

The Holy Optimist

VOL. II

JOHN H. FRANCIS POLYTECHNIC HIGH SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2007

PARROTS PREP FOR SCIENCE BOWL XV

By Karen Aguilar
Optimist Staff Writer

10 Parrots from Poly's Math/Science magnet are preparing to compete for the regional title of the 15th annual Los Angeles area Science Bowl on February 24. The Bowl is sponsored by the Department of Water and Power. If the Poly squad can win the regional title, they will compete at the national finals to be held April 27-30 in Washington, D.C.

Science teacher Karen Bobrow is sponsoring the teams, who also get training from a Science Bowl coach. This is Bobrow's first year as sponsor.

The magnet students are split into A and B teams, each with five members. The groups practice once a week for three to four hours, usually on Saturday or Tuesday.

Last year, 42 teams from 32 public, private and parochial schools competed for the title at the DWP headquarters in downtown Los Angeles.

During the competition,

elimination rounds are held all day. The final session is based on the old "General Electric College Bowl" television game show. Subjects included computer science, biology, physics, geology, astronomy, robotics and space travel.

The winner will receive \$1,000 in science equipment, materials or software and each of its five team members will receive Hitachi scholarships of \$1,000. The second-, third- and fourth-place schools will also receive money for equipment, the DWP said.

Public schools from throughout the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), charter schools and private/parochial schools in the city participate in the Science Bowl.

Local teams have won four national titles and placed among the top five schools nationally nine times since 1995. The national titles were won by Van Nuys High School in 1995, Venice High School in 1996 and 1997 and North Hollywood High School in 2001.



Photo By Jose Peralta

FIRING UP THE PIPES: Poly Choir members practice Extreme's "More than Words" for Valentine's Day gig.

Singing Their Way Into Your Hearts

By Jose Peralta
Optimist Staff Writer

The lilting sounds of 37 voices delivered a little romance to Poly classrooms on Valentine's day, February 14, as five groups of Choir members sang 200 telegrams Parrots had ordered.

It's a traditional event at Poly, sponsored by Choir Master Kevin Patterson's sturdy group of vocalists.

The lullabies this year aren't exactly traditional

words of love, however.

Here's an excerpt from Extreme's love-struck ballad –

*"Saying I love you
Is not the words I want to
hear from you*

*It's not that I want you
Not to say, but if you only
knew*

*How easy it would be to
show me how you feel*

*More than words is all you
have to do to make it real."*

Ain't romance grand.

"Five chicks in mini skirts, fish nets and thigh-high boots."

Showalter Rocks Kosovo for USO

Poly drama teacher takes her band on the road to Kosovo.

By Meri Sarkisyan
Optimist Staff Writer

What's a Poly teacher doing halfway round the world, on the rolling hills and farmland of Serbia, singing to hundreds of America's finest. Find out as the Optimist goes on tour with Drama teacher Amy Showalter.

Q. Tell us about your band.

A. I'm in an all-girl group called BANDSHE. We are on MySpace and gigmasters.com. We are a six-piece band. Shelby and I handle the leads. She has a really, really high voice, so she sings Christina Aguilera and Heart. I sing all the Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin stuff, any song sung by a guy, cause I have a lower voice.

We are really good about not being jealous of each other because everyone gets their own turn on stage. We play rock and roll. It is heavy, heavy stuff like Red Hot Chili Peppers. Oh yeah, we're like slammin'.

Q. Who contacted you to go on the USO tour?

A. The bass player had been on a tour before with another group a few months ago and she got us hooked up with A.K.A. A.K.A is a privately-owned production company in Burbank that books USO (United Service Organizations) tours.

We sent them our press pack. They heard us and hired us. We went and played and they've already scheduled us again for another tour at the end of April.

Q. Who was in charge of the tour?

A. The production company assigned us a tour manager, who took care of everything, from making sure the plane tickets arrived to making us get our passports. His name was Fab and he was fabulous. We had a great time with him.

Q. Where did you play and



Courtesy of MRW

RED HOT : Showalter belts out "Dani California" to troops.

how long was the tour?

A. The tour started and ended in the Kosovo area. It's called a "whirlwind tour." It's the shortest tour the USO has. It's two days to travel, two days to perform and two days home.

