

BLACK PINE CIRCLE SCHOOL

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 – 2024

Mission

Black Pine Circle School's mission is to create a learning community that encourages humanity, empathy, moral depth, cultural understanding, and intellectual freedom.

Educationally, it is our goal to create vibrant, independent thinkers who will never lose their passion for learning, their delight in research, and their involvement in cultural pursuits.

Black Pine Circle School's teaching philosophy is best described as Socratic. This student-centered method of learning is based on inquiry, questioning, exploration, and discovery: it minimizes competitiveness and makes the curriculum personally relevant, motivating students to acquire knowledge and skills for their own sake. The focus on mastery not tasks is reinforced by an interdisciplinary approach, which integrates rigorous academics with music, drama, and the visual arts.

Socially, it is our goal to instill mutual respect, compassion, and an appreciation of differences among our students. Our faculty and staff are dedicated to fostering a warm and supportive environment in which children can safely address challenges and grow in their understanding of themselves and others.

Our Pillars

CURIOSITY | COMMUNITY | INQUIRY | VOICE

Letter from Head of School John Carlstroem



The year was 2005, and the movie version of the 90's-based musical RENT had recently come out.

On a rainy Bay Area June day, I was heading out of San Francisco, driving my gray, compressed natural gas Ford Crown Victoria. My car was full of tchotchkes and boxes from my old office at the Hamlin School. I can vividly remember driving down Sansome Street, distracted, because I was hurrying to get to graduation at the school where I'd been hired to be the new head, Black Pine Circle School. My heart and head were full. I was jolted from

my daydreaming by a yellow cab rear-ending me. I should have known that day, that BPC would be a place where I would feel that extraordinary jolting – in a wonderful way – nearly every day!

When I arrived at the Black Pine Circle campus, I slipped into the back of the FAD theater and sat down next to Laura Wolff, whom I'd met through the interview process. I was immediately blown away by eighth-grade graduation. There were almost no adults speaking and zero bloviating – just student memories, quotes, speeches, and of course songs. The eighth-graders, led by Cheryl Sumsion and Andra Marziano, performed a pitch-perfect version of "Seasons of Love" from RENT. Most of us know the catchy chorus, "525,600 minutes, how do you measure, measure a year?" and the coda in the songs asks, "How about love?" I had never really met any of these students or their families but in that moment, I teared up. The sincerity, the talent, and the passion these students exuded was extraordinary. I knew I had come "home."

It's almost overwhelming to look back at the last 19 years (or 9,986,400 minutes, if you will) of my life and times at BPC. In 2005, my daughter was just three years old, I'd only been married about seven years, my beard was a dusky brown, my eyes were filled with stars, as I tell the students, "Wheels were square, and dinosaurs roamed the earth."



It's been an amazing journey and, more than anything, it's been about love and learning. That same combination of "Goodness and Knowledge" that makes BPC so unique. In my time we've had so many constants: math victories, remarkable teachers, clever kids, paths of belonging, and this remarkable feeling that at BPC you can be your authentic self. You can wear a pirate hat every day, and/or love to play basketball, and/or love pickles, and/or play the bass, or even be a middle-aged man who writes cheesy songs about annual themes and get the whole community to sing them with you.

BPC is on the precipice of an amazing new era! Fifty years in, new buildings coming on line, and the opportunity to take our school to yet another level of success.

Our fine school has grown in extraordinary ways, and we have seen tough times too, where we've lost wonderful friends along the way, and managed pandemics, floods, and economic ups and downs. We continue to evolve and change and, yet, we always come back to the non-negotiables that founders, Oscar, Frances, and Carmen had spelled out: Socratic probity and playfulness in all areas of the curriculum, differentiation so that students and families can continue to stretch into Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. Of course

all this intellectual verbiage is wonderful but, perhaps the real secret of Black Pine Circle School is the simple reality that it's fun to learn here because everyone's ideas matter!

As I head west, 2300 miles across the Pacific Ocean to Maui, I will carry all this learning and love within me. It's fair to say that my desire to grow and do something I haven't done before (run a Montessori School), comes from the ethos of this remarkable community! BPC has changed me.

Finally, like all leaders, I know that I stand on the shoulders of so many remarkable people. I want to heartily thank my caring and diligent partners on the administrative team, all of the board members of the past two decades, the inspiring, life-changing teachers, and perhaps, most importantly, the students who have always been the best part of all my time at Black Pine Circle School. I'm filled with gratitude for this extraordinary experience. Indeed, how do you measure a year (or 19 years)?

Dr. John Carlstroem
Head of School

2022 – 2023

Black Pine Circle Board of Directors

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Board Member and Advisor to Life Sciences Companies

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Sabine O'Sullivan

Associate Producer, Pixar Animation Studio

Lukasz Strozek

Chief Technology Officer, Hippo Insurance Inc.

Ryan Sullivan

Co-founder and CSO, Space Kinetic

Jase Turner

Assistant Head of School for Strategic Priorities, The Seven Hills School

Karen Zukor – Board Secretary

Statistics Consultant, World Health Organization

Letter from Board Chair Shalini Sharp



This 2023–24 annual report is the last one that we will have under our fearless leader, John Carlstroem. I would like to thank John on behalf of all of us for dedicating the past two decades of his life to our school and our children. During his tenure, the school has grown, offering its unique blend of academics, arts, and goodness to more students from our community. Thanks to John, we are now on much stronger financial footing than we were 19 years ago. We are also poised to grow our footprint further, to create more space for community and voice for our faculty and students.

We have a group of committed and exceptional teachers, and students who are engaged, curious, and kind.

Having been your Board Chair, I have had a unique vantage point on what it truly takes to run this place behind the scenes. The everyday magic of BPC happens in the classrooms and hallways, with the faculty and students. To make that magic possible though, there is a whole team of other people who manage the school's finances, facilities, personnel matters, fundraising, admissions, communications, events, legal matters, traffic, yard duties, aftercare, and everything else. For the past two decades, John has led all of these efforts. He is one of the hardest workers I have ever met, putting in evenings and weekends and going above and beyond for everyone at BPC who has needed him. When someone on his team is sick or overwhelmed, John is the one who steps in. The buck truly stops with him.

