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## The Start of Son

Whether you're a 9th grader, a new teacher, or someone that's been involved with the school since its inception, YIHS is often the source of new challenges and opportunities for those brave souls who choose to enter.

Like the great Union Pacific Bailey Switching Yard<sup>1</sup> in North Platte, Nebraska, YIHS is an entrepôt for interesting people of all generations. They come from the nooks and crannies of our own county to the wide expanses of the world. Flatwheelers<sup>2</sup>, empties<sup>3</sup>, black snakes<sup>4</sup>, gas cans<sup>5</sup>, bad order cars<sup>6</sup>, battleships<sup>7</sup>—every buggy<sup>8</sup> that enters our yard has its eye on the horizon; a beautiful, chugging, screeching accumulation of experience and aspiration. If we are lucky they stay with us a mere four years, we point them in the right direction, and give them the highball<sup>9</sup>.

So much turnover can give one the mistaken impression of transience, instability, reckless speed. But there is a very special thing that holds us all together, and gives us an indelible identity. For those who join our community, whether it be for two years or two decades, Youth Initiative High School is a place to start something big: journeys, careers, arguments, passions, life-long relationships.

So in honor of all auspicious beginnings we dedicate this Kaleidoscope to big plans, big risks, big growth, big change.

- 1. The largest train switchyard in the world. 6.
- 2. A rough riding boxcar
- 3. An unloaded train car
- 4. A coal car
- 5. A petroleum tanker car
- 6. A car in need of repair
- 7. A locomotive
- 8. Any rail car
- 9. The signal to depart from the yard



### Not Just Faces in the Crowd



Throughout its nearly 20 years of existence Youth Initiative

High School has had its share of problems. Measles epidemics, leaky roofs, maxed out credit lines, "personality conflicts"; all of these and many more have stalked the halls of our humble little school. Like any thing worth doing, maintaining an institution that is made up of people at one of the most volatile points in there lives, and then asking each one of those people to share their input in the maintenance of that organization, can lead to a number of unforeseen (and sometimes

YIHS also added 8 new staff members for the 14-15 school year L to R: Nolan Frank, Aaron Lopez, Susan Nesbit, Chris Dunn, David Ecklund, Zoe Drew-King, Megan Baumgartner (1 not pictured)

bizarre) problems. If you stick around long enough you can begin to see some of these problems come around more than once, an experience that can be strangely comforting.

This year, however, our little school ran into a problem we had never seen, and seldom imagined before it occurred. Unlike nearly every problem we had previously encountered, this one was actually a good problem. Here was the problem: more students wanted to come to our school than our facility and staff could handle. This was unprecedented, and, after years of sometimes panicked efforts to squeeze as many students out of our little rural community (which is also blessed with a high-performing public school) it was like being at a Chinese buffet after a hearty snack. We wanted more Crab Rangoon but just couldn't stuff another thing into our gut.

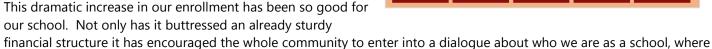
There was no official written policy directing us under such a circumstance, writing such a policy would have been like the DNR putting a bag limit on unicorns, so traditionally fantastical was the

idea that we would actually reach our capacity. What did exist was a goal within our Long Range Plan of 60 students and a strong feeling among our long-term staff that going above 60 students in our current building with our current staff would begin to substantially erode some of the programs and structures that made our school worth coming to in the first place.



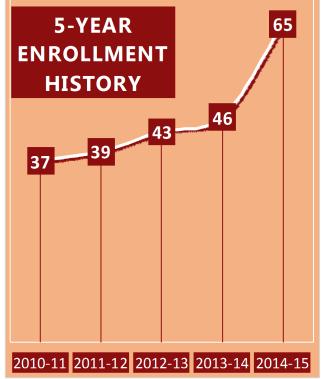
So, after much reflection and discussion, the decision was made to cap our enrollment and create a waiting list. It was certainly not a decision that any of us took lightly. As the person in charge of informing those students who would not be able to go to the school that they really wanted to go to, I was intensely conscious of the unique and powerful experience from which they were being excluded, and it was not easy to say no to worthy, enthusiastic young people.

