

## OPENING DAY SPEECH September 6, 2007

Good morning and welcome to the 2007-2008 school year. I wish to begin with a moment of silence for two remarkable individuals, Harrison Carnevale, a recent Shaker High School graduate, who died in a tragic car accident on July 1, and Russ Tapler, BOCES special education teacher housed at Shaker Junior High School, as well as head junior varsity football coach at Shaker High School, who died on August 21.



Tapler, Russell J. 8-23-07

**GUILDFORD** — Russell J. Tapler, 51, of Spawn Rd., passed away peacefully at home on August 21, 2007 with his family at his side.

Born in Lansburgh, N.Y. in 1956, he was the son of Joseph and Mary Zesto Tapler. He was a high school graduate of Lansburgh High School. He earned a master's degree of science for special education from the College of St. Rose and a second master's degree of science for educational administration from SUNY Albany. For the past 11 years, Russell resided in Guilford with his family and had worked for the past 18 years for Capital Region BOCES at Shaker Jr. High School. Russell also served as the head JV football coach during his tenure there.

He was a dedicated educator, compassionate father and husband, a passionate football coach and volunteer basketball coach for his daughter's travel team (JGC) and was an avid golfer.

Russell is the cherished husband of 21 years to Marjorie (Check) Tapler and the deeply loved father to Ian Joseph and Elizabeth Ann Tapler, both of Guilford. He also survived by his parents, Joe and Mary Tapler of Ocala, Fla.; a sister, Joanna Wall of Riverside, Calif.; and many aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews-in-law, and many good friends.

Family and friends are invited to call at DeMarco Stone Funeral Home Inc., 5216 Western Turnpike (Route 20), Guilford, on Friday, August 24, 2007 from 2 to 8 p.m. Funeral services will be held Saturday, August 25 at 9:15 a.m. at the funeral home. Immediately following, a Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10 a.m. at St. Madeline's Catholic Church, Carmel, N.Y. Schenectady. In keeping with Russell's wishes, he will be cremated and interment will be private and at the convenience of the family.

In lieu of flowers, the family specifically requests that donations may be made in Russell's memory to the following: The Leontine Lymington Society, 5 Court-puter Drive, West Suite 100, Albany, NY 12205 and/or Community Hospice of Albany County, 455 New Karer Road, Albany, NY 12205 and/or Community Hospice of Rensselaer, 295 Mahony View Blvd., Rensselaer, NY 12144.

**DEMARCO-STONE FUNERAL HOME, INC.**  
5216 Western Turnpike  
Guilford, NY 12084  
(518) 356-5325

Last year was another great year for North Colonie. I want to take a few minutes to celebrate the work done by all of you on behalf of our students. A number of these accomplishments are listed on the screen:

- Forts Ferry's new playground
- Southgate School's 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebration
- Turnkey trainer positions
- "5 Browns" concert
- Science research program success – accomplishments of Arun Puttachi
- Infinite Campus
- 231 teachers participated in 44 curriculum workshops this summer
- "Fame" at Shaker High School
- "High School Musical" at Shaker Junior High School
- "The Crucible" at Shaker High School
- "We Shook the Family Tree" at Shaker Junior High School

- North Colonie School District recognized as one of New York State's 272 Title I "high performing/gap closing" districts
- Shaker High School and Shaker Junior High School recognized among New York State's 589 non-Title I "high performing/gap closing" schools
- Southgate and Blue Creek recognized among New York State's 1,083 Title I "high performing/gap closing" schools
- High school art students accepted into several Juried Regional art exhibits
- Advanced Studio electives offered for College Credit this year through Sage
- Advanced art students on field trips to the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- Elementary school plays, graduations and DARE programs
- Elementary Art Explorers at Skidmore College's Tang teaching gallery
- Several junior high art students honored with first and second place awards at the Olympics of the Visual Arts competition
- 23 out of our 28 varsity teams qualified as scholar athlete teams in the New York Public High School Athletic Association scholar athlete program
- Boys' and girls' tennis teams were Suburban Council Champions
- Girls' lacrosse team was sectional runner-up - they played in the finals for the first time in Shaker's history
- We had two finalists in the Capital Region Sports Foundation Scholar Athlete awards program: Matt Bogdan, who will run cross country and track at Yale, and Marissa Amiraian, who will play softball at Cornell
- Almost one-half of all the high school students earned a letter on one of our teams
- NYSSMA Majors Festival – Gold with Distinction and Gold medal performances by North Colonie ensembles
- Suburban Council Music Festival – 76 North Colonie students (more than twice any other district)
- SPAC Class Action program – Performances by the New York City Ballet and Philadelphia Orchestra for North Colonie elementary students