One of the bases was in the Croatia, Serbia area and the other was smack dab in the middle of Kosovo.

There's military presence all over there. You see tanks and humvees, burned-out buildings, its like war-torn. It's so surreal, a weird experience. It makes me appreciate what I've got at home.

Q. Where did you stay?

A. We flew from LAX to Washington Dulles and then 13 hours to Vienna. We stayed there for a night in a hotel.

The regular hotels are not like American hotels. They are nicer on the inside but they are smaller. We are big people in the States. Everything there is really clean but the rooms were tiny. The beds were little and the comforter didn't even cover the whole bed.

In the military bases we slept in something called connexes. The military guys call them tuna-cans.

They're like these metal

shipping crates like on a train that are all hooked together and lined up long ways and you get two beds and a little dresser and little wardrobe and a little mirror. But you had no bathroom. You had to share a bathroom down at the end of the line. We didn't care though because they were warm and it was cold outside.

Q. And the gigs?

A. We played in Bondsteel, the main Army base in Kosovo, first. 500 Army guys were there to hear us. Then we went to a NATO base the next night. There were soldiers from 36 different countries there and thousands of people.

We signed autographs afterwards and it was like a mob scene. Some of the girls were "like oh-my-God I feel like the Beatles" because they wanted our autographs. But they probably hadn't seen American woman in a long time, especially five chicks in mini skirts and fish nets and thigh high boots. We had a great time.

Q. Transportation?

A. The General took a liking to us. "Oh you guys don't need to be driving around in all these entourages," he said, [See Tour Page 2]

“Young people can have a dramatic impact.”

STUDENTS AND POLITICS: GETTING OUT THE VOTE FOR ALARCÓN

On the campaign trail with city council candidate.

By Jennifer Rivera
Optimist Staff Writer

The Optimist spoke with former Poly grad Richard Alarcon, now running for a Los Angeles City Council position, during a recent campaign rally at Hansen Dam. This is part of that conversation.

Q. Why are you running for city council?

A. We have to do something about gang violence.

I'm a former teacher and I did my student teaching at Poly High School. Having graduated from there and being student body president, I want to improve the education system.

I've also put together a collaboration of 60 organizations to focus on the dropout rate for the high schools in my area.

Q. What is the focus of your campaign?

A. They are projecting that the turnout will be very low, so our big focus is to get enough volunteers to get the voters out.

Q. Why do you use high school students to help you campaign?

A. When I ran for city council in 1993, a lot of volunteers came from Poly High School. Mr. Blackton, the Government teacher at the time, was giving extra credit to students who worked on any campaign. Most of them chose mine.

A young lady, 15-years old, walked with me on Election Day through the whole precinct. We walked that precinct about 7 or 8 times, all day long and we were able to get people out to the polls.

I won by 1% but the thing was, she was so intimidating to the people. She was about 4'10", weighed about 100 lbs. and she was so intimidating.

"I can't vote, but you can and you're not. Why not? If I could vote, I would've voted already, so I want you to vote because I can't," she told everyone.

And people would be so impressed that she would ex-

press her democratic right that people felt almost guilty. So young people can have a dramatic impact.

Also, the average age in my district is about 25, so it's a very young district. That means I have to pay a lot of attention to young people.

Q. Why did you create the Young Senators program?

A. I felt that one way to give back was to tell young people something they don't get from school.

We don't replicate what they teach in Government class, although I was a Government teacher. I do things like strategy and relationships and subject areas that might not be touched on by the teacher to get a real hands-on opportunity for the young people.

Q. What do you like about the program?

A. There are so many different things, I like to work on the community service projects with the Young Senators. I like to be out there painting houses for people who otherwise wouldn't be painting their houses and cleaning up the neighborhoods, the physi-

cal things. Going to Sacramento and going through the actual legislative process in the rooms where the legislators do it. I know the kids get a great kick out of that.

Q. What events are the Young Senators' favorites?

A. Different students like different things. But the event they like the most is when they go to Time Warner and produce their own show. They get to be the director, anchorman and on-scene news reporter and they produce a 20 minute show in four hours. Secondly, of course, is going to Sacramento and seeing the legislature.

