

A Common Cause



Districts partner with businesses to boost learning opportunities for students and strengthen community

Public school districts across Wisconsin have been increasingly working with local businesses to bring learning and work opportunities to students and gain the support of leaders in their community. Each year, through the WASB Business Honor Roll, the WASB helps school districts recognize those businesses and organizations that provide support to their local schools. This article features some of the unique school-business partnerships included on the **2017 WASB Business Honor Roll**.

River Valley School District **AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE**

The River Valley School District and its students have found inspiration from working with American Players Theatre (APT), an outdoor theater located outside of Spring Green. The partnership encourages and supports students' interest in the performance arts.

Each spring, middle school students stage a student production of a

Shakespeare play that is on APT's schedule. The play is directed and produced by teachers with help from David Daniel, APT's education director. Actors from APT attend the play put on by middle school students and then the students see the professional production of the same play.

Sara Young, communications director for APT and a member of the River Valley School Board, said the interaction between the professional actors and the middle school students is awe-inspiring for the students. "When middle school Juliet met APT

Juliet a few years ago, it was really a beautiful moment," she said. "That happens again and again."

Another program is APT's education program, "The Potency of Poetry." This program is led by Daniel at River Valley High School. One River Valley High School teacher noted the program's popularity, "David Daniel is a rock star among the students at River Valley. When my students hear his voice coming from another classroom, the first question is always, 'Is he going to work with us?' David has spent time with my students covering topics as



diverse as a day in the life of an Elizabethan, the role linguistic profiling plays in our country, and the power of poetry and metaphor.”

Because of the close proximity of the APT, many River Valley teachers bring their students to the matinee performances during the fall. This

year, the entire middle school and freshman class will attend “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” junior AP English will attend “Cyrano de Bergerac,” and senior AP English will attend “A View from the Bridge.” These trips are often paired with classroom visits from APT teaching

artists who provide a preview of the performance.

Students interested in theater also have opportunities to apply for an internship and they regularly job shadow APT artists and staff.

For the last three years, APT has invited River Valley High School to stage its annual musical in the Touchstone Theater (APT’s indoor performance space). As part of this partnership, APT also regularly lends costumes and technical supplies to the student productions. Additionally, professional actors have coached students for their roles.

A handful of students have even auditioned for and gotten roles in

“Being part of the River Valley community is vital to APT’s identity and the school district is such an important part of the community.”

— Sara Young, communications director for American Players Theatre



Marco Lama, a senior at River Valley High School, has appeared in seven productions at APT.

the professional productions. APT's current production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" has four River Valley students ranging in age from 8 to 17. Marco Lama, a River Valley High School senior, appeared in "Cyrano de Bergerac" this past summer. The performance was his

seventh production at APT in as many years.

"APT treasures its relationship with the River Valley Schools," Young said. "APT is unique — professional Shakespeare theaters are usually not located in such rural locations. But being part of the River Valley community is vital to APT's identity and the school district is such an important part of the community. It's one of the very best perks we can offer actors who usually work in urban centers — a place to call home and raise families."

Baraboo School District CIRCUS WORLD

Baraboo School District's strategic plan challenges the district to develop meaningful partnerships with five local businesses each school year.

"We are looking at how do we get to that level of engagement that actually changes lives," said Superintendent Lori Mueller.

Last summer, the district began working with Circus World and,



Baraboo High School's marching band appears in the Circus World parade.

although the partnership is only about a year old, it is already making an impact on students. The partnership got started with a brainstorming session between school district staff and Circus World Director Scott O'Donnell. It quickly became apparent that there were many potential benefits for the district and Circus World to work together.

For Circus World, it is an opportunity to introduce local students to their community's history and inject some fresh ideas and energy into the organization. And for the school district, the partnership gives students opportunities to showcase their skills in a real-world setting.

Circus World has been a fixture in the Baraboo community since it opened in 1959. However, since its peak, the organization has seen a reduction in staff and in January it was announced that the Ringling Brothers Circus would be shutting down. Still, Circus World holds performances and hosts the world's largest collection of circus memorabilia and historical documents. The museum also has the world's largest collection of restored circus wagons.

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Last school year, in the first year of the partnership, it connected with students in the district's elementary, middle and high schools. Circus World brought its array of musical instruments to the district's elementary students. The district's middle school students studied local history in the museum's library, assisted with the circus wagon restoration process, and started a student-run website highlighting Circus World's attractions.

