

ROCKBRIDGE REPORTER

A Newsletter for Rockbridge Academy

June 2002

THE PLAY'S THE THING

by Leslie Collins

Hamlet recognized the power of theatre to reveal the truth

about his murderous stepfather. On April 12th and 13th, parents and friends of Rockbridge Academy experienced a confirmation of a different sort as they watched "The Music Man," Rockbridge Academy's first Broadway musical.

The cast was made up of thirty-eight actors, most of whom had never performed in a musical before. However, everyone seemed to agree that this show was one of the best school productions they had ever seen. Many asked, "How did you get so much talent in one place?" While no one would downplay the innate talent of the students, neither should the training the children receive at Rockbridge be ignored. Nor should anyone consider that, to acknowledge the training students receive is to deny God the glory He deserves for the gifts He dispenses. Mrs. Sheir, the Costume Designer, said, "The training at Rockbridge made all of the difference in the world." Lori Hill, the Director of Choreography, whose experience includes over fifty productions, added, "The kids stepped out of their boundaries and were stretched. Because of their attitudes, and striving for excellence, God allowed the success. It wasn't just talent." Mike McKenna, the



MORE RELATIVE THAN THIS: THE PLAY'S THE THING WHEREIN I'LL CATCH THE CONSCIENCE OF THE KING.

(Hamlet, Act II, scene ii)

Director, said, "God-given gifts are like gold...they have to be refined."

CHARACTER

From the moment the students enter school, character training begins. Students are taught how to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ. They learn not to think of their needs only, but to consider the needs of others. "Here the children respect each other and encourage each other," said Emily Cusimano, who played Marian Paroo.

Students are also taught to view authority as those whom God has placed over them. Tammy Sheir described the cast as "obedient from the time they were asked to do something. They worked hard without complaining. They were all very diligent in learning what they needed to do, and it showed." The students are also trained in how to accept criticism from others, which is one of the most difficult skills to learn. Drix Niemann, the Director of Stage and Lighting, explained, "The way you judge character is by asking 'How do they handle conflict? How do they handle being corrected?' I've worked in other productions in which there was much more 'push back,' but in this case, there was very little of that."

WORK ETHIC

The students at Rockbridge are taught to do everything to the glory of God (see Maggie Lively's comment in the article "Music in

the Park" in this issue). Whether it's forming a letter correctly, or practicing their math facts, students can choose to either give glory to Him, or to withhold His glory due to their lack of diligence, joyfulness, or perseverance. David Sheir, who played Harold Hill, said, "What we've always been taught at Rockbridge is to give all the glory to God, and if you are working for God and not for men, then there is going to be a spirit of excellence." Jan Horst, the Director of Music, observed,

continued on page 2

THE PLAY'S THE THING...continued

"These children are not afraid to work hard. They work hard everyday. They took this life skill into another venue and didn't skip a heartbeat."

DETAILS

Don't sweat the details is a phrase often heard in this postmodern era. Historically, though, people took a different approach to details. The attitude before was that God, the Creator of all life, is intricately involved in every detail of His creation. Therefore, when imitating His creativity, we should be equally concerned with the details of our work. Rockbridge students have been trained that small details in handwriting, grammar, and spelling are not to be taken lightly. They learn from the very beginning that careful attention to details makes one's work excellent. Many who watched the students dancing were amazed at the level of detail involved. What was even more amazing is how little coaching the students needed to understand that when Mrs. Hill said, "Try it this way, it will look better to the audience,"

the students understood the value of details. "Rockbridge, along with their families, teaches them discipline, attention to detail, perseverance," observed Mr. McKenna. "The training in all of these areas makes putting children through this kind of pace possible," he added.

SELF-ESTEEM

Rockbridge Academy has never been a school caught up in the modern self-esteem fad. The Bible knows nothing of "self-esteem," but does mention having a *sober estimation* of ourselves (Rom. 12:3). Therefore, we focus on training the students to do their best to the glory of God, and let them see the fruits of their labor. We believe that this is what gives children something to be proud of. Parents who work with their child to persevere through a difficult assignment, rise to the challenge, and press on to the finish line, understand that this task is a daunting one. In this culture of immediate gratification, microwavable meals, and instant everything, we often fail to grasp the full

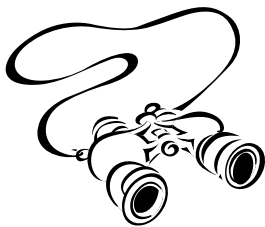
meaning of hard work. It behooves us to press on toward the goal of their education much in the same way as the Apostle Paul admonished the church of Philippi (Php. 3:14). We do well when we forsake the whining attitudes of our culture and show our children how to do all things without complaining (Php. 2:14-15). The rewards of the hard work of the students were written all over their faces as the audience cheered them on. The training of parents and teachers paid off, and the students were honored to be part of such an excellent production. Their participation in "The Music Man" gave them a more sober estimation than any formalized program in self-esteem could have done. But these students didn't remember how hard it was to learn to sing, act, and dance all at the same time. As David Sheir said, they "just had a ton of fun." As our children look back on their education at Rockbridge, may their memories be equally selective.



ATHENS CORINTH OLYMPIA ROME ASSISI SIENA FLORENCE VENICE

Europe Trip Summer 2003!

Rockbridge Academy will be taking the rising senior class to Europe in the summer of 2003. The trip is planned for June 8-22 and will include tours of Italy and Greece, including Athens, Corinth, Olympia, Rome, Assisi, Siena, Florence, and Venice. We invite parents of the rising seniors, faculty, staff and parents of the Rockbridge Academy Association to join us.



