Countryside Trees

NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SCHOOL ALUMNI

Spring 2025

Letter from the Head



Krystal Young

Dear Friends,

It's hard to believe we've already reached May 2025 - this year truly flew by! We're excited to share some highlights with you in this edition of *Trees*.

This was the *Year of the Minion* - the nickname for our eighth-grade class - and what a year it was! With 21 graduates, it was the largest eighth-grade class in Countryside's 33-year history. Their size and spirit reflect the evolution of our middle school program. From our annual retreat (yes, a sleepover at my house!) to planning schoolwide events, dances, and their graduation, these students led with heart and humor. They also explored what it means to be an effective leader - skills we hope they'll carry with them into high school and beyond. I'm so proud of them, and every spring, saying goodbye is bittersweet.

This spirit of leadership, joy, and community isn't just limited to our middle schoolers - it's woven into every corner of Countryside. I love writing this article each year because it gives me a moment to reflect on how much we accomplish together. Some of this year's highlights included movie night and food trucks in our big backyard, placing third in our very first Battle of the Books competition, celebrating Eid with our Muslim families, the always-charming kindergarten boat show, and of course, our annual trivia night (my team didn't win - but I'm blaming that on trading my husband for my sister!).

This year also marked the launch of our new elementary school alignment, and we are thrilled to say it's been a resounding success. Students and teachers are thriving in their new spaces and routines - it's been a season of growth all around.

Of course, as the school year ends, we also prepare for a few bittersweet goodbyes. Mr. Bielenberg is heading to Texas to join his fiancée, who's in her second year of medical residency. Mrs. Carpenter is stepping away after a wonderful career at Countryside to enjoy a more flexible schedule. And after more than 30 years of dedicated service, Mrs. Kaplan is retiring to spend more time with her grandchildren. We'll miss them dearly and are so grateful for the many ways they've shaped our community. We wish them nothing but joy and adventure in the chapters ahead.

As we say goodbye to some beloved staff members, we're also excited to welcome new faces. Mr. Kyle Probst will be joining us as our

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Fall Day - 8th graders (Minions) and middle school teachers (heroes & villains) from *Despicable Me*

Big News

- We Established a golf team and a Battle of the Books Team
- We held our first ever Basketball Shootout fundraiser
- We hosted our first ever Scholastic Bowl all-day tournament

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Welcome from Mrs. Young

Welcome Letter - continued from page 1

new social sciences teacher. He brings ten years of experience in social studies, including five at another NAIS independent school. We're thrilled to have him on board and look forward to the energy and expertise he'll bring to our community. Meanwhile, our search is just getting underway for a new Director of Admissions and a new Business Manager - we're excited to see who the search brings us!

As always, even as we reflect on the year behind us, we're already looking ahead with excitement. Plans for the 2025–26 school year are taking shape, and we can't wait to welcome everyone back in the fall - with new ideas, fresh faces, and our strong sense of community that makes Countryside so special.

I wish you a summer full of adventure.

Krystal Young
Head of School

Homecoming/Fall Picnic 2024

Our Homecoming/Fall Picnic attendees enjoyed inflatables and face painting. In addition, our returning alumni were treated to free Kona Ice! We loved having so many of you return! **Mark your calendars:**

Saturday, August 23 4:00 - 6:30 p.m.
Homecoming 2025!

See additional alumni photos here:
www.countrysideschool.org/alumni



Kaitlyn Young, Alleigha Nelson, Lahori Mitra, Mattox Pugh (behind), Shivani Anand



Isaac Sulkin, Nate Sharpe, Aiden Kim, Nicholas Woodward, Cole Dimpsey



Helen Fu, Mallory Young, Minna Adoni, Sophia Kalantzis-Cope, Juli Balogh



Above: Kathryn Williams, Allison Williams, Aliyah Enoch-Wilmore, Briley Miller

Right: Nate Sharpe, Oren Akresh, Cole Dimpsey, Nyal Adoni, Ian Yao



New Classroom Configurations

This fall we introduced a stand-alone kindergarten classroom, a combined 1st and 2nd grade room, a combined 3rd and 4th grade room, and a stand-alone 5th grade classroom.

Our youngest students can softly transition from preschool while our first graders return from summer break ready to hit the ground running, and our fifth graders will be able to focus on transitioning to middle school.

Our new middle school math room moved across the hall. It is now our only fully carpeted room, and it utilizes entirely digital instruction. Ms. Santiago teaches from her iPad and casts the lesson to the 86" TV.

Our 5th grade now being stand-alone allows us to expand at this grade by a couple of students. With a focus on hands-on projects, the room now has comfort seating for entire class discussions - assembled by the students.

The Mary E. Breault Library moved down the hall when the middle school math classroom needed the space. It is now used daily by our world language teachers and for our computer programming class.



Middle school math classroom for digital instruction



Self-contained 5th grade classroom with sofas



Mary E Breault Library



Self-contained kindergarten classroom

Help us add books in Mary's memory!

To donate: Send checks made out to Countryside School with "Mary Breault Memorial Fund" on the memo line.

WE ARE ON:

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

LINKEDIN

YOUTUBE

Countryside Basketball Shoot-a-Thon

Our athletics department sponsored our first-ever basketball Shoot-a-thon this spring. Students collected pledges of $1 per basket made. They then had 100 attempts to shoot free throws. Our winners were 8th graders Piper with 51 baskets and Crew with 50 baskets.

