

# Superintendent gets “surprise” farewells

## Retirement wishes come from students

By Janice Denham  
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Along with eight other Kirkwood School District employees, David Damerall will be recognized today among this year's retiring staff members. Tomorrow he will return to his office, blinds on a long band of windows slanted open to face busy Manchester Road, to finish his 15th school year as superintendent.

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New superintendent not planning major changes, Page A4

Starting two weeks ago, each school in the district has “surprised” him at a farewell event. These are not the cookies-and-punch type of party alone with parents. Students changed the sign next to district offices at North Middle School to declare “Dr. Damerall Day,” wrote and delivered notes and turned his own pre-school picture into face masks.

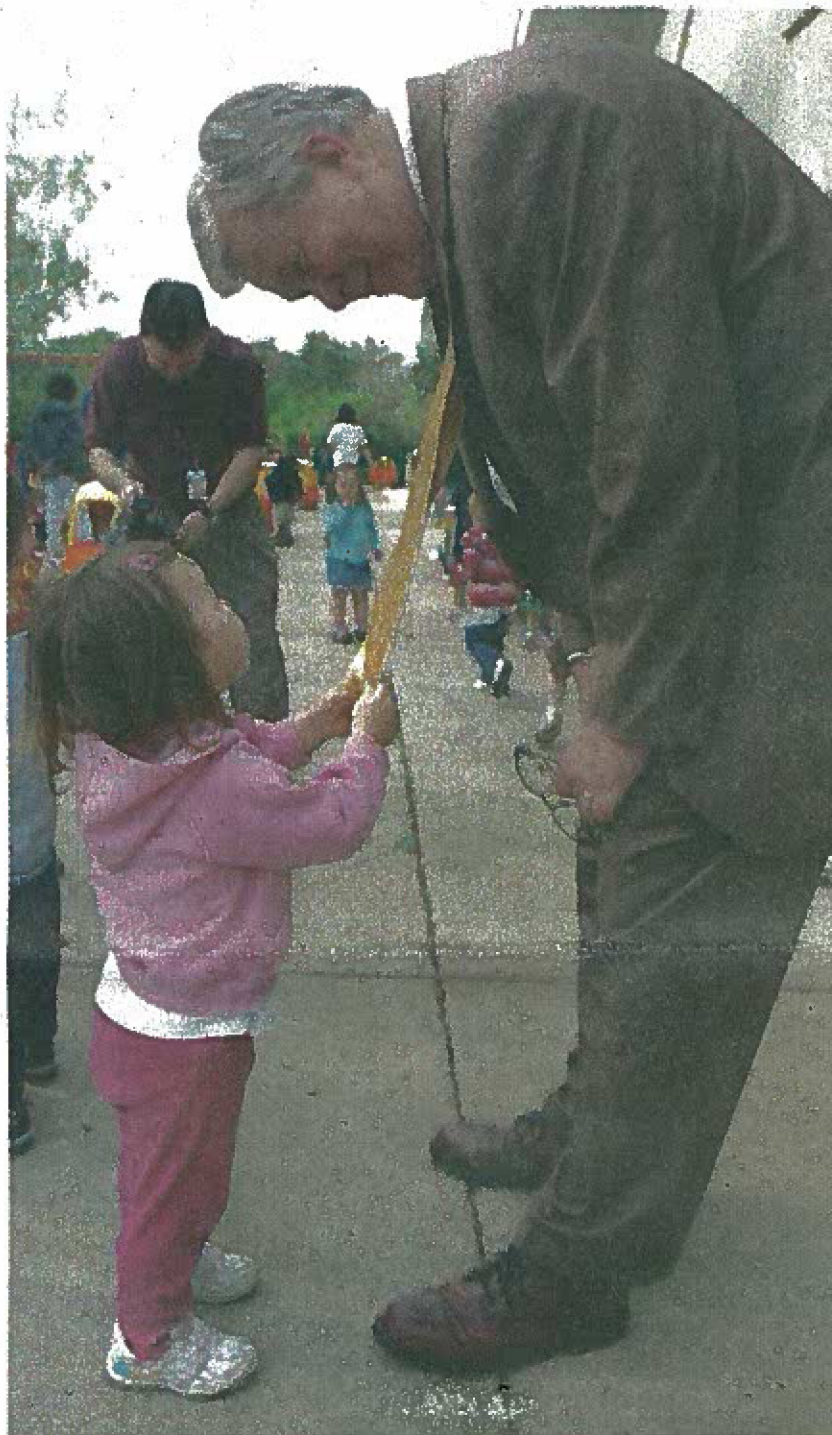
The wish is personal. He spends time every Tuesday in classrooms.

“I went to see the kids and let them see me,” he said. “A lot of what I did on those visits was look. If the children's work is being honored, it is displayed. I could sit on the floor with the kids and know who the teachers are.”

Damerall takes pride in personally hiring and evaluating principals.

“Strong principals are the central agents of change in their schools, based on their leadership and management,” he said.