- Shaker High School Marching Band performance in DisneyWorld
- “Mix It Up at Lunch Day” at Latham Ridge
- June Jamboree at Boght Hills
- Loudonville Field Day with Hawaiian theme
- Blue Creek School recognition by Governor Spitzer for promotion of peace in our schools and community in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 107 Shaker families participated in our exchange programs with Russia, Germany, France, and Costa Rica
- Over 180 elementary students and families participated in the 2007 International Festival
- Shaker High School selected by the State Education Department to have a Model Transition Program for students as they prepare to go into their post-secondary education

And to add to this remarkable list, 97% of our graduates earned Regents diplomas, and 68% of our students with disabilities earned Regents diplomas. These are wonderful accomplishments, and they are the result of all of the efforts of staff members at all grade levels. I applaud you.

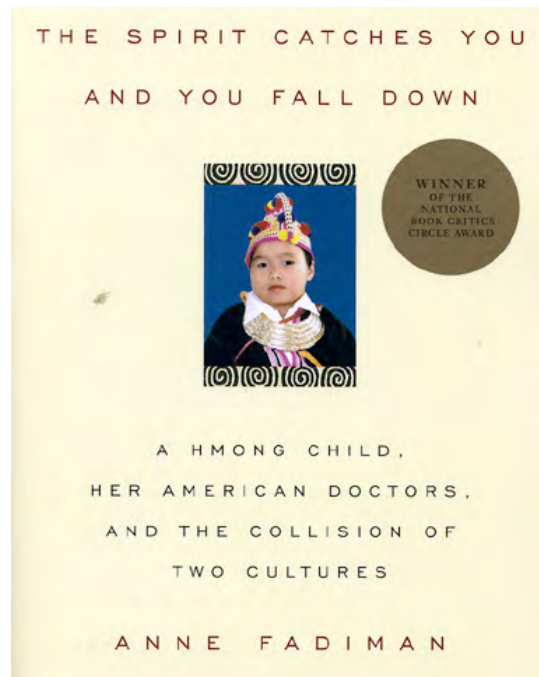
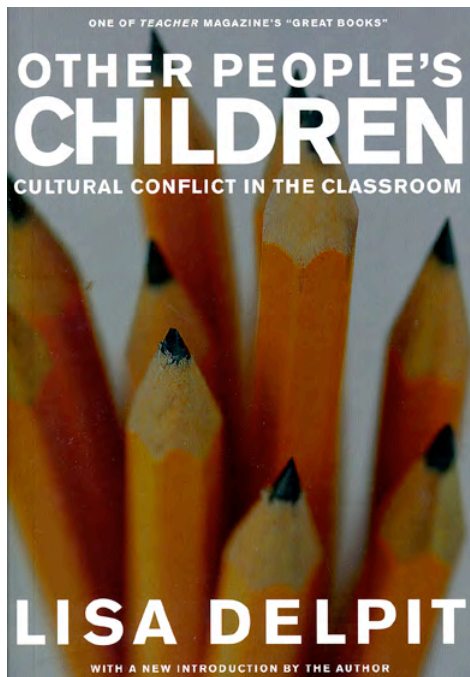
It is now with great pleasure that I introduce our new North Colonie faculty members. I will call you by groups. Please hold your applause until all names in a group are called. As I call your name, please stand and remain standing. I also want to recognize our graduate interns, master level special education teacher interns and psychology interns.

I would like to thank all of you who are serving as mentors for the 2007-2008 school year, those who participated in the August skit, as well as those of you who have participated in the mentorship program in past years. Would you all please stand and be recognized? Special thanks go to Joe Corr, Bob Bedell and Dimitri Vasilakis for their leadership in this program that is jointly sponsored by North Colonie Teachers’ Association and the district.

