

**Smith College Club of Washington Partnerships with D.C. Elementary Schools**  
**By**  
**Nancy Goodman Simon, Smith '62**  
**April 2010**

Since 1989, the Smith College Club of Washington (SCCW) has had a partnership with a DC elementary school. In that year, we started at Ketcham Elementary School in Anacostia in Southeast Washington and ten years later moved to Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School in the Congress Heights area of Southeast Washington. Both schools include nearly 100% minority students. How did we get involved with these schools?

A May 1988 report of The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life published by the American Council of Education concluded that by the year 2000, one-third of all school aged children would be from minority groups and that at every level they were opting out of continued education. It also emphasized that the ability to succeed in college and beyond must be nurtured in childhood.

In the fall of 1988, President Mary Maples Dunn of Smith College hosted a Five College Forum called "An Educational Agenda for the New Administration". Here they agreed that elementary and secondary education must be a priority. President Dunn had visited elementary schools across the country including in Washington in an effort to widen the horizons of young people and to recognize and encourage administrators and teachers who motivate their students to academic achievements.

President Dunn visited Washington, D.C. in February, 1989, to open Smith's Capital Campaign. She visited Ketcham Elementary at 15<sup>th</sup> and U Streets, S.E. The visit was arranged through the college and Carol Thompson Cole, '73, the DC City Administrator at the time. The Board of the SCCW wanted to follow up on President Dunn's visit by establishing an on-going relationship with Ketcham. A committee was formed in March 1989; they visited the school and recommended to the Club Board that the Ketcham School Project be established. Principal Romaine Thomas welcomed us. The underlying goal of this project was – and continues to be -- to serve Smith College, with important additional benefits for the D.C. community and our alumnae.

OVERVIEW:

From the beginning, the purpose of the Smith Club's partnership with Ketcham and MLK has been to instill a life-long love of reading in order to encourage students to continue their education by challenging their imagination and instilling ambition. Our program has provided a good way for many volunteers to work in a school. In the past 20 years, a total of 163 volunteers have participated in this partnership. This includes 139 Smith alumnae and 24 other individuals who have heard of our program and are eager to join us (see attached list). We welcome all volunteers. The group is accepted as a whole, thus providing a way for individuals who want to participate.

To further our goals we developed a four point program:

1. Tutoring—one-on-one tutoring in reading and/or math for reinforcement or enrichment primarily for Grades 1 and 2. We have found that students fall behind very quickly if they are not reading at grade level by third grade. Tutors meet with 2 to 3 students weekly for a year. Over the past 20 years, approximately 10-12 volunteers have tutored each year. We estimate that we have tutored about 400-500 students during this time, equaling thousands of hours of volunteer time. We know we have had an impact when children come hug us in the hallways and tell everyone that “That’s my tutor.”
2. Read-Aloud— on a regular basis a volunteer reads and discusses one or more books with a whole classroom for about 45 minutes. Over the past 20 years, on average 8 to 12 volunteers have read each year. Some have been involved from the very beginning, others have read for many years, and still others read for a few years as their schedules permit. In a typical year, we estimate we have read a total of at least 50 times to about 10 classes. Over the years, that means we have read about 1,000 times, helping to expose many children to new books, interesting stories, and figures from history; fostering the students’ critical listening and thinking skills; and helping to instill a love of reading.
3. Library—When a librarian has been present we helped process and shelve books. When no librarian was available we provided library days so that children could check out books and learn about the library. In 2007 we assisted in cataloging books and preparing for the library renovation. After the renovation, we provided whatever assistance the librarian requested. We try to provide books that the school might not otherwise be able to purchase.
4. Field Trips—Trips to local museums or performances are provided on an occasional basis (see attached list).

Over the years we have also organized a number of other activities including book awards, collecting grocery receipts, helping with art and writing projects, and much more.

#### HISTORY:

The first Project activity was to present Smith Book Awards in June, 1989. One student from each grade, Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup>, was awarded an atlas. These book awards have been expanded and continue today. The first awards were presented by Carol Thompson. First Lady Barbara Bush, a Smith alumna, was invited to participate, but she was unable to do so.