They collected over $3,000 to donate to the Strides Shelter - a homeless shelter in Champaign. Well done, Comets!



Our Newest Teams



Battle of the Books:

We started our first-ever Battle of the Books team and they took 3rd place at the Battle of the Books competition! The 4th and 5th graders in our book club spent several weeks familiarizing themselves with 20 books written and/or illustrated by or about Africans and African Americans. Then they pitted their knowledge against other local teams at the competition at the Champaign Public Library.



Golf Team:

Thanks to 8th grader, Crew, we had a golf team for the first time in Countryside history. Congratulations to Crew who competed at IESA Sectionals representing Countryside!

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Lunch Donation Thanks!

Huge thank you to our anonymous alumni who donated funds to provide our entire staff and faculty with lunch from Siam Terrace this spring. The faculty thoroughly enjoyed having Thai food brought in.

Our Newest Alumni

Our graduating 8th graders plan to attend these high schools this fall:

Zachary Akresh	Central
Giovanni Bellina	Academy
Isaac Bodony	Urbana
Lawrence Booth	Academy
Kaia Bowe	Central
Meera Chekuri	Central
Sylvie DeJarnette	Unity (Tolono)
Jacob Epstein	Olympic Heights Boca Raton, FL
Piper Fields	Academy
Blayke Johnson	Central
Christopher Kota	Central
Daehyun Lee	Urbana
Zoe McMillan	Centennial
Crew Messer	Monticello
Mustafa Muhammad	Payton College Prep Chicago, IL
Johan Ochoa	Centennial
Soma Sarathy	Urbana
Sophie Shaffer	Urbana
Isabella Sun	TBD
Ethan Wisdom	Central
Ezra Zook	Academy

Our students matriculating as sub-freshmen at University Laboratory High School:

Lauren Braun	Joshua Koo
Reynard Ji	Sameena Raj-Underhill

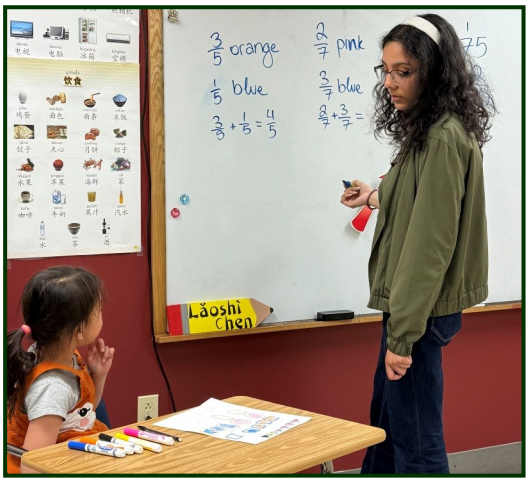
Expedition Suggestions

Thanks to everyone who took the time to suggest ideas for our middle school Expedition (our day out in Champaign using public transportation and visiting cool sites.) Our list of ideas for our students to choose from has grown tremendously - thanks to your suggestions!

Alumni Giving Back to Countryside

Many of our alumni return to volunteer or work at Countryside. They do tutoring, help with Extended Day, teach summer camps, and more.

Shoutout to **Suhani Garg** (2020) (pictured below) who spent the spring semester tutoring some of our young students in both math and reading.



Shoutout to **Lauren Feddersen** (2015) (pictured below) who created the curriculum and taught the *Science Academy* summer camp for grades 3-5 and even dissected squid with the excited campers.



Shout out to **Mallory Young** (2022) for helping with assessment testing and working at the front desk.

Thank you to **Mallory Young** (2022) who taught *Book Nook* camp for grades K-2. And to **Suhani Garg** for assisting with the *Let's Put on a Musical* camp. Shoutout to **Alaia Ahmad** (2022) and **Kaitlyn Young** (2023) for assisting with *Book Nook* summer camp.

Thank you to **Mattox Pugh** (2024) (pictured below) who helped us host Scholastic Bowl by volunteering as a moderator.



Shoutout to **Kaitlyn Young** (2023) (pictured below) and **Madison Young** (2022) who filled in as substitutes for a day in our Spanish classes this spring.



Shoutout to **Leslie (Cooper) Gascoine** (2000) who is now in her second year as our full-time school counselor and also taught *Middle School Boot Camp* last summer.

Interested in volunteering at Countryside?

Contact Kristin Feddersen, Advancement Director: feddersen@countrysideschool.org

8th Grade Trip: San Antonio, Texas

This year's 8th grade trip was an adventure in San Antonio, Texas! Over the fast-paced four days, they visited Tower of the Americas, took a cruise along the San Antonio Riverwalk, enjoyed a guided evening ghost tour of San Antonio, and toured both the Natural Bridge Caverns and the Alamo. In addition they spent a day at Six Flags Fiesta Texas and visited the San Antonio Missions. They even made a late night pilgrimage to the viral sensation, Buc-ees!



The Alamo in San Antonio, Texas



Back at school wearing Buc-ees gear from the late night trip to the iconic convenience store



Above: Mrs. Young's "punishment" for students who lose things on a trip is that they have to hold her hand. We had two students and one teacher lose items in San Antonio.

Below: Mrs. Barker, our MS science teacher, suffers the "punishment" for leaving her phone on the bus!