I have never seen John falter in his commitment and dedication to putting the students' needs above everything else. He has taken care of BPC through financial crises, geopolitical crises, fire seasons, a pandemic, and countless other challenges. Understanding the traditions of our school and the importance of community events, John has always gone to great lengths to keep these things going through thick and thin. At this point, most of us have had a pancake

personally prepared by John. Every student of BPC over the past 19 years will have graduated having heard numerous original compositions and guitar performances from John, who truly draws his strength and inspiration from the students. Any parent who reaches out to John will find an empathetic ear and true listener. He only wants what is best for our children and our families. I have had so many conversations with parents who sent their kids to BPC because they heard John speak at an admissions event.

Heading into the next year, the Board's top priority is the impossible task of replacing John Carlstroem. Our Vice Chair, Lukasz Strozek, is leading this effort, having formed a committee of parents, faculty, and administrators and selected a nationally renowned search firm. You will all be invited to contribute to this process. Meanwhile, we are so lucky to have seasoned professionals like DeAndre Calhoun and Andra Marziano to step in on an interim basis as head of school and head of upper school. After this school year, John will be moving to Maui to run a school there. John has a deep love for nature, the ocean, and whales, and I cannot imagine a more wonderful place for his next chapter. We wish him and his family all the very best. His contributions to BPC will last for many lifetimes...

Shalini Sharp
Chair, Board of Directors
(Sachin '23 and Rani '24)

2023 – 2024

Black Pine Circle Board of Directors

Shalini Sharp – Board Chair

Board Member and Advisor to Life Sciences Companies

Alper Atamturk

Earl J. Isaac Chair, Science & Analysis of Decision Making, Prof. & Dept Chair, Industrial Engineering & Operations Research, UC Berkeley

Nirav Bisarya

Managing Partner, Gen3 Ventures & Co-Founder, Coral EV

Mirna Cervantes

Executive Director, The Multicultural Institute (MI)

Max Christoff

Senior Director of Engineering, Chrome Browser (Google)

Dave Hoverman

Partner, Bain & Company

Katy Isa (Hakimian)

Criminal Defense Attorney, Law Office of Katherine Isa

Seema Jain

Medical Epidemiologist, CA Dept of Public Health

Sonia Katyal

Professor and Distinguished Traynor Chair, University of California, Berkeley School of Law

Christine Ma

Prof. of Pediatrics, UCSF, Med. Dir. for Encore Medical Clinic, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland, and Kerry's Kids

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Independent Consultant – Social Impact

Sabine O'Sullivan

Associate Producer, Pixar Animation Studio

Lukasz Strozek – Board Vice Chair

Chief Technology Officer, Hippo Insurance Inc.

Ryan Sullivan

Co-founder and CSO, Space Kinetic

Jase Turner

Assistant Head of School for Strategic Priorities, The Seven Hills School

Tony Wicks

Managing Director, Sovereign Consulting Services

Karen Zukor – Board Secretary

Statistics Consultant, World Health Organization

Our Parent Community

Black Pine Circle School is teeming with multi-talented, creative, and engaged parents who are committed to building a strong sense of community through leadership and participation in school committees, events, and activities. The hard work of our dedicated parent volunteers provides invaluable support for our thriving school community.



PARENTCIRCLE

Parent Circle Committee

Parent Circle, BPC's parent association, facilitates parent involvement in the life of the school and acts as a bridge between parents and staff. Parent Circle is comprised of volunteer class representatives from each grade who meet regularly to plan school events, coordinate volunteer opportunities, and discuss relevant issues pertaining to the school.

2022 – 2023

Parent Circle Co-Chairs

Amy Ng, Chaylee Priete, and Robin Sease

Class Representatives

Kindergarten

Alex Hart
April Metzger
Ceylan Webster

1st grade

Chris Lillevand Hendricks
Joanna Phoenix

2nd grade

Lauren Arnault
Annie Reding

3rd grade

Inna Belogolovsky
Julia Katz

4th grade

Diva Chan
Amy F. Zheng

5th grade

Barbara Denianke
Myriah Rose
Matthew Specter

6th grade

Vivian Li
Amrish Patel
Rebekah Punak

7th grade

Sonal Bhujwala
Melissa Garcia
Elena Kaloyanova

8th grade

Frances Baca
Simone Hoelck
Darien Meyer
Sanjog Sikand
Jess Thayer

2023 – 2024

Parent Circle Co-Chairs

Judd Antin, Stacy Ham, Chris Lillevand Hendricks, and Cecily Vix

Class Representatives

Kindergarten

Lauren Arnault
Nikki Cheng
Kate Keleman

1st grade

Catherine Crump
Manuel Juarez
April Metzger
Ceylan Webster

2nd grade

Chris Lillevand Hendricks
Joanna Phoenix
Matthew Specter

3rd grade

Haiyan Huang
Dana Sandu

4th grade

Erin Lenhert
Thao Nguyen-Horowitz

5th grade

Glenn Chen
Missy Chen
Erika Chong Shuch
Amy Zheng

6th grade

Jennifer Baird
Julie Beck
Myriah Rose

7th grade

Mika Matsui
Erinn Nahid
Jennifer Wai-Kwun Toy

8th grade

Markley Bavinger
Melissa Garcia
Carolyn Gramstorff
Alex Hart
Elena Kaloyanova



Community Matters Committee

The Community Matters Committee develops and sustains partnerships with local community organizations such as Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (Harrison House), the Multicultural Institute, and Shorebird Park Nature Center (Annual Coastal Cleanup). The committee focuses on identifying meaningful volunteer opportunities for our students and families.

