

# ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

April 2003

## WRINKLES IN THE BRAIN by Grant Colvin

Perhaps the most peculiar thing about being a Latin teacher (if I must limit myself to just one) is that I find I have an entirely different view of my subject from non-Latin teachers. At first reading, this should not sound odd to you. Do we not expect our teachers to approach their subject from a different angle than do the students and parents? Sure we do. We expect our teachers not only to know their subject through and through but also to delight in teaching it. How can the typical parent or student relate to a Latin teacher on those grounds? But my point is this: more than with any other academic subject, Latin teachers have been perennially forced and challenged to defend their existence and the worthiness of their beloved language. No self-respecting school proposes to offer an optional course in world history, English literature, or mathematics. Some things are untouchable in the canon of American education, but Latin is not a distinguished member of that club. By sending your child to Rockbridge you have immediately beaten some fairly daunting odds in grafting your child into a mandatory Latin program. Indeed most schools that have the sense to offer Latin would never dream of making it anything but an elective. Rockbridge Academy believes otherwise.

Why do we believe Latin is a necessary and noble pursuit? What do we say,

gritting our teeth and shaking all over, in response to “Latin is a dead language—dead as dead can be! First it killed the Romans and now it’s killing me!”? I



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could offer up the arguments you’ve heard before, which are as valid as ever—that students of Latin score markedly higher on verbal standardized tests than their Latin-less peers; that Latin allows an 80% surface understanding of vocabulary in English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish; that Latin grammar is essentially an organized guide to English grammar, both in form and terminology. My family (a brood of mad classicists) is

fond of noting that the only time we seem to open an English dictionary is to find out if a word that appears to derive from Latin actually in fact does. I testify here that after my third or fourth year of Latin, my English composition quality, speed, and confidence grew exponentially. As soon as your child hits the high school years, writing cogent essays or research papers becomes an academic task of unparalleled importance. Latin equips the mind with tools of organization and variable expression. You can do worse than copying the style of Marcus Tullius Cicero, the greatest lawyer and rhetorician in world history.

“But tell me what you really think, Mr. Colvin.” To be perfectly frank, the arguments presented above are no longer my favorites. So here is the true justification for the study of Latin. We live in a society imperiled by encroachments on logical, time-tested, Christian thought—encroachments that affect politics, education, entertainment, and really every facet of life you care to mention. Having been through “traditional” collegiate Classics, political science, or philosophy departments, we can all attest to the fact that the prime defilers of the Christian heritage are academics. American students across the land are thrust in front of an altar of “isms,” often without realizing it—atheism, humanism, hedonism, utilitarianism, feminism, and

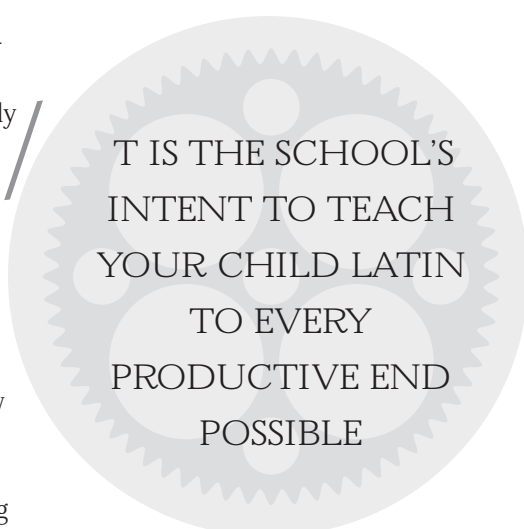
continued on page 2

continued from page 1

post-modernism. What do the next generation of American politicians, clergy, lawyers, and experts in every academic field have in common? They will all go to school somewhere, likely will attain advanced degrees, and at the end of the day, either they will understand that the glue, the matter, of everything from religion to law, from international diplomacy to the relationship with their spouse, is language, or they will not. As believers, we ultimately derive our faith not from a teacher, parent, or vivid dream, but from language-- specifically from ancient languages in which God inspired men to record the story of cosmology and human salvation. The understanding of God's word in the languages in which it was originally written (Hebrew and Greek), studied, and propagated (Latin) is critical to the preservation of orthodoxy. John Calvin, after explaining that the Roman church had mistakenly made marriage a sacrament partly because the Vulgate translated the Greek "mysterion" with the Latin "sacramentum," exclaims, "Let them go now and clamour against skill in languages, their ignorance of which leads them most shamefully astray in a matter easy and obvious to every one."<sup>1</sup> The care that Latin demands we pay to lexical and grammatical detail is the prime weapon with which your children need to be equipped to combat fuzzy thinking throughout academia and the debasing of God's truth.