Q. What is it about this job that attracts you?

A. You can have great impact, you can help people empower themselves. Whether it's putting in a traffic signal or putting a streetlight on a corner that is too dark or building housing so people can buy their first house, creating opportunities for new businesses, all of those things make you feel good at the end of the day, when you see positive things happen in the community. That's why we do it.

USO Tour

[Showalter from Page 1]

"we need to just fly you over." So to get to the bases, we flew on a Black Hawk helicopter.

Q. Compensation?

A. I made 1200 dollars for 6 days. All of our meals were paid for, all of our hotel rooms were paid for and then we were paid 300 euros (about \$500) for spending money.

Q. How long did each show last?

A. We only had to play 2 hours. Two hours both nights.

Its awesome. You get to take a trip, you play for little bit, then sign autographs. The first night we signed autographs for an hour and a half. The second night we went to a "meet and greet," where we signed our pictures and stuff like our promo pictures. We were supposed to be there for an hour, but the crowd was big so we were there for four hours signing pictures. We wanted everyone to get a chance to take pictures. We were the stars on stage. They were there to see BandShe. They had posters up a month before we got there. So they were looking at our promo shots for a month.

Q. How was the food?

A. Not very good. The military base food was better then going to the restaurants.

The restaurant food was crazy; it was like different flavors put on all together.

We ate military food on the bases but every single night we were there the General took us to dinner.

Q. How did the troops react?

A. They'd say "Hey thanks for coming, Thanks for coming. Ohh, I like the song you sang." And we'd say "I appreciate and glad to be here." Because they say thank you for coming a lot because it's like a piece of home for them. And they don't get that. Both of the entertainment directors said "We never had a band like this here ever." So they were excited to see us.

We like to move around and get all crazy on stage.

Q. Did you bring home any souvenirs?

A. I just brought sweat bands, a lighter and a wallet that says Kosovo, a shirt that says Vienna. I brought Mr. Schwal t-shirts from everywhere.

Q. Would you give up teaching for a showbiz career?

A. Yes. This is my dream. I wanted to be a rock star since I was a girl. It's a dream every kid has, to be a fireman or an astronaut or a rock star.

THE POLY OPTIMIST

Editor-In-Chief

Jose Peralta

Assistant Editor

Jennifer Rivera

Sports Editor

Daniel Jimenez

Photo Editor

Erick Robles

Optimist Advisor

John Blau

Writers:

Karen Aguilar

Aldo Mendez

Meri Sarkisyan

LETTERS

Letters to the Editor are accepted and encouraged for topics relevant to our readers. Submitted letters must be typed or neatly printed in ink and must have the signature of the writer. Editors reserve the right to determine which issue the letter will be published in, and the right to edit the letter for grammar, length, and structure.

Corrections published in the following issue of the newspaper.

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Poly Optimist adheres to the responsibility of a Free Student Press. It serves as a voice for the student body and the community. This newspaper accepts all the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. The Optimist staff strives to follow the Code of Ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists. Editorials are the opinion of individual staff writers, and not presented as news facts.

Hands On With Ceramics Class

By Jennifer Rivera
Optimist Staff Writer

What exactly do they do in Poly art teacher Karen Daneshvari's ceramics class, anyway? Optimist staff writer Jennifer Rivera decided to find out firsthand by joining Daneshvari's class for a day. Here is her experience.

Walking into Poly art teacher Karen Daneshvari's Ceramics class, I feel like I'm in the most relaxed atmosphere in the school.

I head over to watch one of her advanced students working on the potting wheel. I'm entranced by how swiftly he works. I don't even notice the background music.

Daneshvari's students come in, set the radio to a Spanish music station and begin working. They don't stop until the bell rings.

I go to a nearby table for tools - a wedging board, sculpture clay, rollers, wire ribbon, a wooden knife, cut outs and a sponge.



Photo By Jose Peralta

EMBEDDED: Staff writer Jennifer Rivera spent a class period learning the fine points of crafting a ceramic figure.

Choosing one project from many possibilities is difficult.

Melissa Davila, who sits next to me, is glazing a coffee mug. She looks as if she has done this many times before.

