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Class study on sailboat race earns high marks from students

By Eileen M. Daly

The Volvo Ocean Race, an international sailing competition, has become an exciting subject of study for seventh and eighth grade students at Lawn Middle School. Team teachers Nick Alfred, math, Kristen DeSantis and Dawn Huff, language arts and reading, Jim Kaczynski, science, Maureen McGuirl, history, and Michaela Onosko, Spanish, combined resources to present a weeklong interdisciplinary learning unit focused on the race.

The team was first approached by the director of Sail Newport, Brad Read, whose brother Ken is participating in the race as skipper of the Puma racing team. He had a race-based curriculum already being used in two private schools in Newport and Lawn school teachers agreed to utilize a modified race-based curriculum for Jamestown's seventh and eighth graders. According to the team teachers, the Puma boat is based in Newport and has many local connections, including the boat being built in Bristol and the rigging was done in Portsmouth.

The race, which began in Spain, is currently in progress with participants making their way around South America. Alfred pointed out that the race participants should make their way to Boston by the end of April or the beginning of May. "We're hoping to be able to get the kids out there for a field trip," he said. The race is scheduled to end in Russia sometime this June, Alfred said.

The interdisciplinary learning

unit began last week when team teachers re-grouped students into learning groups with students that they are not normally grouped with. The teachers did this, they said, in order to make the experience special and more exciting.

With the help of parents Samira Hakki and Dory Vogel, speakers were scheduled for every afternoon. Brad Read spoke on the first and last day of the segment, providing the introduction and wrap-up discussions. Other speakers included Mark Kroening, a New Zealander based in Portsmouth, who worked on the rigging for the Puma boat. Kroening brought samples and talked about the set-up and engineering aspects of the race. Jamestown resident Onne van der Wal, described as a world-renowned racing photographer, provided a slide show of photos from around the world and also donated posters of Jamestown. Speaker John Barnitt, a team member on three winning America's Cup race teams, also provided videos. Barnitt showcased the life of a sailor during an average day on a racing boat.

According to the team teachers, the Volvo Race unit was a big success that allowed them to incorporate many different learning experiences. The teachers all agreed that one of the most pertinent topics in the segment involved helping students link sailing, an activity that most children experience as merely a fun sport to participate in, with actual jobs in the maritime industry. Other topics included: world geography, studying waves

and converting miles per hour into knots, graphing environmental conditions, reading about individual sailors and their backgrounds and histories as well as exploring other cultures.

The children were unanimous in their agreement that the segment was a great success. Jack Tregenza called the experience "cool." "It was a great way to meet people who really have something to do with the race," he said.

Owen Heath liked the break from normal studies. "It was a good change of pace," he said.

Tyler Woodward enjoyed learning about the different race participants. "We got to pick one sailor and find out everything about him," Woodward said.

Sean Stanford enjoyed learning about "real world stuff." "There are a lot of jobs that I didn't know about," he said.

Charlie Keen and Elliot Roberts both have experience racing sailboats and agreed that this was a fun way to learn. "It was cool to learn more about the Volvo Race," Roberts said. "It is a huge race and our boat is doing really well."

Keen enjoyed the projects in science and English. "I liked studying the waves and learning about the sailors," he said.

Overall, everyone agreed the week was a both a great change of pace and a wonderful learning experience. The team teachers said that they would consider a similar project in the future, if not based on the Volvo race then on another of the many world races that are run each year.

Statewide slavery exhibit coming to Jamestown library

Jamestown Philomenian Library will host one of several satellite exhibits called "Hidden from History: Slavery in Rhode Island from its Inception to Its End," a landmark project depicting slavery in Rhode Island. There will be a lecture and an opening reception of the exhibit at the Jamestown Library on March 19, at 7 p.m. with the exhibit running through March 22.

According to Ray Rickman,

the project's director, authentic historical documents will trace the beginning of slavery in Rhode Island to its end, and give people a rare glimpse into the politics and pervasiveness of slavery. The artifacts will include the earliest known document in Rhode Island, 1652, to the recognition of the last known slave in the state, 1863. Documents will be drawn from the State Archives, Brown University, Rhode Island Historical Society,

the Providence Public Library and private collections, and will include runaway slave posters, newspaper advertisements for slave auctions, slave narratives, abolition pamphlets, indenture documents, bills of sale, state laws, and manumission papers.

The main exhibit opened on Feb. 26 at the Providence Public Library and will continue through March 29 during regular library hours.

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