

Faith and music inspire singing Graduation Project

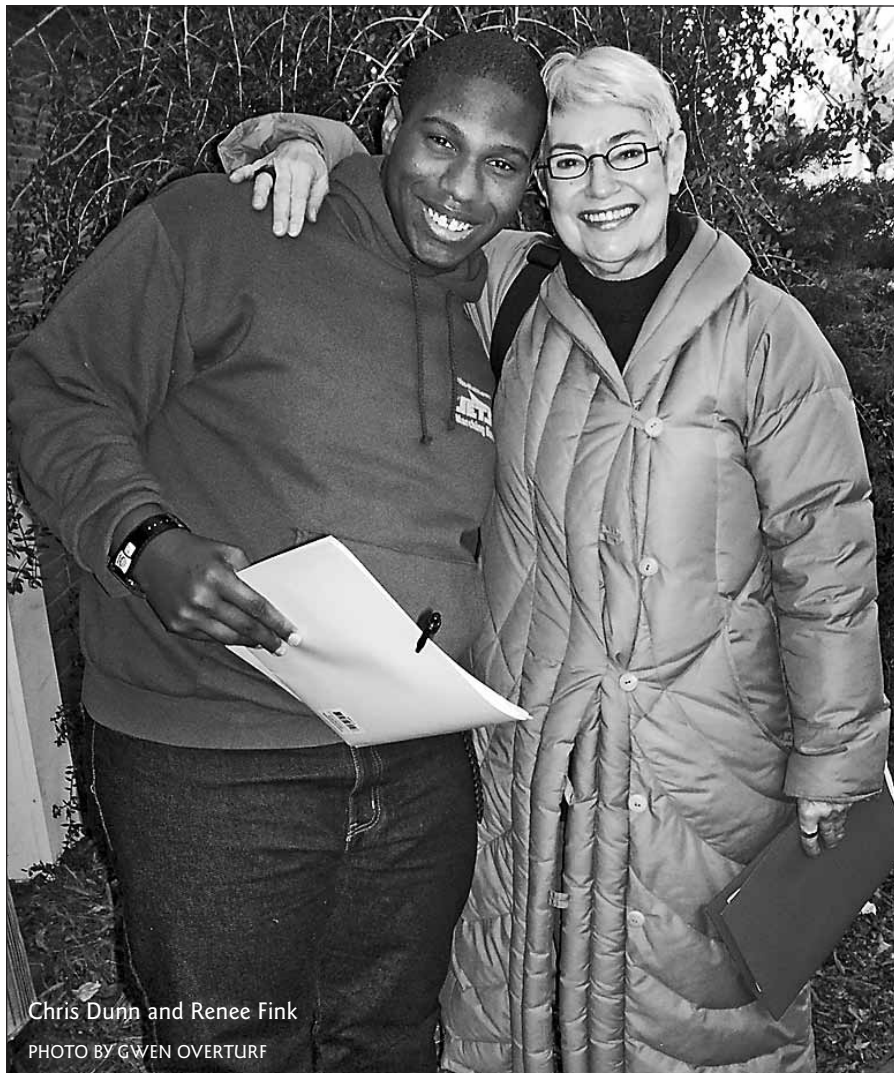
By Milburn Gibbs

Like every other graduating high school senior in Chatham County, Chris Dunn is required to develop an original Graduation Project, and deliver a presentation about it to a panel of judges or he will not graduate.

Jordan-Matthews High School (J-M)'s Chris Dunn of Goldston has a love of music and religion that seems to have fit in perfectly into his choice of his graduation requirement. Chris's very unusual and original idea for his senior program did not surprise his mentor, Renee Fink, a volunteer chosen for Chris by Chatham County Together.

Fink says Chris' program is decidedly different from his classmates – he learned how to sing three Jewish hymns in Hebrew.

"I am interested in the



Chris Dunn and Renee Fink
 PHOTO BY GWEN OVERTURF

GRADUATION

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Literacy council helps Chatham adults learn the basics

By Fran Mears

More and more adults say they want to improve their reading or English-language skills as a way to get ahead, and the Chatham County Literacy Council is responding by adding classes to meet their needs.

"Most of us can't imagine being unable to read to our children, find an address, balance a checkbook or understand the directions on a bottle of medicine. But that's the reality for far too many Chatham County residents," said Susan Bridgers, the council's executive director.

"These people are struggling because they can't read and write at a sufficient level or because they have a language barrier, and they don't know where to turn," she said. "The literacy council wants them to know that we can help them learn the skills they need to succeed – and it won't cost them anything but their time and effort."



Tutor Gloria Wilkins and two of her Siler-City students practice the gestures and expressions used to greet people in the South.

PHOTO BY BOB WILKINS

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Jordan Lake School of the Arts
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Donna Bianco on the positives of Chatham private schools

Beth S. McCullough on the positives of Chatham public schools

Jeff Davidson on the negatives of what the world learns from us

Chatham County Schools Need YOU

By Mia Munn

Only a handful of community members regularly attend Chatham County School Board meetings. Superintendent Logan begins each meeting by saying, "Our system of public

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education depends on community involvement." The district's Strategic Plan and the plan to increase graduation rates both call for building partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and local merchants, with the faith community, human service agencies and other community leaders. You are those community leaders. You are the people our schools need to be concerned with local education issues.

There are a lot of good things in our school system. An active PTA Thrift Shop and the Chatham Education Foundation bring additional funds to the schools. Every high school student has the use of an Apple laptop during the school year. We have award-winning programs in the arts, horticulture, and athletics. The AVID program in each high school is helping prepare students for success in college.

The core business of our schools is educating students. By that measure, we are doing OK, but we need to do better. On average Chatham County test scores hover a few points below or a few points above the state average. One way to measure academic success is the rate at which students actually graduate from high school. In North Carolina as a whole, a little less than 70 percent of students graduate from high school. Chatham does much better, at almost 80 percent, but that still means one in five of our students doesn't graduate. Did you get that? One in five students in Chatham County does not graduate from high school. That is not good enough. That rate is an average, but averages are funny things. They hide a lot of realities. In 2009, when Chatham County's graduation rate was 78.9 percent, only 75 percent of students from low-income families graduated. Only 75 percent of our African-American students graduated.

72 percent of male students graduated. Only 70 percent of our Hispanic students graduated. Think about the future the student who doesn't graduate will have. We need to do better, and the schools can't do it alone. They need your help.

So, what can you do? Talk about education. Talk to your friends, neighbors, and family, to your co-workers and people you do business

CHATHAM SCHOOLS

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