In the fall of 1989, Reggie Oldak ’73, a member of the planning committee, became the original coordinator of the project. Two new activities were begun. First, a Read-Aloud Program in which a volunteer reads to a whole class began in November 1989 with six readers. Andrea Kane ’83, who began reading around 1990, soon took on coordination of the read-aloud program and has continued ever since. Second, an individual tutoring program began in October 1989 with 5 tutors. In January

1990, an additional six tutors joined the program, including four who are still tutoring—Margaret Greene '58, Peggy Greene '65, Barbara Harper '51 and Jane Lescure '60. Field trips soon became the third part of the project.

Field trips to theaters, museums, and nature programs proved a good way to expand children's experiences and vocabulary. We sponsored many such field trips with Smith volunteers as chaperones. Trips to National Colonial Farm, Mount Vernon, the many Smithsonian museums, National Park Service Tour of the Mall, Discovery Creek Children's Museum and many others were included. We tried to provide two trips a year for each grade level 2-6 and occasionally a trip for younger grades. Trips to the Pumpkin Patch were particularly popular. In the early years DC school buses were available for free during school hours. Over time they started charging and eventually stopped providing the service altogether.

We also had additional projects when volunteers had special talents. For example, Katrina Mason, '65 did creative writing with grades 5 and 6 and produced a literary magazine. Shelly Ross-Larson '68 started a French club including an annual trip to the Alliance Française and lunch at Ecole de Cuisine. Harriet Bergman '63 provided computer lessons. The Kennedy Center provided buses and tickets to annual Saturday afternoon children's concerts at Christmas, thanks to Carole Wysocki '78, Education Director at the National Symphony.

There were art sessions led by Starke Meyer '48 that resulted in prizes being awarded by Wilderness Society and an exhibition of students' posters of our National Parks being displayed in the Society's windows at 17<sup>th</sup> and I Streets, NW in July 1996.

In the spring of 1998, Pat Bitondo (MAT '93 and leader of DC Babe Ruth Inc.) was able to bring an after school softball program to Ketcham. She found a sponsor for the \$500 cost of uniforms, equipment and bases. DCBR helped Ketcham fix up their field and games drew a good crowd, including Assistant Principal Frances Riddle and her husband. The team also visited the Baltimore baseball stadium and received professional coaching and awards.

In October 1999, Smith College honored the mission of the SCCW partnership with Ketcham and then MLK by including Margaret Greene '58 in a special college event which recognized "Remarkable Women, a Smith Continuum." Margaret was cited for "using her cultural experiences, time, and leadership skills to enrich and transform public education for inner city children and their families."

One of our readers Marilyn Urwitz (Temple, '69) started a summer reading group for a group of fourth grade girls. She followed these girls through Ketcham and worked to get some into charter schools once they moved on to secondary schools. In 2007, she attended the college graduation of one of these girls.

During this time, the Giant and Safeway grocery stores began a grocery receipt project, donating money and/or supplies to area schools depending on how much the

participating groups spent. Crocky Hogg, '47 spent much time collecting and tabulating the receipts. In one year she tabulated over \$169,000 grocery receipts. The club was very supportive of the school.

Although we were no longer at Ketcham when it happened, we were deeply saddened and shocked when Mr. James Debeuneure, a fifth grade teacher with whom we had worked, was killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. He had gone into teaching at age 45 and went back to school to get a Masters Degree in Education. On 9/11, he was chaperoning a Ketcham student on a National Geographic trip to California.

By the summer of 1999, we had been at Ketcham for ten years and felt we were no longer making a difference. Through Wendy Winters, a former Dean at Smith College, we learned about Dr. Valoria Baylor, the principal at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School. Margaret Greene arranged for us to transfer to Martin Luther King in the Congress Heights area of Southeast Washington. We focused on the same programs that we had used at Ketcham—mainly Read-Aloud and tutoring. Field trips were slower to get started but we did provide a few. At this time the schools were under pressure to improve test scores, devoting much time to working on the basics of reading and math.