Meera, Sophie, Sylvie and Zoe enjoying treats at Tower of America





Left: Ethan trying on a Davy Crockett hat at the Alamo museum gift shop

JOIN US!
ALUMNI & FORMER FACULTY:
GRADUATION
MAY 22
7 PM

Alumni Shout Outs

Jordan Gunn (2011), now a professional cellist, performed at Krannert Center in April in *An Evening with Mandy Patinkin and Nathan Gunn*. Jordan joined her mother, pianist Julie Gunn, her father, singer Nathan Gunn, and singer Mandy Patinkin with his accompanist for an evening of showtunes, classics, and witty banter.

Ezra Bernhard (2020) was named the 2024 *The News-Gazette* All-Area Tennis Player of the Year. Congrats on your repeat award! Read about his journey in The News-Gazette here: **https://tinyurl.com/TennisEzra**

Olivia Dempsey (2021) competed at IHSA State again in swimming. She swam for Champaign Central in the 200 medley relay.

Sasha Goncalo (2022) received 1st place in Uni High's Iris Chang-Peter Kolodziej Writing Award for non-fiction last spring.

Oren Akresh (2023) received a Bronze Award in the American Mathematics Olympiad, an international math competition.

Congratulations to our alumni on the Urbana High School Science Olympiad team which took 2nd place at State! Congrats to **Lahori Mitra** (2024) and **JJ Lee**, **Simon Hamilton** and **Cameron Hamilton** (all class of 2022). Special shout out to **JJ Lee** who won a gold medal in robot tour and materials science.

Congratulations to our alumni on Academy High's Science Olympiad team who won medals at State! **Jack Braun (2021)** won 2nd place in electric vehicle, 4th in wind power, and 5th in chem lab. **Oren Akresh (2023)** won 4th in astronomy and 5th in chem lab. **Nicolle Scifres (2024)** won 4th place in bottle rocket.

Involved in a show?

Let us know when you are cast in a show because we LOVE to go to see our alumni perform! Drop an email to Kristin Feddersen at feddersen@countrysideschool.org and she will let our faculty and staff know about your upcoming performances!

Alumni in *The Nutcracker*



Lorenzo Pantano (2019), **Janaki Raj-Underhill** (2022), Sameena Raj-Underhill (current 7th grader), **Quincy Payton** (2023) and **Alexandra Warwick** (2006).

Several Countryside alumni performed in CU Ballet's *The Nutcracker* at Krannert Center in December including performing the lead roles - Sugarplum Fairy, the Cavalier, and Clara.

We love that our alumni are involved year after year in this Krannert Center tradition - some even returning from college and beyond to assist backstage and perform.

Alumni on Stage at Central

We loved seeing **Jordan Rinkenberger** (2022) and **Lauren Payton** (2021) in both *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* and *Cinderella* at Central High School. And Jordan portrayed George Gibbs in *Our Town* too.

Check out this wonderful interview and mini performance by **Jordan Rinkenberger** as the Prince with his Cinderella on WCIA-TV's CI Living:

https://youtu.be/xUT8R3mGVws

SEND US YOUR "SHOUTOUTS" FOR SPORTS, THEATRE & ACADEMICS

Alumni Updates

Please note: *Students are listed by "affiliated class year" - the year the students graduated 8th grade or would have graduated had they remained at Countryside.*

ALUMNI:
PLEASE SEND US YOUR UPDATES!

WE'D LOVE TO FEATURE YOU

Aliyah Warwick (1999) welcomed a baby boy and will have her first book of poetry published later this year.

Leslie (Cooper) Gascoigne (2000) still loves working at Countryside School as the school counselor. She and her husband welcomed a baby girl, River, last summer so they are looking forward to her 1st birthday and all of the fun milestones that come with having a baby.

Nate Graham (2001) has became the CEO of Techpaladin LLC, an international software consultancy focused on free and open-source software.

Hilary Pope (2003) owns Art Coop, Inc. in Urbana, IL. "Thanks for teaching me to think creatively!"

Madelyn Gunn Sapp (2009) is living in St. Louis and working and attending law school at St. Louis University. She and her husband TJ are expecting their first child in June.

Juliette Strauss (2009) is living in Chicago with her husband & their 5 year old mini Bernedoodle. She continues to travel the world including Africa, Croatia & Germany in the past year. She is focused this summer on training for the Chicago marathon in October. She is fundraising for Sunrise Association, a day camp for kids with cancer. If you are interested & able, any donations are appreciated!
https://fundraisers.hakuapp.com/julie

Jordan Gunn (2011) is playing with the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, FL. She is marrying Ben Dettelback in May in Champaign.

Mac Dressman (2012) will graduate in June from Science Po in Paris with a master's degree in environmental policy.

James Vaughen (2013) will be moving to Minneapolis in the fall to start a position as principal trumpet of the Minnesota Orchestra.

Dylan Gunn (2014) is living in New York City and teaching history at Success Academy. In the fall he will begin the Middle Eastern Languages and Civilizations Master's Program at Harvard University.

Justin Wang (2014) started medical school at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine this past July and is just working on getting the hang of things!

Lauren Feddersen (2015) is pursuing a master's in biology at Tufts University in Boston. Last summer she competed at US Masters Nationals earning All-American (top time nationally) in the 400 IM in her division.

Nicholas Gunn (2016) is living in Oxford, OH and trading assets. He recently became engaged to Elise Bossenbroek, who is earning her master's degree in speech pathology at Miami University.

Olivia Gunn (2016) is living in Cincinnati, OH and serving as a behavior specialist for K-3 students at Alliance Academy.

