TAKE YOUR KIDS TO SCHOOL DAY

On Thursday April 24, more than 40 honorary Rhinos attended Ridgewood Avenue School for the day in celebration of Take Your Children to Work Day. Teachers and staff were invited to bring their kids to school for a day filled with fun and new friends.

Ranging in age from 18 mos to 17 years, the kids started the day by sharing their names during morning announcements, followed by a scavenger hunt that required a thorough search through the school. Other activities included mindfulness drawings with Mrs. Bas, seed plantings with Mrs. Ely, playground cleanup with Mrs. Roberts, gym games with Ms. Raven, extended recess and a pizza lunch in the Makerspace with Dr. Donovan.

Take Your Child To Work Day is a nationally recognized program generally observed on the fourth Thursday of April. Many companies and organizations take part in the event with programs for children of employees. Almost 150 current RAS students took part yesterday by attending work with their parents - nearly 25% of the student body!
This year, a West Indian manatee named Ginger was generously adopted for Ridgewood Avenue School by Peter Seymour, a Glen Ridge resident who actively supports various preservation initiatives to protect manatees and their aquatic habitats for future generations.

Ginger is more than 25 years old, having first been identified near Marco Island, FL in 1994. Many manatees, like Ginger, are identified by permanent watercraft scars on their bodies and tails. A volunteer for the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission first recognized Ginger by a large exclamation point-shaped scar near her left shoulder. Using this identifying feature as well as satellite tagging, Ginger’s movements and activities are tracked for research and protection.

Ginger frequents the west coast of Florida, south of Tampa Bay. In the summer she is active in the waters of the Marco Island canal and mangrove systems, and travels each winter to the warm waters the Florida Power & Light power plant in Tice, FL with hundreds of other manatees to stay warm. This area became so popular that a county-run Manatee Park is now adjacent to FPL, with an education center and viewing area.

The mother of two known calves, Ginger was seen with her baby Ale in the winter of 2010. Ginger’s adoption certificate and biographical information is now on display at RAS, and additional information about Ginger and other manatees can be found at www.savethemanatee.org.
ALL KINDS OF POWERFUL

The Glen Ridge Municipal Alliance Committee sponsored an amazing experience for 4th and 5th grade girls at Ridgewood Avenue School. The program, facilitated by Girls Leadership, invited girls to attend with an adult mentor they feel comfortable with for a 4-week course that practiced using the skills of assertive self-expression through activities, discussion, and paired scenarios. The workshop gave the girls and their grownups the opportunity to have fun, bond, and work together to explore the importance of healthy and productive conflict.

The registration filled quickly with many girls and grownups interested in participating. For those who were able to join, the reviews were overwhelmingly positive. Thanks to the support of GR MAC and RAS, it was an experience the participants will remember—and draw from—for a lifetime.

“Since girls have been found to be more susceptible to depression and anxiety, we felt that it was important for GR MAC to take a more holistic look at substance abuse. One of those ways was to help girls gain more confidence and work their way through healthy conflict,” said Hayley Krischer.

“As a participant, I found Girls Leadership not only enlightening in teaching me new methods to communicate with my daughter—but my daughter learned to confidently communicate as well.”

Next up, girls in grades 6, 7 and 8 will participate in another Girls Leadership training program and in May, GR MAC will sponsor an evening event for young men in grades 6-12 focused on the film “The Mask You Live In.” The evening will include a film viewing and break out sessions designed to support young men and the adults who attend with them to talk about topics focused around masculinity.

Ridgewood Avenue is grateful to the two newest leaders of GR MAC, Ross Fields and Hayley Krischer, who are continuing to seek new programming and revitalize this important community organization.

Additional information about Girls Leadership and available programs can be found at www.girlsleadership.org.
RIGHT TO VOTE AND WRITE TO WIN!

Fourth Grader Dalia Moldovan Wins Regional Essay Contest

In the fall, 4th grade teacher Mrs. Roberts found an essay contest that would be a wonderful connection between the two subjects she teaches her students--Social Studies and Language Arts. The American Freedom Essay Contest challenges educators to have their students write a 100-300 word essay on the importance of freedom in their lives. Entries are judged in Elementary School, Middle School and High School categories; the winner in each category is awarded a free Constitutional Walking Tour field trip in Philadelphia for his/her class.