MLK, also a Title I school, was in a visibly better neighborhood. Title I schools have a high percentage of children coming from families below the poverty line and thus receive additional educational services. The school was built about 1970 replacing the old Congress Heights School which we have watched deteriorate over the years. We met the principal, Dr. Valoria Baylor, and a neighborhood council member, Dr. Vivian Archer, at our initial volunteer lunch at Peggy Greene's.

### SPECIAL EVENTS

**Visit to Smith Campus:** In the fall of 1999, Ruth Simmons, the President of Smith College, while visiting Washington, visited MLK at our invitation. The school put on an assembly for her. She spoke to students about the importance of a college education and answered questions about educational and career journeys. It turned out that the school nurse, Barbara Henderson, had gone to Dillard College with her and they had a nice reunion. After the school choir sang, Ms. Simmons complimented them and said they should come sing for her girls at Smith.

We followed up on this invitation and the choir did visit Northampton in the fall of 2000. The college paid for a roundtrip flight from Baltimore to Hartford, CT. Many MLK students had never been on a plane. Peggy Greene and Margaret Greene paid their own way to join the group. MLK students were treated to a night in a motel and breakfast at the Faculty Club, where Ms. Simmons greeted everyone warmly. The 35 Washington students were joined by fourth-graders from the Smith Campus School and Northampton public schools. Together, the students spent time getting a glimpse of college life. The goal was to open the children's eyes to all the things you can do in college. The MLK choir performed for a packed Sage Hall. The college worked to make the day fun and

memorable. Along the way, they hoped to spark the students' interest in math, science, and the humanities. The students' visit was one way that Smith has responded to Secretary of Education Richard Riley's call for colleges to reach out to primary and secondary students. For MLK, staff and students, it definitely was the highlight of our partnership with the school.

**Rolling Rain Forest:** In 2003, Nancy Simon '62 arranged for the Rolling Rain Forest from Discovery Creek Children's Museum to visit the school. The exhibit is housed in a tractor semi-trailer and was parked in front of the school for a week. As a Title I school we got a very favorable rate. On the first day, every class had a 15 minute tour of the exhibit after an introductory lesson. The exhibit excited all the senses. All the children were impressed by the live snake. The remaining four days were devoted to scientific investigations by grades 3-5. On Thursday evening there was an open house for the whole neighborhood. They had 190 visitors.

**End-of-Year Lunches:** At the end of each school year, readers and tutors host a luncheon for the teachers and staff. It is greatly enjoyed by everyone and is one of our best chances to talk to the teachers. Over the years various classes have brought thank-you gifts and cards to their volunteers. This is just one of many signs that we are appreciated.

**Book Awards:** At the award assemblies at the end of the school year, the Smith Club presents book awards to the most improved reader in each class. Originally given one per grade, we have expanded to each class from Pre-K through fifth and also the special education classes. Rather than present the award to a child who receives many awards we hope to reward the child who makes the most progress during the year. June of 2009 marked the 21<sup>st</sup> time we have presented these awards.

**The Next Generation:** Another highlight of the 2008-2009 year was an intergenerational reading team consisting of Phyllis Lavine and her son Matthew. Phyllis described this in an article for the SCCW newsletter. At the end of the year, Matthew said: he "would like to give something back to Martin Luther King Elementary School for allowing me to read to the class and for being a visitor to their school. This coming November, I will be having my Bar Mitzvah. I would like to ask my friends to bring to my Bar Mitzvah party unused school supplies and hard cover children's books which I would like to donate to MLK." Both Matt and his mother have continued reading in the 2009 – 2010 school year.

**Other Activities:** For those club members who cannot volunteer at the school, there are other opportunities to be helpful. We encourage our membership to donate books to the school library and magazines for art projects and to participate in the grocery store programs that aid schools.

