

TECH TALK

Technology Takes Ravens to Zimbabwe and Beyond

DR. PETER H. KILMARX, director of the U.S. Center for Disease Control in Zimbabwe, peered into Ravenscroft's Library & Technology Center from Zimbabwe to talk with eighth-grade students via Skype.

Kilmarx's animated face filled the computer screen as he greeted students and asked, "Can everyone see and hear me?"

It wasn't so long ago that talking with someone a continent away proved to be a difficult task, and viewing a live image of them was out of the question. Now, thanks to various technologies, opportunities abound for Ravenscroft students to connect with people all over the globe.

The Middle School is embracing technology not only to help students complete assignments and conduct research, but also to facilitate interactions with professionals in various fields who can help them learn how to better change their

world. The eighth grade Ravens in Action speaker series and its related activities use new technologies as a catalyst for intellectual conversations that provide students with a global perspective. Ravens in Action has focused recently on the issues of hunger, poverty, health, energy and the environment.

Kilmarx spoke to students in January about his role in combating infectious diseases and how they, as global citizens, can help in the effort to decrease outbreaks. Students viewed his PowerPoint presentation while he described his work with the CDC and the Peace Corps in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He spoke of diagnosing ebola and malaria outbreaks and how the organization has significantly controlled these outbreaks over the years through modern medicine and technology.

"I greatly enjoyed talking to the students in January via Skype. It was a lot of fun and the technology served us well. Their questions and insights were excellent and very interesting for me to hear," Kilmarx said. "The interaction with the students and the use of modern technology left me feeling very energized and hopeful about the future."

Middle School Instructor Wes Brown explained that the Kilmarx talk was consistent with the purpose of the Ravens in Action speaker series.

"One of the goals of the Ravens in Action Speaker Series is to give students the opportunity to hear from experts in the field of various global



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(above) FRANCES MARGARET GEHRKE '18, BELLA CHURCH '18 and PELL WILLIAMSON '18 at the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant trip.

issues," Brown said. "Kilmarx's position and experience fit this criteria, and certainly allowed students to see how researchers are working to gain a better understanding of various diseases that are impacting people in the developing world."

Students have also had opportunities to interact with speakers directly connected to Ravenscroft. Dr. Kevin Campbell, a Ravenscroft parent, came to campus in January to discuss the importance of healthy choices and the positive impact of general medical information being shared through modern technology and social media, expanding the audience for general health information.

"This exposure allowed students to see the various capacities in which social media could be used," said Brown. "It also showed them that people value what eighth-graders think and they can make a difference in their world."

Earline Middleton, vice president of Agency Services at the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, spoke to students in October about hunger and malnutrition and the need for protein-rich food items in the food bank. Students kicked off their food drive in October and learned about world hunger throughout the month.

Middleton's presentation provided a better understanding of where their donated food was going and how their donations affect the community. Some students also toured the food bank and worked in the organization's warehouse. In February, students visited the UNC Energy Labs and Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant in New Hill, N.C., as they researched energy and the environment.

The monthly global themes are a new element of the eighth-grade curriculum, and advisory activities have also focused on the monthly themes. The series kicked off in September with an introduction to global issues, during which Brown presented the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to students.

In March, students chose a topic they have learned about this year and started collaborating in small groups to provide possible solutions. The students will present their findings during April's Forum Day, which serves as the capstone of the program.

"Technology has expanded our ability as educators to reach students and to give them mission-aligned experiences that will prepare them to thrive in a complex and interdependent world," said Brown. *R*