



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL WINS NATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD**

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education (CSEE) awarded The Athenian School, a distinctive San Francisco Bay Area college preparatory day and boarding school recognized for its innovative, challenging curriculum and unique programs, the prestigious 2007 Community Service Award for Athenian's excellent integration of community service into its academic curriculum. CSEE is a non-profit organization that supports the moral and spiritual development of young people by providing resources and educational opportunities to elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education presents the Community Service Award once a year to a CSEE member school. The focus of this year's award was "Integration with Academics."

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education was founded in 1898 as an outreach of the Young Men's Christian Association. The organization separated from the YMCA by the middle of the 20th century, and became known as the Council for Religion in Independent Schools (CRIS). The acronym CRIS was changed to CSEE in the mid-1990s, as the United States was becoming increasingly pluralistic religiously and as an increasing number of non-religiously affiliated schools sought membership because of the quality of programs offered for moral development and ethical leadership. Today, CSEE, which has approximately 300 member schools, fulfills its mission by developing and providing programs and resources for moral and spiritual development; moral leadership, community service, ethics, and character education; exploration of students' religious heritages and the sacred dimensions of their lives; and the study of religions and inter-religious understanding.

Athenian competed with other independent schools from around the United States that are members of the Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education. CSEE awarded Athenian the Community Service Award for

its exceptional integration of service into academics, but also as a result of three other components that fits closely with CSEE's stance on moral development and how it is best fostered in schools:

1. The program is visibly and audibly supported and encouraged by the school's administration.
2. Service is addressed squarely in the school's mission, which embraces "service as a way of life," and aims specifically at the principles of democratic governance, stewardship for the environment, and respect for human dignity.
3. Service and the development of student leadership skills are integrated; students take increasingly large and independent roles in their service to the community as they progress through Athenian, to the extent that some juniors and seniors lead group projects for younger students.

The philosophy of The Athenian School is guided by a strong belief in the promise of young people to shape a better world. When Dyke Brown founded The Athenian School in 1965, he modeled the school after Periclean Athens and the full development of each citizen—thus, intellectual growth, fitness of body and character, commitment to humane values, aesthetic sensitivity, and readiness for adult citizenship and leadership are Athenian's objectives for each student. An education in the qualities of good citizenship and leadership is integral to participation in the Athenian community, and the school's community service program has been at the core of the curriculum since the school welcomed its first students.

Because community service is a key component of Athenian's philosophy, it is also naturally an integral component of the school's curriculum, which places an emphasis on experiential learning. A key tenet of the educational approach at Athenian is that lessons learned through community involvement are as important as those learned in the classroom, so completion of the school's community service program is a requirement for graduation.

Gabe Del Real, Curriculum Coordinator and Humanities faculty member, explains that "Community Service requirements have become a recent enthusiasm in education. At Athenian, service has been at the core of the curriculum from its inception. If, at the end of their time here, students have begun to discover the gifts they have and how they can use those gifts to make a better world, then we have been successful in our enterprise with them."

Successful completion of each year's community service program is essential at Athenian in both the Middle School (grades 6 to 8) and the Upper School (grades 9 to 12). The primary goals of the program are to:

- Develop students' citizenship skills, including their ability to analyze and advocate for a social issue and to take leadership to address community needs
- Develop ongoing relationships between students and persons different from themselves; develop students' respect for the dignity of all persons

- Make a substantive difference in communities through reciprocal relationships with non-profit organizations and government agencies
- Inculcate service as a way of life
- Foster civic virtues such as integrity, courage, responsibility, and compassion
- Invigorate the core curriculum by providing a meaningful context for students to understand and utilize classroom learning

Middle School community service projects include student government, dish crew, weekly campus clean-up, fundraisers and more. Middle School students also do independent service work throughout the year as community volunteers; they have cleaned the Hayward shoreline, worked at food banks, and volunteered at an assisted living facility. Chris McCulloch, Middle School Dean of Students and faculty member, explains, “Dyke Brown, Athenian’s founder, envisioned community service as a key component to an education that stresses not only academics, but also personal development and awareness of the surrounding world. It is in this same spirit that we ask our current students to involve themselves in their own communities and to lend a hand where there is a need. While community service is a school requirement, many of our students pursue it with a passion, motivated purely by their own desires to help others.”

