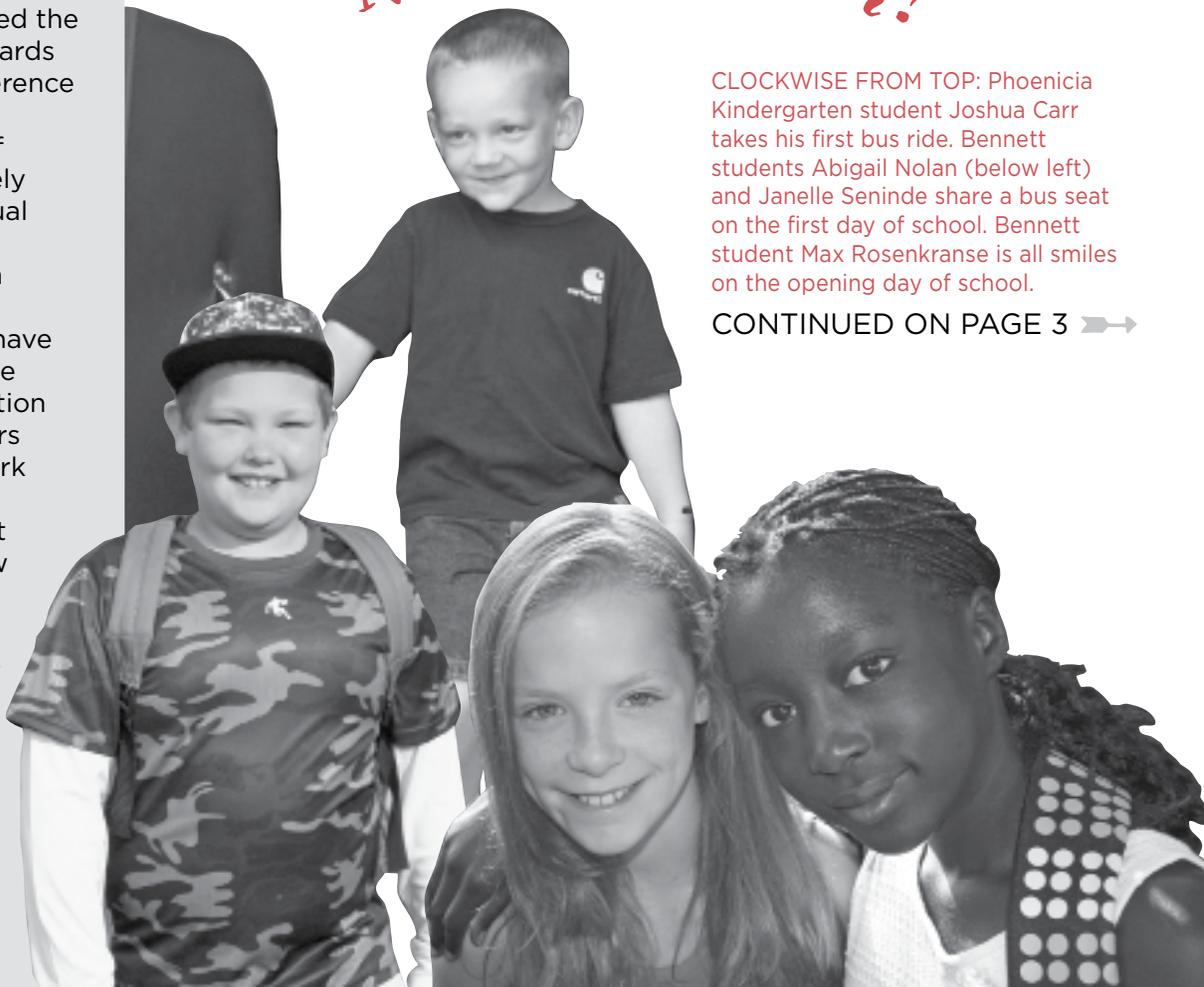
*Onteora Kicks Off  
New School Year!*



Aleya Gaffney-McCobb and Sophia Wall examine a preserved green frog.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Phoenicia Kindergarten student Joshua Carr takes his first bus ride. Bennett students Abigail Nolan (below left) and Janelle Seninde share a bus seat on the first day of school. Bennett student Max Rosenkranse is all smiles on the opening day of school.