Last year and this summer work was done in a number of key curriculum areas. We continue to implement our differentiated instruction initiative so that we can more effectively meet the needs of students of

diverse backgrounds and learning styles. We are also doing an outstanding job of sustaining our K – 12 reading initiative, and we worked on developing a universal framework and some units for our writing initiative. In the area of technology, we made good progress in implementing technology throughout the district. We are increasingly aware of the power of technology as a tool for research and presentation, as well as a means to promote critical thinking.

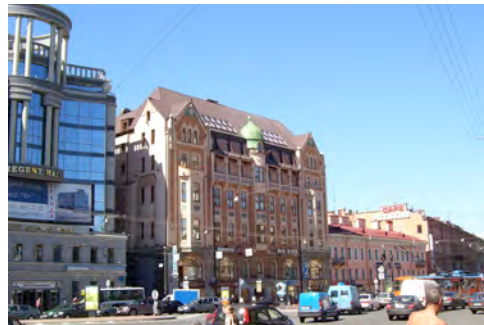
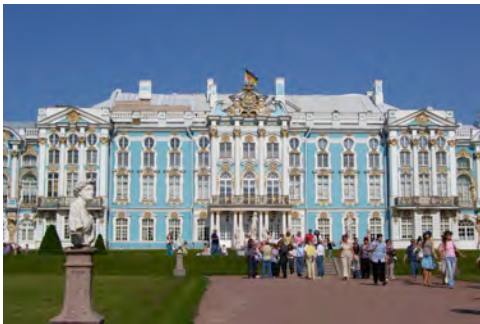
This past year the Globalization Task Force continued its work. Two literature groups met to discuss two books about the impact of diversity in the school setting and in the medical community. The books, Other People’s Children; Cultural Conflict in the Classroom by Lisa Delpit and The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors and the Collision of Two Cultures by Anne Fadiman, led to discussion about the impact of culture and diversity on people’s lives. This year we plan to also continue our study circles and to offer both faculty, community members and students the opportunity to further to explore cultural issues. More information can be found in the district staff development resource booklet.



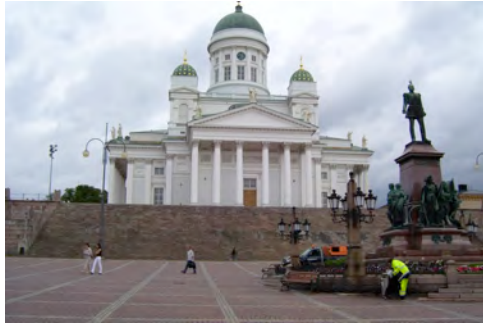
This summer my husband and I spent a week and a half out of the country on a 40th anniversary trip. We began in Stockholm and then visited Tallinn (Estonia),



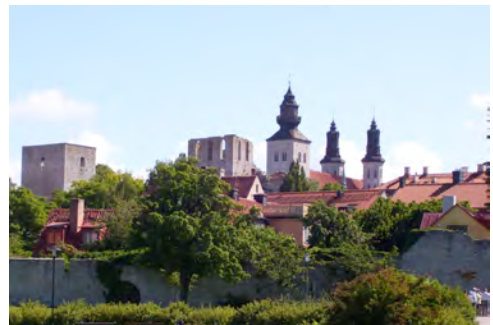
St. Petersburg (Russia),



Helsinki (Finland),



Visby (Sweden),



and Copenhagen (Denmark).



We traveled far in a rather short period of time and learned a lot about the various places we visited. For example, I learned that many nations face the same issues that we face in the United States of trying to integrate populations with different cultures. Estonia has a large Russian population, and Finland has a significant Swedish speaking population. I was most fascinated to hear how life in places previously under communist rule had changed. I learned that life was different now and that some changes were very much for the better and other changes were harder to accept. On the positive side, literature, art and music were freed from censorship and people are now able to more openly express their views. People with ambition and a drive to work hard were doing better economically. Others who were less inclined to work hard were struggling under the new system.

One of our guides' words truly resonated with me. This guide worked during the school year as a high school English teacher. She said that now she and her family and friends were working hard to get ahead and to make a good living. She said that what she felt had been lost was time for family, friends and the opportunities to foster relationships. I found this very interesting. As we gain in one area of our lives, we need to be cognizant of the possibility of losing in another and must work equally hard to avoid having the latter occur.

