

# ONTEORA

Winter 2020

## LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

DEAR ONTEORA COMMUNITY,

We have enjoyed a mild winter so far! We had an unheard-of clear weather month in January without a single snow day, and we hope to move into Spring without having exhausted our snow days!

I'm hopeful that the Onteora community has been following all of the good things happening in the District this year. We have had a wonderful start to our Social Emotional Learning initiative this year, and we plan to continue and expand this program in the 2020-2021 school year. We have heard from teachers and parents that they are already seeing the impact of this important work.

We have also seen an increase in community engagement in the District throughout the year. We had a record attendance at our Homecoming in the Fall and then again at our Winter Pep Rally and Community Night.

The Board has also received the completed Building Utilization and Grade Configuration report from Dr. Baughman, and his presentation can be seen on the video from the Board meeting of January 21. Dr. Baughman's full report, his PowerPoint presentation, and the video can be found here: <https://www.onteora.k12.ny.us/about/building-utilization-and-grade-configuration-study>.

The Board has begun to hold public forums on topics such as Start Times and Building Utilization and Grade Configuration as a means to gather input from the community. The forums provide an opportunity for dialogue that does not exist within the structure of a regular Board meeting. The public forum on Building Utilization and Grade Configuration will be held during the Board meeting on March 31.

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## Onteora High School Hosts Visitors from Galilee



Arab and Jewish students from the Israeli region of Galilee visited Onteora High School on January 31. Participants in a program called Galilee Dreamers, they conversed with Onteora students on a number of topics, including their wish to promote inclusion, tolerance, and peace in their homeland and in the world.

**ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS RECENTLY HOSTED SOME VERY SPECIAL GUESTS**—fellow teenagers who traveled from the Israeli region of Galilee to dispel misconceptions, combat biases, and promote their dreams of inclusion, tolerance, and peace.

The eight visiting students—four who identify as Jewish and four who identify as Arabs—were participating in the Galilee Dreamers, a program developed by the Oranim International School in Israel.

On January 31, the Dreamers dropped in on a number of Onteora classes, including ones focusing on global studies, European history, human rights, government, and human geography. The resulting conversations ranged from the peace process to New Year's parties, segregation to snowmobiles, religion to right-on-red driving habits.

The visitors talked about how at home in Galilee, Arab and Jewish youth typically live segregated lives. They go to different schools, practice different religions, socialize separately, and speak different languages at home.

The Galilee Dreamers program, they suggested, was an opportunity to break through that separation. "I'm definitely making friends," said 16-year-old Gali Mordechay. In the essay she wrote when applying to the program, she said, "I would really like to get to know the Arabs who live close to me, because I don't know a lot about their customs and culture. They are so close to us, and yet I know almost nothing about them."

Fellow Dreamer Adan Khalaila, 16, expressed a similar sentiment. "We are living five minutes from each other, but we don't know each other."

Mohammed Aborya, 16, mentioned his hopes for an end to the conflict in his homeland. "Our purpose is to show people we want to live in peace," he said.

Onteora teachers found the visit to be extremely educational. Global Studies teacher Alicia Curlew said, "I thought it was a great opportunity for our students to learn about another place through the eyes of teenagers," she said.

"It's such an amazing opportunity," said Global Studies teacher Brian Connolly, who explained that the idea for the visit was brought to him by Grade 11 Onteora student Sophia Roberts, who put him in touch with Rabbi Jonathan Kligler of the Woodstock Jewish Congregation. Rabbi Kligler's sister-in-law, Dr. Roberta Bell-Kligler, is Director of the Oranim College International School.

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# Onteora High School Hosts Visitors from Galilee

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Onteora students Darrah Allison (left) and Gabriel Garratt (right) talking with Mohammed Aborya, one of a group of eight teenagers who visited Onteora on January 31 from the Israeli region of Galilee.

“The goal of the program,” Mr. Connolly said, “is to make connections and to build a peaceful future in Israel and Palestine and the world.” The Dreamers program has extended an invitation to the Onteora High School government to visit Galilee, he added.

Sophia, whose family hosted two of the Galilee Dreamers, said she learned a lot from the students’ visit. “I didn’t realize there could be a part of Israel where Arabs and Jews were living peacefully,” she said.