But it was exactly that unique and powerful experience that we needed to preserve by limiting our enrollment. The family atmosphere and individual attention given to each student is at the core of who we are and quantity over quality has never been something our school has been interested in. We have added extra faculty and courses to ensure that our teacher –to-student ratio remains low and we have added a fifth house leader to ensure that all students get the individualized support that they need. We want to grow *stronger*, and only grow bigger as a means to that end.



we want to be, and what kind of students are best served by our programs.

We have been humbled by the enthusiasm for our school that has been shown by applicants from DeSoto to Dehli. And we are incredibly excited about the new students we have been able to welcome in to our family. For them, this will be the start of something big. There is no way to know where they will go from here but I am confident that their time here will make a positive and indelible impact on their lives. Much of that impact will be due to our school's commitment to never allowing any of our students to become another face in the crowd.





### View from the Third Floor



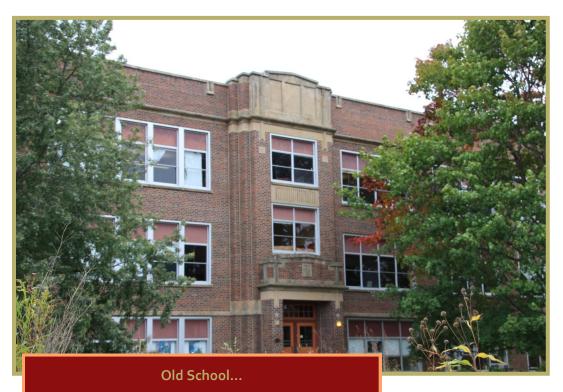
When Youth Initiative opened its doors to eleven students in September of 1996, the one room of our one-room schoolhouse was on the second floor of the Landmark Center. We quickly grew to occupy the entire third floor and became the anchor tenant in a building that has housed dozens of different businesses, from chiropractic offices to music studios.

The Landmark Center was built in 1923 and opened in 1924 as the Viroqua Public High School. It was the third building the district had built for that purpose. 36 senior classes later, in 1959, a new high school was built on the western edge of town, and the building at 500 E Jefferson became a grade school and middle school. I spoke with Chet Lee, who served as the principal for many years during that period. He had many fond memories of the place, and confirmed that the roof already leaked back then. In 1995, the public school completed building its western campus and had the old high school put up for sale. Nancy Rhodes purchased the building at that time, with the expressed intent of giving the Youth Initiative High School a place to get started.

I have served as a member of the YIHS Board off and on since 2002. The issues we have addressed have varied greatly, but there has always been one constant: The Landmark Center. A solid, handsome brick building. Beautiful views, nice big classrooms, hardwood floors, occasional leaks from the roof and hissing, hot radiators. This building has been the very ground of our existence as a school.

As a teacher at YIHS, I mainly love the building. From all of the classrooms, there are magnificent views of Viroqua to the west, north, and south. The Landmark Center was built as a school and built to last. As a teacher, I have always been happy to come to work here. As a member of the Board responsible for looking after the health and well-being of the school, I have often been frustrated by the leaking roof and the uneven winter temperatures.

Beginning in 2003, the Board began a systematic look at the Landmark, with the idea of perhaps eventually buying the building. Testing toilets, inspecting radiators, checking out crawl spaces, getting estimates....trying to figure out if we could afford to own the Landmark. In 2004, the Board told Nancy that we were interested in buying, and in May of 2005 the Board made an offer to purchase the building. Buyer and seller were not able to come to agreement on the price, and Youth Initiative remained a renter. Over the next seven years, there were several offers to purchase, but the school



and Ms. Rhodes were not able to agree on a price. In 2011, Mark Hanson of Hoffman Design and Architecture came to evaluate the building and estimate the costs of bringing the mechanical systems up to current standards. It appeared from his estimates that fixing up the building were greater than the cost of a new building to house 60 students. It seemed to make more sense to build a new building specifically for our needs. The Board communicated with Nancy that we were no longer interested in purchasing the building, and shifted our atten-

"I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph...