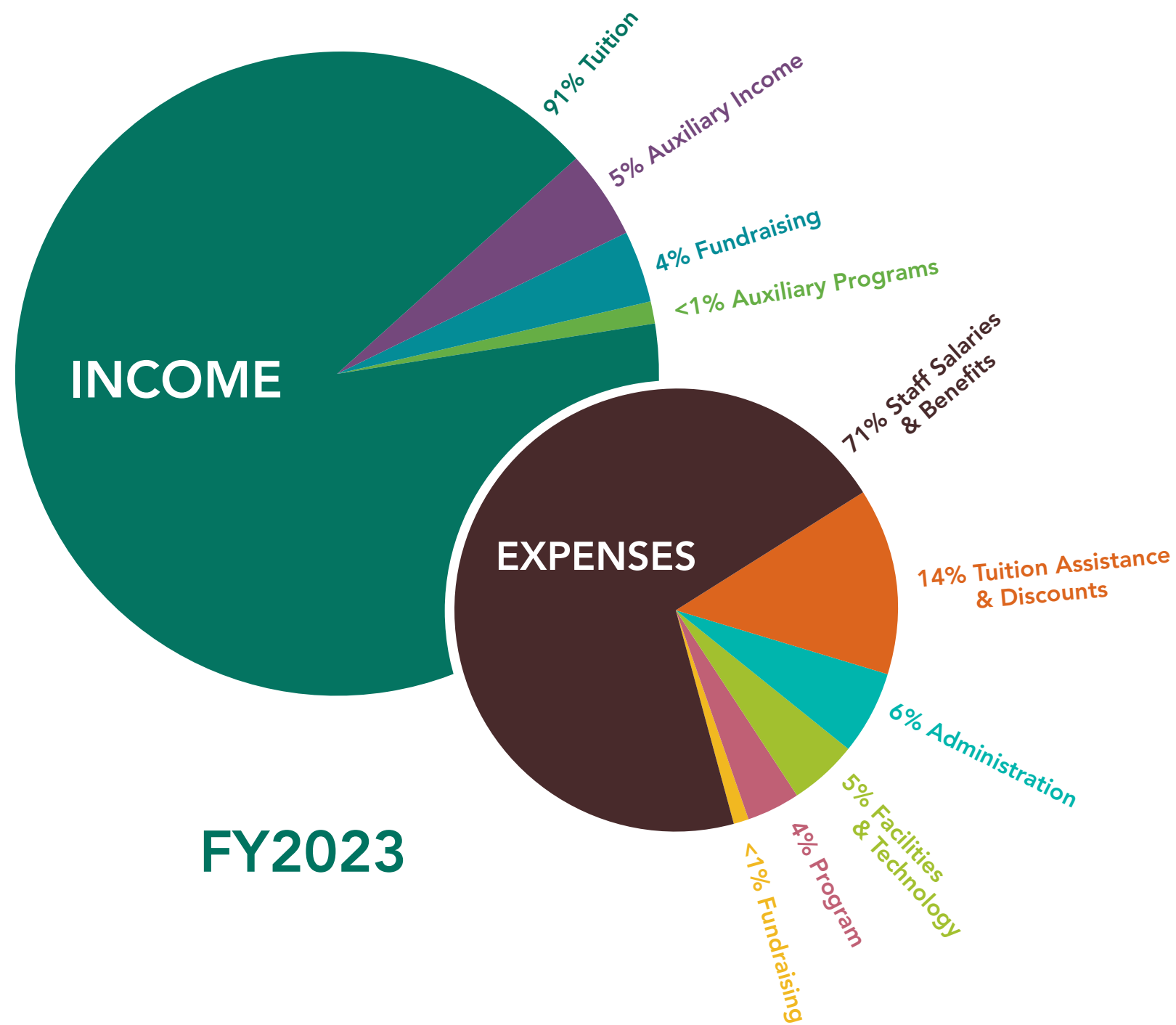
Community Matters Co-Chairs 2022 – 2023

Amy Ng and Vivian Li

Community Matters Co-Chairs 2023 – 2024

Vivian Li, Chris Lillevand Hendricks, and David Beiser





Our Financial Picture

Thanks to years of strong admissions and careful management, Black Pine Circle’s finances are on sound footing. The school budgets conservatively and has comparatively low debt. Being opportunistic, agile, and doing a lot with a little is a foundation that will serve BPC well as it enters a period of growth and expansion.

BPC’s budget is roughly \$12 million annually. The vast majority of expenses (71 percent) are related to staff salaries and benefits, which we are happy to report are now comparable or greater than the average for our peer schools. The school also invests generously in tuition assistance in order to attract and retain a range of families. It is typical for approximately 30 percent of families to receive assistance. Tuition is by far the largest revenue generator. Philanthropy plays a smaller, but essential role. Additional revenue results from a variety of other sources including our Extended Day Program (EDP), interest income, and fees.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS FY23 & FY24

Eric Sullivan
Chair

DeAndre Calhoun
Head of Upper School &
Assistant Head of School

John Carlstroem
Head of School

Brett Hazlett
Board Member

Dave Hoverman
BPC Parent

Alexis Kleinhans
Alum Parent

Shalini Sharp
Board Chair

Bill Shea
Chief Financial &
Operating Officer

Jase Turner
Board Member

Tony Wicks
Board Member





A SPACE FOR SCIENCE & INQUIRY

Realizing BPC's Future

In the summer of 2023, Black Pine Circle purchased two buildings immediately to the north of the Upper School campus on 7th Street and University. 2010 7th is a large brick warehouse that used to be known as "Big Hydro." 844 University was formerly a garden store. These acquisitions fit squarely within BPC's Master Plan and strategic objectives. They represent a unique, generational opportunity for a school with big ambitions but a small footprint. Combined, the structures currently comprise 6,400 square feet.

The spaces are currently being used for offices, a faculty lounge, meeting space, and storage. Visioning and planning are underway to determine what is needed to convert these spaces for the direct benefit of students. These are early stages and there are many moving pieces. As things come into greater focus, the school leadership will reveal more of its thinking, invite community input, and embark on an effort to turn ambition into reality. Stay tuned!



Loving and Supporting Our School: The Annual Fund Campaign

July 1, 2022 – February 15, 2024

The following alphabetical list includes everyone who made a gift to the Annual Fund Campaign (AFC) during this period. It includes current parents, board members, former board members, alum parents, alumni, grandparents, faculty and staff, business partners, and extended family members and friends. Donors who have given three years running are so noted, as are our wonderful faculty.

The AFC is BPC's highest philanthropic priority, making up four to five percent of our school's overall budget. Among other things, it makes possible our robust tuition assistance and professional development programs – helping to keep our community diverse and intact, and our teachers challenged and rewarded. The AFC benefits every child in every classroom, which is why we ask every family to make BPC their "charity of choice" and make a meaningful gift every year.