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RICK GRAEFE | JOURNAL

Two-year-old Alin Krejcavek, a student at Kirkwood's Early Childhood Center, finds the tie of retiring Kirkwood Superintendent David Damerall worth inspecting Thursday morning at the center.

## WEBSTER GROVES

# Church hosts talks on faith's effect on issues

## Raven set to speak tonight

By Danette Thompson  
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Politics, health care and the environment aren't typically discussed from a perspective of faith.

But with the Faith and Real Life series, members of Webster Groves Presbyterian Church are working to create an environment that encourages people of all religions to talk about key subjects in the context of their faith.

“We know that people of faith often struggle with

how to translate their faith to the real world outside the church walls,” said John

Carothers, head pastor. “This series encourages dialogue and helps people find their own answers.”

Faith and Real Life events take place quarterly and feature high-profile



P. Raven

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## LADUE SCHOOLS

# Ladue students' project promotes conservation

## Rain garden fights erosion, flooding

By Danette Thompson  
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It wasn't a typical high school extracurricular activity - designing and constructing a rain garden as a model for erosion and flood control.

But the project has earned a group of Ladue Horton Watkins High School students national recognition and \$40,000 in grant and scholarship money.

Ladue's Team LEAF (La-

due Environmental Action Force) were among 14 U.S. high school teams recently named first-place winners in the Lexus Eco Challenge. The national contest encourages middle school and high school students to develop and implement environmental programs that positively affect their communities.

Team LEAF's members are seniors Natalie Krebs, Rivka Feinberg, Max Montaldo, Mark Wilensky and Gina Wilmott. Sarah Barton, a high school science teacher, is the team's

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sponsor.

The contest challenge was a natural extension of Team LEAF's mission to expand their own and others' understanding of key environmental issues in order to promote action.

"The theme of our project is, if you build one rain garden, you prevent erosion. If you plant 100, you can prevent a flood," Gina said. "Our goal is to get 100 or more people to build a rain garden."

The students weren't sure what a rain garden was when, several months ago, their adviser suggested they design one for the Eco Challenge contest. That quickly changed as they spent weeks researching rain gardens and the many positive effects rain gardens can have on the environment.

Rain gardens are constructed using deeply rooted perennial native plants cultivated on low-lying ground to retain moisture in storm-water run-off areas.

"Rain gardens are natural storm-water controls," Natalie said. "The water collects in the rain garden and seeps back into the ground. It's much better than allowing the water to run off into a drainage ditch or onto a parking lot or street. Rain gardens will also filter out pollutants, and the result is improved water quality, as well as storm-water and erosion control."

Team members built their 250-square-foot rain garden on a corner of the high school parking lot, near practice fields and a creek.

Building it meant more research, learning what species would do best, and the optimum methods for germinating seeds and planting.

"Once a rain garden is established, it's easily maintained," Max said.

"You don't have to water it; it doesn't need fertilizers or pesticides, and the plants are extremely hardy. Most of the work is in the initial design and construction."

The creation of a rain garden has the added advantage of reconstructing

a small part of a natural habitat that's been slowly disappearing.

"Because of urbanization, Missouri has lost significant wetlands areas," Rivka said. "By building a rain garden, you're helping to re-establish wetlands areas and providing a habitat for smaller wildlife."

On a larger scale, rain gardens are an effective flood-control method, Rivka said, because the overflow of water that can't be contained by rivers, streams, ponds and lakes is now absorbed back into the soil.

That's one of the reasons team members have worked to expand their project beyond the grounds of the high school.

The team has given numerous presentations to environmental groups, community representatives and educators, and a group of master naturalists. They've also written letters to state and federal officials, asking them to support and promote rain-garden projects.

Mark took charge of de-



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Five Ladue High students recently won \$40,000 in scholarship and grant money in a national competition for designing and implementing a rain-garden project at the school. They are, from left (front row), Mark Wilensky and Maxwell Montaldo; (standing) Gina Wilmott, Natalie Krebs and Rivka Feinberg. The garden is behind them.

signing a website for the project. This gives the team a larger venue for distributing educational information about rain gardens. The website encourages indi-

viduals and groups to build a rain garden.

Since the first of March, Mark said the Team LEAF website, [www.teamleaf.org](http://www.teamleaf.org), has had more than 3,500 hits from people in more

than 120 countries. "This is a project that can easily be translated to a smaller area in a back yard or a larger area near a business," Gina said. "We hope by reaching out to the community and globally that we can inspire others to build their own rain gardens."

Their rain garden will endure long after they've graduated this month, but Team LEAF students are planning to leave another legacy behind before they move on to college life.

The group wants to use the grant money they won in the Eco Challenge to finish a project started by last year's graduating class, installing solar panels at the high school to help reduce energy costs.

Team LEAF members have gotten permission from their school administration to go ahead with a proposal for purchasing and installing the solar panels.

"Our goal is to make a difference, to make our community and the world a little better place," Natalie said.

## Page Foot & Ankle

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