## **LIBRARY**

When we started at MLK in 1999, the library was inadequate and not well-used. Children seemed more likely to be watching videos during library time than checking out books. From

2001-2004, with money provided by the Smith Club and a private donor, the Smith Club purchased at least \$5000 worth of hardback and paperback books including the “I Can Read” series and “Step Into Reading” series with spinner racks to shelve them. At the club’s annual Holiday Tea attendees were asked to donate a book to the school. Several volunteers from The Bethesda Friends Meeting asked to join us. One of these, Jane Nutter a retired librarian, developed long and thoughtfully selected book lists for library acquisitions with participation of the Bethesda Meeting children. The children also raised money for these purchases.

In 2004, when there was no librarian, the Smith Club volunteered to run the library and have children check out books. We were fortunate to have Sarah Bradley Leighton ’97, who worked at the Library of Congress, to get us organized. We spent a good bit of time setting up the library, cleaning out old materials and preparing a program for the children. The first year we concentrated on the upper grades. Each class was scheduled for 30 minutes—during which time we discussed library use and set-up and then various genre of literature. We talked 15-20 minutes and then allowed time to select a book. Borrowed books were to be kept in the classroom until the next library day.

In the summer of 2004, one of our longest serving tutors, Barbara Colgate, ’37 died just short of her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. She had tutored until that spring. Her family asked that memorial gifts be given to the school. We had a plaque in her memory placed in the library and dedicated approximately 50 picture books in her honor. Books were also donated in memory of Katherine Elizabeth Pope, Smith ’03 by her parents.

In 2005, we continued library days for grades 3-5 and expanded to grades 1 and 2. We saw grades 3-5 one day and grades 1 and 2 on a second day. We could squeeze in 6 or 7 classes in a day. We were exhausted when it was over. Generally we had 3-4 volunteers. They were all needed when it was time to check out books.

The library had abandoned the old card catalog, but had never fully converted to the computer system. We were unable to access the computer catalog anyway, so we functioned without a catalog. Sarah offered at one time to take the training, but the DCPS library authorities would not hear of it.

In 2006, the school hired a retired librarian half-time. She saw most of the classes from K-5 except the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. So the Smith Club continued library days for the 4<sup>th</sup> graders while continuing to process books and make some order in the library.

Early in 2007 plans were underway for renovation of the library. Every elementary school in Southeast Washington received a \$50,000 grant to modernize its library. In addition, the school received 1000 new books from the Toyota Initiative, administered through the Washington DC Jewish Community Center. Margaret Greene ’58 was asked by the principal, Dr. Baylor, to attend a meeting for principals and librarians with the new head of the school libraries, Philecia Harris. Margaret asked Dr Baylor to appoint a library committee at the school to learn what the staff would like to see in the library. Ideas were drawn up. Margaret also visited several schools and got ideas for a library layout, furniture, equipment and signage..

In the meantime, under the direction of Nancy McKinley of Lore Consulting (consultant to Philecia Harris) Smith volunteers began to weed out the old library collection. The Smith Club and the Bethesda Friends Meeting over the years have added many good books to the collection. Children like new books. We also had more paperbacks than hardbacks and a library should really have the latter. In April, Nancy Simon '62 and Marie Champagne '94 attended a two day training session on the computer library program so that we could begin cataloging—a daunting task when nothing is cataloged. Cataloging continued the rest of spring and into summer. Thanks to the art teacher Mr. Hill, we had two working computers. Hermine Dreyfuss '62 obtained an Apple printer for these old machines though we never succeeded in printing the spine labels we wanted. The last books were catalogued in early August, just in time for the packing up of the library prior to renovation.

Dr. Baylor budgeted for a full time librarian for the school year 2007-08. Margaret worked up a job announcement and had it posted at the local library schools. She communicated with Dean Ann Weeks of the Library Science Program at the University of Maryland College of Information Studies and received help in recruiting qualified applicants. Dr. Baylor hired Melissa Jackson, who graduated in December 2008, but had already completed her course work. Mrs. Jackson also has an MA in early childhood education and 17 years teaching experience.

Over the summer, Mrs. Jackson and Smith volunteers finalized what furniture and supplies were needed. Different jobs were being done by different agencies. In one good day, Mrs. Jackson and Margaret were able to coordinate the final design elements—shelving, furniture, carpeting, books, maps and computers.

