

The Parents Association: A Vital Partnership

I write this letter having just been reunited with my computer, and my shower, two things New Yorkers used to take for granted until we experienced the blackout of 2003. For me, the 26-hour blackout was inspirational. It was an opportunity to spend a day with my son (a rising senior at HM) without electricity, without television, without the computer. I experienced first-hand his wonderful sense of social responsibility, his civility, his level of maturity, and his perspective on the situation. While walking through the streets of Manhattan, we ran into a few other rising seniors whose parents also commented on their children's approach to the day. The core values they each displayed are those that Horace Mann tries and succeeds in instilling. What a privilege to be able to serve as the incoming president of the Parents Association (PA).

I look forward to my first term with both pride and trepidation. Pride because I believe in Horace Mann, its administration, faculty, students, and parents. Trepidation because I know about Horace Mann, its administration, faculty, students and parents. They're a formidable lot! This is a very exciting time to be at the helm of the PA, taking over from Marjorie Kuhn and her board who laid the foundation for many of the initiatives which are just now bearing fruit. Each project is designed to enhance and support the programs of the School, to promote a sense of community among HM parents, and to facilitate communication between the School and the parent body. We hope that alumni will take advantage of some of our activities.

The 2002-2003 academic year met our financial and programmatic expectations. Revenues were high, community involvement was tremendous, and we have the generosity of parents and alums to thank. The spring benefit held at the Toy Center in Manhattan's Flatiron district was a huge success from the standpoint of attendance and revenue. We were over 500 strong in a beautiful space being serenaded by the talented members of the Horace Mann Jazz Ensemble. What a privilege to witness first-hand the artistic gifts of our students. To supplement the silent auction, which took place that evening, an online auction was inaugurated a few months prior to the actual benefit. This fundraising effort allowed members of the HM community, including those unable to attend, to bid on some very exciting and creative offerings, donated by parents, alumnae, teachers, administrators, and trustees. The response to the online benefit was very positive from the point of view of income and participation. We plan to expand the concept of online bidding and hope to offer bidding opportunities for seasonal events including fall foliage, the Super Bowl, and the World Series, to name a few. We are fortunate that Wendy Gold and Vivian Bernstein, parents of HM alumni, will be serving on the PA board. Their mission will be to insure that parents of alumnae who have been so supportive of the School in the past, are apprised of PA-sponsored activities, including the online auction, which may benefit them, and in turn the HM community.

The HMPA is very proud of its online initiatives begun by Marjorie Kuhn and her board, and continuing with some expansion this upcoming academic year. The online textbook recycling store has been completely revamped, offering used textbooks donated by students. Money raised directly benefits the Student Assistance Fund. The site, which

enables students to shop by book or course name, has been dubbed “cool” by one of my sons. Parent volunteers collaborated with a very talented web designer to develop a site which would be functional and attractive to students. We hope to expand the site to make used electronics, including calculators, available. The PA News is an online vehicle for keeping parents and alumni abreast of PA sponsored activities, and features articles of interest. *The Bulletin* and PA minutes are posted, as well. The Featured Books site, where children’s books are donated by various publishers to the School libraries after being reviewed online by a parent, is a wonderful collaboration between the School and parents. It will be expanded this year to include reviews of books for Middle and Upper Division children, as well as Nursery and Lower Division students. Finally, we are hoping that more parents, students, and alumni will avail themselves of the Merchants site, where our partnership with retail stores and websites (Amazon, Best Buy, Staples, and Modells) provides revenue to Horace Mann each time a purchase is made through the Horace Mann website. We are very proud of the PA website and urge alumni to take advantage of what it has to offer.

The PA is constantly exploring ways in which we can support the educational objectives of HM, keeping it at the forefront of education. On October 8, 2003, the PA, in partnership with the School administration, sponsored a lecture by Howard Gardner, Ph.D., The John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor in Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The lecture, entitled *Intelligence and Morality: Developing Both in Turbulent Times*, was held in the magnificent and comfortable Gross Theatre. We were very fortunate that Dr. Gardner, who was featured in two *New York*

Times articles this summer, agreed to spend much of the day with us. Best known for his theory on multiple intelligences (MI), Dr. Gardner is a prolific and much sought after scholar, educator, and lecturer. The focus of much of his recent research has been on uncovering ways in which individuals “at the cutting edge” can carry out work that is ethical and socially responsible. The evening, which was free to HM parents, alumni, teachers, and students, enabled our community to explore together the responsibilities, and the possibilities, of educational institutions.

Finally, in the wake of 9/11 and the blackout of 2003, the PA, in collaboration with the School administration, is constantly exploring ways to insure expeditious and alternative avenues of communication. To this end, we are distributing credit card-size emergency notification cards to each family. The cards include important numbers to call at HM should questions arise about dismissal procedures in the case of a midday emergency and/or school closing. In addition, we are exploring the possibility of inaugurating an automated contact management system which will enable the School to improve outreach communication with parents when an emergency situation presents itself. We are very appreciative of the support we have received from the administration and trustees on these important initiatives in the area of communication.

In closing, I look forward to working with parent volunteers to support HM in its commitment to ensuring that our children are learning in the richest possible educational environment. I share Jon Dewey’s conviction that “school is a form of community life”

and it is through the Parents Association that I, as a parent, can in a small way contribute to the life of the school as a whole.