I decide to make a Valentine's Day present, a cut out of a teddy bear with a pocket in the middle. I begin to roll out clay on the board until it is smooth from both sides.

Next I press the cut out into the clay and then remove the bear. I take some water with

my fingers and drip it on the surface of the bear to smooth out the cracks in the clay. I mold eyes, a smile and a nose, score them and stick them to the bear.

With my wooden knife, I carve the words "Hug Me."

I set the finished project on a wooden board to dry. I feel a sense of accomplishment. I've tried something new. Working with the clay felt very stress free. I was consumed with the project all period.

Sondheimer on Sports

L.A. Times reporter talks about sportswriting, his career and working for the *Times*.

By Daniel Jimenez
Optimist Staff Writer

The Optimist's Sports Editor sat down recently with Los Angeles Times sports reporter Eric Sondheimer to talk about his work, his subject and what it takes to make it in big-time sportswriting. The following is that conversation.

Q. How did you get started reporting?

A. I was cut from the Madison Junior High basketball team and wanted to stay involved in sports, so I soon learned writing for the school paper gave me more influence than playing. Everybody wanted to get their name in the paper, giving me an insight into the power of the press. I haven't stopped writing since.

I worked for the weekly *San Fernando Sun* through high school and joined the Poly paper as a 10th grader. At Cal State Northridge, I joined the *Daily Sundial*. I worked part time at the *Daily News* while in college and was hired full time there in 1980, becoming the prep editor, where I tried to make prep sports a big deal.

I was with the *Daily News* from 1980-1997 except for 18 months in 1990-91 when I worked for the *National Sports Daily*, the first daily sports newspaper that folded. I have been at the *Los Angeles Times* since 1997.

Q. How did the Times come into the picture?

A. My dream was to work for the *Times* for years. I applied to the *Times* as soon as I graduated from CSUN, and the toughest moment was getting a rejection letter telling me I didn't have enough experience. It made me cry and served as motivation every day I worked at the *Daily News* to scoop the *Times* and to make sure the *Daily News* sports section was better.

By 1997, the *Daily News* was in turmoil. People were leaving because it was for sale. I was working too hard, feeling too much pressure to do things all by myself. The *Times* presented a great opportunity to work only as a columnist and not worry about the other things I was doing, such as organizing the prep section. It allowed me to continue to grow as a journalist and not just cover the San Fernando Valley.

The *Times* approached me. They had a San Fernando Valley sports section. That section disappeared in 2001, forcing me to adjust to covering all of Southern California. At first, I didn't like it. But now, it's a great challenge and offers me a chance to pick and choose and find the best stories in the Southland.

Q. Compare the LATimes sports department to the NYTimes or the Washington Post in terms of staff, budget, national prominence, awards, etc.

A. We have more than 50 writers and editors in the sports department. It's one of the best in the nation because we have top columnists, great editors and dedicated reporters and are given

the time and help needed to produce high-quality stories. The late Jim Murray won a Pulitzer Prize for sportswriting, one of the few sports columnists to have done so.

Q. You chose to write sports stories. Why?

A. Sports is a great subject to tell stories. You can make people laugh, make people cry. It's a fun way to communicate with people because most like to watch, talk or play sports. I've written news stories and features. To be a sportswriter, you have to be versatile, be able to tell stories, be a good reporter, a good interviewer, a good listener, a good observer. I've stayed with sports because it really doesn't feel like a job. Who wouldn't want to get paid for going to watch an athletic event and tell what happened and why.

Q. What makes a good sports story?

A. Sports reporting has evolved because of television and the Internet. We no longer just write about who wins or who loses. We have to tell stories and explain why or make the story interesting enough that even if someone doesn't care who won or lost, they want to read the story. That means we have to find intriguing angles and go behind the scenes.

Q. Talk a bit about your Poly days.

A. When I was at Poly, I thought about going out for the Class C basketball team. But my older brother, Michael, had been the basketball manager at Poly while also working for the school newspaper and being the student body president, so I followed him except for student body president. Being the manager was a great opportunity to go behind the scenes and learn what happens in the locker room and at practice, observing the coaches and players. That experience has been incredibly valuable and I use many of the things I learned from three years at Poly today in covering teams, players and coaches.

