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Bingham Arts Academy open to the public

By De Maramed
Managing/News Editor

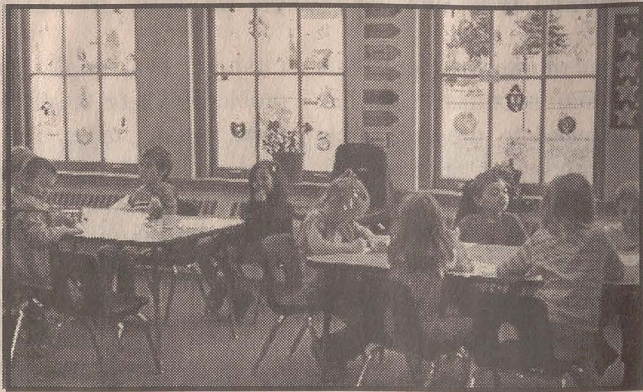
The recently opened charter school, Bingham Arts Academy, is thriving despite controversy over its use of merit pay for its teachers and the money it gets from the State for each of its students.

For each attending student, a public school gets a certain amount of money from the State. And wherever that student goes, the money follows. Some local public schools are feeling the loss of students and money.

"If you follow the thinking that Burger King came along and offered a choice for consumers, not just to go to McDonald's, then McDonald's didn't look favorably on that. They took business away, took money away," said Bingham Academy Principal and Chief Administrative Officer Ron Miller. "If there is any conflict, it's probably based on economics."

Bingham's use of merit pay is also a controversial subject, one that teacher's unions are against. Mosaica Education, the private company that owns Bingham Academy, provides monetary incentives to its teachers for improving their students' learning. The better the teacher, the more merit pay they receive.

Because Bingham Academy is not a public school, they have a little more freedom when it comes to delivering the curriculum. They also have smaller class sizes, longer school days and longer school years. They still have to



Students hard at work (Photo by De Maramed).

follow the same guidelines as a regular public school. Their teachers must be certified, their 4th and 5th graders have to take the MEAP test, and they have to report their membership to the State.

Bingham Academy has a special focus on the arts, including the performing arts. Students have a half hour every day devoted to art or music, and their social studies curriculum also has a special focus on the arts integrated into it. Rather than exclusively studying facts, figures, times, and dates, they explore the big ideas that changed society. "Quite often those [ideas] are either artistic in nature, or the arts reflect the changes in the time," Miller explained.

There is also a Spanish language class that starts at the kindergarten level.

Bingham Academy has an added emphasis on technology. There is no computer lab yet, but there is a planned computer to student ratio of one computer for every three students. Mosaica Education believes in weaving

technology into the curriculum, not separating it. There are also plans to put cameras in every classroom and television monitors in the halls. Parent involvement is a big part of Bingham Academy. Parents are encouraged to get involved, and are welcome to come in any time without notice to observe in the classrooms, help out or be anywhere else they want to be.

Mosaica Education invested over half a million dollars in renovations for just the first floor of the Bingham Academy building, and the plan is to expand into the upstairs for six additional classrooms. While there are still skeptical parents and public school officials, Miller is confident that Bingham Academy is here to stay.

There are over one hundred students currently enrolled. Bingham Academy is one of 50 such institutions throughout the US and Qatar, all owned by Mosaica Education. This company manages public schools either under contract from a local school district or funded directly by states.

Perspective

Opposing viewpoints on Alpena's future

By Alicia Estlack
Contributing Writer

Two public meetings were recently held to discuss the future of Alpena's lake and river frontage. Suggestions were made to draw tourism to the area. Concerned citizens opposed any commercialized development and wanted to keep the tight-knit community feeling.

This mentality hinders this town's growth and potential. An active participation needs to be taken by those who are living here. Overall change in Alpena should be supported because otherwise the town will not survive.

Different degrees of support were expressed for the city's contracted plans that were not yet final. They still required revision and approval by committee vote in November. However, these initiatives included condominiums on the river, a lakefront hotel and relocation of the bike path. Downtown patronization was encouraged and Alpena's historic theme was highlighted. The fate of Mich-e-kew-is and Starlight beaches was also mentioned. Summer plans included a boardwalk, children's splash park and outdoor Frisbee golf course. In the winter, the current baseball diamond would be flooded into a free form ice rink, an ice-climbing wall would be made and an outdoor movie theatre would be

projected onto a massive snow bank. Lastly, a 30-lot RV Park was proposed.

A majority opposed the RV Park in a vote and a few expressed their disapproval. It was made clear that they could contact the council members by e-mail to lobby for any disagreements they had. They would have liked the frontage to be for the general public and to be kept in its current state. People exhibited disdain for commercialized development that had occurred on the west side of the state, particularly Traverse City. The waterfront there had once been open but is now cluttered with hotels, restaurants and businesses.