As with anything worthwhile and valuable, Latin is not a cakewalk. Of all the languages that write in the Roman alphabet, you'll be hard-pressed to find one more taxing on the memory. Why must everything be declined or conjugated according to different patterns?!

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Get over these initial hurdles with self-discipline and time sacrificed and you'll be hard pressed to find a language more internally consistent, symmetrical, and patterned. Says Stephanie Brush in a Washington Post article on foreign language, "The fact is that learning a language is like learning to ski: The first three years are unmitigated torture, but if you stick it out, it becomes the thrill of a lifetime. There's a moment of recognition that occurs when you actually understand a mind that had been closed to

you moments before."<sup>2</sup> Latin may not open up for you the mind of a shop-keeper or pedestrian on the street of a foreign country, but it opens up for you the minds of great thinkers, poets, and politicians who shaped Western society in drastic and permanent ways.

It is this school's intent to teach your child Latin to every productive end possible. Rockbridge students will absolutely come away with more polished English skills. Yet, where the culture, mythology, and government of a pagan civilization have affected Western society, they will be equally equipped with understanding. I hope we transmit this passion and importance for Latin when we teach. Ask our students who compete in high school Latin competitions if they feel this language becoming more enjoyable and connected to the rest of their studies. I trust they do, and their growing enthusiasm encourages me to keep up the fight. Some time last month, 8th grader Kenny Trovato asked me to refresh his memory why we study Latin. With all these answers swirling through my mind, I could only sum it up by saying, "It puts wrinkles in your brain, Kenny, and those kinds of wrinkles are good." □

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.xix.36, trans. H. Beveridge. (Grand Rapids, 1989). vol. 2, p. 648.

<sup>2</sup> Brush, Stephanie, "A Matter of Interpretation." *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1990.



## COUNTY SPELLING BEE NEWS

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Rockbridge Academy 7th and 8th grade students competed for a spot in this year's County Spelling Bee. Kenny Trovato, an eighth grade student, won the Rockbridge bee and went on to compete at the county level. We are pleased to announce that Kenny placed 2nd in the county competition. Congratulations, Kenny!

# VOLUNTEERISM

by Amy Boswell

vol • un • teer—A person who renders aid, performs a service, or who assumes an obligation voluntarily

**V**olunteer. The very word may send chills down the spines of the normal school parent. Who among us really has the luxury of oodles of free time to devote to classroom decorating, cookie baking or chair folding? Do any of us really want to make four pounds of play dough for relief maps or relieve a busy teacher of his lunch or recess duty? Truth be told, there are few, if any, among us who wants to spend more time volunteering at school. However, the fact remains that it is volunteers who drive the tasks that make the vision that is Rockbridge grow to fruition.

The writer of Proverbs wisely wrote, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Pr. 29:18). I strongly believe that the same can be said regarding our community—without volunteers, schools perish. Rockbridge has so many volunteer opportunities because the Rockbridge community has such a rich vision for the future. When we volunteer our time, talent, and resources to the myriad of tasks in our school, we are meeting immediate needs. We are also torchbearers for the future. We are seeing to it that the vision Rockbridge was founded upon is illuminated and carried to its next level.

This year at Rockbridge has been unique. Our little academy is growing. Many of us have given much of our time to help rearrange and repaint and redecorate classrooms and to support our teachers and administrators who are working very hard to keep our tight ship afloat. Many of us have may have grown somewhat weary with doing good, despite the Lord’s encouragement, “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

Our desire to carry out the vision of Rockbridge Academy must be ever in the fore. The future will provide continued opportunity for our volunteer effort, an effort that must be undertaken in the spirit of community and service to one another and to our Lord who has made all of this possible. It has been said that, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal 6:7). Let us seek the Lord’s guidance as we sow the seeds of the vision for Rockbridge Academy in order to reap the harvest of minds, hearts and souls trained to do His work. □



## Art Contest Winners

Rockbridge Academy art students recently took top honors in the Annapolis Symphony Orchestra’s annual art contest. This year’s contest, “Can You Draw The Excitement Of The Orchestra?” drew over 500 entries from students across Maryland. Out of this large number of entries, Rockbridge students walked away with 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place!

Sixth grade student Kathleen Dowd was awarded 2nd place and second graders Madeleine Stevens and Jeremiah Niemann took 3rd and 4th places respectively. The three students were honored at an awards ceremony held on March 9th at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts. Congratulations to these fine young artists! □



The Maryland Legislature is currently deciding whether to halt capital punishment. The Rockbridge Academy ninth graders visited the State House in Annapolis to hear the debate.

*Pictured in **front row** are Matt Tucker, Zachary Cochran, Kevin Hinz, Delegate Don Dwyer, and Ashley Dwyer. **Back row:** Palmer Horst, Brandon Antkowiak, and Mr. Bradley Finkbeiner.*