Onteora’s Boiceville campus was just one stop in the Dreamers’ 10-day itinerary, which also includes stays in Philadelphia, Woodstock, and New York City.

## LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

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We have begun the annual budget process and will be sharing information in as many ways as possible. All of our presentations can be found on the School Board page of our website. We will be providing links to our budget presentations on Facebook following each Board meeting as well.

We are excited to finish the work on our Chemistry Lab this summer in addition to the projects approved in the budget last year. We will be repairing the drainage on the field hockey and baseball fields and replacing a section of the roof at Bennett Elementary School. We will also be doing work at the Middle School/High School to make the gymnasium entrance, locker rooms, and some of the bathrooms handicap accessible. We know that these projects will enhance the District, and we appreciate the community support that allows us to maintain and improve our facilities for our students and our community.

Sincerely,  
**Victoria McLaren**  
**SUPERINTENDENT OF**  
**SCHOOLS**

## MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOK LOVERS ENJOY LITERARY LUNCHEONS

A love of reading unites members of the Middle School Book Club, which is advised by English teacher Elizabeth Lastner and Library Media Specialist Amy Weisz. The club members meet once or twice a month during their lunch periods to discuss books and play literature-inspired games.

During a recent meeting, the students talked about James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* and other examples of “dystopian” fiction. “I like dystopian books,” said Grade 7 student Keegan Burkhardt, referring to tales about societies, communities, or worlds that are frightening, unjust, and thoroughly imperfect (the opposite of utopian ones, in other words).

“This was my fourth time reading *The Maze Runner*, and every time I love it!” Keegan said. Grade 8 student Jonimaya Huber shared her fondness for the dystopian stories spun by Suzanne Collins. “I like the *Hunger Games* series,” she said.

Before the meeting started, one student shared a sample of his own writing with another classmate, who declared, “You should be a writer when you grow up!”

The book lovers also discussed preparing for an upcoming Battle of the Books competition, a *Jeopardy*-like contest that would test the contestants’ familiarity with 10 books representing different genres, including autobiography, mystery, historical fiction, adventure, and realistic fiction. The Battle of the Books is scheduled to take place in March.



English teacher Elizabeth Lastner (back row) poses with members of the Middle School Book Club.



# Time to Tap at Woodstock Elementary

SINCE DAYTIME TEMPERATURES HAVE BEEN ABOVE FREEZING, it was the perfect time for students at Woodstock Elementary School to participate in a popular pre-spring ritual – tapping a maple tree and collecting its syrup.

On February 4, children in Kindergarten through Grade 3 gathered in the school playground with Physical Education teachers Sonja Rothe and Patrick Burkhardt for a hands-on lesson on maple sugaring. For the past 10 years, Mr. Burkhardt has been sharing his extensive knowledge on the subject with students at all three of Onteora’s Elementary Schools – Woodstock, Phoenicia, and Bennett.

“With abundant maple trees, many locals have been making syrup for generations in all three communities,” Mr. Burkhardt said. “I like to think I am helping pass on this local tradition to the children so that when they see the blue sap lines in the woods, they know what they are.”

Mr. Burkhardt’s lessons covered a range of topics, including the history of maple sugaring in our area, the tools used, and the identification of maple trees.

Eager to get tapping, the young learners demonstrated their knowledge about a tree’s circulatory system and how it utilizes sap. When Mr. Burkhardt pointed to a pine tree, they were quick to note that pine is not a good tree for syrup. “It’s not sweet!” they shouted in unison.

Students were engaged, busy looking for the largest root on the selected maple tree to tap, using a tool called a “refractometer” to test the sugar content of the tree, and a “spile” or tap to extract the sap inside. Almost immediately after Mr. Burkhardt drilled a small hole into the tree and set the tap, the liquid began to drip. Students could also see how much sap had already

gathered in a container from previous classes, and even get a taste.

Mr. Burkhardt first began making syrup as a hobby with very little equipment, literally boiling the sap down on an outside fire. He decided to share his experiences with students at the school at which he taught, and from there, his lessons expanded to include all three elementary schools. Over the years, he was able to

purchase more sophisticated equipment and give samples for each class to enjoy.