The Role of Major Giving at BPC

Critically important for the success of the AFC each year are Major and Leadership Donors. Major Donors are defined as those giving \$1,000 or more per year. Leadership Donors contribute \$5,000 or more. We recognize our biggest donors every fall with the "Major Donor and Leadership Party" and in other ways. It is typical for BPC to have 30 or more families give at the Leadership level every year.

The Spring Soirée is another way to support our school. Though auction purchases do not count toward our AFC goals or recognition, they are a valuable source of revenue. That said, "Raising the Paddle" at the Soirée does count toward AFC goals. This year's Soirée is on Saturday, May 11 on campus. The theme is "All that Jazz."

If you would like to make an online gift now, visit:

blackpinecircle.org/donate

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS FY23 & FY24

- Katy Isa (Hakimian)**, Chair
- Nirav Bisarya**, Board Member
- Max Christoff**, Board Member
- David Fleck**, BPC Parent
- Liz Maw**, BPC Parent
- John Ormsby**, Director of Development
- Shalini Sharp**, Board Chair



DONOR CIRCLES

LEADERSHIP DONORS:

SOCRATES — 4 Donors
Gifts of \$25,000 & above

ATHENA — 9 Donors
Gifts between \$10,000 & \$25,000

PLATO — 23 Donors
Gifts between \$5,000 & \$10,000

MAJOR DONORS:

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. — 26 Donors
Gifts between \$2,500 & \$5,000

LAO TZU — 56 Donors
Gifts between \$1,000 & \$2,500

SOJOURNER TRUTH — 52 Donors
Gifts between \$500 & \$1,000

ARISTOTLE — 124 Donors
Gifts up to \$500

The following alphabetical list includes everyone who made an Annual Fund gift between the dates of July 1, 2022 and February 15, 2024. Families who have yet to give, or who may wish to support BPC further, will have wonderful opportunities to do so, including at the Spring Soirée in May.

Laurie Abrams-Hall
Katie & Marcelo Alba
Kristin & Matthew Aldrich
Abbi Alemu & Chris Knopick ‡
Tanveer Alibhai & Zahoor Kareem *
Corinne Allen *
Deidre & Timothy Alley
Judd & Tamar Antin ‡
Max Factor & Jane Arnault
Lauren Arnault & David Fleck ‡
Alexander & Rebecca Ashton ‡
Nilgun & Alper Atamturk ‡
Catherine Atcheson & Christian Fritze ‡
Bill Press & Elana Auerbach ‡
Frances Baca ‡
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Vera & Felice Balarin ‡*
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Dazzle & Sonal Bhujwala ‡
Heather Birks & Jonathan Beamer ‡
Chetana & Nirav Bisarya ‡
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Ryan Carver & Rae Brune
Wendy Buffett & Joel Kreisberg ‡
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Deandre Calhoun ‡*
Megan Carlos & Cruz Carlos Jr ‡
Missy & Glenn Chen
Nikki Cheng & Andrew Sellergren
Shanta Cherla & Kumar Upadhyay ‡
Fan Chew & Nic Tan
Lydia Chow *
Emily Mackil & Max Christoff ‡
Kristian Clemens
Torin Coffino *
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Kanoelani Connor *
Betsy Cory *
Catherine Crump & Bryson Bennett
Thomas & Elliott Cussins ‡
Eliane Trepagnier & Andrew DeMond
Kwame & Barbara Denianke
Shruti & Kashyap Deorah
Milana Dolezal & Matthew Smith
Diego Carretero-Frades &
Irenka Dominguez-Pareto ‡
Tracy Dooley ‡
Elisa Dumesnil & Jay Momet

Lucas & Urvi Dunnington
Rachel Durling & Michael Papciak
Sally & Terry Eagle
Jennifer & Aaron Edlin ‡
Erica Tanov & Steven Emerson
Jacqueline & Greg Emerson ‡
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Nathaniel Emodi
Setareh Siavash & Ehsan Ettehadieh
Mark & Ivana Fedor ‡
Michael Feferman *
Wendell & April Ferguson ‡
Stefan Finsterle & Yingqi Zhang
Brennan Fischer *
LaTrina & Peter Franklin
Bradley Froehle & Corinne Scown ‡
Naya & Oliver Fross
Jacob & Freya Fuchs
Aida Garcia-Pons *
Caroline & Daniel Gershwin ‡
Barbara Gertz & Joe Sinha
Ahna Girshick & Scott Snibbe
Bethany Goldblum
Rachel Gomez & Niall Battson
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Margarita & Zach Gordon
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Katy & Tony Hakimian ‡
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Kathy Henderson & Greg Gholson ‡
Chris & Jeff Hendricks
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April Higashi ‡
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Janice Hui & Dan Rohn ‡
Christina Jack
Seema Jain & Jacek Skarbinski ‡
Sandy Jensen

‡ indicates three years giving
* indicates faculty/staff



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 Liz Maw & Gabriel Rogin ‡
 Cecilia Mayer
 Inna Belogolovsky & Boris Mazniker ‡

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Apple Matching Gifts Program

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Chevron

Cisco Corporation

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 Jana & Chris Oliver
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 Matt Johnson
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 Ann Reding & Ajay Krishnan ‡
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 Lothar Schubert & Akemi Nojima ‡
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 Tara Steele & Jay Shapiro

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 Karen Sumner ‡
 Cheryl Sumsion *
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 Wendy Symon ‡
 Elisa Tamarkin & Mark Goble
 Yuko Tanaka & Quentin Falconer
 Isabelle Tanov
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 Jessica Tillery ‡
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 Bette Tsai & Tom Silverstrim
 Annie Tsong & Jeffrey Kim ‡
 Jase Turner ‡
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 Tommy Wallace ‡
 Bonnie & Richard Wang ‡
 Haiyan Huang & Weigang Wang ‡
 Dina Weinselbaum & Craig McAmis
 Erica Michelstein & Ari Weinstein ‡
 Lisa Woo & Eric Westervelt ‡
 Matthew White & Sarah Holzman ‡
 Carla & Tony Wicks
 Ke Williams ‡*
 Sandra Williams-Hamp & Tim Hamp ‡
 Diane & Joshua Wirtschafter
 Micah Brenner & Stacey Wisnia ‡
 Tiffany Wiyono *
 Greta & Gary Wong *
 Shanthy Kappagoda & Aaron Woolsey
 Caitrin & Walker Wright
 Will DeVries & Joyce Wu ‡
 Suzie Wu & Fred Liao ‡
 Fei Xu
 Rong He & Min Xu

Xiaoyan Xu & Marc Fletcher *
 Monica Xu *
 Kari & Gen Yasuda ‡
 Eugenia Yu & John Belliveau-Flores
 Fang Zheng & Charles Wu

‡ indicates three years giving
 * indicates faculty/staff

The preceding gifts were received between July 1, 2022 and February 15, 2024. Every effort has been made to ensure that the list is complete and accurate. To report any errors or omissions, please contact Director of Development John Ormsby at

jormsby@blackpinecircle.org



Where Do BPC Students Continue Their Education After Graduation?