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# Bennett Students Learn About the Catskill Mountain Watershed

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Mr. Savatgy handles the scheduling, acquires the needed materials, and sets up laboratory-type activities, often in Bennett's new Science lab, a room brimming with books, displays, specimens, and scientific instruments. On any given day in the lab, children may discover such treasures as a live red-eared slider, boxes of butterflies, and a beaver-gnawed log.

Science lessons are also given outdoors, on the Bennett Nature trail. "The children enjoy the time they spend in the stream looking for critters," Mr. Savatgy says. The learning continues during the winter months, when the children may strap on showshoes to search for evidence of animal activity. "In addition to using the trail, they get an opportunity to care for it with year-end conservation projects and trail work," he adds.

Leigh VanDeBogart, one of Bennett's Grade 4 teachers, appreciates the vital role that Mr. Savatgy plays in enhancing Bennett's fourth grade Science curriculum. "Mr. Savatgy provides indoor experiential learning, laboratory experiments, stream watch experiences, and a better understanding and importance of the stewardship



Bennett student Cameron Grant uses a magnifying glass to compare the shells of a wood turtle and a box turtle.

of our watershed," she says. "He not only helps prepare our children for the daily rigors of the Common Core Learning Standards, but also for the New York State Science Test. The children are learning a lot, and are having fun doing it!"

Mr. Savatgy also offers afterschool Science-based clubs at Bennett, thanks to the generous support of the Bennett PTA, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County, the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, and the Catskill Watershed Corporation.

# Middle School Science Teacher Wins Prestigious Teaching Fellowship

**SO-CALLED STEM EDUCATION**— encompassing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics — is a priority at Onteora Middle School, where Science teacher Kate VanBaren is sharpening her STEM skills with the help of a prestigious teaching fellowship.

Ms. VanBaren, who teaches 8th grade Physical Science and Pre-Engineering at Onteora, is one of only 10 local teachers to receive the fellowship, which is sponsored by Regeneron Pharmaceuticals and presented in collaboration with Columbia University's Teachers College, the NASA Endeavor Science Teaching Certificate Project, and the non-profit STEM Leadership Center.

STEM subjects are vitally important for today's students, according to Ms. VanBaren. "An understanding of STEM is important for overall literacy, not just careers in technical fields," she says. "The pace of change in technology is accelerating, and it's important for my students to understand how that may impact them in the future. In addition, something like basic computer coding ability is a marketable skill in a wide range of careers."

The 16-month fellowship program consists of coursework leading to a graduate certificate in STEM Leadership from Teachers College, as well as a two-week laboratory research mentorship at Regeneron's labs in Tarrytown, New York. The fellowship concludes with professional development activities offered by the STEM Leadership Center in White Plains.

Prior to receiving the fellowship, Ms. VanBaren had already been integrating STEM activities such as robotics and computer programming into her Science classes.

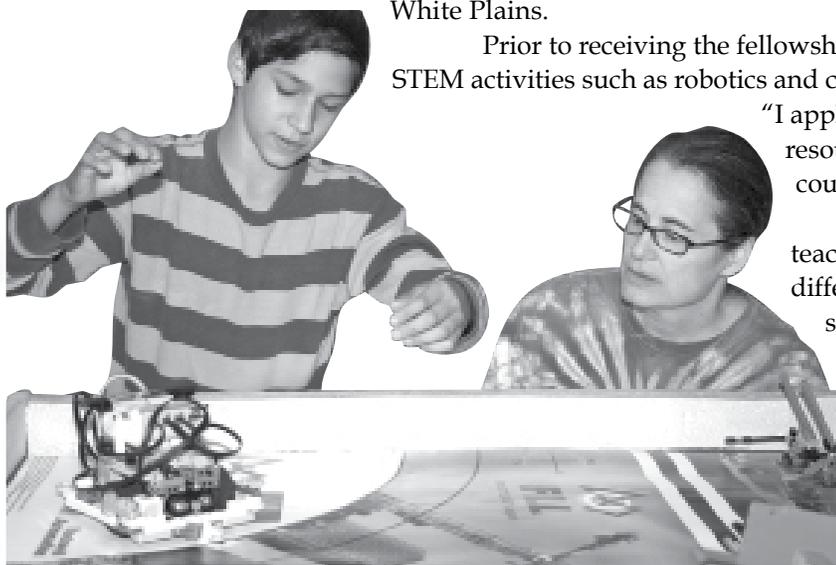
"I applied for the fellowship to learn about additional resources for integrating STEM activities into my courses," she explains.