Q. What advice would you give to aspiring journalists, especially high school students?

A. There's no better time to practice the craft of reporting than in high school. It's almost as if you are embedded with the students. You can observe, find interesting stories and learn how to interview people.

The key is letting yourself believe you are a real journalist. It frees you from any shyness. You have that press pass, and it arms you to ask questions to anyone, from the principal to the coach.

It's a major responsibility that shouldn't be taken lightly. Every word



Courtesy of L.A. Times

COLUMNIST: Times' Sondheimer.

you write can have a huge impact, positive or negative. A journalist can make a difference if that person is dedicated and determined to finding the truth and most importantly, presenting both sides of an issue. Fairness, credibility and integrity mean everything.

My advice is be organized, arrive early and out hustle and out-work your competitors. Always try to talk to as many people as possible. You never know who might give you a tip.

Q. What's your favorite sport to cover?

A. For high school sports in Southern California, I like baseball a lot because so many athletes have gone on to play in the major leagues. It's fun to see someone in high school, then follow their progress to the college ranks or the professional ranks.

I first started in 1976, when John Elway arrived at Granada Hills High. To have a future Hall of Famer as one of the first athletes to cover was incredibly lucky. I have my favorite sports and least favorites, but you have to be able to cover anything.

I've seen maybe one hockey game in my life. I like horse racing a lot. I'm not a big soccer fan because I haven't gotten over how few goals are scored, though internationally, it's terrific.

Q. Do you prefer covering professional, college or high school sports?

A. I've covered the Super Bowl, the World Series, the NCAA Final Four, the Rose Bowl, the Little League World Series, big horse races, big golf tournaments. I've stuck with high school sports originally because it was an important part of the newspaper coverage and I felt I could do a good job. But now, I feel it's the best way to make a difference, telling stories of teenagers that can be inspirational to others. It's also rewarding to watch someone mature from high school to college to the pros. I still believe high school sports is an important part of any newspaper when told in a way that can be compelling, informative and entertaining. That's my challenge at the *Times*. I have to find stories that not just are interesting to the family involved but to thousands of readers who don't necessarily want to read about high school

sports.

Q. How much freedom do you have to choose your stories?

A. Once you become a columnist, you have more freedom than almost any other writer on staff. You can choose whatever subject you want. Editors give you suggestions, but the freedom as a columnist is the ultimate for a sportswriter.

Q. Talk a bit about one or two career highlights for you as a sports writer.

A. In 1988, while working with the *Daily News*, I helped break a story about the University of Kentucky sending a package to a high school basketball recruit in Los Angeles that contained money. As a result of that story, the Kentucky coach resigned, the school was placed on probation and the entire state probably hated the *Daily News*. That story won an Associated Press award as best sports story for 1988 in the *Daily News* circulation category. It told me how one story could make a huge impact. In 1997, I received an AP award for being the best sports columnist in Los Angeles. I beat out some *L.A. Times* columnists. I doubt that will ever happen again.

Q. Who do you read?

A. I like Bill Plaschke, a sports columnist for *The Times*. I like John Feinstein, who wrote *Season on the Brink*. I try to read novels because they help you write better. I read lots of newspapers on the Internet. I don't just read sports, either. It's important not to focus solely on sports. You need to keep up with what's happening in your community and the world, whether it's in arts, movies, news or business. Again, being versatile is critical.

Q. What other interests do you have?

A. I like to take a trip out of the country every year. I've been to China, Russia, Israel, Indonesia, Tibet, Thailand, Vietnam, England, Germany, France, Poland. It's fun to see how others live because it makes you feel more fortunate about living in America.

Q. Is the Internet good for the newspaper industry?

A. The Internet has changed newspaper forever. *The Times*, like every newspaper, is trying to come up with a plan on how best to take advantage of the Internet. The impact has already been felt in high school sports, where most of our stories now run solely on the Internet and not in the newspaper. I think the Internet is good in ways. You can write as much as you like on the Internet. It has allowed us to print stories from hundreds of schools when they call in scores and report stats. It's here to stay and we all have to adjust. It's terrific for breaking stories. Blogs are also here to stay. I only worry that we use a different criteria for writing on the Internet and blogs vs. being in the newspaper. We can speculate more on the Internet and not be so careful in checking facts, which is a concern.