At the high school level, Circus World challenged students from a marketing class to come up with new marketing campaigns for the organization. Students worked together in small groups and then formally pitched their ideas to Circus World staff. O'Donnell was very impressed with the students.

"They brought us some amazing ideas," O'Donnell said. "They came up with ideas that we didn't even think of."

One student team suggested that Circus World create a virtual reality tour of its museum. Circus World staff took that idea and worked with a local company to produce a 360-degree virtual reality tour. Other



Circus World Executive Director Scott O'Donnell speaks to the Baraboo school board.

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The Circus World partnership engages Baraboo students from elementary school to high school.

marketing ideas and slogans developed by the high students now appear on billboards around Baraboo. O'Donnell said the marketing work helped Circus World attract more people, especially local students.

Mueller and O'Donnell will continue the partnership this school year and hope to eventually add an apprenticeship program. The world's

only professional circus wagon restorer works at Circus World in Baraboo and he is nearing the end of his career. O'Donnell said that position and other highly specific skilled jobs exist at Circus World.

"We would love to have our staff work with local Baraboo students," O'Donnell said. "We want these students to know there's a unique career path right here in Baraboo."



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West Bend School District **EN FUEGO FITNESS**

Two active parents and local business owners are helping students and staff at the West Bend School District lead more healthy and active lives. Addy Fahrenkrug and Sarah Griffin are the owners of En Fuego Fitness. The fitness studio hosts workout events to support local families, provides options for teams and youth to train at a nominal cost in the facility, and hosts a large contingency of teachers.

"Between the two, they have eight kids in the district but you would think they mother 7,000!" said school board president Tiffany



Thanks to a partnership, the dance teams at West Bend have been able to practice in a professional studio space.

Larson. "They have a heart for students, fitness, health, and caring for families."

En Fuego Fitness has led free classes during the district's staff wellness days. The studio's facility has also been helpful to the district. Because of space availability issues, some teams, like the high school's dance teams, are often searching for practice space. Fahrenkrug and

En Fuego Fitness has led free classes during the district's staff wellness days ... and they've been helpful in resolving some space availability issues.

Griffin routinely offer them off times for free or deeply discounted rates. They also offer a popular sports conditioning program in the summer attended by area youth athletes.

In addition, Larson said, Fahrenkrug and Griffin regularly volunteer

in the schools, "You can always count on Addy and Sarah to bring a positive, can-do attitude to any field trip, volunteer event, or school function. They are generous in all ways within our educational community and beyond."

Larson said they are also the kind of advocates that schools need in their communities, "Addy and Sarah encourage their customers to be informed and knowledgeable of our school district and our school board membership." ■

2017 WASB Business Honor Roll

The following businesses have been nominated by their partner school districts to the WASB Business Honor Roll.* For descriptions of each partnership, visit wasb.org. Select "Services & Resources," "Communication Services," and then "Business Honor Roll."

Unified School District of Antigo

Country 106 WACD
Co-Vantage Credit Union
Aspirus Laglade Hospital
Antigo Daily Journal

Baraboo School District

MSA Professional Services
Baraboo District Ambulance Service
Gasser Construction
Circus World

Eau Claire Area School District

Plank Enterprises
Mayo Clinic Health System
Royal Credit Union
Xcel Energy
Marshfield Clinic

Elmbrook School District

Boswell Book Company

Glenwood City School District

Boblink Nursery
Lake Magnor Store
Herdsman Feeds

Greendale Schools

Wisconsin Institute of Certified Public Accountants
Ferch's Malt Shoppe & Grille
The Greendale Lion's Club
Direct Supply

Howard-Suamico School District

SMT Machine & Tool
Foth

Kaukauna Area School District

Abel Insurance

River Valley School District

The Kraemer Company
The Shed
American Players Theatre
Arena Cheese
Wis-Coat Asphalt Maintenance

Turtle Lake School District

Saputo Cheese USA
Northlakes Community Clinic

West Bend School District

En Fuego Fitness
Dunn Brother's Coffee

***Please note:** this list reflects all of the nominations received by mid-September. Additional nominations may have been added to the Honor Roll since this time. For a complete list, please see the 2017 WASB Business Honor Roll at wasb.org.