In the coming weeks, Mr. Burkhardt will return to Woodstock with an evaporator to show students how to boil the sap down, giving them a chance to see how it is transformed into the kind of syrup they might see on their breakfast table.

Another part of their learning involves nutrition. Mr. Burkhardt and Ms. Rothe emphasize to the students that pure maple syrup has natural sugars and is

healthier, unlike the syrups we see at most pancake restaurants, which have a lot of added sugars. Over the years, both have noticed that more students recognize the natural kind and are using it at home.

“When we first started doing these lessons, some students didn’t even recognize the ‘real’ stuff!” Mr. Burkhardt said.

They also are more familiar with the tradition of tapping. “I know people are getting sap from the maple trees when I see the buckets!” exclaimed Grade 3 student Byron Reznick. Seth Monroe, a Grade 1 student, said he was excited that the weather had gotten warmer because he and his family would be tapping maple trees this weekend right in his backyard.

Mr. Burkhardt hopes the lessons will continue to have a positive impact on the students and encourage them to support local maple syrup makers and see the value in all natural products.



Physical Education teachers Sonja Rothe and Patrick Burkhardt (back row, left to right) showing Woodstock students how to tap a maple tree and collect its syrup.

## PRESENTATION FOCUSES ON FUTURE OF OUR SCHOOLS

The future of Onteora’s schools was the focus of a well-attended presentation held at the High School/Middle School on January 21. The District’s Educational Consultant, Dr. Kevin Baughman, presented the results of a building utilization and grade configuration study to the Board of Education and members of the Onteora community.

Missed the presentation? Visit <http://bit.ly/2GcJ8l1> to see a video of the meeting, Dr. Baughman’s PowerPoint presentation, and his final report.

Dr. Baughman was hired to conduct the study in support of the Board’s goal relating to the development of a long-term plan that strategically addresses educational goals, declining enrollment, facilities, community impact, budget concerns, and cost-saving measures.

A public form on Building Utilization and Grade Configuration will be held during the Board meeting on March 31.



Educational Consultant Dr. Kevin Baughman presenting the results of his building utilization and grade configuration study.

# Onteora Middle School Students Love Science!

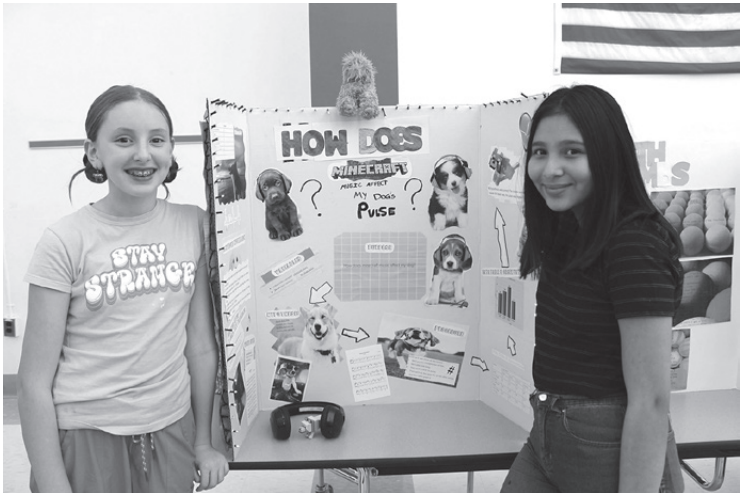
STUDENTS FROM ALYSSA BABCOCK'S AND KATE VAN BAREN'S GRADE 7 AND GRADE 8 CLASSES showed off their science skills to family and friends at Onteora Middle School's Science Fair in late November. As Ms. Babcock explained, "Students practiced using the scientific method to ask questions, formulate hypotheses, collect data, and make conclusions." Topics ranged from the study of reaction times, to the effects of music on human and animal subjects, to the impact eating breakfast has on test scores. Students presented their findings at the fair with 3D dioramas, as well as in the classroom using Google Slides.