BPC students are very well-prepared for high school, and are reported to be highly engaged in their learning. About 40% of our graduates attend East Bay public schools and the other 60% attend local independent and parochial schools. Head of Upper School DeAndre Calhoun, who has many years of experience in high school counseling, offers to meet with every eighth-grade family at the beginning of their eighth-grade year to support each student's journey in finding the high school that is the best fit for them.

Bay Area High Schools

Albany High
Bentley School
Berkeley High
Bishop O'Dowd
Drew School
El Cerrito High
Head-Royce
Lick-Wilmerding
Marin Academy
Maybeck High
Miramonte High
Oakland School of the Arts
Oakland Tech
Piedmont High
Salesian College Preparatory
St. Mary's College High School
The Athenian School
The Branson School
The College Preparatory School
Urban School of San Francisco

Universities

BPC students attend a number of highly regarded universities; many remain in California choosing to attend University of California schools.

American University
Amherst College
Art Institute of Chicago
Bennington College
Brandeis
Brown
Cal Poly Pomona
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
California State University, Monterey Bay
Case Western Reserve University
Chapman
Chico State University
Colby College
Colgate University
Colorado College
Cornell University
Cuesta College
DePaul University
Drexel University
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Georgetown

Gonzaga
Grinnell College
King's College, London
Lehigh University
Lewis and Clark
Loyola Marymount University
Macalester College
Middlebury
Montana State
New York University
Northeastern
Northwestern
Oberlin
Oregon Institute of Technology
Pitzer College
Puget Sound University
Reed College
San Diego State University
San Francisco State University
San Jose State University
Scripps College
Seattle University
Skidmore College
Sonoma State University
Southern Methodist University
St. Andrews (Scotland)
St. Mary's College of California
Stanford
Trinity University, San Antonio

Tufts University
Tulane
University of British Columbia
University of California, Davis
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Los Angeles
University of California, Merced
University of California, San Diego
University of California, Santa Barbara
University of California, Santa Cruz
University of Chicago
University of Colorado, Boulder
University of Denver
University of Illinois
University of Montana
University of Oregon
University of Pennsylvania
University of Richmond
University of Southern California
University of Vermont
University of Washington
Vassar College
Villanova University
Washington University (St. Louis)
Wellesley
Wesleyan University
Wheaton College (MA)
Willamette University



Voices of Appreciation for John Carlstroem from Members of the BPC Community



Tanveer Alibhai
Head of Lower School
2020 – current

From singing at the Addison gate with his guitar, to welcoming children and families on Friday mornings, and to the fist bumps and jokes, John's presence at Black Pine Circle School will be sorely missed. The energy, warmth, and connections he makes with students, families, and faculty are part of the 'magic' that is behind who we are at BPC.

In my time in independent schools, John is the Head of the School who continually pushes faculty to reflect and innovate, sharing ideas and always researching the latest and greatest educational trends. He has been integral to defining who we are and what academic excellence looks like by promoting professional development for all teachers, working in collaboration with DeAndre and me to put Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice at the forefront of BPC's strategic plan, and ensuring that we attract and retain the best and brightest faculty. Perhaps the most striking characteristics of John's leadership are how he values relationship building and his empathetic ear. He understands how the needs of parents and children and the complexity of the world we live in, impact us as educators.

Even throughout the pandemic, Mr. C always had the brightest smile for everyone. His smile shone so brightly even through the masks. We couldn't have made it without the high-fives and loads of encouragement. While the rest of the world was dark and bleak, Mr. C made sure that BPC was an oasis and at the forefront of community, joy, and light. We take that joy with us. BPC won't ever be the same without you. May you never doubt your imprint on the community you leave behind.

– The Persleys: Miriam, Phillip, Sirena '2022, & Evan



John is a visionary leader with big ideas, an out-of-the-box thinker with an inspiring ability to bring others along. His leadership style models to the faculty and staff the value of risk-taking, learning from mistakes (which John likes to say is "always an option"), and dreaming big! This echoes in the ethos of the school. John is leaving behind a wonderful legacy of honoring teachers while staying ahead of the curve in curriculum development and thinking creatively.



Maria Palmer
6th Grade English Teacher
1993 – current

When I first came to BPC in 1993, things were a bit different: school was like a small business without standardized norms. My contract was written in felt tip pen on computer paper, salaries were determined willy nilly, and faculty meetings often went on well into the night. When John Carlstroem came to BPC in 2005, he turned BPC's ship around. Keeping the best parts of a school devoted to music, math, and academic excellence, John brought our school into the daylight, instituting a robust HR department and business office, a salary scale, and regular meetings for divisions and the whole faculty (that ended before 5pm!)

As a scientist, John has always been interested in our environment and was a big supporter when I began an intra-school climate network (Climate Positive Student Network) two and a half years ago. John jumped in wholeheartedly, putting our group of students from five Bay Area schools on the radar of other independent schools and meeting with us once a week, fanning the fires of our students' enthusiasm for doing something about climate change. John's devotion to science, his setting BPC's keel in the water by getting the school accredited and creating uniform standards, his inspiration and hard work in building our exciting Q Labs, and his warmth and humor have made BPC one of the best K–8 schools in the Bay Area. John is a "mensch;" he has been a wonderful captain of our ship, and he will be sorely missed.

Hey Mr. Carlstroem! It was always so much fun having you sing or rally the crowd at our school performances. Although it's been a long time, my time with BPC is something I still hold close to my heart. In case you're wondering, I'm still very close friends with Andy Zhang and Jackson Wong! Best wishes on your future endeavors!