Her words reminded me of life in our school district. There have been tremendous changes in the last six years in North Colonie. We have replaced large numbers of teachers and a large percentage of our administrators. The great challenge is to maintain the extraordinary North Colonie culture, in the face of huge turnover. With so many of you newly arrived here, I feel it important to share with you some of the things that I encountered six years ago when I arrived in North Colonie that, in my mind, characterized this outstanding school district.

- I saw teachers who viewed teaching as a lifetime profession and, more specifically, teaching in North Colonie as a lifetime profession.





- I heard students at all grade levels say that they felt their teachers were there to help them succeed.



- I heard how teachers invited students to stay after school to get extra assistance from teachers.



I heard that students loved having their teachers attend their music, art, theatre, sports events and award programs.



- I saw a faculty dedicated to a powerful mentoring program.



- I saw tremendous numbers of faculty members involved in staff development activities.





- I saw a district that truly embraced inclusion of students with disabilities.



- I saw a concerted effort to work with individual students so that no child would be left behind.



- I saw a concerted K – 12 effort in curriculum work.



- I saw teachers and administrators whose number of years of service had caused them to “max” out on the retirement system and were still working in North Colonie essentially for very few dollars because they loved their work, students and colleagues so much. Here I wish to welcome back for the start of her 56th school year in our district Mrs. Joy Horsman, who is serving as an educator in New York State for 58 years.



- I saw a district in which teachers, parents, students, and administrators treated one another respectfully.



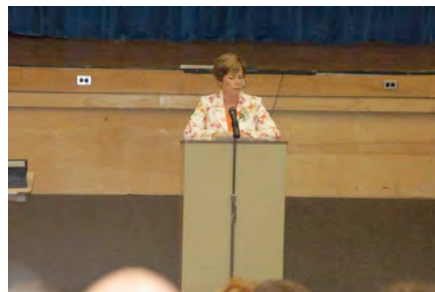
- I saw a community in which education was highly valued.



- I saw an administrative team committed to helping faculty members be all that they could be.



- I saw a Board of Education committed to maintaining and improving the high quality of education being delivered in the district.



I am happy to report that, in spite of all the changes that have occurred, these important features still characterize our school community. We must all work together to perpetuate their existence. Together we can accomplish this goal. This will be important for the future success of North Colonie. It will be important as we continue the process of annexation of the Maplewood School District. We need to understand what we value and hold dear and continue these practices.

As many of you know, one of the changes in my life since arriving in North Colonie over six years ago, has been the birth of two grandchildren. My grandson Noah, now age 3 1/2, learned this summer that he will be having a baby brother. As a rather typical first child, when told the good news, he looked at his mommy and daddy and asked: “Will you still love me?” After reassuring Noah, his parents asked if he would like to see the sonogram picture of the baby. Noah’s response was, “I don’t have time for that now.”



My granddaughter Talia, now age 2, is enjoying life and talking up a storm.



I had the pleasure of babysitting her a little this summer and saw her very strong little personality at its finest. Pictured here is Talia doing what she likes to do best – running away....



Talia's mother dropped her off at a pre-school summer camp this summer and told her that mommy would come back to pick her up. When the teacher took the group of children out to the playground, Talia got very

upset, and it was only days later that her mother learned that Talia was concerned that her mother would not find her if she went outside. The lesson I take from this is that we must be very careful in how we speak to our children.

We have a number of colleagues who are fighting brave battles to combat serious illness. I know that you join me in keeping them in our thoughts and prayers and in hoping that they will return soon to the halls of our school buildings in improved health. My own sister-in-law is currently battling a very serious illness. I wish to dedicate our song this year to all these courageous individuals whose lives enrich our own. I also wish you and all your students a joyous and fulfilling year. Now I invite you to sit back and enjoy “ You Raise Me Up”, sung by Shaker High School graduate, class of 2004, Brian Schwenzfeier, who will be student teaching this year in North Colonie with Dimitri Vasilakis and Ned Fleischer. Brian will be accompanied today by Mr. Fleischer.