Many students were surprised by their results. Grade 7 student Anna Johnson studied the "Stroop Effect," where a delay in the reaction time of a task

occurs due to a mismatch in stimuli. Visitors could see the results of others or try themselves to beat the "Stroop" by naming the color of a word without being tricked into its literal meaning. An example would be the word "pink" written in yellow (the correct answer is yellow). Anna said that she imagined adults would have a quicker reaction time. They didn't!

Grade 8 students Hailey Peck and Madeline Mills were surprised that, although they served everyone cherry-flavored soda, dyeing the liquid in different colors caused people to identify the flavors based on color association. In other soda experiments, Iris Koester and Sarah

Wolfeil showed everyone how soda stains your teeth, even after brushing. And they had evidence to prove it!



Middle School students Maya Ferrara and Carla Alvarez studied how Minecraft music affected a dog's pulse.

## WINTER PEP RALLY CELEBRATES SCHOOL SPIRIT, COMMUNITY

The Onteora community came out in force for the Winter Pep rally, which took place at Onteora High School on January 28. In a show of unity and team spirit, many of the attendees wore white, following the event's suggested "White Out" dress code.

Kicking off the festivities was an after-school pep rally, which featured the recognition of winter athletes and coaches, a host of hard-fought competitions (including slam-dunk and tug-of-war contests), and the debut of the High School's talented new Dance Team.

The Athletic Booster Club donated pre-game meals to students who wished to stay longer for that day's athletic contests, and the Onteora Food Service provided serving assistance.

In addition to exciting Varsity basketball games and wrestling matches, the evening's highlights included recognition of Town of Olive Youth Basketball players and Onteora Youth wrestlers, music provided by DJ Dave Leonard from JTD productions, and a Belleayre Bash fund-raiser that invited people to pay for the privilege of taping Onteora Athletic Director Kim Pilla to the gymnasium wall.

It was a day—and night—to remember!





# DECA Students Shine at Regional Competition

CONGRATULATIONS TO ONTEORA'S CHAPTER OF DECA, WHICH ATTENDED ITS ANNUAL REGIONAL COMPETITION at Rockland County Community College on January 7. Onteora competed against 14 other DECA chapters.

This year was extremely challenging, with many new DECA chapters joining the region. Although Onteora didn't place this year, some of our students excelled. Angelo Musillo and Adam Williams received a score of 91 on their role-play situation in Financial Services Team Decision Making, and the team of Brian McHugh and Daniel Meisler received a perfect 100 on their role play in Entrepreneurship Team Decision Making.

The students competing in the DECA regionals were tested in areas like business administration, finance, marketing, and hospitality. Students took a challenging 100-question exam online prior to the day of competition.

During the competition, students were assigned different role-play situations, which required them to solve problems with a limited amount of time to prepare and then present their ideas to judges. Test scores were combined with role-play scores to determine which competitors would move on to the State level.

Kudos to all our DECA members for their hard work!



Onteora's chapter of DECA, led by Business teacher Colette Goho, attended a regional competition, where they showed off their knowledge and problem-solving skills in areas like finance, marketing, hospitality, and entrepreneurship.





# Social and Emotional Learning at Bennett Elementary School



Bennett teacher Judith Iapocce (right) leads a conversation about community during a Social and Emotional Learning class.

AT BENNETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, THE DISTRICT'S NEW SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) INITIATIVE has been rolled out in all Grade 5 and 6 classes. Once a week, students have an SEL class with activities that aim to build community, encourage respect towards others, and strengthen the social and emotional skills that are essential to succeeding in the classroom and beyond.

On a recent wintry morning, students in Doreen Erlwein and Judith Iapocce's Grade 5 class sat in a circle, discussing the meaning of *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco. The book tells the story of a precious family heirloom, made of scraps of old clothing, that is used over the years as a baby blanket, a wedding canopy, and a tablecloth on the Sabbath.

Sitting in a circle, the students talked about the concept of community as it related to the book as well as to their own communities—including their school, their town, their country, and the world. When it was their turn to speak, the students held a soft, stuffed earth, which they called their "talking globe." Children who didn't want to talk simply passed the globe along to the next person in the circle. Everyone listened intently.

"We are a community in our classrooms," noted one of the teachers. "We're like a quilt, and each of us is an important piece of that quilt."