– Jonathan Keung '17

DeAndre Calhoun
Head of Upper School
Assistant Head of School
2018 – current



With great admiration and celebration, we honor the remarkable legacy of our esteemed Head of School, John Carlstroem, as he embarks on a new chapter in his illustrious career following an exceptional 19-year tenure, during which I had the privilege of working with this visionary leader for six years.

Throughout his tenure, John has demonstrated extraordinary stewardship, particularly evident during the daunting challenges of the pandemic. Under his guidance, our school has achieved significant growth, nurturing a vibrant community where authenticity thrives – a testament to his unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. John's genuine concern for every member of our community has earned him the reputation of a "pastoral" leader who prioritizes genuine connections and inclusivity. His willingness to take risks and recruit talented individuals who might not otherwise have had opportunities elsewhere has further enriched our institution.

His steadfast dedication to prioritizing the student experience, fostering innovation, and infusing joy into our rigorous academic environment is admirable. While John's departure marks the end of an era, we are confident that his profound impact will continue to resonate, enriching the lives of countless students and staff in his future endeavors. John will always be held in high esteem, and his legacy of excellence will serve as an enduring source of inspiration for us all.

Appreciation from BPC's Former Board Chairs

Peter Wong
Board Chair, 2016 – 2022
(Jackson '17 and Daniel '21)

John never stopped thinking about how to create more education and play space for the kids. From adding 'vertical' space with a climbing wall to adding the turf field by acquiring property on Addison Street and moving administrative offices there, he was always captaining the "Space Force." BPC even acquired a house across from the lower school as a 'chess piece' for other potential expansion moves, and that created more administrative elbow room and served as a health center during the chaotic pandemic years, until we sold it to focus on better properties.

The crowning glory during my tenure on the Board was the renovation of the Athena Building and the creation of the Q Lab as a dedicated space for STEM learning. That was a game changer for the school and the campus experience. Even the Q Lab name came from John – he always wanted the students to keep asking really good questions. And now, Black Pine Circle is expanding towards University Avenue with big ideas about how to further optimize the campus and learning environment.

Thanks, John, for setting the right course for the BPC ship!
Bon Voyage on your next great adventure!

Eric Sullivan
Board Chair, 2006 – 2016
(Ryan '09, Maeve '12 and Hayley '15)

When I reflect on John's nearly two decades as leader of the school, two words come to mind: transformative and inspirational. When John took over as leader of BPC, the school was in a period of uncertainty in many important areas. Enrollment and stakeholder morale fluctuated wildly from year to year. The school's financial situation was precarious. John led the effort to transform the school into what we know today—a well-managed and beloved community, where all stakeholders work together to create a rigorous and compassionate learning environment for everyone.

John was able to achieve so much because he is a truly inspirational leader. He gently pushes all of us to be our best. But he recognizes that we all need encouragement, training, clear communication, and lofty but achievable goals. John inspires us to want to learn and work together to create a school that is exceptional in every category. He is one of the best leaders I have had the pleasure to partner with in my decades of board work with organizations of all types. John's gifted leadership will benefit BPC long into the future.

Dave Kellert
Board Chair, 2001 – 2006
(Kathy '02 and Scott '04)

Over 20 years ago, I was tasked with forming a search committee for the new director of Black Pine Circle. This person would be the first director to be neither a founder of the school, nor someone chosen directly by a school founder.

After a couple of months of searching, we had a reasonable candidate but not someone we could get ecstatic over. Then, just as we were about to close the process down, John Carlstroem decided to throw his hat into the ring (I suspect he had just had a very bad week commuting to SF and a commute to Berkeley suddenly looked very attractive!)

Once the search committee had a chance to meet John and get familiar with his qualifications, it became what I considered a classic no-brainer decision. I continued on the BPC board for several years to make sure John's transition went smoothly. During those years I thought we'd be lucky to get five years, or maybe ten at most, out of John. I never dreamed he'd stay at BPC for close to 20 years! Now, looking back over the growth in the school's student body and facilities, I can see how fortunate we were to have John at the helm for a couple of decades.

And looking forward, I only wish John the best for his future endeavors in what I consider the real "Happiest Place on Earth" – Maui!

If you think about the pedagogic ingredients in BPC's secret sauce several things come to mind: the school's thoughtful, iterative approach to curriculum development and its unique, Socratic method of teaching and learning. Also, its investment, giving teachers time to collaborate and learn new skills. And, of course, the care and passion of its teachers and administrators.

But underlying all that for nearly two decades has been the unique mix of empathy and inquiry exhibited by John Carlstroem. Whether it's greeting kids while playing his guitar or leading a robust discussion, John every day models blending empathic goodness with knowledge and exploration. To me, John's openness and sense of fun while getting students or adults to probe ideas and issues are the key ingredients in BPC's secret Socratic sauce.

Mr. C's example and legacy, I'm sure, will live on at BPC as he gets ready to bring his formidable talents to the good people of Maui. But we'll miss you, John!

– Eric Westervelt, Olivia '23

There was a funny Thirty Rock episode on religion where Tina Fey shared, "I just do whatever Oprah tells me to do." Our family used to joke that we just listen to John! Between our two boys, we had five years at BPC and John always had such brilliant learning and parenting advice. He shared his warmth and wisdom and always with humor and authenticity.

– The Happoldt, Whitehill Family:
Ingrid, Bob, Connor '18,
& Diego '16



Appreciation from BPC's Former Teachers & Staff



Madeline King
K – 3rd Music Teacher
1997 – 2020

John Carlstroem. Where do I even begin? I have known John, or JC as he is fondly called, for many many years. As a music teacher at BPC for 25 years, and head of the music department for much of that time, I was in my eighth year of teaching when John came on board. I was actually on the board of directors at that time, and was one of those who “voted” for him to be our next head of school. John was, from day one, a charismatic, kind, and intelligent leader. And he has always had a clear and firm commitment to the arts.

His dedication to the music department impressed me. He held onto some of the precious traditions that were passed down to him, such as music being taught K–8, while forging ahead to make improvements for the better in the music program. Under John’s direction, when we sadly and unexpectedly lost our band teacher, Ken Durling, we were so fortunate to find Mr. Kennedy to lead the band program, and John has been instrumental (no pun intended!) in helping to support and shape the band program into the hugely popular and successful program that it is today. The music department further blossomed under John’s leadership with the introduction of the lower school Orff program, in addition to our unique strings program being part of the lower school curriculum.