We are beyond excited that 4th grader Dalia Moldovan’s essay “The Right to Vote” was selected as the contest’s elementary school winner!

According to its website, The American Freedom Essay Contest received many wonderful essays from students attending public and private schools, as well as those being home schooled, all along the East Coast. In total, more than 400 Constitution Day essays were received from 32 schools in 8 states including Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.

The 4th grade team turned this exciting win for Dalia into a win for the entire grade so all 4th graders will enjoy a very special trip to Philadelphia. Of course, the kids and teachers are excited for the trip but no one more than Dalia!

RAS 4th Grader Dalia Moldovan celebrates her winning essay in Philadelphia
March Madness Comes to RAS

Ridgewood Avenue tried something new this year to celebrate Read Across America. Our Literacy PLC, led by teacher Alyssa DeSimone, came up with some creative ideas like Flashlight Friday and our new March Madness book bracket idea. Teachers Jerry White and Lindsay Coral led the way with this project, organizing the books, the voting and the brackets.

Adding a fun twist included having 16 teachers, administrators and staff members read the books on video and give the kids a chance to listen to the stories before voting for their favorite book. As the days and weeks have passed, the brackets have gotten smaller. The championship bracket included Library Lion [read by Superintendent Dirk Phillips] by Michelle Knudsen and Our Tree Named Steve [read by Reading Specialist Francoise Spano] by Alan Zweibel.

The votes are in and the champion book has been announced. Ridgewood Avenue has selected Our Tree Named Steve as Our Favorite. If you haven't had a chance, we encourage you to read it!
Professional Learning Communities are a way for teachers to stay current with trends in education, review and discuss relevant research and explore best practices in education. Ridgewood Avenue School has 5 PLCs occurring this year which represent various interests and areas throughout our school building. Each of the PLCs is led by one or two teachers who are particularly interested and engaged in a specific topic and who dedicate their time and professionalism in serving as teacher leaders. A 6th PLC is led by Dr. Donovan and focuses on staff training, professional development and the ongoing process of reviewing school operations.

**The Sustainability PLC is led by Alice Roberts and Charlene Dalton.**
This group of professionals focus on ways to infuse sustainability themes into our classrooms and school. Discussions focus on education for staff, students, parents and the community. Goals are set for exploring and implementing “green theme” projects in and around Ridgewood Avenue School. This group will also plan out Earth Week Activities. This PLC is responsible for increased recycling in the cafeteria, our new Tower Garden and the puppy pull toy projects.

**Our Literacy PLC is led by Alyssa DeSimone**
This group of professionals focus on reading and writing. Discussions focus on guided reading, writer’s workshop and other successful approaches to balanced literacy. This group discusses programs such as Rhino Reading (along with response to reading prompts) and will also plan out Read Across America Week Activities. So far this year they have focused on the use of anchor charts in the classroom, novel studies and valuable tips for guided reading. They are beginning a book club model to read about the most successful approaches used in literacy classrooms.

**Eileen Ippolito and Juliann Beckmann lead our Mindfulness PLC**
This group of professionals focuses on the importance of mindfulness, health and wellness in our school. Discussions include best practices in “brain breaks,” yoga and other mindfulness activities to optimize student learning. This group focuses on ways to incorporate the SAFE room into school operations and will also plan out our Rhino Romp and Field Day. This PLC is responsible for our daily “Mindful Moments” and was instrumental in gearing our upcoming February Professional Development Day to focus on mindful strategies in schools.
The Character Education PLC is led by Lauren Bas
This group of professionals focuses on character education and anti-bullying initiatives. Discussions focus on monthly character themes, school-wide incentive programs and activities for classrooms, grade-levels and the school focused on character education. This group plans out Week of Respect, Red Ribbon Week, Block the Bully Lessons, the WE initiative and are also members of the School Safety Team in reviewing HIBs and making important decisions about character education and anti-bullying programs. This PLC brought the Start with Hello Campaign to our school in the Fall and is preparing for No Name Calling Week.