A lesser vocal minority cited that another RV Park was needed. One comment was made by a lady in the audience to her friend, "... [in the summer] relatives cannot find a motel [because they have to] find a room a couple of months in advance. People are so backwards." This group supported the improvement of the waterfront to enhance tourism and new business endeavors. Some complained about the current lack of economic development and loss of jobs in the community.

Last year, 85 jobs were lost at The Alpena Regional Medical Center, one of the largest employers in the community, and there has been a decline in en-

rollment in the public schools. If business endeavors are blocked in our own community we are only committing ourselves to having limited low paying jobs available. Alpena may be the "perfect place to raise a family" but already one is pressed to find employment in this town, let alone raise a family on the wage they are being paid. People may move to more developed cities specifically because they cannot afford to live here. In Traverse City, even though open lakefront had been destroyed, development allowed tourism to come in and jobs to open up so the city could thrive year round. Only upon retirement can a person return to Alpena to spend their pension money. If this is maintained, there will not be opportunities for employment to meet the needs of citizens and its population will dwindle.

This city has had a history of numerous oppositions to community change. A few mentionable include a proposition of a casino, which would draw tourism; a state prison that would provide many higher paying jobs; and the implementation of a four-lane highway on the existing US-23, which would give people an easier and direct access to the town and the northeastern shore of Michigan. These were opposed because council members feared that crime would be brought in and

disrupt the quiet atmosphere of their little hometown. However, I feel that this is unlikely, seeing as though majorities of the people who go to casinos are harmless elderly; that if in the event an inmate broke out of the prison, they would not stay in the city; and a highway would be a quicker, more convenient means of traveling around the state.

Alpena needs new developments to be supported and encouraged if our population is to increase and the economy to improve. We could look to the other side of the state and aspire to be as successful.

I think it is necessary for the public to become more aware of what is being proposed for the community they live in and take part in the decisions made. By attending forums and meetings concerning the future of this town, change can be implemented. In addition, discussing these issues with family, friends and neighbors can spread the word indirectly and influence how development happens. This should be important to everyone who lives here because it will guarantee a decent life for ourselves and future generations. Open up your minds and recognize how our town needs to change and then take a stand to implement them.

By Chris Engle
Sports/A&E Editor

The administration of Alpena Regional Medical Center (ARMC), previously known as Alpena General Hospital, has proposed a change in the required dress code for nurses that is planned to take effect in March.

The proposed dress code would require the 205 nurses of ARMC to wear uniforms, or scrubs, consisting of blue pants and a white shirt. The rest of the hospital staff will also be affected by the new code. This strict dress code would enable patients, as well as hospital staff, to distinguish nurses from other staff members.

Christmas Wish program needs donations, volunteers

By Glenn Lenard
A&E/Perspectives Editor

Christmas Wish, a program started here at ACC over 25 years ago, is going strong and preparing for another year of gifts and support from local community members to help out Alpena Public Schools, Head Start, and Hillman students.

If you have a little extra jingle in your pocket this season, why not help out someone who doesn't. You can stop in either Center Building 104 or 106 to be matched up with

The administration of ARMC states that this new dress code was created in the interest of patient safety.

The nurses' union, however, argues that administration made a unilateral decision to enact the dress code change, and breached contract by not discussing the issue with the union as agreed in contract.

Jim Engle, president of the nurses' union, plans to file an unfair labor practice suit against the administration.

"The administration is unilaterally imposing monetary requirements on the nurses as conditions of employment," says Engle. The nurses are required to purchase the new uniforms themselves, since

most scrubs they currently wear will not meet the requirements.

"If (the change) is instituted, the vast majority of scrubs currently worn by nurses will not be suitable for the new dress code."

Engle also added that the administration's statement for instating the new dress code as a patient safety issue is illogical.

"If this is a patient safety issue, why didn't the administration talk to those most concerned with patient safety - the nurses?"

Diane Shields, of administration at ARMC, could not be reached for comment on this issue.

a youngster or contact the volunteer center directly at 358-7271, or 358-7335.

Gifts on the list range from socks and sweaters to toy trucks, and Barbie's. If you are looking to sponsor a child this season, no matter what age or amount you are willing to donate, they are sure to have someone who is willing.

If you cannot donate cash or gifts, then volunteering a

few hours to wrap and sort gifts the week of December 6 may be for you. Contact the Volunteer Center to set up a time to stop in and wrap a few gifts.

Christmas Wish has provided gifts to Alpena, Head Start and Hillman students for many years, and this wish will be no different, especially if everyone chips in.

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