

# IPEI

Ithaca Public Education Initiative

Connecting  
School &  
Community

## Reflections on IPEI's Founding and First Fifteen Years

Interview with Stuart Basefsky, First IPEI President

*Describe how IPEI was "initiated".*

My wife, Claire Germain and I, were the catalysts for the formation of what became IPEI. We wanted to show our appreciation for the quality education our son was receiving. We made a \$2000 donation to the Boynton Middle School in April 1994.

As it turned out, the ICSD had no policy or procedures for receiving such donations. When presented with this monetary dilemma, the Board of Education asked that this notion be



Founders Basefsky and Chuck Brodhead discuss IPEI's past, present and future.

included on the agenda of its strategic planning committee. The committee directed that a task force develop proposals for establishing something akin to a school foundation so that donations like ours could be utilized effectively.

Attorney Henry W. Theisen was appointed chair. In looking for a good mix of talents and occupations, he solicited several people to join it, including myself. The task force created bylaws and applied for nonprofit status; IPEI's 501(c) 3 was official in 1996.

### *Why was it named Ithaca Public Education Initiative?*

There was much discussion about what to call the new organization. Everyone agreed that it should focus on the importance of public education and its impact on Ithaca. The intention was to have a name that clearly indicated what the organization's focus. We were a group established to support public education for Ithaca. The word "initiative" was commonly used in public policy at the time. We did not want to have to explain our purpose to volunteers and donors. The name should say it all!

### *Why did Adult Spelling Bees become the first fundraisers, and why "Teacher Grants" as the way to allocate those funds?*

Members of the task force were assigned to research how successful school foundations operate. Melissa Seigel found that successful ones in Pennsylvania were making great progress with mini-grants for teachers. This fit with our intention to create an atmosphere where teachers could be entrepreneurial. This was fully supported by Susan Mittler (Ithaca Teachers Association) who was also on the task force.

The IPEI Adult Spelling Bee was Ralph Jones' initiative. This "simple fun" engaged adults' memories of their early education—the loved and often dreaded "spelling bee." They gave money to form a team or to sponsor others so that they would not have to spell themselves!

### *What do you envision as the next stage of growth?*

Key from the outset of IPEI was convincing Ithaca that private support for public education was important for our community and that IPEI was a worthy, sustainable organization. This is not an easy thing to do in a skeptical community where transient events, people and organizations are the norm. Consequently, the early years required us to demonstrate that nearly 100% of our funds would go to the support of students and their teachers. The organization has been dependent on continual recruitment of volunteer "doers" who have the time, skills and energy to do all that needed doing. There have been no paid administrators or staff.

The next stage needed to sustain the growth of IPEI is to hire staff to supplement and expand on the efforts of the dedicated volunteers. Claire and I believe that IPEI has gained the trust of the community to continue its good work on behalf of our students, teachers, and community. We hope that Ithaca will continue to support the work of IPEI and its long-term sustainability.



Hangar actors from Ithaca College spelled and sang at the 2010 Bee. Mark your calendars for the 13th Annual Adult Spelling Bee on Sunday, Nov. 13, 2011.

Make a donation online at [www.ipei.org](http://www.ipei.org)

# The Arts Are Important

## SURVEY SNAPSHOTS

Surveys are useful to capture a snapshot of community thinking which can guide planning. Two recent surveys confirmed community support of the arts: the Ithaca City School District Budget Survey and the Fine Arts Booster Group (FABG) Mission Evaluation.

ICSD used a survey as one tool to gauge budget priorities in crafting the 2011–2012 budget. Supporting art and music emerged as the highest priority and many people commented on the excellent teachers and programs in the district. Complete survey with comments at [www.icsd.k12.ny.us](http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us).

The Fine Arts Booster Group, approaching its tenth year, conducted its own survey to evaluate its mission and future direction. Respondents were asked to rank elements of the mission. “Advocate for the arts” ranked the highest followed by “Support and celebrate existing district arts programs and staff”. It is available at [www.fabgithaca.org](http://www.fabgithaca.org).