It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed. In this life we get nothing save by effort."

- Theodore Roosevelt

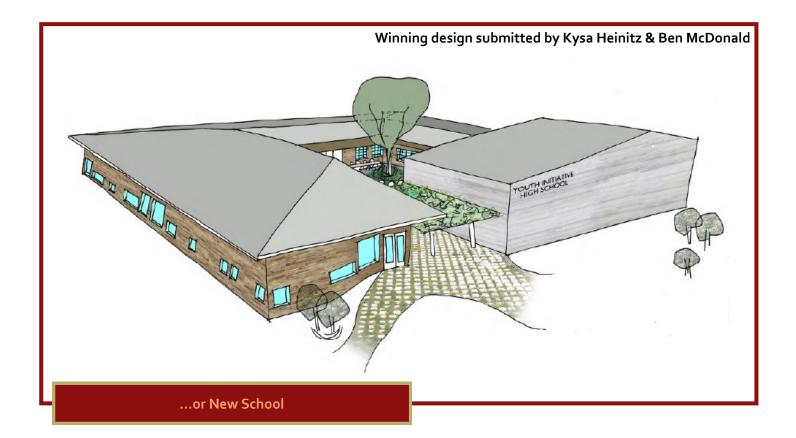
tion to investigating potential building sites. We polled the parents, students, and faculty and there was a strong consensus that YIHS ought to remain in Viroqua. We looked at several properties, but one was too small, another not really for sale, a third across the road from a rendering plant.

This past year we tried to take it the other way around and staged a Building Design Contest, with a \$1,000 first prize. Entries came in from across the Midwest. The Board had long discussions and picked the three finalists. The top three designs were each inspiring in their own way, with the winning entry coming from local team Kysa Heinitz and Ben McDonald.

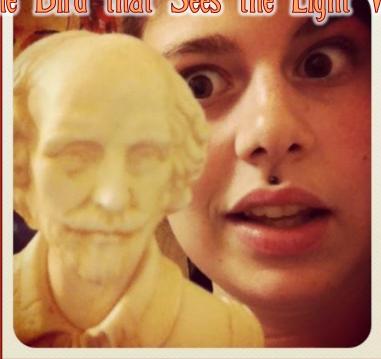
This moment in 2014 seems full of possibility for our school. We have over 60 students, a waiting list of students wanting to attend, a stellar and experienced faculty....a perfect time to start something big. The current Board and the newly created Building Committee includes Guthrie Knapp, the first YIHS alum to graduate from architecture school. We have new ideas and more students than ever. Now seems to be the perfect time to move boldly in some direction.

I am sure that it is within our ability to buy the Landmark Center and make it last another 90 years. I am also sure that it is within us to buy some land and build something beautiful that is all our own.

We at Youth Initiative are involved in a radical democratic experiment, and democracies aren't always so decisive. Somehow the Spirit must move us all, collectively, to make something happen, to channel the power of our aspiration into an actual physical building. Owning a place of our own is a commitment, an indication of maturity. First we must determine what sort of place we want. Here at age 18, the Youth Initiative must choose what to be, how many students to serve, what kind of place to be.



The Bird that Sees the Light While the Dawn is Still Dark



### By Zoe Drew-King, 2014-2015 Teacher Development Intern

Why is there a tiny gray car with California plates suddenly driving around Viroqua?

That would be me, the Teacher Development Program Intern at YIHS.

Oh, so you're the "new Henry" (last year's Teacher Development Intern)?

I prefer to think of Henry as "the old Zoe."

What brings you to Viroqua?

My family friend has a brother who lives in Viroqua, and as a result I spent an evening in Yosemite this past January hearing all about YIHS, the Co-op, and The Ark. Actually, the conversation went in the opposite order -- She knew I was applying for fellowships and internships at theatre companies, and thought I might

want to contact The Ark. At the time, I thought to myself, "there's no way it would work to move out to Wisconsin for an unpaid internship." Boy, was I ever wrong.

And, as luck would have it, I'm actually working at The Ark too.

No, what I meant is...why are you actually here? The short answer? A man named Will Putnam.