The students discussed what was special about their classroom community. "We don't fight," said one boy. "We all have our differences, but we all get along," said his neighbor. "We spend so much time in school, it feels like home," added another speaker.

After talking about what makes their community work, the students talked about the types of behaviors that could damage their sense of community—things like rudeness and bullying, for example.

Next, the students were invited to share one positive thing that had happened to them since the last class. Responses ranged from being named to an All-County music group, to playing in a basketball game, to welcoming a new student into their classroom.

Finishing up the day's SEL lesson, the teachers handed out blank paper "quilt squares" to the students, which were theirs to decorate. "Each square represents a student interpretation of our class community through words and/or pictures," said Mrs. Iapocce. "The finished quilt will be displayed in the classroom."

According to Bennett Principal Gabriel Buono, the school's staff members and students have been very receptive to the lessons of social and emotional learning. "This curriculum complements and bolsters our social skills lessons, which our school counselor has been offering for a number of years," he said. "Adding a more positive perspective can only result in more positive outcomes!"

Earlier in the school year, representatives from the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (<https://www.morningsidecenter.org/>) provided training to Onteora teachers currently implementing the SEL initiative. In addition Bennett's Grade 5 and 6 classes, the initiative was introduced this year to Grade 9 at the High School, Grade 7 in the Middle School, and Grades K-3 at Woodstock and Phoenicia. Additional grades will be added next year.

## KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

If you have a child who will be enrolling in Kindergarten at Onteora next September, it's time to register your child. The District's online Kindergarten registration system is now open.

To register online, parents or guardians should visit [www.onteora.k12.ny.us](http://www.onteora.k12.ny.us) and click on "New Student Registration." The link for online registration is at the top of this page.

Once your child is registered, you will be contacted with an appointment for Kindergarten screening. Screening will take place during the week of April 20-24.

Children who turn five on or before December 1, 2020 are eligible to enroll in Kindergarten beginning in September 2020.

If you have any questions, or if you don't have access to a computer, you may contact Sharon Wood, Onteora's District Registrar, by calling 845-657-6383 ext. 1023 or emailing [swood@onteora.k12.ny.us](mailto:swood@onteora.k12.ny.us).



Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella greeting a new Kindergarten student on the first day of school.

## INTERESTED IN PLAYING COLLEGE SPORTS?

An upcoming presentation, scheduled for April 28, will focus on college athletics. Speaker Mark Leinweaver of PERFECT PLACEMENT will be speaking at 7 PM in the High School auditorium. Leinweaver is an MLB Sports Agent and former Division II athlete who has spent two decades working in pro and college sports. He educates students, parents, and coaches on how to best approach the college selection "recruitment" process – and how character matters – starting with a simple, realistic plan.

# Technology Enriches Classroom Learning at Phoenicia School

TECHNOLOGY IS AN IMPORTANT TEACHING TOOL AT PHOENICIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AS IT IS IN SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT.

On a recent winter afternoon, Phoenicia Grade 3 teacher Robert Hallock was using Chromebooks and Google Classroom to teach a math lesson on fractions. Referring to the lesson, Mr. Hallock said, “It’s just a virtual version of what we usually do.”

To begin the lesson, Mr. Hallock had the children type in their answers to various questions, investigating the extent of their knowledge of numerators, denominators, and the nature of fractions. “The use of technology allows students to delve into investigative inquiry and discuss their ideas on the Google Classroom message board,” he said.

Using their laptops, Mr. Hallock’s students played a game that required them to divide “worm sandwiches” into equal shares by correctly filling in the numerator and the denominator. “This game is awesome,” remarked Angel Cruz. “I’m learning a lot about fractions.” One of Angel’s classmates, Soe Moe Kan Tun, was equally enthusiastic. “The Chromebooks have games that entertain and give us information,” he declared.

Another Grade 3 teacher, Jaclyn Sobolewski, shared that her students have been using the Chromebooks for Lexia (a phonics/reading program), Sumdog (a math site), and Reflex (a math-fact fluency site). “We’ve also used them for research of European countries and of



Phoenicia teacher Robert Hallock working on a math lesson with students Axel Reyes Coronel (left) and Soe Moe Kan Tun. The students are using Chromebooks to learn about fractions.

weather,” she added.