## ARTS ALIVE FUND UPDATE

ICSD secondary school music extra-curricular activities for this past school year were restored due to the successful Arts Alive Fund drive. The FABG responded to cuts brought on by the state and national economic situation. An anonymous donor offered a \$10,000 pledge as a challenge match. Thanks to the generosity of 93 donors, most giving \$100 or less, and a budget re-allocation by the school board, all

activities were restored for 2010–2011. The FABG believes middle and high school students make important academic and social development gains through co-curricular arts participation. For the 2011–2012 school year, the previous arts cuts will be fully funded by the district budget (choirs, orchestras, bands, plays and musicals at all the secondary schools).

## Kids Discover the Trail! Now In Its Seventh Year

The students and teachers across the ICSD explore the Discovery Trail through *Kids Discover the Trail!* (KDT!). Seven years ago IPEI wanted to make the cultural resources of the community part of every child’s school experience. At the same time, the Discovery Trail wanted to reach all children in the ICSD. KDT! is the result of the unique collaboration between these three partners: IPEI, the Discovery Trail and ICSD.

Every elementary class, from Pre-K to Fifth Grade, has the opportunity to visit one of the eight Discovery Trail sites each year, with Fifth Grade classes visiting two. Sites are matched with grade levels based on the best fit for meeting grade level New York State Standards and for matching content areas. These visits not only provide curriculum-based learning experiences but also promote understanding and respect among elementary students from

Jennifer Engel reads “Library Lion” to the stuffed toy lion enjoyed by Kindergartners on their KDT! visits to the Tompkins County Public Library.

different neighborhoods. The pairing of children from two classrooms at different elementary schools introduces students to each other. Most classrooms continue to build relationships across schools with “Buddy Up” activities in addition to their KDT! trips together.

Funding is provided for “Buddy Up” as well as for KDT! Books that are given to every student to correspond with each year’s KDT! programming.

KDT! is funded by gifts from community members, businesses and local foundations made to the IPEI; by gifts to the eight Discovery Trail organizations; and is supported by ICSD. The overall Program Sponsor for 2009 and 2010 was BorgWarner Morse TEC.

“*Kids Discover the Trail!* represents the best of what Ithaca and Tompkins County have to offer our children—equity, diversity, and a chance to experience eight world-class cultural organizations right here at home, all during their formative elementary years,” remarked Charles Trautmann, Sciencenter Executive Director and *Kids Discover the Trail!* co-chair.



MARY GRAINGER



MARTHA FROMMELT

The Ithaca community values arts education!



JOHN SULLIVAN

“Buddy Up” field trips give friends made during KDT! more chances for fun and learning. These two classes visited the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology together.

## Robotics Impressive in Boston

Ithaca High's Code Red Robotics team successfully finished their eleventh Build Season and two competitions! The team, composed of 51 students, 15 professional mentors, and parent volunteers, worked for six weeks to build a 120-pound, competition-ready robot and a companion mini-bot.

Code Red competed at Rochester Institute of Technology and at Boston University. After the "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology" (FIRST) qualifying rounds in Boston, I.H.S



DAVID LIM

During Robotics "Build" season, everyone works together.

was ranked an impressive 5th place out of the 53 teams with a win-loss record of 8-2, but lost in the quarterfinals. They received the Jack Kamen Imagery Award for their imposing 'duck bill' that functioned to clamp down on the inner tubes used in competitions.

FIRST engages 1500 teams from ten countries and creates an exciting and highly educational environment where the students work collaboratively with professional engineering mentors in the spirit of "Gracious Professionalism." Major funding for Code Red comes from Kionix, BorgWarner, BAE Systems, Autodesk, Incodema, Accufab, Innovative Metal Works, CBORD, Tru-Cut Technologies, 104 Contractors, U-Haul Center, and Goodrich.



3D CINEMATION

Fall Creek's "School of Rock" is an 80-member rock band including ages from pre-K to fifth grade and skill levels from complete novice to experienced performers. Teacher Chris Bell engaged parents who are involved with local music scene, and received support from a Red and Gold Grant.

## Grants Inspire Innovation and Excellence

Thanks to the generosity of our donors since IPEI's founding in 1996, over 1,000 grants totaling over \$1,000,000 have been made in support of teaching and learning for Ithaca students. IPEI encourages innovative projects that bring community connections into the classroom and that enhance the education of every student through Teacher Grants, Red & Gold Grants, and Community Collaboration Grants as well as through awards programs, affiliates, and KDT!.