The long answer? ...there's not really a snarky way to tell this story, so I'm just going to go for it.

I entered my fourth year of college a heavy heart. I could feel graduation drawing closer, and I was digging my heels in as much as I could. I didn't want to leave the cozy nest of privilege that had been constructed for me by my family, friends, and university. I fully acknowledged this, and fought against falling back on comfort, but somewhere along the way I



began to panic. I had constructed an ideal post-graduate life for myself that had crumbled over the summer, and when I saw my friends organizing lists of theatre companies, publishing houses, and graduate schools I didn't see a place for myself in any of it.

Instead of worrying about the future, I immersed myself in the present. I had the busiest year of my college career, taking on additional classes to complete my dual majors and extra-curricular projects to distract me from the fact that I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. And I grew in that time, delving into the worlds that drew my interest -- so much so that I began to find ways to pursue them in the future. I began to formulate ideas of what could be in my future. I could study dramaturgy and practice it in a theatre company; I could be a freelance writer or be an online tutor or keep my marketing internship and hope it turns into something.

I came back to school in January with five future career paths, all of which had an introductory position/internship/job for which I would apply. The only problem was -- I really, really wanted to do all of them at once. I had

worked it out that technically, I could do more than one at a time, but one of them -- this Teacher Development Program Internship - was way out in Wisconsin, and no matter how perfectly it suited me, I wasn't going to drop everything and move out there for a career I wasn't sure about.

But I had bigger fish to fry in January. The day after I cast my thesis production, one of my leads presented me with a non-negotiable conflict. I was an actor short and pulling my hair out in the Theatre Arts office, and on Super Bowl Sunday I ran into one Will Putnam.

To give some background on Will: I had worked with him on a few shows before, and not only is he a tremendous actor, but he is also one of the most genuine and engaged people I've ever met. Will didn't audition for my show because he was already in the main



stage production (understandable) but when I ran into him that afternoon, nearly in tears, I knew it was fate. I asked if he had a minute to chat, and we proceeded to have a four-hour dialogue about life.

Somewhere between discussing the character I wanted him to play in my show and John Milton's poetry we started talking about feeling overwhelmed about our choices in life. Will's a year younger than me, but will be graduating this year with a dual major as well, and has similar impulses -- to try to do everything all at once, to want to take it all in at once. I likened how I was feeling at the time to that Robert Frost poem -- "the road less taken" -- and not wanting to even step down one, because what if all the paths I want to travel never cross?

It was then that Will said, "you just have to take a leap of faith."

And so I did.

I applied to and interviewed at three theatre companies -- two in California, one in Chicago -- for positions in dramaturgy and literary management. I also applied to and interviewed at Youth Initiative.

It poured, hailed, thundered on the day of my graduation. My mortar board was soggy and my dress soaked through. I had been rejected by all three theatre companies, and I was saying goodbye to my home of four years.

The next morning I loaded my life into a van and started driving to California. At 9 p.m. my mom and I stopped for gas, and I checked my phone to find an email from Matt -- I had been accepted as the Teacher Development Intern at YIHS. I started to cry.



It wasn't until after that conversation with Will that I really began to understand what it meant to graduate. It felt like a shove out of the nest, sure -- but I didn't have to keep flying onwards. I could alight on any branch I wanted, I could change direction, drop to the ground -- or let the wind carry me. And who ever said I had to be pushed, anyway?

I took a leap of faith instead.

And here I am.



# Seeking Discomfort



Sometimes it's hard to get out of bed on Sunday morning. Sometimes it seems like too much to quit that well-paying job that has been slowly corroding your soul for a decade and start that writing career you've always dreamed about. Comfort. In many ways it is the teleological holy grail of every species that has ever evolved on our planet. However, for modern humans living in a first-world country comfort can become an addiction, an intellectual and spiritual death trap that lures us into its sticky deliciousness and then paralyzes us with a soft warm elixir of microwaves, goose feather duvets, and HBO series streaming on Netflix.