The fellowship has already impacted her teaching at Onteora, she believes. "I already see a difference in the degree that I relate the academic subjects to real-world applications," she says. "As the fellowship year progresses, I'm sure I will have even more resources and experiences to share with my students."

Middle School student Zoren Mastel shows his Pre-Engineering teacher, Kate VanBaren, the EV3 robot he created.



Middle School Science teacher Kate VanBaren (right) works with Grade 8 student Ciarra Palmer on a robotics project.



# Onteora Kicks Off New School Year

ONTEORA STUDENTS BEGAN the 2015-2016 school year on a sun-drenched September morning shortly before Labor Day. In all, more than 1,300 students poured off school buses, tumbled out of family cars, and strolled up their schools' sidewalks with an eager enthusiasm that only the first day of school can inspire.

Teachers and staff members were there early to welcome the students as they arrived, helping the littlest ones off the buses, directing them to their classes, and reassuring the occasional teary-eyed tyke. Kindergarten students were accompanied on their bus rides by parents and guardians, who helped ease their children's transitions to their new learning environments.

Older students, happily reconnecting with classmates they hadn't seen since June, strolled confidently into buildings that had been spruced up over the summer. Youngsters at Bennett, Woodstock, and Phoenicia passed through newly installed



Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella (center) greets Lilah Signore and her father on Opening Day.



Bennett student Amira Chefridi exits the bus on her way to the first day of school.

doors. Repairs had been made to the pavement at Phoenicia and Woodstock, as well as to the brick façade at the High School/Middle School.

At Woodstock and Phoenicia, students arrived to see that their beloved playgrounds had been removed during the summer to make way for safer play areas with colorful new equipment (see pages 6 and 7 to read more about the playground builds, which took place later in September).

Another year of learning has begun!

Conner Avery, a student in Ms. Lim's Grade 3 class at Woodstock, works on a writing assignment.



## Welcome Back to School

Lily Spada, a Grade 1 student at Woodstock, practices her reading.



### MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT AND BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESIDENT

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The Board has appointed two groups to work on important District initiatives. The first group is tasked with the creation of a new Shared Decision Making document. This document provides the structure for stakeholders to work collaboratively and provide input on important educational topics. The other group is a Wi-Fi Task Force that has been charged with gathering and organizing research pertaining to Wi-Fi and making a recommendation to the Board regarding the use of Wi-Fi in our school buildings.

Our community is beautifully diverse in its beliefs and traditions. However you celebrate the winter season, we wish you health and happiness. Reaching out to help others is something we can do year-round. Children learn by example; let's be their role models.

Sincerely,

**Victoria McLaren**  
INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

**Bobbi Schnell**  
BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESIDENT

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

- Leo Buscaglia



## BENNETT'S RED DRESS RUN

**RED-GARBED BENNETT STUDENTS** continued their Homecoming tradition, racing onto the Onteora track to raise money for a good cause. Patterned after a charity run held each year in New Orleans, Bennett's Red Dress Run raised funds that are being used to enhance the school's Courtyard Study Garden through the addition of comfortable seating and a shade-providing pergola.

# HOMECOMING 2015

**THIS YEAR'S HOMECOMING CELEBRATION** was a multi-day affair, beginning on Thursday, September 24, when High School students cast their votes for Homecoming King and Queen. The festivities continued on Friday, when Onteora's athletes provided the entertainment for a spirited pep rally featuring scooter races, Hula hooping, dancing, a half-court basketball challenge, music, and lots of laughs. The weekend was chock-full of athletic contests, including soccer, volleyball, and field hockey games, as well as a modified football scrimmage. Saturday brought brilliant sunshine, Bennett Intermediate School's Red Dress Run, and a ceremony recognizing the fall sports teams, senior athletes, and this year's Homecoming Court. Receiving the coveted King and Queen crowns were Troy O'Conner and Stephanie Smith. Bringing the celebration to a close was the traditional Homecoming Dance, when students had the opportunity to show off their school spirit—and their athleticism on the dance floor.



