

# Transportation Plays Key Role in KDT

By Heather Zimar

This article is one in a series of pieces marking the 10th anniversary of Kid Discover the Trail!

Kids Discover the Trail! Ithaca (KDT) provides all Ithaca City School District (ICSD) students with unique learning experiences with the world-class Discovery Trail, and some of these happen in an unlikely place, outside the classrooms and field trip sites: on the bus.

KDT is a collaboration between the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI), ICSD and the Discovery Trail. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the program, which gives every district student the opportunity to visit a DT site each year during elementary school. KDT partners 3,000 Ithaca students in more than 150 classrooms with another elementary school classroom at the same grade level for the field trips and pre- and post-trip activities.

"Transportation is key to the program because the bus is the very first part of the face-to-face KDT! Ithaca experience," said IPEI President Jennifer Engel.

"While getting to a field trip site may seem like a simple transportation issue, the bus ride itself plays a very important and magical role in a KDT! Ithaca trip," said Randi Beckmann, KDT teacher liaison.

Prior to the Discovery Trail visits, students are assigned "buddies" from their paired classroom, an integral component of the program designed to foster understanding and familiarity between students from different backgrounds who will come together in middle school. They often communicate through emails, letters or Skype prior to the field trips.

"The wonder and excitement of the first encounter of children who have only met through friendly letters or Skype is thrilling," Beckmann says. "The look of joy on children's faces when they meet for the first time on the bus is delightful."

Students share bus rides to the sites, eat lunch together, and participate in structured field trip activities and open-ended exploration. Many teachers prepare students with lessons on how to initiate and maintain conversations to facilitate positive relationships between and among children.

"Prior to the trips, I like to share letters with our buddy class," said Ashely Paolangeli, a fifth-grade teacher at Belle Sherman Elementary. "I have always had the partners made ahead of time and students sit with their buddies. The ice has been broken with their letters, and they have a starting point from which to begin conversations."

Allison Pritz, a teacher at South Hill Elementary, whose second grade class visited the Sciencenter in February, said her students were given a lesson on how to start, continue and finish a conversation. "It worked!" she said. "There was lots of polite conversation on the bus, and two pairs exited the bus holding hands when we arrived."

"Buses are always such a social place," Paolangeli adds. "The bus ride really lends itself to budding friendships. Then on the way home there's even more buzz as the kids [still sitting with their buddies] have the new experiences to talk about."

Rhonda Hull, an ICSD bus driver, agrees. "The students are a little

nervous in the beginning, but they are excited. When they come back, they act like they've known each other for years," she says.

ICSD Transportation Manager James Ellis says there is always a lot of energy on the bus. "Our drivers say they've seen some really cool connections being made between kids from different schools," he says.

"The program helps those from different backgrounds come together," Hull says. "By starting this young, when the students are in older grades, it's just something they are used to. They have learned to work with students from different cultures."

The transportation component is also important because it brings students to areas of the district they may not have access to otherwise. "The bus experience allows 'city mice' and 'country mice' to experience a new dynamic," Engel says. "I remember a child exclaiming, 'Look! We have cows in Ithaca,' and then the inverse when another child said, 'Wow! You can walk to school! Cool!'"

"They love the farms," Hull says. "A lot of these kids have never been



Photo provided

ICSD students get off the bus before visiting the Museum of the Earth during a KDT field trip.

out of the city." She notes that the teachers are always encouraging the students to consider their environment as the bus travels through different parts of the county. "And while I'm driving I'm getting an education, too," she says.

"As a teacher, it's always great to have the time to chat with other

teachers as well as see our students making new friends and having new experiences, sometimes being taken way out of their comfort zones, and rising to the challenges set for them," Paolangeli says.

"I am so very proud and in awe of how well the teachers and the

Please turn to page 16

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## Solar

Continued from page 1

contract's a big deal for the city, and it took a lot of work to make this happen. Council approved it unanimously, and we're moving forward to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions substantially, and at a discount to the city," he concludes.

The city's 2012 Energy Action Plan recommends increased use of renewable energy, recognizing solar PV as one of the most promising sources. It also calls for cutting emissions 80 percent below 2010 levels by 2050.