Being a musician himself, John has always loved nothing more than singing and playing his guitar, whether at an assembly, an all-school concert, or the Parent & Staff Music & More Showcase. My personal favorite was the lower school holiday sing-along just before winter break. When John would join in, singing and playing his guitar, the kids loved it! I remember each school year would begin with a “cheesy song” written by JC, and performed along with other BPC music teachers, in honor of the school theme he had chosen for that year.

John would always make time, listen intently, and offer up answers or suggestions when I went to him with questions. I was always so grateful for that. Thank you, John. You are a true gift.

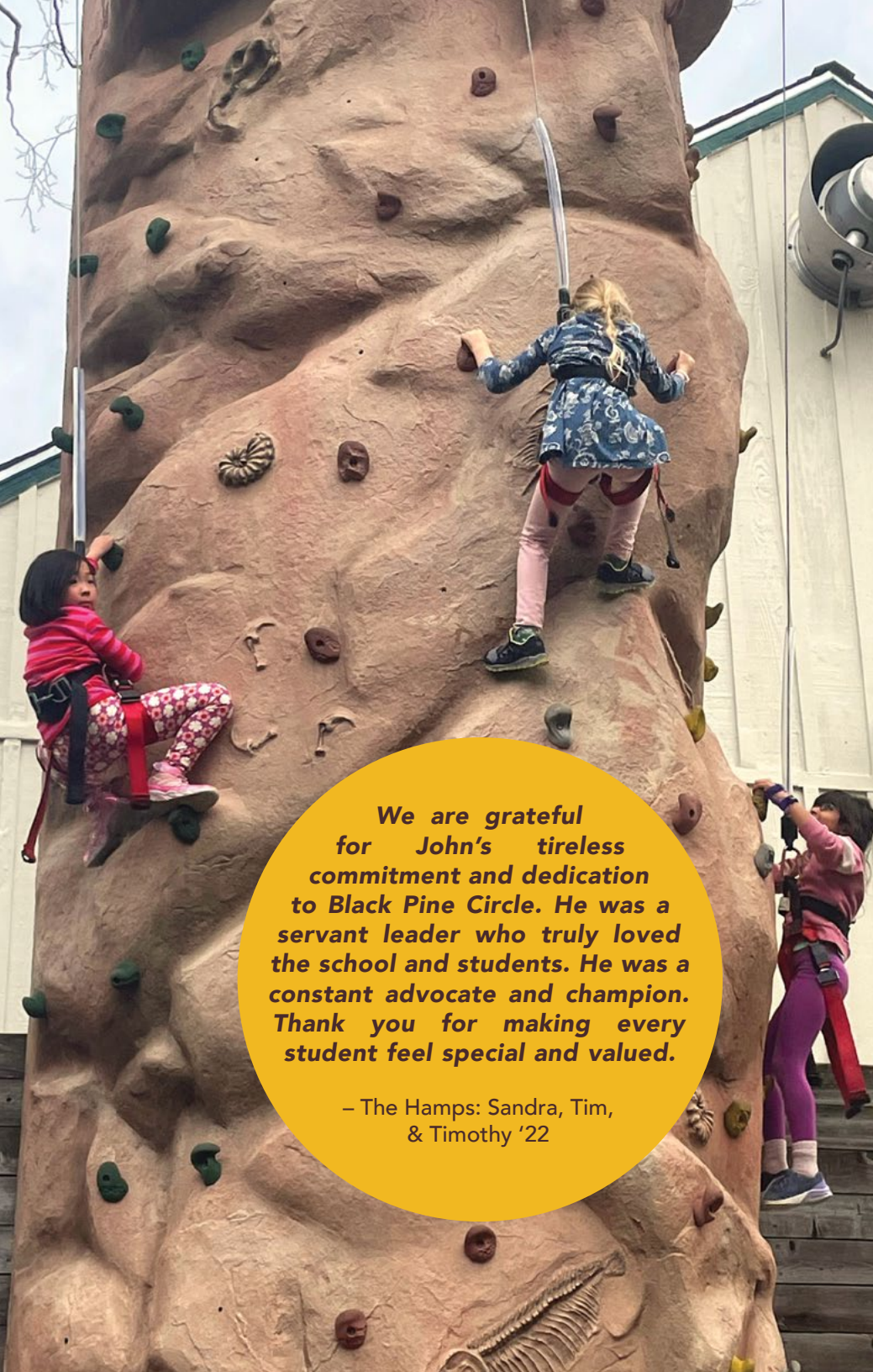
Laura Wolff
Head of Lower School
1996 – 2016

When John came to BPC to meet the staff and be interviewed, as Head of Lower School I had the opportunity to meet with him one-on-one. He asked me if I could have one wish for something BPC should invest in, what would that be? I was very proud of the BPC staff, curriculum, and the community of great families but one thing we were lacking was a more creative approach to developing open space for the students. Green space was challenging to find even with our great gardening program!

Within a few years, in response to our outdoor space constraints, John had the brilliant idea of creating “vertical space” by having a climbing wall erected on the upper school campus which continues to this day to be enjoyed by all students, kindergarten through eighth grade. Following that, John encouraged the Board to acquire the large backyard of our neighbor on 7th Street at Addison and fence it in to create a safe, fun play area for all the students during P.E. and recess. The upper school’s garden and eating area, with the later addition of the chicken coop, also provided a new and improved use of the space.

Over the years, since my retirement, I have visited the school and continue to be impressed with all the outdoor improvements that John has championed over the years, including murals and inspiring play spaces like the Oasis on the lower school campus.

I am grateful that John had a vision for what the school could look like and how it could better serve its community!



We are grateful for John’s tireless commitment and dedication to Black Pine Circle. He was a servant leader who truly loved the school and students. He was a constant advocate and champion. Thank you for making every student feel special and valued.

– The Hamps: Sandra, Tim, & Timothy ‘22

Catalina Lacy
Upper School Spanish Teacher
1991 – 2022



When I think of John Carlstroem, many commendatory adjectives come to mind. One of the adjectives that stands out is “innovative.” John’s relentless pursuit of innovation to meet the continuously evolving needs of the students and his commitment to transform planned and unexpected events into learning opportunities have been among his most notable contributions to the Black Pine Circle School community.