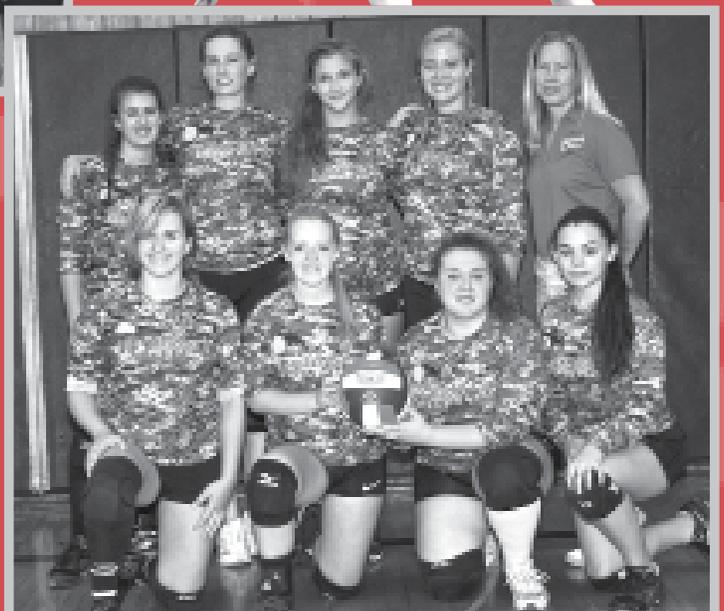
Onteora's senior athletes posed with family members in front of the Homecoming star.



Elected to Onteora's 2015 Homecoming Court were (from left to right): Raegan Loheide; Alexander Schaefer; Sean Harkin; Stephanie Smith; Troy O'Connor; Megan Wiacek; Keenan Jones; Correy McGlyn; Graham Ebbecke; and Bradley Clinton.



**HALLOWEEN CAME EARLY** for children enrolled in the Onteora Pre-K program administered by First Steps Day Care in Woodstock. On October 30, the youngsters enjoyed a host of Halloween-themed activities, including a costume parade that snaked through the neighborhood. They also read spooky books, sang seasonal songs about spiders, skeletons, and the like, and practiced their hammering skills on giant pumpkins.



# Phoenicia Playground: A Community Affair

**COLLABORATION** — working together to achieve a common goal — is integral to an Onteora education. Students are encouraged to work together to tackle problems, brainstorm solutions, and carry out projects. So it's no surprise that collaboration was key to the success of the recent community build for Phoenicia's new playground, which took place September 11-12.

"This was one of the most amazing collaborative events that I have ever been involved in, and I've been involved in quite a few," said Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella, who worked alongside parents, community members, staff members, and even a number of High School students. The volunteer labor — which included members of Onteora's Volleyball team and the joint Onteora/Kingston Football team — helped keep down the cost of the project, which, like Woodstock's playground project, was funded with money allocated as part of the 2014-2015 school budget.

Though the building event was a two-day affair, the planning process took at least two years, noted Mrs. Sella. The design process involved a playground committee



that included parents Adam Turba, Marcey Brownstein, and Yuki Asada; PTA President Caro Turba; Teacher/Physical Therapist Paula Wade; Physical Education Teacher Patrick Burkhardt; Principal Linda Sella; Director of Facilities and Operations Jared Mance; and the co-chairs of the Board of Education Facilities Committee, Trustee Rob Kurnit and Interim Superintendent Victoria McLaren.



Phoenicia students Chase and Cole Matteson enjoy the view from the playground's climbing tower.

The playground committee finalized the playground design in collaboration with Parkitects, the vendor chosen to oversee the playground projects at Phoenicia and Woodstock. Phoenicia students, given the opportunity to vote on the final piece of playground equipment, chose a climbing "rock" that has proved to be very popular during recess time.