On November 6, 2007, the new library was launched. There were dignitaries from the DC government including Michelle Rhee, the new school chancellor, and representatives from Toyota. The library is wonderful and Ms Jackson has become a great asset for the school. It was a rewarding experience to see it all come together—actually in a very short time. What isn't apparent is the considerable time and headaches that went into getting it done.

Since the opening of the new library, the Smith Club has been supportive primarily by purchasing materials that were needed but not provided. We pay for the magazine subscriptions and have purchased books. Ms Jackson is trying to replace the paperback collection with hardbacks over time.

In 2008, Ms Jackson took over the distribution of books from RIF (Reading is Fundamental). Smith Volunteers have helped at each of the distributions, which are done in one day. Ms Jackson has made each distribution day a big event with a theme, activities and hand-outs. We have volunteers from RIF who are eager to come back.

This has been a rich and rewarding partnership for both the school and SCCW. We look forward to more years of our partnership.

**Smith College Club of Washington Volunteers with  
Ketcham and Martin Luther King Elementary Schools  
1989-2009**

The following are all the Ketcham and Martin Luther King volunteers that we have identified from our records. These include tutors, readers, chaperones and others. Non-alumnae volunteers names are followed by \*.

**Smith College Club of Washington  
Ketcham Project Planning Committee:  
April, 1989**

**Ex Officio:**

**Trish Frazier  
Susan Goodman  
Pru Lake  
Reggie Oldak  
Mary Ann Orr  
Valerie Smith  
Helen Strong  
Fran Welles**

**Gail McKinley  
Marion Ballard  
Barbara Lundberg**

**Volunteers**

**Judy Al-Saadawi  
Diana Stewart Artis  
Joe Auburg \*  
Ruby Auburg  
Linda Barnes  
Lisa Baylor  
Brooke Bennett  
Joan Benesch \*  
Kaitlin Bergen  
Harriet Bergman  
Frank Bernick \*  
Joan Bernick  
Amy Bloom  
Myra Brown \* (from MLK  
community)  
Kathleen Brueger  
Agnes Bundy  
Bridget Buttinelli  
Kara Callahan  
Rives Carroll  
Mary Cathcart  
Marie Champagne  
Hope Childs  
Peggy Christie**

**Tracy Coates  
Carol Thompson Cole  
Barbara Colgate  
Kimberly Cowell  
Jean Crocker \*  
Susan Crudgington  
Joann Dann  
Sally Dick  
Michelle Dickens  
Rosalyn Doggett  
Liz Doudoumopolous  
Mary Douglas  
Hermine Dreyfuss  
Betty Edelson  
Rosemary Enright  
Ellie Evans  
Marie Farinella  
Robin Fernkas  
Sandy Foote  
Maria Consuelo Gall \*  
Pirie Gall \*  
Paulie Gallagher  
Cammy Gawlak  
Emily Gawlak \*  
Amy Garndner**

Sarah Gelinas  
Stephanie Gerard  
Jennifer Givens  
Susan Goodman  
Kathy Gosselin  
Margaret Greene  
Marion Greene \*  
Peggy Greene  
Gina Grippando  
Jan Gross  
Joyce Gwadz  
Betsy Haines  
Melody Hardy  
Barbara Harper  
Joanne Harris  
Jean Harrison \*  
Stephanie Helfrich  
Colleen Hershberger  
Crocky Hogg  
Beth Williams Holloway  
Terry Hong  
Penny Houghteling  
Jill Howell \*  
Sarah Jemielity  
China Jessup \*  
Virginia Johnstone  
Estrellita Jones  
Claude Kacser \*  
Linda Kacser \*  
Andrea Kane  
Charlotte Kea  
Joan Keenan  
Kristy Keteltas  
Carolyn Killee  
Pamela Kinsey  
Polly Krieger  
Sarel Kromer  
Pru Lake  
Matt Lavine \*  
Phyllis Lavine  
Janet Lee-Thorp  
Sarah Bradley Leighton  
Jane Lescure  
Deborah Levy  
Jennifer Levy  
Lisa Lindberg