John’s strong support of teachers’ professional growth has impacted faculty and students alike. I had the invaluable opportunity to study during one summer in Salamanca, Spain, and that experience, in addition to the international Spanish language trips I led to Costa Rica and Mexico for our eighth-graders, opened a cultural door for me that allowed me to teach with even more cultural awareness. This, in turn, transformed the educational language experiences for the students.

As I reflect on the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that John’s visionary leadership and his determination to embrace the challenges that it presented him, were the determining factors of BPC successfully navigating the path through the pandemic. During those years, the teachers and the staff did their very best to adapt their teaching practices but the person who successfully kept the BPC boat afloat was John Carlstroem.

John, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for all the support and encouragement that you extended to me during my time of need. Your legacy of innovation will continue to inspire the BPC community for years to come. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors!

Appreciation from BPC's Former Board Members



Randi Lee
Board Member 2008 – 2014
(Olivia '12 and Connor '14)

During my time as a BPC parent and board member, John and I worked on several significant initiatives that helped make BPC what it is today. There are results you can see, like the Q Lab, athletic field, expanded middle school, and tech infrastructure. However, the most treasured memories lie in the subtler, often unseen facets of John's

leadership: the meetings (many over coffee at Tomato Cafe) with faculty, staff, students, board members, neighbors, and alumni families, as John worked tirelessly to include every voice in the vision for the school; the financial sustainability that's been achieved through hard conversations, planning, sacrifice, and discipline from the entire community; the vibrant community itself, built flipping pancakes together for school events, attending evening meetings in the lower school library and FAD, and in living rooms planning fundraisers. John was always there, and always present – at the lower school gate in the morning, at school events nights and weekends, chaperoning field trips, and on the stage, singing with guitar in hand.

BPC is here for the long term, preserving its core values and the spirit that make it truly special. That's thanks to my friend John's vision, inclusion, tenacity, and heart. It was a privilege to be part of it. I am grateful to him and also to Natasha and Marina for their dedication and commitment through the ups and downs. Their impact, both seen and unseen, will ring through the halls at BPC for many years to come!

When I think of Mr. Carlstroem, the first memory that comes to mind is when he was teaching my class how to say his name. He was on the stage in the theater with his guitar and he told us to remember his name by saying, 'car' like driving your car, the letter 'L', and 'strum' where he proceeded to strum his guitar. I always enjoyed when he would have us say it along with him. In general Mr. C has the best energy that lights up a room and demands your attention. When I was at BPC he was so friendly and fun to talk to and I always felt a sense of comfort around him. I also remember watching The Matrix in his philosophy class. Fun times.

– Alexandra Jones '17



Paci Seeds of Change Day

Black Pine Circle School alumni grandparent, Mary Paci, came into our school and changed it for good, forever. Ms. Paci, a valued member of the BPC Board of Directors, provided our school with several significant matching gifts to encourage families to support the Annual Fund Campaign and then later the Campaign for the Q Lab. Ms. Paci was particularly motivated to support BPC's tuition assistance efforts to benefit historically oppressed and economically challenged families. Her most generous donations signaled a new and essential era of BPC philanthropy that has allowed our school to say "YES!" to families who belong here, but may be facing the hurdles of adversity.

In 2017 the board and administrative team dedicated our annual "Service to the Community Day" to Mary, and renamed it "Paci Seeds of Change Day" in her honor. Ms. Paci believes that we can plant the proverbial "seeds of positive change" together and tend these new growth areas, while they bear wonderful fruit in perpetuity. BPC remains forever grateful for all the wisdom, grace, and role modeling that she gave to our community.



– John Carlstroem, Head of School



Mary Paci
Board Member 2013 – 2017
& BPC Alumni Grandparent
(Adriana '13 and Nora' 17)

It is a privilege for me to write about John Carlstroem. My granddaughters, Adriana and Nora Furlong, attended Black Pine Circle during John's tenure as Head of School. I got to know John personally during these years and quickly began to feel a bond with this visionary man who cared so profoundly

for the school. It was an honor when I was asked to become a member of the Board of Directors. I took my position seriously, and appreciated being able to serve during Eric Sullivan's time as Chair, and later under Peter Wong.

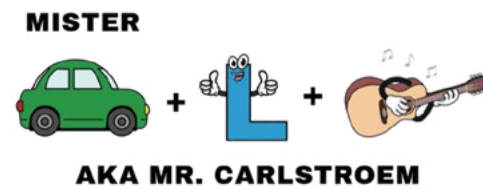
The Q Lab was beginning to see the light of day during this time and came to fruition in 2017. It was my privilege to propose a matching gift that would encourage BPC families to contribute and to appreciate the benefit of philanthropic giving.

John's vision, energy, creativity, dedication, magnetism, ability to listen, infectious smile and laugh combined with his kindness and generosity of soul, were always very evident to me. The students are first and foremost the great beneficiaries of these qualities in John – and of course the parents and grandparents of those students – as are the faculty and the staff. All the times I visited the school, either to drop off my granddaughters in the morning or pick them up after school, or to attend an event or a board meeting, I could feel the influence of John's impact on the school. We have all been enriched by this great man and we will miss him dearly as he moves on to his new adventure in Maui. But I know that the students and the entire community of the school will be richer for having had John Carlstroem among them.



Head of School John Carlstroem's Legacy

John Carlstroem was captain of the ship, BPC, from 2005 – 2024. He will be remembered for his steadfast commitment to our school's mission, and for truly embodying our core values of Curiosity, Community, Inquiry, and Voice. A heartfelt thank you to Mr. C for all that he did to help BPC mature into the wonderful school it is today. We wish him all the best for his next adventure!



Black Pine Circle School Annual Report 2022 – 2024
Produced by Lesley Jones and John Ormsby
Designed by Lisa Dahl



Finding only one memory to encompass how much joy Mr. C brought to my time at BPC is extremely difficult. I have an image in my head of Mr. C always being super charismatic and encouraging whenever I saw him around the school. I'm wishing him good luck at his new school, but he will be missed here in the Bay!

– Matt Garrison '15
Mergers and Acquisitions
Research Analyst





CURIOSITY | COMMUNITY | INQUIRY | VOICE

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