Angela Xu (2016) is graduating *summa cum laude* from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) with a degree in computer science and will begin dental school at UIC in the fall.

Ethan Cho (2017) is graduating from the University of Illinois with a BS in Engineering Mechanics. This fall he will begin graduate studies at UIUC as a PhD candidate in mechanical engineering.

Terry Ma (2017) is pursuing his PhD in the School of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University.

Holden Siena (2017) is graduating from Augustana College with a double major in biology and psychology. He will be attending Washington University in St. Louis for a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree.

Alumni Updates

Charlie Smith (2017) is graduating from Williams College, completing a thesis in creative writing. Next year they plan to teach middle or high school English through Teach for America in New York City.

Jyoti Sundaram (2017) recently graduated from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). She took a gap semester to travel to London to see family and start a part-time job at an ice-cream store. In August she will matriculate at UIC for medical school.

Jake Regenwetter (2018) is a junior at Brown University, swimming on the varsity swim team. He recently declared a double-major in Applied Mathematics-Computer Science and Human Spatial Interaction and Design (the latter of which he independently designed!) He is looking forward to the summer, where he will be working at an undergraduate research program at the University of Florida, swimming in his free time, and enjoying the warm weather!

Sophie Zerrouki (2018) truly enjoyed her time in London this semester studying at Bayes Business School, along with traveling almost every weekend across Europe. This summer she will be a strategic advertising intern at Momentum Worldwide in NYC, and for 10 days in June, will play volleyball with Team USA in Brazil.

Teoman Sehitoglu (2019) is a sophomore studying finance at the University of Illinois. This summer, he will be interning in Internal Audit within the Finance department at Kohler Co. in Wisconsin. He has also been helping lead the AXIS Risk Management Academy on campus.

Ian Weible (2019) traveled to Death Valley and the Mojave Desert as part of a two-week geologic mapping course in January. He completed a 60-acre bedrock map of the Rainbow Basin north of Barstow, CA. This summer he will be interning at the Illinois Geologic Survey studying sediment cores.

Coleman Clougherty (2020) is completing his freshman year at UC San Diego where he is studying data science.

Hadley Siena (2020) is finishing her freshman year at the University of Illinois Gies College of Business. She has been inducted into several business fraternities and a pre-law fraternity and has a summer internship with LSI (Logistical Solutions, Inc) at their Washington, DC office.

Cornelia Ye (2023) is finishing her sophomore year at Ithaca High School and is looking forward to working this summer in Washington, DC.

Former Faculty Updates

Sharon Henson (4th grade teacher) In mid-May we will be traveling from our winter home in Florida to our summer home in Iowa. There will be a family gathering in July to celebrate my 80th birthday! I keep busy feeding birds, tending flower beds, planning picnics, and working out at the gym.

RECENTLY GRADUATED COLLEGE?
LET US KNOW YOUR FUTURE PLANS

New Role: Advancement Director

Kristin Feddersen, who has been our part-time Director of Communications and Alumni Relations for over 15 years, is stepping into a new full-time role as Advancement Director.

Kristin has been involved in the Countryside community since 2003 when her eldest started in kindergarten. She is the parent of two alumnae - Taylor (2012) and Lauren (2015). She will continue to be your contact for alumni relations in this new position.

Contact her at feddersen@countrysideschool.org



Q & A with Judy Kaplan

CHECK US OUT ON INSTAGRAM
@COUNTRYSIDEK8



Judy Kaplan

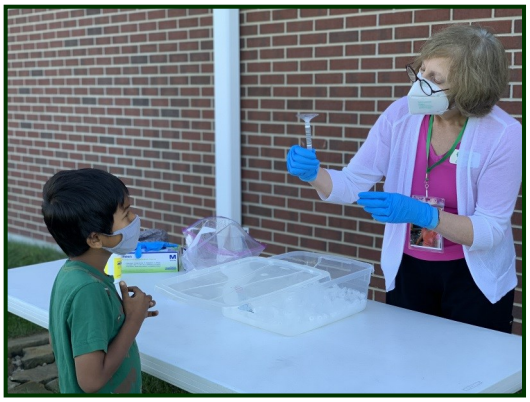
After 22 years as our Director of Admissions, Judy Kaplan is retiring to spend time traveling and time with her grandchildren. We asked Judy a bit about her experience at Countryside:

How did you get involved with Countryside?
This answer is really a history of the start of Countryside. In May 1992, while chatting with other parents as we were waiting to pick up our kids after kindergarten at University Primary School, one of the parents said that she had heard of an upcoming meeting at the Urbana Library on May 7 to discuss the possibility of starting a private school focused on gifted education. As many of the students from UPS, which then ended with 1st grade, hoped to continue in the Unit 4 gifted program at 2nd grade, a lot of us parents were interested.

I went to the meeting, talked with the parents in charge and got involved in the initial steering committee. The first decision was whether we should proceed with even trying to open a new school. We decided that, although it would probably take a year to get it all organized, we really did not want to lose the enthusiasm and impetus at the time, so we decided to aim to open in 3 months, in August 1992.

The second decision was picking a school name for the papers of incorporation. We spent a week polling interested parents on their choice of name, picking from a long list. The chair gave our chosen name to the lawyer, who promptly said no, that name was overused, and to please pick a new name before their meeting in 3 hours. Two of us on the steering committee brainstormed 4 names, the committee polled as many parents as they could, and we all agreed on "Countryside".

