

Accipiter takes flight

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/021413/magazineSM.png>

Grafton High School magazine gives students an award-winning outlet for creativity

For a 2-year-old, Accipiter has made a remarkably rapid ascent.

Filled with vivid colors, sharp insights and soaring expressions, Grafton High School's literary magazine has captured high honors in each of its two appearances.

The publication — which features students' prose, poetry, artwork and photos — received superior ratings in a program sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English for both the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.

Last year, Grafton was one of only four Wisconsin schools to earn accolades at that level.



Although the magazine's mission is to provide an outlet for "the creative minds of talented students" without regard for awards, two-for-two recognition at the national level has become a proud feather in the hats of the students and their faculty advisers.

"We weren't expecting to win these kind of awards," said Stacey Houck, who joined forces with fellow communication-arts teacher Tracy Brogelman to mentor the young writers and artists.

"We were just amazed to get the recognition. We were happy just to put together a good magazine."

The magazine's name is derived from the Latin word for hawk, a fitting spin-off from the school's moniker of Black Hawks.

Accipiter has had plenty of eye-catching features in its first two 50-page editions. Art and photos are typically paired with writing in the Reader's Digest-sized magazine, creating snapshot expressions on high-gloss pages.

Subjects range from love, ecology and music to childhood, sports and insecurity.

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In her poem "Same," Geena Frank confesses:

*My cliché words are
A suffocated catastrophe
Of jumbled emotions ...
Once I find comfort in darkness,
There's simply nowhere else to stay.*

Houck and Brogelman offer student staff members advice and encouragement but limit their mentoring roles.

"This is the students' magazine, and they're allowed to make the decisions. It's 90% students and 10% advisers," Houck said.

As an annual publication issued each spring, Accipiter is assembled throughout the school year. A dozen or so students meet Wednesday afternoons from September through April to exchange ideas, review submissions and design pages.

Each of the first two years, submissions have been slow to arrive but eventually result in a number of exceptional pieces, the teachers noted.

"It's sometimes hard to get students to submit things at first, but by the second semester it picks up," said Brogelman, who also serves as the school's yearbook adviser.

"We work with the art department to get those students involved with art and photos."

Houck said she was inspired to help create Accipiter after attending a national teachers conference where school literary magazines were discussed. Brogelman's work with the yearbook made her an ideal partner in the venture.

Each submission is critiqued by several staff members, with their collective reviews used to select final pieces. Not everything makes the cut, which calls for tough decisions, Houck noted.

"Turning someone down is really difficult, but there is only room for so many," she said.

In addition to the quality of the work, keeping subjects varied is a strong consideration.

"The first year, we got a lot of teenage angst things. We decided there should be a lot more than just that in the magazine," Houck said.

Staff members reserve the right to edit submissions, with each writer or artist required to sign a form agreeing to the critique process. Although the staff is open to all grade levels, most members are juniors and seniors enrolled in creative writing.

"I like the fact that you get to show what you can do," said senior Jess Otero, whose photographs appeared in last year's edition.

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Senior Megan Leonard is submitting poems and a short story this year after having a photo chosen last spring.

“It’s a great way to let people know what you’re thinking and feeling,” she said.

Sharing thoughts with other students through a magazine appeals to Nathaniel Fischer and Jakob Dufner, both juniors in their first year on the staff.

“I’ve written poems since I was in the seventh grade,” Fischer said. “I just thought of this as a good outlet.”

Dufner was drawn to the Accipiter because of its quality. “I heard it was good, but I didn’t know it was going to be this good,” he said.

To help cover printing costs for 200 copies, Accipiter sold for \$5 last year. This year, the price goes up to \$6. A one-year grant of \$800 from the Grafton Education Foundation also defrayed expenses.

Houck and Brogelman said they’re more concerned about giving students a creative voice than balancing budgets.

“If we have to, we will hold fundraisers,” Houck said.

Cost aside, the biggest challenge is “getting the word out each year so that students know they have the chance to be part of this,” Brogelman said.

Image Information: THIS YEAR’S MEMBERS of the Accipiter staff include (front row, from left) Marci Klugiewicz, Jessica Otero, Sarah Corner, Autumn Weiland, (middle row) Megan Leonard, Lelaina Evans, Alisebeth Sandoval, Grace Cotter, Ashley Tanski, (back row) Jakob Dufner and Nathaniel Fischer. Photo by Sam Arendt

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