Among the volunteer workers was parent Laura Siegel, who has a third grade son at Phoenicia. "It's amazing what can get accomplished," she enthused. "I've never done anything like this before, but it all worked. We all cooperated with each other, figuring out what needed to be done."

## Onteora Hosts Film-Themed Career Day

**IT'S A WRAP!** Continuing its successful collaboration with the Woodstock Film Festival, Onteora High School once again hosted the festival's Youth Career Day. The annual event, which introduces high school students to some of the many careers available in the film industry, took place on October 2. This year's attendees included students from Onteora, Ellenville, and Locust Valley high schools, as well as Woodstock Day School.

Career Day kicked off with a screening of *The Student Body*, a documentary inspired by Ohio's controversial mandate that required schools to perform Body Mass Index (BMI) tests on students. The film's co-director, Bailey Webber, began filming after realizing that some of her fellow students were receiving what she viewed as "fat-shaming" letters, informing them that they fell outside of the test's acceptable weight range.

After the screening there was a question-and-answer session with Bailey, who is now in college, and her father and co-director, award-winning filmmaker Michael Webber. Students also had an opportunity to interact with other industry professionals, including actor and director (and Kingston native) Ross Partridge, director Aaron Nee, and Laurie Wertz, a director and screenplay writer.



Filmmakers Bailey Webber (left) and her father, Michael Webber, fielded questions from the students attending the Woodstock Film Festival's Youth Career Day.

David Nelsen-Epstein, who teaches History as well as filmmaking at Onteora, was excited that the young attendees had the opportunity to view *The Student Body*. "For a lot of these kids, this film will raise the bar," he says. "This girl was just a sophomore in high school when she started working on it."

Onteora senior Jack Warren, whose film *Train* was showcased at the 2013 Woodstock Film Festival, was among the repeat attendees at Career Day. "I'm working on a short film that I'm going to submit to colleges," he shared.

Also present was Onteora freshman Morgana Edelstein, whose interest in a possible film career was spurred in part by her grandfather's role as an associate director on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. "I've seen him edit; it was an inspiration and I want to try it," she explains.

The collaboration between Onteora and the film festival is a natural one, suggests Mr. Nelsen-Epstein. "We have this terrific resource in our community — the Woodstock Film

Festival — why wouldn't we want to collaborate with them? We also have great projects, a great screen, and an auditorium that can seat 600. It's an obvious place to show films."

# Woodstock Welcomes New Playground

WOODSTOCK PRIMARY SCHOOL students not only work hard – they also play hard. So it's not surprising that the school's beloved playground needed replacing after more than 25 years of intensive use and weathering.

This fall, the school welcomed a newer, safer playground, thanks in part to hours and hours of free labor donated by parents, students, community members, and Onteora staffers.

Gone are the splinters, which prompted too many visits to the nurse's office, and the obstructed sightlines, which hindered adult supervision. Gone, too, is the pressure-treated wood, which contained arsenic.

In their place is a colorful, state-of-the-art playground with plenty of opportunities for climbing, swinging, spinning, hanging, and creative playing. In a nod to Woodstock's rich musical heritage, there's even a guitar-shaped car for children to play on.

Volunteer labor was an integral, cost-saving part of the project, which was overseen by Parkitects, the playground vendor. A community build event on September 18-19 was a huge success, drawing scores of willing helpers, including members of the Varsity Football and Volleyball teams.

"The new playground is very exciting. It was a long time coming," said parent volunteer Lorelei Voelker, who spent much of her time at the event pouring cement. "We'll be able to watch the kids more effectively," added fellow volunteer Roy Brueckner, who has two children at the school. "We're also getting rid of that nasty pressure-treated wood."

All the volunteers' planning, hauling, lifting, digging, leveling, and pouring paid off, according to Woodstock Principal Scott Richards. "The new playground is a hit with the students," he enthused. "They especially love climbing on the Mobius, a curving climbing wall."



Sunari McNabb practices her balancing skills on the new Woodstock playground.



## ONTEORA STUDENT SELECTED FOR NATIONAL CHOIR

SENIOR DAN FOSTER recently had the opportunity to showcase his musical talent on an impressive stage: the historic Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee. Dan, who was selected as a member of the All-National Honor Ensembles Mixed Choir as a Bass, performed at the iconic music venue on October 28.