I continued on the steering committee, attending an incredible number of meetings, for another few months. Then when my son enrolled for 2nd grade at Countryside, I was asked to join the board in May 1993. All board members had to do something to help run the school, so I volunteered to chair the admissions committee in the 2nd year of the school. When Cathie Webber came as Head in the 3rd year, I continued to help out on the admissions committee, giving tours and reviewing applications, as well as being board secretary. In 2002 I was officially hired as the part-time admissions director.



Judy Kaplan working weekly COVID testing (University of Illinois' saliva test) September 2021

What do you love most about working at Countryside?
The people, both staff and new families. I really liked meeting new families and giving tours. I particularly enjoyed meeting families moving to Champaign and telling them how great the community is.

What do you love least?
Having to send rejection letters. We have had so many great applicants but with no open spot for them. At least some of them would re-apply in future years and I could then happily send the acceptance letter.

Favorite word: Nu? It is a Yiddish word that has no direct translation. Could mean either "what's up?", "what are you thinking of"?, "what's going on?", "let's get going"...

What will you miss? I have some good friends on the staff, whom I will miss seeing every day. And I will miss meeting new families and giving them tours.

Outside of working in a school, what profession would you have enjoyed ? Well, this could more appropriately be what else did I do? I was a neonatologist in Boston before moving to Champaign, then worked a while as a general pediatrician. Ability to work with parents and children, with a knowledge of child development - a pretty good background for K-8 admissions work. And the medical background came in very handy during the pandemic, with all our COVID testing.

Send Us a Sentence Winner

Thanks to all who sent us a sentence about themselves for *Trees*. The winner of the "Send Us a Sentence" drawing is **Hilary Pope** (2003). Hilary has degrees in public relations & advertising and in graphic design, is a practicing artist, and owns Art Coop, Inc. in Urbana, IL.

Thanks, Hilary! These tumblers are truly coveted. We will get yours delivered to you.



High School Alumni Lunches

We hosted an alumni lunch in October - on a day when most of our local high schools were not in session, but Countryside was. This year the returning alumni enjoyed pizza and conversation with Mrs. Young.

Save the date: **Monday**, **October 13** from 12 noon - 1 p.m. for our High School Alumni Lunch!



Back rows: Tara Santiago (Math), Gabe Bielenberg (Social Science), Chris Antonsen (LWW), Cole Dimpsey, Nyal Adoni, Aliyah Enoch-Wilmore, Kathryn Williams, Leslie Gascoigne (School Counselor), Cali Cooper, Mallory Young, Helen Fu

Front row: Ian Yao, Isaac Sulkin, Briley Miller, Shivani Anand, Allison Williams, Adelaide Kota, Madison Young, Krystal Young (Head of School), Lahori Mitra, Brooke Kim (Art), Minna Adoni, Kaitlyn Young

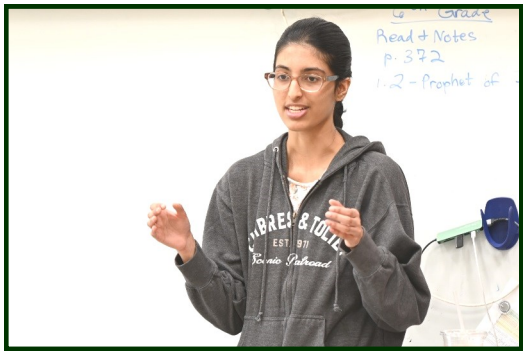
HOMECOMING
FALL PICNIC
AUGUST 23
4 PM - 6:30
AT THE
SCHOOL

Alumna Career Talk

Jyoti Sundaram (2017) returned to chat with our middle schoolers over lunch about her journey from Countryside to medical school. She starts med school this fall at University of Illinois Chicago. She spoke about majoring in biology, minoring in Spanish, and the classes students take to get to med school. She also emphasized the importance of taking risks and trying new things.

Interested in the paths that lead to medical school? Email Jyoti and let her know you are Countryside alum!

jyotisundaram0806@gmail.com



Jyoti Sundaram speaking to middle schoolers about her path to medical school

ALUMNI: WANT TO GIVE BACK? WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU SPEAK TO OUR STUDENTS

Alumni: Will you be visiting the area?

Let us know in advance. We would love to have you come speak to a class or to a group over lunch! Let Kristin Feddersen know: feddersen@countrysideschool.org

Giving Back to the Community

To give back to the community, our students spend time on service projects. Our middle schoolers also have a small service hour requirement and average over 600 hours of service each year! Where they volunteer is their choice. This year they packed food for the Feeding Our Kids program, helped at Salt & Light and DREAAM House, picked up trash at the University of Illinois, to name a few. They also volunteer at Countryside by working concessions for athletic events, assisting with after school clubs, and handling door duty each morning opening car doors and greeting our arriving students.

Our Sociedad Hispánica de Amistad (Spanish Honor Society) held a fabulous tamale sale and operated La Tiendita (little store) on Thursdays from September to April. They collected an amazing $1,284 in revenue to purchase items for a program for residential youth at Cunningham Children's Home. The donated items included: 20 weighted blankets and 12 welcome bags containing socks, sandals, deodorant, sunblock and other toiletries, as well as a book, dictionary and other school and art supplies.



Mrs. Young gets "pied" as part of the middle school fundraiser on Fall Day to benefit C-U at Home, a local homeless shelter.