Technology PLC is led by Christine Sullo
This group of professionals focuses on technology used at RAS for teaching and learning. Discussions focus on programs, software and hardware that can enhance teaching and learning. The staff audits programs being used. The goals are to ensure all staff have access to technology and technology understanding through teacher training. This group focuses on Google, including the steps to become Google Certified Educators. Each week, they share valuable websites with all staff.

The ScIP PLC is led by Mike Donovan
ScIP stands for School Improvement and is a state mandated group. This is a group of professionals who focus on Professional Development needs for our staff, along with identifying the talents and expertise in our building. The goals of this group are to serve as an important advisory group focused on teaching and learning protocols, training needs, and teacher learning and development. This group reviews and discusses curriculum, data, instruction and school operations. They are responsible for planning out professional development days and for the brainstorming, discussing and eventual implementation of possible new ideas such as new teaching models.
Mindfulness is the act of becoming more aware. This can include awareness of your surroundings, awareness of parts of your being such as breathing and heart rate and an appreciation for becoming more aware of your feelings and needs.

Mindfulness has become an important part of schools. Schools have started to incorporate activities such as yoga and relaxation techniques into parts of their day. Breaks and movement for students are extremely prevalent. And a general mindfulness about being mindful has become an area of focus for so many teachers in so many schools!

Ridgewood Avenue School embraces the value in mindfulness in a variety of ways all year long. One of our more exciting steps has been the implementation of our RAS “Mindful Moment.” Each day, a mindful chime plays over the PA system. The teachers and students never know when it will occur but all have been trained to respond. Mr. Curfman and Mrs. Beckmann have talked about the mindful moment in their health classes to prepare all students and the staff has shared activities with each other and their students for ways to maximize that mindful moment. No matter what they are doing or where they are, when the mindful moment begins, everyone in the building stops to take a deep breath. Some may incorporate a quick meditation or imagery exercise while others may simply take a break and reset through breaths and a break.

Mrs. Ippolito and Mrs. Beckmann lead a staff Professional Learning Community (PLC) focused on mindfulness and their group was responsible for this idea. “Sometimes, that mindful moment comes exactly at a time when certain students really needed a reminder to take a deep breath and that makes us so happy,” said Mrs. Ippolito.

Teachers throughout the building have been incorporating mindful strategies into their classrooms in different ways. This could be through “Go Noodle” brain breaks, a quick guided meditation, or other activities that support the children becoming more mindful and we encourage you to try this at home as well.
RAS GROWS GREEN!

Sustainability continues to be a focus at Ridgewood Avenue School. If you’ve visited RAS this year you’ve noticed a new addition to our main hallway--a hydroponic tower! Last year, community member Bob Hayes began a conversation with RAS staff member Alice Roberts about the benefits of such a tower. Through Bob’s generous work with the Rotary, they donated the tower to our school. Bob has been an invaluable Glen Ridge community member for many years and has remained a true supporter of Ridgewood Avenue School!

Once the tower was delivered, it became a family event to put it together as Alice enlisted the help of her mother, Glen Ridge environmental leader Elizabeth Baker and her husband Rob, a Glen Ridge Police Officer, along with their kids. During a staff professional development day in October, interested staff members attended a presentation about the tower to learn its benefits and focus on sustainability, along with lessons on managing and maintaining it. Staff members, in turn, began introducing it to students and integrating the concepts of hydroponics into important science lessons.

The best part? We’re now growing basil and bok choy and baby tomatoes and more in our main hallway! It has become a daily sight for students to watch as water and light are bringing food to life. Recently, our cafeteria cooks used our basil in their homemade sauce for Meatball Monday, our bok choy in a fried rice recipe and have requested we begin growing cilantro to be used on Taco Tuesdays!