According to Onteora Vocal Director Krista Cayea, "Dan was the first Onteora student ever to perform with the national choir. We're so proud of him!"

Dan's previous musical accomplishments include starring in *Ghost*, the High School's spring musical, and participating in the highly competitive New York State School Music Association's All-State Chorus. Congratulations, Dan!



## ONTEORA BOARD OF EDUCATION APPOINTS NEW TRUSTEE

THE ONTEORA BOARD OF EDUCATION has appointed Woodstock resident Kevin Salem to fill the vacant position of Board trustee. The appointment follows an interview process conducted at the October 13 Board meeting.

Mr. Salem will fill the Board of Education seat vacated by Gideon Moor until the Budget Vote and Election on May 17, 2016.

Mr. Salem was born and raised in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. After attending the University of Pittsburgh, where he studied psychology and anthropology, he moved to Boston and continued his career as a musician, composer, and record producer. In 1990, he moved to New York City, often residing temporarily in Woodstock, where he recorded at local studios, finally resettling there in 1998.

Mr. Salem's daughter is currently enrolled at Onteora Middle School. From 2012-2014, he served as Bennett Intermediate School's PTA president. He has also served on several District committees. "I am a fervent believer in public education, school sports as a community-building apparatus, and progressive political causes," he says.

Mr. Salem is also involved in anti-bullying and peace-building efforts, particularly in the Middle East and the Ukraine, through his work with Operation Respect. He has worked with the organization since 2009, touring schools and collaborating with government agencies, the Department of State, and local recording artists to develop a music-based initiative to foster an atmosphere of openness and respect among youth living in areas of conflict.

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## To Postal Customer



### ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT Djuna Perkins CLASS OF 1985

**ONTEORA ALUMNA DJUNA PERKINS** has spent much of her professional life working on behalf of victims of crimes, discrimination, and harassment. She credits her Onteora education with planting the seeds for her impressive legal career, which has included stints as a state prosecutor, private litigator, and founder of her own law firm.

“My teachers at Onteora played an enormously influential role in my career path,” recalls Perkins. “In fifth grade at Woodstock Elementary School, Mrs. [Susan] Klotzberger gave me the ‘Scales of Justice’ award at the end of the year. She told me she gave me this award because I was always standing up for other students in the class, like a lawyer would. It was then that I started thinking about becoming a lawyer.”

Other Onteora teachers inspired her with their passion for their subject matters and their belief in her abilities, including Grade 8 Social Studies teacher William Kronenberg and High School History teachers John Wildermuth and Hubert Breitenberger.

Her greatest inspiration, however, was her AP American History teacher, Matthew Ostoyich. “In addition to teaching us so well about our history, Mr. Ostoyich spent a tremendous amount of time advising us about our writing and our educational and career aspirations,” she remembers. The teacher’s emphasis on the importance of

critical thinking helped convince her that she was meant to become a lawyer.

After graduating from Smith College and Boston University School of Law, Perkins served as an Assistant Attorney General in Massachusetts and an Assistant District Attorney in Boston. In her latter position, she served as Chief of the Domestic Violence Unit, where she oversaw the prosecution of all of the city’s domestic violence cases.

After leaving the District Attorney’s Office, she spent nine years practicing law at a small firm, where she represented victims of crime and sexual harassment.

In 2012, she started her own law practice, DP Law (<http://djuna-perkins-law.com/>). “When a college, school, or employer receives a complaint of sexual misconduct against a student or staff member, they hire me to investigate the complaints and decide whether a violation has occurred,” Perkins explains. “I enjoy this work because it serves a critical mission and challenges me to ensure that my decisions, and the process by which they are made, are fair.”

Perkins also teaches a class on employment law at Northeastern University, and serves as chair of the board of directors of Brookview House, a non-profit organization that provides housing and supportive services to homeless families.

Perkins looks back fondly on her Onteora education. “I had many great teachers throughout my years at Onteora, from Kindergarten through 12th grade—almost too many to name,” she says. “Their warmth, dedication, and attention made school a welcoming place for me and inspired and challenged me to be everything I could.”

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