Its no small task to leave one's comfort zone and try something totally new. But for those ready to take on the challenge it is a powerful (if oft overwhelming) experience. In one way or another every student, teacher, and parent at YIHS has done just that. They have foregone more conventional, less expensive options and chosen an independent, alternative form of education. Most have come from a previous background in Waldorf education and enrolling at YIHS is a natural extension of the grade school years. Others have been square pegs in round holes, struggling to meet with success in traditional public schools. But once in a while we get a student with the courage and spontaneity and self-awareness to leave a situation characterized by comfort and success for one that may include discomfort, challenge, and potential failure. One such student is YIHS senior Hannah Eddy.

"My experience at Westby High school has left me with some great friends and bonds with teachers that I know care about me. I learned valuable life lessons and had mind opening classes and conversations at Westby, as well as academic learning. Most importantly I grew so much as a person in 3 years and watched myself mature through the halls and classrooms of Westby High school." Hannah was a very successful student on the cusp of graduating from a school that satisfied her in many ways. There wasn't much push in the way of push-and-pull factors that would lead someone to make a change. "I appreciate my teachers that I left behind but I was beginning to feel like I wanted more freedom in my education. I wanted more social and personal growth and to be in a new environment. I was ready to put myself outside of my comfort zone in an independent way while I [was] still in high school"

For a successful young student in Westby there are more options than most other students in rural towns across the nation. Open enrollment allows students to explore other public schools in the area and there are a number of private and charter schools within commuting distance from Westby. "I chose Youth Initiative because it seemed like a place where I could meet like minded people and make connections with new people in a totally unique environment. I was drawn in from watching last year's play and my visit to the school."

So Hannah put in her application and had a great admissions interview. She was readily accepted into the school community. Starting something new is never a walk in the park, and the beauty of YIHS is that it is both comfortable and

uncomfortable at the same time. "The camping trip was such a relaxed and intimidating start to the school year," said Hannah. But as the annual camping trip progressed Hannah became more comfortable. "Being able to meet my peers hang out and get to know the people I'm going to be spending the year with and connecting with people away from all distractions and technology was very liberating. I wish every school could do that because it takes away the potential fear of walking into a strange building filled with strangers and made me feel confident and comfortable in my learning environment."

One of the reasons we as an admissions committee were so confident that Hannah would



succeed here is that she seemed to have a rather rare self-awareness about her education and seemed to be consciously seeking productive discomfort. "I hope my experience at YIHS allows me to build a strong connection with my peers and teachers, learn new concepts and build more knowledge in areas I already have been studying. I hope to look deeper in myself to find out who I am in different situations, who I want to be, and what I want to do." Certainly not every student who we admit is so conscious of their goals but it is our hope that each student who graduates shares the same appraisal of what's important.

Sadly, Hannah will be gone too soon as she graduates in the Spring of 2015. Where will she go after her time with us? "My goals are to travel right after high school in predominantly Spanish speaking countries to work on becoming fluent. I want to go to college to learn how to make a difference in the world. I could write pages and pages of my goals and ambitions but I just want to see myself learning and experiencing living in different places while I'm still young with nothing holding me back." We're glad she made us a stop along the way.

## Putting the World's Puzzle Together, Piece by Piece

WITH MAT STAVUN & BENNY MARS, YIHS EXCHANGE STUDENTS

How do two guys from France and Switzerland end up serving soup to the homeless in inner city Chicago? YIHS, that's how. Mat and Benny are YIHS exchange students who got the full YIHS experience by participating in our annual Service Week. Then they wrote about it in their English as a Second Language class. The place did not exactly grab Mat right away: "Su Casa [Catholic Worker House] lies in a dangerous area of Chicago, such as an area [sic] full of people who have a lot of problems, such as homelessness, health problems. I was not really comfortable in a place like this. All of the buildings were old. They were from the '80's. They looked like the movie "Blues Brothers" and I don't like old things."



Despite these trepidations the power of the mission was not lost on Mat or Benny. Mat writes, "...we went to an association call Precious Blood that takes in homeless children, or children who have problems. We visited the school. We listened to the students' tories and we visited the art room, full of drawings that represented the hurt of the poor children and the request for peace. There was a strong feeling of pity for everyone." But as Benny reported it felt good to know they were making a difference: "...we cooked breakfast for homeless people; a very useful thing. I felt good to help there."



