

EDISON HIGH SCHOOL'S
S.O.A.R. PROJECT CONNECTS
WITH LAKE STATION HISTORY

by Marcia Dow and Caye Girgenti



In the spring of 1998, Edison Junior-Senior

High School submitted a proposal for a federal grant. In our proposal we wrote, "Our school motto reads 'Where the Knowledge of Tomorrow is Taught Today' and our mascot is a soaring eagle...Within our walls, the Eagles do not soar and our knowledge is of a day gone by." Because of budget restraints and past graduation expectations in our community, we wanted the grant to connect us with the rest of the world on that "information superhighway." As we competed for this grant, we focused on our students' efforts at getting jobs for which other students from the surrounding area were better prepared. Students in our bedroom community would be better trained in skills necessary which would also improve their economic conditions if we added much needed technology. In the fall of 1998, we received the grant funding.

The core of our grant project, Systematic Organization of Academic Resources (S.O.A.R.), is the opportunity for our students and community to interact more with society through technology. The ultimate goal is to enrich our students, faculty, and community thus enabling them to build confidence and pride. We also want to compete in today's ever-changing technological world and ultimately be lifelong learners. A computer in every classroom is necessary for the develop-

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ment of an interdisciplinary curriculum, the creation and maintenance of a web page, and the establishment of a community resource center.

S.O.A.R. is unique because it establishes a cooperative project with community stakeholders including the Lake Station Chamber of Commerce and the Lake Station Historical Society. Schools often do not make local community history part of their curricular studies.

With the collaboration of both the Lake Station Community Schools and community groups like the Historical Society, we are now developing a cross-curricular course of studies and a district-wide school web page with a link to community organizations. We promote civic interest and pride by presenting facts, current events, and useful information pertaining to Lake Station. Through Lawrence Vallem and Kathleen Sonntag, our Historical Society contacts, we are doing genealogy searches, web page development, and local research projects. By this summer we will have teasers on our web page—short questions with multiple choice answers followed by a video clip of our students interviewing a historical society member who has researched the answer—all questions pertaining to interesting facts about Lake Station. Our goal is to link each department in the school, during the two-year planning stage, with one or more members of the Historical Society. The history department, for example, is researching the evolution of the city; many students were unaware that Lake Station was Lake County's first county government seat. The science classes, in conjunction with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' Hoosier Riverwatch program, will study the geological and ecological changes of Deep River which passes through the city; many students were unaware of the silica sand from our sand dunes in Lake Station. This sand is the best material to use in molding metals. The English classes study local folklore; many students are curious about the legend of the water tower in Riverside Park and its curse by the Indians. Other projects evolving include the math department's gathering of statistical data from census surveys during various time periods. The home eco-



nomics department is uncovering recipes that reflect Lake Station's multicultural influence. Additionally, a project comparing wedding plans today to that of the Depression and World War II eras is planned. The industrial technology department plans to research information on the evolution of transportation in Northwest Indiana and study our community's few existing Sears houses. The business department will investigate the downsizing and automation of the steel mill industry and its effect on our community's declining population. Each department has its own plan to tie into the technology grant.

As a grand opening in the 2001-2002 school year, the web page will focus on the celebration of Lake Station's sesquicentennial and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the renaming of the city.

Historical Society members are eager to participate; they are anxious to transfer their print materials into digital format. One of the surprising findings in this project is the number of resources that the aging Historical Society has collected. Presently it doesn't have a permanent home; much of its collection is in basements of its members. They are now hoping to remodel a vacated grocery store as a community-wide civic center which would house and display their materials. They invited Lake Station high school students to solicit the community, seeking financial

contributions and general support. Edison High School students did participate. The Historical Society also found this was a good time to boost their membership.

Our S.O.A.R. community resource center will allow our school and community to progress. We now watch a grateful staff and excited student body fight for lab time to experience what has been denied them because of financial shortcomings. Through these partnerships, students will experience the background of the city and strengthen their knowledge of its founders. Through the revised curricula, teachers have experienced the change from straight lecture to more hands-on projects involving computers.

It's a simple situation where everyone (students, teachers, and community groups) wins. As you drive into Lake Station, there is a sign that reads: Welcome to Lake Station, City of Prudent Pride. We are happy to say that we are attempting to secure that pride with the help of technology.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Marcia Dow is Librarian and Caye Girgenti is Director of Technology at Edison Junior-Senior High School in Lake Station, Indiana.