Highlights of the 2008-2009 Year at City & Country School

City & Country had another record setting year! For the first time in the School’s history, we received a one million dollar pledge from parents Sam and Ellen Newhouse and the Newhouse Foundation, to kick off Block by Block: Building City & Country for the Next 100 Years, the largest and most compelling capital campaign in the School’s history. In March 2008 we initiated the planning phase of a multi-year capital campaign with the primary goal of raising funds to acquire additional space, make upgrades to current facilities, build a multi-purpose space and establish an endowment. We are enormously grateful to the Newhouse family for their generosity and their belief in our mission and vision for the future.

Thanks to abundant volunteerism, and the guidance of our new Director of Development, Darrell Yuen, C&C continued to surpass fundraising goals in all areas. The Annual Fund raised more than ever, and our devoted volunteers were essential to this success. The community came together for a stylish, delicious and tremendously successful Benefit, made possible by tireless volunteer Benefit committee members. This spirit of giving of time and resources is the foundation for our continued growth and success.

In step with such positive fundraising news, we are thrilled that C&C has finalized the purchase of the neighboring brownstone at 150 W. 13th Street. This adjacent building will help secure our future by providing needed space for our Groups and program. We took possession in December 2008 and began a major renovation of the building, along with areas of 146 W. 13th Street.

The Middle and Upper School program expanded in 2008-2009 for the first time at City & Country School. We look forward to continued expansion in 2009-2010 with two Groups of IXs joining two Groups of VIII.

The energetic and loyal members of the class of 2009 will bring their high spirits to their new high schools. Among their choices are: Bard High School Early College (public), Berkeley Carroll, Brooklyn Friends, City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture and Technology (public), Dwight, Dwight-Englewood (N.J.), Fieldston, LREI, Loyola, Marvelwood (boarding), Notre Dame, Packer, Rudolf Steiner, Spence.

This year’s fund-an-item (a yearly Benefit activity where funds are raised for special C&C projects), exceeded all previous records. C&C families donated an incredible total of $70,000 to support financial aid at City & Country.

In February, with support from the PA and last year’s fund-an-item monies, Michael Thompson, expert in child development and author of Speaking of Boys, Raising Cain and Best Friends, Worst Enemies, spent two days at C&C. He visited classes, met with the XIlIs, and spoke to C&C staff and parents about friendship, popularity and social cruelty, as well as how to raise responsible children.

First hand research—often through trips—is a core element of the C&C program. Among their many annual trips, C&C children visit the Union Square Greenmarket, 79th Street Boat Basin, Institute of Native American Studies and the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine. The youngest children visit destinations within C&C and take trips to neighborhood shops and sites. New destinations this year included Governors Island, Liberty Science Museum, Onassis Cultural Center, a performance of the Oedipus Cycle, and for the first time, during the XIlls trip to Civil War sites, they took part in an overnight battle reenactment at Pamplin Historical Park in Virginia.

C&C hosted two Block Connection workshops—the program whereby C&C teachers work with Head Start staff to support their work with blocks in their programs. One workshop was held for 13 teachers, and the other with 16 administrators. Direct involvement in early childhood education is a fitting continuation of City & Country’s historical contribution to Head Start teacher training in its earliest years.

I Learn From Children, Caroline Pratt’s work that chronicles the development of Pratt’s educational practices and the history of C&C, was read (or re-read) by C&C staff over the summer of 2008. Staff meeting discussions centered on Pratt’s view of children’s learning, teaching at C&C and changes since the 1940s. The PA also invited
all parents to gain a greater understanding of why we do what we do through a reading of this illuminating book and devoted a meeting to discussion.

In addition to the external speakers and outreach the Parents Association coordinates, this year the PA focused on internal resources and topics connected to C&C history and practices. While also reading I Learn from Children, the PA hosted Mary Hauser, author of Learning from Children: The Life And Legacy of Caroline Pratt, who spoke with the parents about her perspectives on Pratt’s work and legacy. The PA also looked to our community of experts and held a meeting devoted to the Reading and Library Programs, featuring Lower School Learning Specialist Nancy Vascellaro and Librarian Todd Rosenthal.

Supporting our local community of learners, C&C provided space for the Go Project, a non-profit organization committed to working with low-income, underperforming elementary school children in lower Manhattan through academic and social supports. Free Arts, a program for families, met in our Kitchen on Wednesday evenings during the winter and spring.

City & Country School Unit Blocks, developed by C&C with kid o, a C&C-parent-owned educational toy store, hit stores nationwide last summer and were celebrated at a lively launch party in the Rhythms Room in September. The first run of the block sets quickly sold out!

Sylvia Rogers Miller, treasured Rhythms Teacher from 1939-1976, passed away in the summer of 2008. Sylvia’s life and devotion to the teaching and practice of Rhythms were celebrated and remembered at City & Country in October. Sylvia’s family and friends, alumni and community members shared their memories and reflected on a life that touched many, for many years.

MIT’s New Media Literacies Project collaborated with Upper School students on podcasts devoted to youth and technology. Middle and Upper School Director Scott Moran worked with MIT’s Erin Reilly and a group of XIIIs and XIIIIs on crafting audio podcasts that (often humorously) reflect their perspectives and experiences with digital technologies. The podcasts are available on iTunes for free – search “Technical Difficulties” or visit http://technical-difficulties.ning.com.

Despite challenging economic conditions, C&C continued through the third year of significant support for teacher salary growth, and we are gratified that all of our Group Teachers are returning for the 2009-2010 school year.

Play was center stage in the media over the past year and, as always, at C&C.

A special, full-color, bound edition of the Currents newsletter that explores play at C&C was sent home to parents in the spring. The newsletter quotes outside resources on play, with a special focus on media attention, and provides additional resources.

Admissions Director Elise Clark was a panelist in the fall of 2008 at a 92nd Street Y Wonderplay Early Childhood Education Conference, devoted to exploring the importance of play, imagination, curiosity and creative thinking.

Entirely new sets of outdoor blocks were built by C&C Maintenance over the summer of 2008, and were put to practical, creative and pleasurable use by children every day of the school year.

Our community packed the Rhythms Room for “Meet the Grads,” an annual event where a panel of recent graduates reflect on their time at C&C, their transition to high school and beyond, and answer questions posed by parents. Throughout the evening, it was clear that at C&C our grads developed a deep understanding of themselves as learners that they bring to their myriad life endeavors.

Two C&C teachers presented at the New York State Association of Independent Schools conference “Teaching with Technology.” Rebecca Kaye presented methods for learning history through digital social
interaction, drawing on her work with the XIs using social networking technology to publish and share their Greek God historical fiction, creating a "Social Network of the Gods". Ian Klapper shared how teachers can bring Social Studies to life using Adobe Illustrator, as he did with the XIs creating Day of the Dead banners.

A fittingly elegant fête to celebrate 10 years of Principal Kate Turley’s ardent leadership of C&C was held in the spring. Those in attendance fanned themselves with “Kate fans,” shared their deep appreciation of her work, and presented her with a book of treasures, each page created by families and staff. The thought and energy put into the event by dedicated parents was an apt reflection of the honoree’s decade of care, collaboration and guidance.

Finally, The New York State Association of Independent Schools conducted a five-year evaluation of City & Country School, and approved C&C’s reaccreditation for an additional five years!