Eastmont Says Goodbye to Garn Christensen

BY DOMINICK BONNY

This year marks the end of 38 years in public education, 15 of which were spent as the superintendent of the Eastmont School District, for Dr. Garn Christensen. When he came to Eastmont, he was the fifth superintendent in eight years. “I didn’t know if it was a position I would be successful in or if it was going to be the right fit,” Christensen said. “Fortunately for me, it worked out. There are a lot of good people here. It’s a beautiful area. It has been an honor to work in this community.”

As for the legacy of leadership he leaves behind, he said being a good administrator means listening to people and supporting them, but also looking to the future. “I think the public education in our country is one of the foundation pillars of our community, and I think that the whole democratic process is one where we share different opinions. Schools force individuals from all different backgrounds to come together, in kindergarten classrooms and graduation stages, on teams and on plays. It makes us understand and appreciate those differences.”

The fact that students get second and third chances to write their own futures, happen every day in public schools. “I think public education in our country is one of the foundation pillars of our community, and I think that the whole democratic process is one where we share different opinions. Schools force individuals from all different backgrounds to come together, in kindergarten classrooms and graduation stages, on teams and on plays. It makes us understand and appreciate those differences.”

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Goodbye to Garian Christensen

After an extensive process, the Eastmont School District Board of Directors concluded their superintendent search and offered the position to Dr. Becky Berg. Dr. Berg began her professional career as a middle school teacher in the Renton School District. Her first principal role was in the Bonnbridge Island School District for three years and then in the Meadow School District for six years. In 2010, she was invited to serve as superintendent of the Deer Park School District and served there for three years. In 2013, Dr. Berg became superintendent of the Marysville School District, which serves nearly 11,000 students in 22 schools, with a staff of roughly 1,300 and a budget of $152 million. She was in Marysville for six years. Most recently, Dr. Berg has been the associate and interim superintendent of The American School of Dubai, which serves approximately 2,300 students from 82 countries, including children from the United States Consulate. The school was recently named the “Most Outstanding School Overseas” in the United Arab Emirates. Dr. Berg earned her doctorate in organizational leadership from Teachers College Columbia University and her superintendent’s credential from Washington State University. Dr. Berg is married and she and her husband, Grant, a retired firefighter, have three grown children.

Community’ in the Graduation Equation

By Garian Christensen

This is my 38th year in schools as an educator and my final graduation newsletter as the Eastmont Superintendent. Observing student success, and mishaps, during the time I have been the community’s leader has offered a few life observations. First, families and communities that play, travel, and experience things together tend to grow young people with better physical, social, emotional health, and future success. These events don’t need to be world travel tours or expensive weekends, but just time playing, ball, board games, camping in the backyard or nearby mountains and deserts, and perhaps an occasional road trip to visit family and friends.

Conversations are critical. As a teacher, I observe facial gestures, eyes, and tone of voice as well as how my words and information are being received. Yes, computers, smartphones, emojis, and memes can do amazing stuff, but only a face and eyes can truly smile. People also tend to be bit more forgiving than electronics where everything is logged with no room for error.

One caring adult is all a young person needs to succeed. At the same time, three is great, and a community full of extended family and friends is magnificent, but one caring adult can make the world a better place for a young person. For me, there was a year in my teens when the adult who knew where I was and what I was up to was my mother, a dedicated and creative teacher at Nebo Alternative High School.

Thirty years later, I found Dr. Ibarra leading a respected public affairs firm in Washington DC and personally thanked him. I could tell he didn’t really remember me, as I was but one of many needy teens in his educational career. But I never forgave his ability to connect with the very basics of my being during that time in my life. Such as: Did I have a place to sleep? Enough to eat? Warm clothes for the winter? I was on my own and working full-time during my high school years and had those things covered, but he was my one emergency contact who I knew would show up. I challenge all you as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends to take time to be the one caring adult in the life of a young person. Show them the way. Be there for that person and help them through the various obstacles they will face in life.

‘Community’ in the Graduation Equation: The message is plain and simple. It is commonly used with other disease prevention/management policies. This policy is one that Eastmont’s community is etched into the DNA of our culture. When asked earlier in the year in your home, “What do you want most for the future of Eastmont?” Eighty percent of your response was the same: for your children to enjoy the community as we transitioned from K-4 to K-5. The educators, employees, students, parents, families, coaches, and community leaders of today, the board has obtained over 15,000 signatures to this mission of Eastmont’s community. This policy and the support behind is one that is commonly used with other disease outbreaks once our health providers and their mission are fully supported.

Reconfiguration and Attendance Area Revisions

Before the start of this school year, hundreds of students and staff moved as part of the overall configuration of students in our educational facilities. The board has directed the preparation of a bond proposal to continue Phase 2 of the modernization of Kenyon, Lee, Cascade, and Rock Island Elementary schools as well as build the transportation center and do other major safety and athletic improvements. Knowing that both land and construction costs have escalated, the board is carefully examining the tax impact on district property owners. Their goal is to increase the tax rate, rather maintain a similar rate for annual local school taxes paid on Eastmont homes and businesses.