#### From Finance

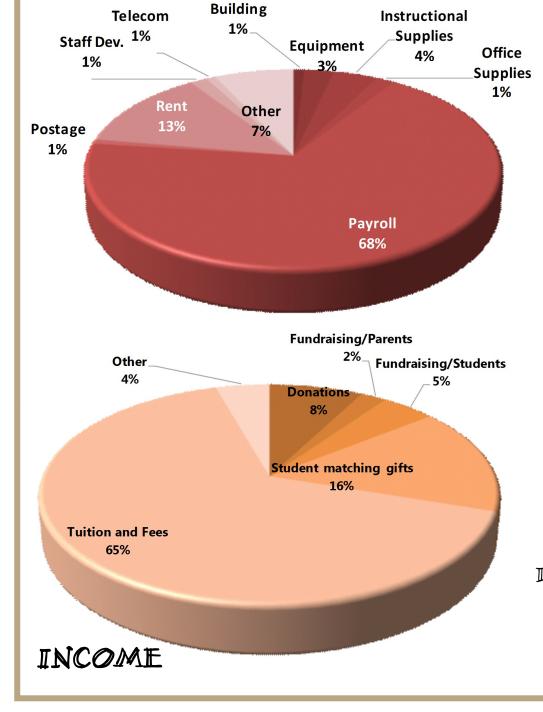
# In the Books YIIIS Annual Report

It was another excellent year for our school from a financial perspective. For the third year in a row we ended our fiscal year well in the black. After forecasting a deficit of nearly \$3,000 for the 13-14 fiscal year we were able to finish with a surplus over \$15,000.

We were able to do this through the Herculean efforts of our student fundraisers who finished at 107% of budget, the solicitous acumen of our Development Office whose donation income came in at 120% of budget, the vivacity and creativity of our parent fundraisers who finished at 132% of budget, and our generous and dedicated staff who donated \$2,370 in deferred salaries.

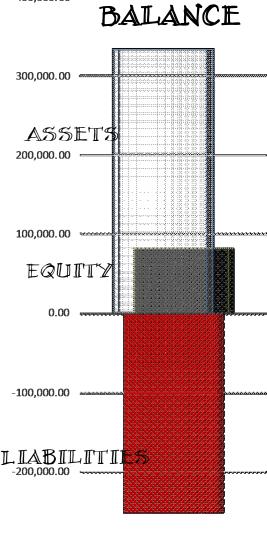
Our budgeting of expenses was almost creepily accurate, having spent 100.2% of what we expected to spend. Cash flow throughout the year was steady and at no time were we compelled to dip into our line of credit. Our average pledge and our enrollment stayed static from 2012-2013 to 2013-2014.

### EXPENSE



Our current financial structure is sustainable and even successful, but only in insofar as the school continues to be the beneficiary of the generosity and goodwill of its employees who forgo more financially lucrative careers for one

that pays spiritual dividends as well. 400,000.00



-300,000.00 -

#### **From Development**

The Long Range Planning committee back in 2012 came up with some goals, which at the time seemed fantastical; 60 students and a home-stay boarding program. In addition, the Development Committee dreamed of raising our Matching Gift Circle numbers to 400%. Like receiving a delightful present in the mail months before your birthday, YIHS met these goals well in advance of expectations. Suffice it to say, it was an exciting year.

Our boarding program is a success. Our initial marketing efforts were wildly effective, garnering more applicants than we had hosts. Given how new the program was, our admissions procedures and the placement of students with families experienced growing pains. In short, the program needed some guidance and structure. The Administrative Group and Development Committee decided to create a separate Boarding Committee to help formalize the processes of admissions, placement, and guidance for boarding students. The Boarding Committee took flight and covered a lot of ground, creating flow-charts, procedures and even a boarding-house proposal. By the year's end, they put out a call for a Boarding Coordinator to staff the program. We hired Bean Voz!