The hydroponic tower will continue to be a daily reminder to students of ways to think outside the box and always consider ways to “Go Green” both at school and at home. According to Mrs. Roberts, “Hydroponic growing systems are the wave of the future. They use no soil, and the water recirculates, so waste is minimal. We are so grateful to the Rotary and Mr. Hayes for this generous donation.”
Glen Ridge Tradition of Excellence Award Announced
Special Education Teacher Paula Ely Recognized

Paula Ely, Ridgewood Avenue Special Education Teacher, is this year’s recipient of the Glen Ridge Tradition of Excellence Award. The distinguished award recognizes a staff member who exemplifies the traits of a true professional; one who represents their colleagues as an innovative educator and seeks out and implements strategies to enhance their teaching and student learning.

Mrs. Ely has been a teacher at Ridgewood Avenue School for 15 years. Prior, she spent many years as the Director of an Early Childhood center and served as the Ridgewood Avenue Home and School Vice President. Mrs. Ely is a resident of Glen Ridge, raised her three children here and currently, her oldest daughter lives in town with her family. As a mother, grandmother and teacher, she has been a strong advocate for decades for the Glen Ridge School District.

Mrs. Ely is widely regarded as a leader on her team and throughout the Ridgewood Avenue School building. Students and parents seek out her support and guidance, valuing her as the consummate professional she is known to be. Staff members rely on her experience and wisdom and always appreciate the sense of humor she brings to every situation. Principal Donovan said, “Paula is beyond deserving of this recognition. She is a true advocate for her students, a strong support system for her colleagues and always finds ways to not only enhance what happens in her classroom but also contributes positively to Ridgewood Avenue School.”

The staff, students, parents and entire Ridgewood Avenue community congratulate Paula Ely on her recognition as the 2018 Tradition of Excellence recipient and thank her for her continued dedication.
On Monday, November 12th, Ridgewood Avenue School celebrated Veteran’s Day with the annual “Bring a Veteran to School” Program. Mrs. Bas, guidance counselor, organizes this special day each year and it has become an event many of our staff, parents, students and Veterans look forward to. A call goes out to our entire RAS community to connect with family and friends who are Veterans and this year Ridgewood Avenue had 20 Veterans answer that call! Many are grandparents of our students, many are relatives, family friends and even a few parents.

The K-Kids (Kiwanis community service group) work together weeks ahead of the day to prepare for the visit, including the making of flag pins for our special guests and decorating the school. The K-Kids Advisors, Mrs. Ely and Ms. DeSimone, work together with Ms. Bas to make sure the day is a big success. The Veterans are gracious with their time and even more gracious with their experiences and memories. Of course, the children are always captivated and eager to ask questions.

We have been fortunate to have some of our Veterans make this an annual event and we look forward to seeing them as much as they look forward to returning. Many of them enjoy joining grandchildren and other kids in the cafeteria for lunch! And each year, we’re also lucky to welcome new Veterans and enjoy getting to know them.
UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT BIAS

Dr. Joseph Ravenell is a Ridgewood Avenue father! Beyond his important roles as husband and father, he also serves as a Dean of Diversity Affairs at NYU and can include “TED Talk Presenter” on his resume.

Last year, Dr. Ravenell was gracious in offering his time and expertise through a training session for all Ridgewood Avenue Staff focused on the concept of implicit bias. Prior to the presentation, he shared an implicit bias test prepared from Harvard University designed to help individuals gain a better understanding of their potential conscious or unconscious biases. Dr. Ravenell used the teachers’ independent experiences on these tests to begin an important discussion and even more important understanding of implicit bias. He was extremely well-received by the staff.

As part of an ongoing relationship, Dr. Ravenell agreed to return and once again present to the Ridgewood Avenue staff. This time, he selected a topic that connects to the previous year’s experience but relies on important dialogue and discussion amongst staff. He prepared a presentation on the research about the short- and long-term impact of unconscious bias in the classroom. There was a focus on how our own cultural contexts can shape classroom interactions, particularly in those interactions between staff and students who may be race or gender discordant.