DJ and his wrecking crew dismantle NoHo
Record-breaking regular season ends with 21st victory.

Three - Peat

Gay leads the league in: points (741), threes (96), steals (64) assists (134).



Photo By Erick Robles

SUNSET SIX CHAMPS: DJ Gay and a swarming defense bring league title to varsity Parrots.

Gay's 30 points per game average ranks him 18th in the nation, 1st in the city.

THIRD LEAGUE TITLE IN AS MANY YEARS.

By Daniel Jimenez
Optimist Staff Writer

It was a perfect ending to a near-perfect regular season. The Parrots got their sweet revenge on North Hollywood, the team who handed Poly their only loss of the season.

It was a very different story this time around. The Parrots, who were held to 13 points in 16 minutes just two weeks ago, yielded a stingy 15 first half points to the Huskies on Friday, dominated the boards (39) and won convincingly, 65-47.

DJ Gay, 18th in the nation in scoring, led his team with 25 points, and was two rebounds and one assist shy of a triple double. Mauricio Gonzalez tied his points per game average of 11 and grabbed five rebounds. Seven more Poly players added the remainder.

North Hollywood guard Jordin Carroll had 12 points and forward Jesse Zarate added six for the

visitors.

The Parrots are on a hot streak heading into the playoffs, having won five in a row and 13 of their last 14 games. They will enter the playoffs as the 3rd seeded team, the highest ever for Poly.

"We've had a very successful regular season," said head coach Brad Katz, "and we're looking to be one of the best teams to ever play for Poly."

Katz' squad has yet to lose at home, where they'll host Washington on Thursday, February 15th.

SUNSET SIX LEAGUE		
Team	Season	League
POLY	21-4	9-1
N. Hllywd	17-11	7-3
Verdugo	16-8	6-4
Grant	17-9	5-5
Van Nuys	8-17	3-7
Canoga Park	4-21	0-10

"We match up well against Washington (18-11), the team we're playing in the first round of the playoffs," Katz said. "They're very athletic but we can keep up with them. They're an all-around good team, but they're not better than anyone else we've played. We can beat them."

The victory against the Huskies was senior Gay's last of the regular season. He'll attend San Diego State University in the fall while coach Katz searches high and low for a replacement.

"Losing DJ is gonna be big," Katz said. "His ability to dominate the game will change our team. It's gonna change our dynamics."

"Teams know him," said Katz. "They know how he plays, and they still can't stop him. His 30 points per game will be missed."

"We have to get our younger kids to play well," Katz said. "We have our best nine players graduating this year."

TOO MANY GOOSE EGGS

By Daniel Jimenez
Optimist Staff Writer

After a promising start, Poly's boys varsity soccer team has suffered a nearly unbroken series of losses, in part because of outsized egos and a pint-sized offense.

"We look good, we dominate throughout the game, but we just can't score," varsity head coach Michael Keller said. "We're like a snake with no venom."

The team's stats bear him out. The Parrots, 2-7-1 in Sunset Six League play and 5-9-1 overall, have failed to score in

three of their last five games, scored only ten points in their last eleven matches and lost all but two of those.

"The San Fernando game was where it started going downhill for us," Keller said. "We played a great first half against them, but it fell apart in the second half. We quit on ourselves."

"We lost the next two games, versus Canoga and Fairfax, and after that it all broke down," the coach added.

"A lot of our difficulties have been due to guys having ego problems," Keller said. "And two guys were removed from the team for not putting

in enough effort and having problems with teammates."

Keller stresses teamwork, but a few of his players didn't get the message.

"They're used to being the number one guy," Keller said, "and it's hard for them to play as a team sometimes."

JV, he noted, had adjusted to the new style better than the varsity had.

Keller, assistant coach last year, has accepted a position in Chicago and won't be coming back next year. But leaving Poly will be easy.

"I've never cared more about a group of guys," he said.



Photo By Erick Robles

BANANA KICK: Parrots needed more scoring to make this year's playoffs, especially against league leading C-Park (8-0).