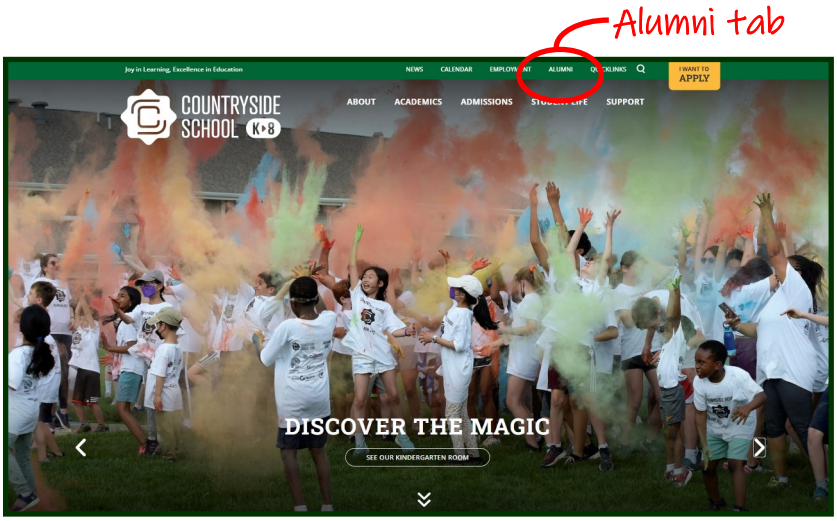
Watch several teachers "get pied" on our YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/@countrysideK8

Our Chinese Honor Society held a bubble tea sale which collected $600. They will use the funds to further the honor society's activities next year and also donate a portion to the Champaign County Humane Society.

Thank you for all your community support!

Alumni Center on our Website



Although our website is designed with prospective families in mind, we hope you will check out our Alumni tab and maybe see some familiar faces in the photos.

Through the Alumni tab you can:

- Access our archive of *Trees* newsletters
- See photos of alumni events
- Update your contact information
- See upcoming events where alumni are welcome to attend

Connect with us!

www.countrysideschool.org

Subscribe to us on YouTube
@CountrysideK8

Like us on Facebook for updates and event info
@CountrysideK8

Follow us on Instagram
@CountrysideK8

Connect with us on LinkedIn
www.linkedin.com/company/countryside-school

IF YOU DID **NOT** RECEIVE *TREES* BY EMAIL, WE DO **NOT** HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Multicultural All-School Lunch Celebrations

Thank so much to our generous families who hosted All School pizza lunches in honor of several cultural and ethnic occasions this year. We love that you explain to all our students the significance of these wonderful celebrations:

November - Diwali, Hindu Festival of Lights

February - Chinese Lunar New Year

April - Eid al-Fitr, end of Ramadan



Our Muslim families and students hosting the Eid al-Fitr lunch celebration in April

Great News at School

Our 5th grade students competed in the statewide **RISE Challenge**, which empowers 5th through 12th grade students to address natural hazards in their communities. Congrats to our Extreme Temperatures group who placed 1st in the state! They are tackling extreme heat by planting red oak trees. Our Tornado Resilience group placed 4th in the state! They focused on tornado preparedness and will lead community training sessions and distribute 100 emergency kits. Both projects were developed with input from local and national experts and reflect the students' deep commitment to building a safer, more resilient community.

Felicidades to our middle schoolers who took the **National Spanish Exam**. Despite being in middle school, our students often do well beyond "8th grade level" Spanish. In Level 1 (1st year high school), we received 1 gold medal (with a perfect score), 4 silver, 7 bronze, and 6 honors. In Level 2 (2nd year high school), we received 4 gold medals, 2 silvers, 2 bronze, and 4 honors! And our 4th and 5th graders rocked the National Spanish Challenge with 19 honored for outstanding or excellent achievement - with 2 perfect scores!

Congratulations to our Mathletes (Zoe, Joshua, Lucas, Liam G) who placed 4th in the team round of the **MATHCOUNTS** chapter competition. They advanced to the team round of the state competition!

Our 5th grade **Rube Goldberg** team won 1st place in our region and then presented at the University of Illinois' Engineering Open House.

Congratulations to our **Scholastic Bowl** team who won 2nd at Regionals. In addition, Countryside hosted our first all day Scholastics Bowl tournament involving 13 teams from 7 schools Our varsity team won 2nd place in their pool.

Congratulations to our **FIRST LEGO League Challenge** team who competed in the Submerged LLF Qualifier at the University of Illinois and advanced to Sectionals. They won the Innovation Project Award for their research on Seabins and microplastics!

CSA Happenings



Countryside School Association (CSA) has been busy. They kicked off the year by using their funds to purchase a custom tent for athletics and school use. We now have shade on the soccer field!

In August CSA provided box lunches to the faculty during in-service. They hosted a welcome back coffee for parents and our annual all-school Fall Picnic/Homecoming event with Kona Ice and other food trucks.

They organized fundraisers partnering with Jupiter's and Panera. They also coordinated the much-appreciated potluck lunches for the faculty during parent-teacher conferences. They hosted the outdoor Family Movie Night and Family Ice Skating Party.

CSA volunteers organized the Barnes & Noble Bookfair - complete with performances by our students and book readings by our teachers. It even included a scavenger hunt around the store. During the January parent/teacher conferences, The Literary provided a wonderful bookfair in our Gallery with the opportunity to buy books at school and benefit CSA.