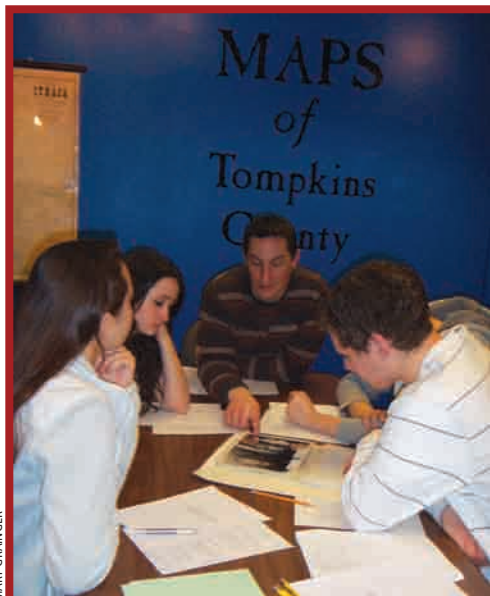
STEPHANIE NISBET

"We use the rug every day, many times a day...The rug has us up and moving, learning, and reading!" Kindergarten teacher Stephanie Nisbet used a Red and Gold Grant to purchase a special alphabet mat for her classroom.



BILL FOSTER

Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom received a Community Collaboration Grant for 100 Boynton seventh graders and 100 DeWitt sixth graders to participate in lake cruises to collect water quality and biological data. New for this year, internet capabilities on the boat will allow data transmission and video broadcasts connecting the boat with classrooms. Classrooms will make use of past data collected by ICSD students to view trends in the data.



MARY GRANGER

A new pilot Ithaca High School American History "super field trip" was planned by teacher Maryterese Pasquale Bowen on the effects of the Depression era on Ithaca, and funded in memory of John Caren, former Social Studies teacher and school administrator. Students learned while visiting the Johnson Art Museum and Kroch Library at Cornell, History Center of Tompkins County, and Robert Treman State Park.

Teacher Grants Applications due on November 1, 2011

## Quality Education Transforms Lives

Terry Byrnes, IPEI PRESIDENT



KAT ANDERSON

IPEI plays a pivotal role in connecting our schools to community resources for the benefit of all students Pre-K through 12th grades. I hope you will enjoy reading about IPEI's current activities and our history in this newsletter.

We continue to focus on facilitating opportunities for teachers to develop innovative ideas and enhanced teaching and learning experiences for their students. Whether it is through community members coming into the classroom or classrooms going out into the community, we believe that this kind of connection enhances learning, increases the potential for student success and strengthens our entire community.

Top quality public education transforms lives by offering learning experiences that lead students to higher education, meaningful employment, a lifetime of civic and cultural engagement, and a better and brighter future. On behalf of the students and teachers of the Ithaca City School District who benefit from your involvement and the many volunteers who make up the Ithaca Public Education Initiative, we thank you so much for your continuing support of this brighter future.

### Recognize a Student's Teachers or School with a Gift to IPEI

At the end of the school year or at graduation, a gift to IPEI is a special way to say thank you. Indicate on an IPEI gift form (or on the website) if you wish to make a gift "in honor of." A certificate will be delivered to the staff member(s) recognized by your gift(s)!



Ithaca Public Education Initiative

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## At Fifteen: Looking Forward

David Shoemaker, Public Relations Committee Chair



JASON KOSKI, CORNELL

2011 marks 15 years since the formation of IPEI in 1996. IPEI looks forward to marking this important milestone with a celebration scheduled for **Wednesday, October 5**. While IPEI is immensely proud of how far we have come in 15 years, we plan to use this occasion to look ahead while seeking to define and refine the ways that we can continue to connect school and community.

IPEI's activities have indeed expanded as we've increased the number and size of grants for teachers to fund innovative curriculum projects, and we are actively supportive of *Kids Discover the Trail!*, Code Red Robotics, and the Fine Arts Booster Group. Yet the need for community support to enhance the quality of our district continues to grow in importance for teachers and students.

As IPEI matures, we look forward to our leadership expanding to a new generation of volunteers as committed to our mission as the founders, and to deepening our partnerships between school and community to ensure the continued excellence of the ICSD.

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