

If you call Crossroads Academy and ask for information about the school, you will be connected to Admissions Director Betsy Warren, the one staff member who has been with Crossroads since its first day of classes, 20 years ago. Twenty years may not seem like a long time when compared to the storied histories of other New England independent schools, but for this small K-8 school in Lyme, N.H., it's been a long journey. The school has grown from 15 students crowded into a borrowed basement classroom to 138 students educated on a sprawling, woodland campus.

166 GRADUATES AND COUNTING

If asked to share the story of the school's founding, Warren will recount that most of the Crossroads Academy's first students were the children of the school's first teachers — teachers like Warren herself — who were looking for a specific kind of education. They wanted a rigorous, structured, content-focused curriculum that allowed for discussion of character. During her search, Warren attended an information session hosted by Dr. Mary Beth Klee. Dr. Klee had arranged the information session in order to recruit students to her new school, a school dedicated to "academic and moral excellence." Upon hearing those words, Warren knew she had found the school she had been looking for.

At first, classes were held in the form of "learning lunches," sessions attended

by local students bussed in from other schools or driven into Hanover, N.H., by homeschooling parents. By 1992, Dr. Klee had recruited 15 students, secured a room in the St. Denis Church in Hanover, and Crossroads Academy was born. On that first day of school, Dr. Klee addressed the students and their parents. "I spoke with the children and urged them to live the school's goals — 'do your best and be your best,'" she recalls.

Two years later, faced with a rapidly growing enrollment, Crossroads Academy moved to a 5-acre campus in Lyme. A few years later, the school acquired 135 acres, 60 of which were donated to the Upper Valley Land Trust. The lower school is housed in the Klee Building, named in honor of Dr. Klee, and the middle school stands nearby, on the other side of the playground. The new Bancroft Campus Center — complete with library, auditorium/gymnasium, art and music rooms — opened in 2006. Last summer, parents

and students worked together to build an extensive natural playground inspired by the school's woodland setting. Future plans for the campus include a new building to house classrooms and administrative offices.

The school may look different today than it did in 1991, but the values on which the school was founded remain the same. Early on in the evolution of Crossroads Academy, Dr. Klee and her staff recognized that they had to plan carefully for the years ahead. They understood that once a school gets started, and expectations become entrenched, change is nearly impossible. A new school, however, is free to define itself, and Crossroads Academy chose to define itself as a school in which character and knowledge hold equal importance in the curriculum. The school's motto, *Scientia Virtusque* (or "Knowledge and Virtue"), is the embodiment of that curriculum.

As the student body grew up >>>>



Students write latin translations on the white board.

Happy 20th Birthday, Crossroads Academy

Text and photography by
JESSICA POTTS LAHEY

and students began to graduate from the lower school, it became clear that Crossroads needed a middle school. Fortunately, faculty member Vicky Price accepted the challenge. Price joined Crossroads in 1993, searching for a job and a school for her young son. Faced with the challenge of building a middle school program from the ground up, Price went back to school and brought her new found education to the creation of the Crossroads Academy Middle School. Today, she is the Middle School Head, sixth grade homeroom teacher and sixth grade English teacher.



A recent theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Since its creation, Crossroads Academy Middle School has remained dedicated to the dual purpose of educating both hearts and minds while preparing students for the rigors of secondary school. Crossroads graduates go on to attend both area public high schools and independent schools such as St. Paul's, Exeter, St. Johnsbury Academy, Middlesex, Groton, and Kimball Union Academy.

GOOD COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Crossroads Academy curriculum is based on two equally important elements: The Core Knowledge Sequence, designed by Dr. E.D. Hirsch, and the Core Virtues program, designed by Dr. Klee. The Core Knowledge Sequence is utilized in nearly one thousand public and independent schools across the country

and is, as defined by Hirsch, "...a body of solid, shared, specific, and sequenced information most essential for literacy in contemporary American society." This curriculum is enriched with music, visual and performing arts, physical education, and world languages, including Latin and French. The Core Virtues curriculum is taught formally, in weekly character education classes, and informally in daily conversations about character in every subject from English to math.

"Other schools have great content, but what they don't have is a specific, planned-out program that incorporates character education and content...but that's what makes us good members of a community," says Price.

To put the Core Virtues program into action, the school requires community service from all students. The students contribute to, perform at, and work for Upper Valley area charities throughout the year. Every December, the students raise money through a penny drive and last year, the Middle School raised more than \$2,000 that went to purchase holiday gifts for children living at the Upper Valley Haven.

Some of the students' favorite community service projects are geared toward conservation. Every spring, students raise and release salmon hatchlings in the Connecticut River Watershed in an attempt to restore the salmon population in the Upper Valley. The fourth grade class tags and releases Monarch butterflies into a butterfly garden they created, a project that helps scientists track the Monarch's migration and population. This year, with the help of the school's science teacher, Dr. Peter Faletra, and a TAPESTRY Grant from the Toyota Foundation, the Crossroads Academy campus will be home to the first sanctuary for the critically endangered Showy Lady's Slipper. Students in grades 5 through 8 are learning how to grow the plants from seed in the school's tissue culture lab as part of their science education. Dr. Faletra hopes that through this project, students will be able to make a real and tangible impact by restoring this

beautiful and endangered plant to the Upper Valley. And just maybe, while they are at it, realize that they really do have the power to change the world.

One of the driving forces behind Crossroads Academy's success is Head of School Jean Behnke. Behnke became the Head of School in 2001, and since then she's been out in front of the school every morning, greeting the students as they climb out of their cars for drop off. "I love this school...I love seeing the children literally tumble out of their cars each morning, eager to greet their friends and begin their days. I love watching the teachers bring Core Knowledge and Core Virtues to life through drama, music, stories, science experiments, video projects, student-written plays, and hands-on activities. I love it that I hear laughter pouring out of classrooms and small children singing in the bathrooms when they think we cannot hear them!" she says. "I so appreciate the caliber of our faculty, engagement of our students, and commitment of our parents and our board. I couldn't ask for a better school to head."

With all due respect to Behnke, students get to have the last word on what makes Crossroads a special place to learn and grow. When asked why they choose to attend Crossroads Academy, students were eager to share their answers.

"I go to Crossroads because it is a great community with great values, and it is a place that makes me feel safe, with people I trust," says a seventh grade student.

Another seventh grade student adds, "Our teachers don't just teach, they make you like it, as if you were at Pompeii or in ancient Rome, or inside an atom."

And from an eighth grade student, "I came here for a unique learning opportunity that I could not receive anywhere else. I am here to learn about important virtues that will lead me to make the right decisions throughout my adult life. I came here for the tight-knit community where everyone cares and no one is left behind."

Happy 20th birthday, Crossroads Academy. UVL