For athletics, CSA offered concession sales and organized popular GREEN OUT events for both basketball teams and volleyball!

During Teacher Appreciation Week, the faculty & staff were treated to a "snacks bar", lunch from Chipotle and Biaggi's, mini duck hunt, "Dress Like a Teacher" Day, a breakfast cart, and gift bags of thank you notes for our faculty.

Our school would not be the special place it is without our CSA. Thank you volunteers!

Look Who Stopped By

Doey Gordon (affectionately known to us as Mrs. Doey), our former Kindergarten teacher, stopped by in February. She and Stacy Kirby reminisced about their time teaching together in the K/1 room.

They chatted and reminisced about the classroom projects like building the first Egyptian pyramid where Mrs. Doey began the tradition of running in (straight from Egypt) with a dripping suitcase full of wet reeds for the students to weave baskets!

They discussed magical experiences like catching a leprechaun in a paper bag and having it escape in the classroom! And they laughed about the Ocean unit - especially the time when the class meticulously built the giant boat but Mrs. Doey then - to Mrs. Kirby's surprise - had the kids paint it "in about 500 colors". Left brain meets right brain educators!



Doey Gordon (former Kindergarten) and Stacy Kirby (now Associate Head of School). They co-taught in the Kindergarten/1st grade classroom from 1994 - 2007.

ALUMNI:
BE SURE WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS TO RECEIVE INVITATIONS

Alumni: How can you help? How can we help you?

Young Alumni: When you are applying to colleges, please contact us so we may connect you with our older alumni who can answer your questions about universities they attended!

Older Alumni: Let us know if you will be in town and come speak with our students! We will schedule a lunchtime/afternoon time slot for you to share what you do in your job.

Also reach out if you are willing to be a resource for our young alumni to ask questions of you via email about colleges or careers.

Email Kristin Feddersen to make this connection: feddersen@countrysideschool.org

Medallion Club Newest Members

Over 20 years ago, Countryside established the Medallion Club to recognize our graduates who attend Countryside from Kindergarten through 8th grade. The honorees receive a medallion at graduation. Out of over 1,000 students to attend Countryside, **only 83 have earned this honor.**

We welcome our newest Medallion Club members:

Jacob Epstein	**Mustafa Muhammad**
Christopher Kota	**Isabella Sun**
Zoe McMillan	**Ethan Wisdom**

Stop by the school to see your name hanging in our lobby!



ALUMNI:
PLEASE SEND US YOUR UPDATES!

WE'D LOVE TO FEATURE YOU

Cathie Webber: The Early Years of Countryside



Cathie Webber opening the car door (rain or shine) for William King (2021) in 2014

Cathie Webber, our founding Head of School, retired in 2014 after 20 years at the helm of Countryside and over 40 years in education. As Countryside marks its 33rd Founders Day (May 7, 1992), we decided to catch up with Mrs. Webber, and we asked her about the early years of Countryside:

"Thirty-one years ago in May, of 1994, I was offered my dream job. Having developed programs in what was then known as gifted education in several school districts, I was asked to meet with a group of dedicated parents who had two years earlier opened a storefront school in Champaign. This was the end of their second year, and they hoped to expand from a K-3 school to a full K-8 school in the coming year. They needed an administrator or what was soon termed a Head.

The mission was to offer hands-on, experiential learning experiences where children could explore their interests and progress at their own pace. Experiments, independent projects, explorations, and simulations would help them find joy in learning. Students would be encouraged to develop topics of study.

My summer was spent developing a complete curriculum guide for such a school. I drew upon my most successful experiences in working with students and guides such as the Core Curriculum and national standards in education to create our first maps.



Countryside's original rental building next to the Eagle grocery store, now Neimann's, at Kirby and Duncan in Champaign, August 1992

At the time, our school was in two separate buildings. The original school was housed in the building which is currently occupied by Ace Hardware on Kirby Avenue. For the coming year, the parent board leased a small building which had been a daycare center and was located on a street behind the strip mall. It was to house our 4/5 students and middle school as well as the main office.



Groundbreaking for building at Kirby and Staley, October 1996. Note that there are no houses, just cornfields.

Thanks to a board of accomplished and very dedicated parents and community members, the school soon earned membership in the National Association of Independent Schools and became accredited after a thorough review by the Independent Schools Association of Central States.



Countryside School's "new" building with a gravel parking lot at the corner of Kirby and Staley, 1997. Note the building has no middle school addition and ends just beyond the old K/1 and 2/3 rooms.

As the school grew in size, we quickly needed a building which could accommodate our current population as well as an expanded middle school. Again, our dedicated parents rose to the challenge. After looking at several possible existing buildings that were available, we decided to launch a campaign to build our own school.

At the time we purchased our land, in 1996, there were some houses behind the school, but we were the only building on Kirby going west. We celebrated three groundbreakings. The first was breaking ground for the main building. Every student had a shovel, and we all dug together! The second groundbreaking was for the addition of the middle school classrooms and office space to the east of our building. And then in 2012 we broke ground for the gym/stage and offices addition.

For twenty years I had the joy of working with so many wonderful parents, teachers, and, of course, children. Retirement wasn't an easy decision."

What are your favorite moments?
One of my most favorite memories is welcoming students on the first day of school into our brand-new building. Another is listening to the 8th grade speeches at graduation.

What are you doing now?
Now I am involved in quite a few organizations, love taking OLLI courses and visiting my grandchildren (2, 5 & 7) in Boston and Florida, and traveling. (Soon I will be off to Norway and Sweden.)