Our package will include: Round trip airfare, accommodations, breakfast and dinner daily, local specialist on Greek archeology and culture, local guides in Italy, coach transportation, boat crossing from Greece to Italy, entrance fees to sites, and gratuities to drivers. **Cost for the seniors will be paid**

for by Rockbridge Academy! For pricing and specific information, please call or visit the school office to pick up a brochure (410-923-1171).



MAKE NO MYTH-TAKE by Michael J. McKenna

Myths and legends are wonderful in their place. When we study the myths of the Greeks and Romans or other ancient cultures, we get a good glimpse of what was important to those people, how they viewed the world in which they lived, and how they sought to explain it. Myths tell us a lot about people and what they value.

It is for this reason that I want to address some of the more modern myths surrounding Rockbridge Academy. I don't mean the myths that our students read during the day, such as *Pandora's Box* and the like. No, I mean the myths *about* Rockbridge Academy that have been circulating over the last few months. Whenever a good work is attempted (like the one at Rockbridge), false reports and rumors will always surface. When they do, two approaches can be taken: 1) Ignore them and hope they die from the weight of their own silliness, or 2) confront them head on, and ask for the help of parents and friends to assist us in giving them the early death they so richly deserve. I've been attempting the former for several months now. This article is an attempt at the latter approach. Following is a brief treatment of actual rumors and false reports that have made their way to my desk. If you hear any of these or others in the future, or if you have already heard them, please back-track the best you can and do your part to make these myths part of Rockbridge Academy's "ancient mythology."

Myth #1 *Students in the high school at Rockbridge Academy are not allowed to talk about anything during the school day other than their academic work.*

When I first heard this one, I had to laugh! Think about it...how could any faculty member or I enforce such a rule?! We'd either have to be omnipresent or, like Big Brother, have telescreens perpetually monitoring every idle word. When I shared this one with the high school students, to enlist their aid in putting it to rest, they laughed, too. However, when I got a phone call from a parent telling me that someone had read to him a "written policy" by me or the board stating that such was the case, I stopped laughing. No such policy has ever been issued. Students at all levels of this

school are permitted to speak about things non-academic. Now, if they try to do that in the middle of a teacher's lecture on Newtonian physics or Egyptian history, they might be asked to refrain for the time being. But that's only asking them to be polite. This is not 1984, and we do not attempt to control the students' private speech.

Myth #2 *Rockbridge Academy is philosophically opposed to girls' athletics.*

We try to be consistent in our philosophical approach to things around here. So, if this one's true, we have to cancel girls' PE. (Maybe a class in needlepoint instead?) The thing that makes this one so laughable is that it came to light just as we are planning to put together a girls' lacrosse team for next year. Rockbridge is committed to developing interscholastic athletic teams for both boys and girls. Make no myth-take about that.

Myth #3 *If students forget their lunches, they just have to go hungry.*

Can you imagine the poor little waif just sitting there like something out of a Charles Dickens novel, watching as all his classmates stuff their bellies, while he sits, pitifully wasting away? You can't? Well, we can't either. That's why we require generosity and encourage the biblical mandate to consider others better than ourselves. When a student forgets his lunch, and Mom and Dad aren't able to bring one over, no problem. All the other students at the table are asked to share with their classmate, which they do, gladly. I've seen this happen time and time again. Heck, I've even given my lunch away a time or two!

Myth #4 *Rockbridge Academy is a cult.*

Hmmm...so many possibilities, so little space. I guess it depends on your definition of the word "cult." The American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition, defines "cult" as "a system of religious worship and ritual." Now, since all of us at Rockbridge believe that eagerly pursuing knowledge, understanding, and wisdom is an act of obedience to God's commands, that all of life's activities (like studying), committed to Him, are rightly seen as individual acts of worship, and that there are certain methods (rituals?) that help us accomplish this goal better than other methods (rituals?), then...*shazaam*...maybe we are a cult! But

then so is every other group of people who get together to work out their religious convictions in one way or another. If, on the other hand, your mind conjures up images of Jim Jones, vats of Kool Aid, and alien space ships coming to take us away, then, No! we are emphatically *not* a cult in that sense of the word.

Myth #5 *Rockbridge Academy is closing.*

This is probably the most pernicious, potentially damaging, and disturbing of all the rumors to cross my desk. I implored the one from whom I heard it to go back and ask the one from whom she heard it to stop spreading it, as I do with all such gossip. I can only pray that our efforts are successful. Allow me to assure you, Rockbridge Academy is healthy, vital, growing, and in no danger of closing its doors.

In dealing with most of the myths above, I've tried to be lighthearted, mildly sarcastic, and a bit humorous, because many of them are just plain silly and don't deserve sober treatment. However, there is a serious side to these rumors that needs addressing. The scriptures admonish us to love and speak the truth (e.g., John chapter 8, James chapter 3, and the entire book of Proverbs). In contrast, talebearers are said to be injurious (Pr. 18:8; 26:22). In addition, we're told that when talebearers are absent, strife ends (Pr. 26:20). When we hear rumors like the ones I've mentioned (or the ones I haven't even heard yet!), we could look at them as harmless rumors and stories which will fade in time, or we could consider them as damnable lies and slander that are useful tools in Satan's arsenal to try to tear down the good work going on in God's vineyard. As H.L. Mencken once said, "The truth has a horrible sweat to survive in this world, but a piece of nonsense, however absurd on its face, always seems to prosper."

Please do the body of Christ at Rockbridge Academy a favor. When you hear these or other rumors, first, give us the benefit of doubt, and don't believe them or spread them any further. The scriptures tell us to believe the best of one another (1 Cor. 13:7). Secondly, go and ask the one who told you to please stop spreading gossip, rumors, and false reports. And lastly, call me. I'll give you the straight scoop.