Construction & Facilities

The Eastmont Board is committed to continuing a building program of offering to our community the best possible educational facilities. Schools experience some of the hardest use there is and public buildings are always needing repair, paint, new flooring and constant preventative maintenance.

At the same time, our board is also tasked with looking into the future and ensuring plans are in place for growth and modernization of current schools. As of today, the board has obtained over $5,600,000 in state construction funds to help build a new transportation facility at the corner of Grant Road and Perry Avenue. This facility will be a multi-district cooperative as it will also provide service for other school districts’ buses and vehicles.

COVID Update

Similar to other diseases, COVID will continue to be something we all hope to avoid, similar to heart disease, cancer or other serious illnesses. As of now, it appears other nation, state, and community plans have moved to isolate and protect our most vulnerable. This policy is one that is commonly used with other disease outbreaks once our health providers and their mission are fully supported.

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‘Hats Off’ to Garn!

Eastmont School District has been very fortunate to have Dr. Garn Christensen’s steady leadership for the past 15 years. He led us through years of incredible student growth, a major recession, and a pandemic. Through it all, we always knew we could count on him.

We could count on him to be physically present at our events, in our classrooms and on our buses. He filled his Friday afternoons with bus rides where he would talk with students, listen to our drivers and view our growing and diverse community. On payday, he would walk the whole district, handing out paychecks and employee newsletters to hundreds of Eastmont staff. During the evenings, we would see him with hat in hand visiting soccer matches, choir performances, STEM events and talking with our students at the fair.

We could count on him to make decisions that would serve the students, staff and community well into the future. The issues that arrive on a superintendent’s desk are complex to say the least. Garn kept us off of the “bleeding edge” of initiatives to ensure what we implemented was well researched and a proven educational program. He kept us compliant with state and federal laws. And he was willing to make the right decision even if it wasn’t the popular one at the time.

Lastly, we could count on him to prepare us for what was ahead. He conducted surprise drills and partnered with first responders to ensure we were ready if and when an emergency occurred. He worked with the community to plan and implement construction bonds, making sure we had durable and functional facilities that were safe and promoted learning. He watched population and construction trends to ensure we had the right amount of staff to serve our students. And finally, he prepared us to transition to a new superintendent this summer.

Thank you, Garn, for serving the students, staff, and community of Eastmont so well!
Focus On: Activities

May 2022

‘Day of the Child’ Connects Parents, Kids with Outdoor Activities

By Dominick Bonny

The free event was also made possible due to the generosity of vendors and supporters like the Douglas County PUD, Columbia Valley Community Health, and Coca-Cola, as well as many others.

Eastmont staff members also showed up to help out, donating their time to make sure everything ran smoothly. Matt Charlton, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, was on the soccer field helping children of all ages line up shots on goal.

After they put the ball in the back of the net, some with a little help, each child received a prize.

View Day of the Child video at: cutt.ly/dayofthechild

Clovis Point Students Surpass Read-A-Thon 20,000 Minute Goal

By Dominick Bonny

Niko. It was actually a surprisingly large turnout, according to Mayra Navarro-Gomez, assistant director of special programs for Eastmont.

Navarro-Gomez said the event was put together by Eastmont Pack Parent reps to give families and students an opportunity to spend quality time outdoors.

"The goal for us with this event is to ensure that our families can spend a quality day outdoors with their children while getting direct access to community resources," Navarro-Gomez said.

"Students get to play different games throughout the stations and best of all – students get a prize."

View the Read-A-Thon video at: cutt.ly/clovisreadathon

Spring Athletics Update – Go Cats!

By Russ Alman

The goal of the competition is to have the last unbroken egg in the gym. The drops begin at a relatively low height, released by Eastmont staff members standing on ladders. By the time the last few surviving egg-protection designs are being put to the test, the drops require the aid of a maintenance staff member and a scissor lift raised almost to the ceiling of the gym.

"STEM careers are such a huge part of our future," Velazquez said. "And so getting them thinking about what it takes to be a STEM thinker" is incredibly important for preparing them for potential future careers.

She said she didn’t see a sad face the entire day and she’s grateful to the STEM coaches for preparing their students so well.

“I have awesome staff members that participate with this program and the feedback I get from them (is huge),” she said. “Not only with what goes well but also how we can improve (is great) because I want Eastmont to have the best STEM program out there.”

View the STEM Egg Drop video at: cutt.ly/eggdrop

Eastmont Wildcats on Facebook and eastmontathletics.com.

Children climb in the lift bucket from a Douglas County PUD service truck while parents learn about diving 811 at the first annual Day of the Child event held at Eastmont Community Park.

Focus On: Activities

May 2022

Annual STEM Egg Drop Sees Record Participation

By Dominick Bonny

The annual STEM Egg Drop Competition at Eastmont High School is back this year, with a new-look event. The group of second graders that converged upon the school was the biggest ever, according to Angie Velazquez, K-6 STEM coordinator for the Eastmont School District. The group was in charge of making sure the return of this beloved event went smoothly.