Thank you to all the teachers, administrators, parents, and especially the students for so greatly enriching my life.

I welcome your updates.
Cathie Webber
Email: caj713@gmail.com



Ribbon cutting for the Gym and Performing Arts Center Grand Opening with Cathie Webber, Head of School, and Earle Heffley, Board President, August 2012

Leave Your Thumbprint

If you were **not** here for 8th grade and attend an alumni event at the school, you may put your thumbprint and name on our Alumni Wall!



HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI LUNCH
MONDAY
OCTOBER 13
NOON - 1 PM

Highlights of the Past Year

Camp Countryside:

After decades of essentially morning-only summer camps, last summer we launched full-day summer camps!

For three weeks in June, campers from K-9th grade could select a morning camp and a different afternoon camp - with the option of campers being dropped off at 7:45 am and staying until 5:15 pm. The all-camp gatherings featured friendly competition for the Stellar Stick trophy.

This summer our offerings have grown to offering four weeks of all-day camps!



Camp Countryside: Story to Stage camp performance of "The Day the Crayons Quit"

Wheelchair Basketball:
This spring Illinois Wheelchair Athletics joined our PE classes, bringing nearly two dozen sports wheelchairs for our students to experience. The program director explained how these wheelchairs - with cambered wheels and additional caster wheels - are designed for stability and maneuverability. They then taught our students the fundamentals of wheelchair basketball.



3rd graders practice shooting during wheelchair basketball in PE class

Our youngest students learned to maneuver their wheelchairs and played tag, Sharks and Minnows, and Red Light-Green Light. Older students learned the fundamentals of wheelchair basketball, and our middle schoolers even scrimmaged!



Middle schoolers scrimmaging in wheelchair basketball in PE class

Holocaust Lecture:

Dr. William Gingold, local Holocaust survivor, spoke to our 4th – 8th grade families last May. Dr. Gingold and his family spent the first three years of his life incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto, survived the Siberian work camps, and eventually made it to the United States.

Retired from the University of Illinois, he dedicates his time to promoting tolerance, educating others, and inspiring the best in us. You can hear him tell the story of his incredible journey on Spotify and YouTube:

https://youtu.be/odi30TPHB1o



Willliam Gingold, local Holocaust survivor, speaks to our 4th-8th grade families last May

ALUMNI REUNION:
DATE TO BE SET THIS WINTER

College Bound and Future Plans

Congratulations to our alumni headed to the following schools with their potential major:

Thanks to those who submitted where they are going - and to those who publicly published on social media where they are headed. *If you are not listed here, we do not have your contact information. Please let us know your post high school plans.*

Sophia Bashir	University of Illinois
Adrian Blume	Rutgers University - biomedical engineering
Jack Braun	Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology- mechanical engineering
Max Chen	Yale University
Olivia Dempsey	Truman State University - exercise science
Deven Galvez	Northwestern University - prelaw
Dillon Jones	University of Wisconsin - computer science
Nellie Kenney	Yale University - English and political science
David Konicek	Illinois State University - public accounting BS/MPA program
Aidan Jane Millar-Nicholson	University of Vermont - animal sciences
Lauren Payton	Xavier University of Louisiana - psychology/premed
Varenya Rao-Mallela	University of North Carolina - chemistry
Staz Smith-Provezis	University of Illinois - psychology
Conrad Tichenor	Cleveland State University - psychology
Bonnie Weaver	Cornell University - public health
Elliot Wasserman	Brown University - applied mathematics

NOT LISTED HERE?
LET US KNOW YOUR POST HIGH SCHOOL PLANS

Shakespeare Field Trip



8th graders Ethan, Jacob, and Soma

Our 8th grade class performed *The Seussification of A Midsummer Night's Dream* - a playful adaptation of Shakespeare's classic (see above) in February.

In anticipation of the 8th grade play, our **entire** middle school took the train to Chicago to see a youth matinee of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater. (Yes, that's over 60 students on an Amtrak train and city buses!)

Athletics Raffle

Win a Yeti cooler and two season tickets to Illini football!

Winner drawn on May 31.

Purchase raffle tickets:
www.countrysideschool.org/raffle

Community Book Club

In furthering our work on culturally responsive teaching practices, Countryside faculty and staff continued meeting virtually with Afrika Afeni Mills during in-service this year.

Next school year, we will be offering a book club - *open to the Countryside community* - with Afrika Afeni Mills!

More information to come this fall!

Countryside School

Joy in Learning, Excellence in Education

NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SCHOOL ALUMNI

Countryside School
4301 W. Kirby Avenue
Champaign, IL 61822

217.355.1253
E-mail: alumni@countrysideschool.org

We don't want to lose contact!

Please send us your email address: alumni@countrysideschool.org

We Need Your Pennant

We LOVE displaying pennants from all our alumni's colleges and universities, and we have over **137 pennants on display!**

Drop us an e-mail if you can provide us with a pennant (12" x 30") or to ask if we already have it! alumni@countrysideschool.org



Mark your calendars:

Graduation	May 22 at 7 p.m. in the gym
5th Annual Golf Outing & Raffle	May 31 at Legends Golf Course
Homecoming/Fall Picnic	August 23 from 4:00 - 6:30 p.m. on our back lawn
High School Drop-In Lunch	October 13 from 12 noon - 1 p.m.
Winter Alumni Reunion	TBD - usually December