Tamara Linderman  
Gwendolyn Lohse  
Liz Lord  
Susie Lukins \*  
Barbara Lundberg  
McNeil Lystad  
Allen MacDonald  
Betty Marks \*  
Mary Marks  
Katrina Mason  
Linda Matkovic \*  
Starke Meyer  
Monica Nettles  
Nora Hoskins Neureiter  
Priscilla Nicholson  
Jane Nutter \*  
Reggie Oldak  
Elizabeth Opsahl  
Judy Ozwald  
Ginnie Paige  
Esther Pan  
Judy Peacock  
Bee Perrin  
Kathy Prendergast  
Dale Robinson  
Dorothy Rose  
Shelly Ross-Larson  
Laurie Ann Phillips Ryan  
Srinivas Savaram \*  
Margaret Shaw  
Royce Sherlock  
Ann Silverman  
Nancy Simon  
Anne Sippel  
Maggie Smith  
Valerie Smith  
Juliana Smoot  
Kate Spencer  
Melissa Spindler  
Margo Spiritus  
Beth Spooner  
Dorothy Stahl  
Jennifer Stoker  
Lois Stratton  
Stephanie Sutherland  
Jeanne Taylor

**Laura Taylor-Kale  
Samara Thompson  
Adrienne Todman  
Marilyn Urwitz \*  
Melissa Utzinger  
Nancy Voisin  
Mary Louise Wagner  
Bobby Walton \*  
Astrid Weddige\*  
Ellen Weiss  
Fran Welles  
Maija Welton**

**Colleen White \*  
Beth Williams  
T. Williams  
Serena Williams  
Claudia Wilson  
Masami Winden  
Joanne Lyons Wooten  
Tamara Wroblewski  
Carol Wysocki  
Judith Zangwill  
Alexandra Zapruder**

**TOTAL VOLUNTEERS:**

**163, of which 139 were Smith alumnae and 24 were other friends and relatives.**

## Ketcham-MLK Field Trips 1989-2009

**Over the years, we have sponsored many field trips in the Washington area, taking advantage of all the city has to offer. We tried originally to provide 2 trips a year for each grade level. As bus prices rose and emphasis on testing took priority field trips have been less frequent.**

**A list of places we have visited includes:**

Adventure Theater at Glen Echo Park  
Anacostia Community Museum  
Arena Stage—"A Constant Star" about Ida B. Wells (For selected 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders)  
Choir Trip to Smith College sponsored by college  
Corcoran Art Gallery  
Discovery Creek Children's Museum  
Discovery Creek Children's Museum -- Rolling Rain Forest Exhibit at MLK  
Fort Washington Park  
Imagination Stage  
Mount Vernon  
NASA Goddard Space Flight Center  
National Building Museum  
National Colonial Farm  
National Gallery of Art  
National Geographic Society  
National Museum of Health and Medicine of the Armed Forces  
National Museum of Natural History  
National Park Service Mini-Mall Tours  
National Postal Museum  
National Symphony Orchestra Family Concerts  
Phillips Collection  
Pumpkin Patch  
Oxen Hill Children's Farm  
Rock Creek Nature Center for Environmental Film Festival and Program By Discovery  
Creek Museum  
Science Program on energy at MLK given by Physicist from Johns Hopkins Applied  
Physics Lab  
Smithsonian Institution  
Arts and Industry Building—Brain Exhibit.  
Discovery Theater  
National Air and Space Museum  
National Museum of African Art  
National Museum of American History  
National Zoo  
US Capitol  
Washington Navy Yard  
Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts

Other—Smith Club contributed in some way usually by paying part or all of cost  
Duke Ellington School of the Arts Annual Spring Dance Concert 2008  
YoJo—“Choose to Read Program” 2006 and 2007

Concert with Smith College Choir at Howard Law School—March 2001  
Smith College Choir visited the School on two occasions