This year was the biggest group, we had about 178 competing," she said.

All the competitors are second graders from all 6 Eastmont elementary schools. We really highlight collaboration and teamwork because that’s a skill they have to work on when they move on to upper high school level and then careers," she said.

But it’s not just the academic high achievers who benefit from and engage in the competition. From drafting their egg-protection designs on paper to fabricating the egg-protection units and then watching them put to the test, the competition gives learners of all different styles something to sink their teeth into.

“They build it and then test it and just like anything else, if it doesn’t work then you redesign," Velazquez said.

She said creating situations where students work as a team and have to deal with failure is beneficial in teaching lifelong lessons.

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Spring Athletics Update – Go Cats!

By Russ Alman

The weather may not have been very cooperative this spring, but Eastmont still had a great sports season.

Congratulations to the LadyCat Softball team and boys head coach Cliff Johnson and his staff for capturing their first Big 9 League championship! They tied with Moses Lake as co-champions.

The boys soccer team won against Sunnyside on May 14, capturing the second berth to State for District 6. Congratulations to the boys, head coach Vidal Hurtado and his staff on a great season.

Unified Sports was back and our unified soccer team was able to play a few matches.

At the time of this writing, our tennis squad and boys and girls golf teams were competing at Districts.

We hosted day one of Districts for track and field on Thursday, May 19 at Wildcat Stadium. Day two was held in Yakima on Saturday, May 21.

This summer, we are holding sports programs to get kids ready for the 2022-23 school year. In addition to our high school programs, we will be offering strength training and conditioning for 7-8 graders.

Parents received an update on the programs through ParentSquare. If you missed it, please contact the high school athletics office for more information. Also, please note that we have moved away from FamilyID for athletics registration and have replaced it with FinalForms. Check ParentSquare for details on how to access the new system or contact us at the athletic office. Fill out the forms online, upload proof of your child’s physical and you’ll be ready to register for upcoming sports.

For the latest sports updates, visit Eastmont Wildcats on Facebook and visit the Eastmont sports website at eastmontathletics.com.

View Russ Waterman’s spring sports wrap-up video at: cutt.ly/spring22sports

By Russell Alman

The 78th second graders from all 6 Eastmont elementary schools competed in this year’s annual STEM Egg Drop Competition.

Angie Velazquez, K-6 STEM coordinator

View the STEM Egg Drop video at: cutt.ly/eggdrop
Focus On: District Updates

Bus Drivers Needed
Full Time & Substitutes

Have you thought about becoming a bus driver for the Eastmont School District? We offer paid in-house training and will help you move through the steps needed to complete the process to become a certified bus driver.

View all open positions available in Eastmont Schools at eastmont206.tedk12.com/hire/

Benefits – including medical insurance and retirement – are included!

Full-Time and Substitute Drivers
- Pay starts at $21.67 per hour
- In-house training (paid)
- Work directly with kids
- Additional routes and trips available in the future

Substitute Bus Drivers
- On-call work schedule
- Flexible hours
- Potential to become a permanent Eastmont bus driver

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Relationships, Relevance, Rigor, Results

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ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
(509) 884-7169
800 Eastmont, East Wenatchee
Dr. Garn Christensen, Superintendent
Caryn Metsker, Executive Director of Financial Services
Kaylee Brown, Executive Director of Human Resources
Spencer Taylor, Executive Director of Elementary Education
Mert Charbon, Asst. Superintendent Secondary Education

EASTMONT HIGH SCHOOL
(509) 884-6665
955 NE 3rd Street, East Wenatchee
Lance Noll, Principal

EASTMONT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
(509) 884-2407
905 NE 8th Street, East Wenatchee
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STERLING JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
(509) 884-7115
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CLOVIS POINT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-1400
1855 SE 4th Street, East Wenatchee
Amy Dray, Principal

CASCADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-0523
2330 N. Baker, East Wenatchee
Kim Browning, Principal

GRANT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-0557
1430 First St. SE, East Wenatchee
Kirsten Mittelstaedt, Principal

KENROY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-1443
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LEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-1497
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ROCK ISLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(509) 884-5023
5645 Rock Island Road, Rock Island
Penny Brown, Principal

WEE WILDCATS/WEE COUGARS PRESCHOOL
(509) 888-4734
Ami Collins, Asst. Dir. of Special Education - Early Learning

SPECIAL EDUCATION
(509) 884-7159
Sarah Lawman, Director

SPECIAL PROGRAMS
(509) 884-7159
Myrna Navarro-Gomez, Assistant Director

FOOD SERVICE
(509) 884-2026
Chad Kirby, Director

TECHNOLOGY
(509) 884-6303
400 NE 9th Street, East Wenatchee
Doug Clay, Director

MAINTENANCE
(509) 884-6700
345 6th Street, East Wenatchee
Seann Tanner, Director

TRANSPORTATION
(509) 884-4621
345 6th Street, East Wenatchee
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