New York's solar industry employed more than 7,000 New Yorkers in 2014, an increase of 2,100 jobs from 2013, according to the New York Solar Jobs Census report, released by The Solar Foundation (TSF). Solar employment in New York grew nearly 40 times faster than the state's employment growth rate of 1.1 percent during the same period, moving New York up to fourth place in the highest number of solar jobs by state.

For more information contact Nick Goldsmith, Sustainability Coordinator, (607) 274-6562; ngoldsmith@cityofithaca.org.

## Education

Continued from page 3

Community Justice Center, helped him prepare a resume. He also credits Vicky Waters for teaching him to use email.

Bailey was able to land a part-time job at the State Street Diner and now he's working full time and doing well as a photovoltaics installer, reports his employer at Taitem Engineering in Ithaca. "I

don't know everything but I'm willing to learn everything to do my job," Bailey says.

Unlike Bailey, some ex-offenders have a hard time getting work. When applying for a job, applicants are often asked if they have ever been convicted of a crime. Although New York State prohibits public and private employers from discriminating based on criminal convictions, employers knowing about an applicant's criminal record may be a reason to reject the applicant.

Efforts are underway around the country to enact "ban the box" laws prohibiting employers from asking about a criminal record on the job application. Instead, the discussion about a criminal record and arrests would come later in the interview process. Two cities in New York—Buffalo and New York City—already have local "ban the box" laws on the books.

"The men in the program who have spent time behind bars do have difficulty securing jobs in the beginning, but each one of our graduates has either gone on to further college education or has found rewarding jobs, says Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, professor of American Studies in Cornell's government department, and co-founder of CPEP.

By working, Bailey can afford a two-bedroom apartment. This winter he's letting a homeless veteran he met on the street use the extra bedroom at no cost.

"It is eminently clear that college education in prison provides a stepping-stone to greater success on the outside than is available to most individuals released from prison," Katzenstein says.

Gleason and Bailey remain active in the CPEP program as advisory board members. Gleason says he

advises female instructors on strategies to avoid pitfalls in a classroom filled with men starving for attention from women. Bailey gives talks on the benefits of the program, such as last fall when he addressed a group at the Cornell Club in New York City. "When I got done speaking there wasn't a dry eye in the house," he says.

CPEP is funded by a grant from the Sunshine Lady Foundation. Cornell allows its professors to volunteer their time, provides an office and doesn't charge tuition for the courses but provides no additional funding. For more information, visit <http://cpep.cornell.edu/about-us/our-history/>.

## Plan

Continued from page 1

replay the County as NYSDEC reimbursements are received. The Ithaca City Common Council is also considering a similar arrangement to commit \$100,000 in up-front interim hydrilla funding for the District.

## County Poet Laureate Named

Legislature Chairman Mike Lane announced the appointment of Ithacan John "Jack" Hopper as Tompkins County's Poet Laureate for 2015. Hopper was recommended by the Community Arts Partnership, the unanimous recommendation of the selection committee, according to CAP executive director John Spence.

In his submitted Statement of Purpose, the new Poet Laureate states: "I would want to reach out to students of all ages grade school through college through seniors by holding clinics in which we could read and discuss work by many different poets ... I'd want to work with veterans groups, interracial

audiences ... Writers, like everyone else must be engaged ... Poetry's goal is to tell the truth." More information on Hopper's background can be found at [www.johnhopper-author.com](http://www.johnhopper-author.com).

**In other business**, the legislature authorized a temporary increase in salary for Public Health Director Frank Kruppa to reflect his service also as interim Commissioner of Mental Health Services, as requested by County Administrator Mareane, following the recent resignation of Mental Health Commission Sue Romanczuk. Kruppa will provide executive-level management for Mental Health while continuing to serve as Public Health Director, until a new Commissioner of Mental Health Services is selected and can begin employment. Kruppa's salary is increased by about \$10,000 to \$108,202.

Lawmakers also approved the award of 2015 grants for Arts and Culture Organizational Development, funded through county room occupancy tax dollars.

## KDT

Continued from page 9

bus drivers and Transportation Department have worked together over the years to improve and respond to the enormous task of moving every elementary student to the DT sites," Engel says. "Everyone works under the basic premise that this is a great experience for our children and worth every ounce of effort it takes to make it happen."

Heather Zimar is an ICSD parent and IPEI volunteer who is a higher education writer and editor.



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