Once again, the staff felt privileged to benefit from Dr. Ravenell’s expertise and willingness to present important information in a style that captivated, engaged and inspired!
IT STARTS WITH HELLO

This week, Ridgewood Avenue School participated in the “Start with Hello Campaign.” The campaign was started by the mother of a young boy who was a victim in the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. Her foundation’s goal was to reinforce for children the significance of saying hello to each other, working to provide opportunities for new friendships to form and finding ways to support children who may be experiencing difficult days.

Ms. Bas and Ms. Szalony enrolled Ridgewood Avenue School in the campaign this year and planned plenty of activities to help support our students in learning how to reach out to other kids, how to make some new friends and how to always choose kindness.

The week began with a BIG HELLO to all Ridgewood Avenue students. The GRHS chorus joined the morning line up and we had a number of student leaders from the HS present outside and throughout the hallways to give high-fives, fist bumps and hellos to the entire student population. All teachers were stationed outside and throughout the building as well, along with the Rocky the Rhino mascot. There were whistles, a bull horn and lots of noise as we celebrated the significance of saying hello! The week began with a “block the bully” lesson that helped students better understand the Start with Hello campaign and what would occur throughout the week.

Different activities were planned and implemented including encouraging kids to join in pictures with all different classmates. Lunches and recesses were combined to give kids a chance to eat lunch and play recess with students in other grades and understand friendships are possible with kids in different grades!

“This campaign was a wonderful way to help our students reflect on the value of being open to interacting with all students,” said Lauren Bas, RAS guidance counselor and one of the coordinators of the week. The campaign also led Ridgewood Avenue School into next week where the school will join the rest of the state in celebrating a Week of Respect.

Dr. Donovan mugs with some new Rhino friends. See pictures from the week on the following page!
A rare opportunity for brothers to lunch together at school!
Ridgewood Avenue School Joins Global Movement to Ban Plastic Straws

Recently, studies have become more prevalent illuminating the various ways plastic straws negatively impact on our environment. Specifically, straws have been shown to cause major damage to our oceans and marine life. Each year, 100,000 marine animals and over 1 million seabirds die from plastic.

Sustainability is an important focus at Ridgewood Avenue School, as we work to create young citizens and leaders helping make our Earth a better place! For more information about the anti-straw campaign created by kids, please visit www.onelessstraw.org.

In partnership with our food service provider, Pomptonian, we are making a small change with big impact. Starting in the 2018-2019 school year, plastic straws will no longer be available in the RAS cafeteria. Should your child require a straw for a specific reason, please reach out to Dr. Donovan and we will certainly accommodate that need. As the anti-straw campaign continues to gain momentum around the world, there are plenty of alternatives available, including reusable, sustainable, personal straws which will certainly be allowed!

Ridgewood Avenue School has a Professional Learning Community (PLC) of teachers dedicated to meeting regularly, researching and discussing ways to integrate principles of Sustainability into the curriculum and operations at Ridgewood Avenue School. This PLC is led by teachers Alice Roberts and Charlene Dalton, who initiated this change.

“Mrs. Dalton and I are excited about this initiative,” said Mrs. Roberts. “There are so many options out there to replace plastic straws--bamboo, stainless steel, or just skipping the straw altogether are all doable actions we can take to help the Earth.”
Another Summer in the Books!

Every summer, the Glen Ridge Public Library coordinates a summer reading program to encourage students of all ages to enjoy great books during the summer months. This year, Mr. White made it a goal to encourage Ridgewood Rhinos to participate in the summer reading program. With his encouragement, and the incentive of a bagel breakfast to any student who completed the summer reading challenge, many students enrolled, participated and successfully completed the program!

Actually, Library Director Jennifer Breur reported they had a record number of participants this summer and can only assume that Mr. White’s encouragement had something to do with it. As Mr. White settles into his new position at RAS, one of his goals is helping the students recognize the value in having a public library literally in our front yard! His next goal will focus on a library card campaign to increase the number of students who not only have a library card but who are accessing the many wonderful resources that are available. According to Dr. Donovan, “Mr. White is not only passionate about reading and writing instruction, he is someone who truly values a public library. His three sons will tell you a week doesn’t go by without a family trip to the library. He hopes to instill in our students the same appreciation for books and reading he has instilled in his own children.”