Grade 2 teacher Jane Wolfrom, whose classroom received 10 Chromebooks this Fall, has been using the devices at math stations for small groups of students. “Sometimes they are used as a reinforcement of what the math lesson was, and sometimes as fluency practice,” she explained. “I have also used them as additional reading support with programs like Lexia and Raz-Kids.”

In Grade 1, teacher Elizabeth Granberg has had her students pair up with partners to explore different math and reading tools together using the Chromebooks. “I have also used them for the science lab and doing a partnership Kahoot game for our sound unit,” she said.

Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella is pleased with how teachers and students are using the Chromebooks, which were delivered to Grade 1-3 classrooms this Fall. The Chromebooks, she noted, will give students practice using computers before they have to take standardized State tests on computers.

“They will also enable the young learners to practice their keyboarding, which is an essential skill in 21st century education as well as a requirement of the New York State Next Generation English Language Arts Learning Standards,” Mrs. Sella observed. The Chromebook’s small keyboards, she added, are perfect for the small hands of third graders.



Phoenicia students Madison Murphy (foreground) and Kendyl Pezzello using Chromebooks to complete a math lesson.

## ONTEORA TEAMS EARN SCHOLAR-ATHLETE HONORS

**O**nteora High School is pleased to announce that many of our Varsity teams have been named Scholar-Athlete Team Award recipients for the Fall 2019 season. In order to meet this designation, given by the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA), 75 percent of team members had to achieve a combined grade point average of 90 percent or higher during the marking period. Congratulations to the following teams: Girls and Boys Cross Country, Girls Tennis, Girls and Boys Soccer, and Field Hockey.

Great job, Eagles!

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT  
Sydney Amster  
CLASS OF 2012

SYDNEY AMSTER, WHO GREW UP IN WOODSTOCK, now makes her home in Manhattan, where she works as a marketing manager for the Food Network television channel.

"I handle network brand partnerships, including events like the New York City Food & Wine Festival," said Amster, who majored in Marketing/Management at SUNY Albany.

Before starting her current job in November 2019, she worked at the Hallmark Channel in ad sales marketing.

Her new position is challenging yet fulfilling. "I love that I'm able to be creative with my ideas," she enthused. "I love brainstorming new concepts for a promotion or event and seeing how it comes to life! This job definitely challenges me to come up with innovative methods that will keep us 'top of mind' for consumers."

For her, there is no such thing as a typical workday. "One of the great things about marketing is that no two days are exactly the same," she declared. "One day I'm hyper focused on the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, and the next I'm working to develop a sweepstakes with a huge prize package to promote a new show!"

Onteora teachers, Amster said, helped lay the groundwork for her career, particularly retired Business teacher (and DECA Advisor) Jean Douglas, Social Studies teacher (and Yearbook Advisor) Brian Connolly, and

retired Woodstock teacher Cindy Hancock.

She credits Ms. Douglas with introducing her to the world of marketing, and Mr. Connelly with letting her take charge of the yearbook, providing her with her "first taste of a project with high stakes and tight deadlines." Speaking of Ms. Hancock, Amster said, "She taught me that sarcasm and quick wit can get you far — along with all the other important lessons 4th grade has to offer!"

Amster has fond memories of Onteora, where her mother works as the District Clerk. "Since Onteora is such a small place, it really fosters an environment for creativity," she said. The District encouraged discussions about how to make the schools better, she recalled. If a club didn't exist, for example, the students could just go ahead and start it. "I think for young people on the verge of starting their life, it's a really empowering feeling to know that your opinion matters and also that you do make an impact," she declared.

"Since Onteora is such a small place, it really fosters an environment for creativity."

—Sydney Amster

Comparing her childhood in the Hudson Valley to her current life in Manhattan, Amster said, "I love the city and having everything at my fingertips — mainly the wide variety of take-out options!" On the other hand, she is appreciative of the community in which she was raised. Speaking of the children she sees growing up in the city, she said, "It's so foreign to me that they don't have a backyard with tons of land!"

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