Enrollment efforts were rock-solid. The first window into the school for most prospective families is attending one of our public events: Our parents put on two heartbreakingly beautiful "Truth Be Told" story telling evenings: the music class put on an original musical, "Bill and Ted's Most Excellent Musical Adventure": the circus arts class performed "La Strada Circus". In January we hosted a combined art night and faculty showcase. This hybrid event drew a big, curious crowd and was a great way to showcase student work while also answering prospective parents' questions. For prospective students, we held three visit days which aimed to engage each student individually. Feedback from the visits was overwhelmingly positive.

Overall, the school is rounding the corner of public perception. Close to home, seven students from local public schools applied to YIHS. From afar--Massachusetts, Arizona, Virginia, and New York--four families moved here for our unique brand of education. Most importantly, we are continuing to enrich our local community. This summer students in Pete Hodapp's public art class completed an epic mural on the county barn. The project was a real testament to YIHS's role in the community, drawing support from local businesses, the County Board, and the Historical Society and giving back an impressive, informative record of the history of county institutions.

Looking forward, we will continue to grow, and I hope we find more and more ways to give back.

#### From the Faculty

In 2013-2014 the YIHS Faculty included 30 teachers and staff, including 6 new members. For the first time, our staff included 4 full-time core teachers – Matthew Voz, Jacob Hundt, Shawn Lavoie, and Dave Hibbard-Rode, all of whom also carried important administrative and student mentoring functions. Over the past decade, one of the greatest improvements we have made as a school has been the gradual establishment of an experienced, salaried full-time core faculty and this year was a culmination of sorts in this process.

On the other end of the spectrum of experience, one of the new faculty members was a returning YIHS alumnus, Henry Hundt (Class of 2009), who came to the school as the pioneer participant in the YIHS Teacher Development Internship Program. In this role, Henry took part in many YIHS classes and activities, including the Development Committee and Theme Week, and had a chance to teach a couple classes himself. Over the course of the year, Henry laid the foundations of a formal program, which will continue in 2014-2015 with our second Teacher Development Intern, Zoe Drew-King.

In the realm of faculty development and training, YIHS took big steps forward this year by launching a semester long Foundation Course in Anthroposophy, in conjunction with the Sophia Institute. Several YIHS faculty, as well as members of the wider community, participated in this introduction to the ideas of Rudolf Steiner and some of the rudiments of Waldorf pedagogy. We also welcomed two internationally distinguished Waldorf high school educators, Douglas Gerwin and Michael D'Aleo, for public lectures and meetings with faculty.

In 2013-2014 YIHS continued progress in developing our outdoors and manual skills curriculum. Dave Hibbard-Rode led the school in a memorable back-to-school Camping Trip to the Porcupine Mountains of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, on the shore of Lake Superior. Dave also launched a cycle of week-long expedition intensives, starting with a canoe trip on the lower Wisconsin River with the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall and an overland hike from the Kickapoo Reserve to Viroqua with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the spring. We also launched a dedicated automotive mechanics block for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and computer and digital technology blocks in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades.

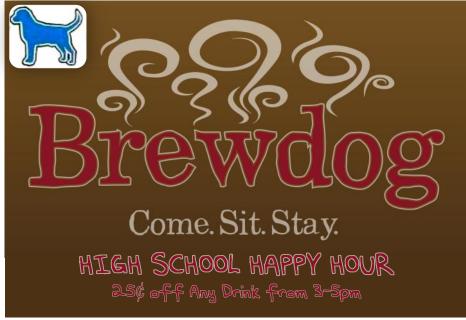
YIHS hosted students from 10 countries as exchange or boarding students, including France, Germany, Switzerland, Thailand, Rwanda, South Korea, Mexico, Grenada, Italy, and the United States. To support this program, we have initiated courses in English as a Second Language (ESL), led by new faculty member Bailey McGowan, We are deeply grateful for the families who have taken these students into their homes. The diversity of cultures has enriched our school community in significant ways and put our little school on the world map in a new and exciting way.

# PLEASE REMEMBER THESE FRIENDS OF VIHS



Bill Brooke Realty offers a 5% donation to the YIHS. Mention this ad when buying or selling your house or property. This offer is open to all families & friends of YIHS.

Feel free to call us to learn more about this program.



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