The Upper School community service program is sequential, offering in-depth opportunities for service engagement. Freshman year emphasizes on-campus projects, and tenth graders may select from several off-campus activities. Service projects have included serving food to the homeless in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District; working with a special needs class at nearby Los Cerros Middle School; helping a Berkeley animal shelter to find safe and loving homes for pets; and organizing a Halloween Party for a shelter in Oakland. During grades 11 and 12, each student designs and completes an ongoing community service project.

With over 16,000 hours of service completed annually, Athenian Upper School students have also coordinated Athenian’s recycling program, taught a refugee to write, renovated the homes of the elderly, worked on a coastal clean-up, staffed a camp for students with severe skin diseases, and founded a non-profit aimed at inspiring urban youth. An Upper School student becomes a member of the *200 Hour Club* if he or she performs more than 200 hours of community service in a single academic year. Students in the *200 Hour Club* have this accomplishment noted on their school transcript; however, often the students who attain this distinction shy away from community recognition for their efforts.

In addition to the integration of community service into the school’s curriculum, Athenian has a Community Service Director on staff, as well as a student-driven Community Action Board (CAB) to help students become engaged in service. Mark Friedman has been the Community Service Director at Athenian for six years and he guides the school’s service learning initiative. He has led three Summer Institutes in service learning for Athenian faculty in recent years, with different faculty attending each year. These institutes help faculty to understand ways they can add more service

learning opportunities to Athenian students' classrooms, with integration into the arts, humanities, science, math, and foreign language departments.

In the same way that Athenian's mission reflects a commitment to educating young people to embrace "service as a way of life," the school's curriculum realizes this goal by offering service as a way of learning. Courses in the Math, Science, Foreign Language and Humanities departments all use this instructional strategy, known as service learning, to bring the academic curricula to life and to provide context for understanding classroom material.

Humanities faculty members Stephanie McGraw and April Smock restructured the tenth grade U.S. Studies class around current issues in American society—which include a component of taking action in the community on this issue. In the course, students work in groups focused on an issue of social inequity, such as racism or women's rights. The students track this issue through U.S. history, look at current events connected to the topic and also work with an organization focused on the issue.

Rebecca Bierlink and Michelle Capobres, also in the Humanities faculty, organize the ninth grade World Cultures class members into groups focused on specific religions. Within those groups, students complete service projects in partnership with a religiously-affiliated organization, which includes interviewing two members of that faith.

For the past three years, April Smock has led a complementary Interim trip with her Humanities course, which has enhanced and amplified the classroom lessons. In March 2006, her students traveled to New Orleans to help with Hurricane Katrina disaster relief. For the previous three years, her class volunteered with an organization called Peace Trees Vietnam. With this Interim trip, not only did her students observe first-hand the fields of conflict from more than thirty years ago, they also participated in a service project, raising funds to purchase and plant trees in the places land mines had formerly threatened local communities. As these examples demonstrate, analysis or conceptual knowledge is only part of the picture of being educated.

Faculty member Judy Harrod's Spanish 5 class during the 2005-06 academic year is another example of service learning in the classroom. An honors project was inspired by a play they read called *La Muerte y La Doncella (Death and the Maiden)* by Chilean author, Ariel Dorfman. The project challenged students to research a case of a young person who had "disappeared" or was executed during the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. Presentations highlighting human rights abuses during Chile's military dictatorship were shared with the school community during the Community Service Fair. Buttons were designed and sold to purchase citrus trees, which were planted on campus as a visible and lasting reminder to honor the lives of these victims.

Community service at Athenian is not just about doing good things. Similar to every other learning experience here, service is a self-directed one. Head of School, Eleanor Dase, shares, "From the start,

Athenian was a place for young people to discover who they were as individuals, what they were capable of and responsible for—as learners, as doers, as contributors to this community and many other communities they would belong to throughout their lives.” More than 40 years since its founding, The Athenian School remains true to this important mission.

***ABOUT THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL:*** The Athenian School is a distinctive San Francisco Bay Area college preparatory school, providing an outstanding education that is challenging, engaging, personal, interactive and international. With 457 students in grades six to 12, Athenian’s 75-acre campus lies at the base of Mt. Diablo in Danville, 32 miles east of San Francisco. The student to faculty ratio is an enviable 10:1 and the average class size is 15 students. The Athenian School is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the California Association of Independent Schools.

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