

# Public Charter School could join TR School District

By Kelly Stolpa

A public charter school may soon be coming to the Tomorrow River School District. A group of like-minded parents, with the support of the school board, is in the process of opening the Tomorrow River Community School, a Waldorf-inspired school in the Tomorrow River area.

The Tomorrow River Community School may still be in the planning stages, but founders Chamomile Nusz, Rebecca Towne, Shannon Korger, and Tina Giombetti are hopeful that the support they have received from the community and the schools will continue and eventually help them open the doors of the charter school. The founders recently completed an important part of the process of starting a charter school, which was getting 10 percent of the teachers in the Tomorrow River School District to sign a petition in support of the school. The next step was getting the school boards final approval.

In order to keep the community involved and informed, the founders will hold a public forum about the Tomorrow River Community School on Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 7 p.m. in the Amherst High School library. The forum will give community members and any interested parents the chance to ask questions and get more information.

The founders plan to open the school in time for the 2013-2014 school year. Initially, Tomorrow River Community School will house kindergarten through perhaps second grade, with the possibility of a Pre-K class as well. However, class size and grade levels will largely be determined by the community and parents' interests. As the students work their way through grade levels, the Tomorrow River Community School could eventually include grades up through sixth or eighth.

The Tomorrow River Community School is described as a Waldorf-inspired charter school, which focuses on a philosophy known as "whole child education." The first Waldorf School was started by Rudolf Steiner in post-World War I Germany, and takes its name from the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory that was its home. The first Waldorf School appeared in the United States in 1942, and in the 1990s the Urban Waldorf Elementary School of Milwaukee was founded. The Tomorrow River Community School's educational philosophy will be influenced by Waldorf Schools and other educational philosophies, such as Enki, that incorporate the arts into the classroom.

The founders hope a school adopting these philosophies will help "explore children's creative side in the younger years." According to their website, the founders "would like to develop a charter school with the realization that traditional school settings work well for most children, but not all." Teaching traditional lessons through stories and hands-on activities will hopefully benefit children who have different learning styles.

"We just know that we'd like our kids to be taught that way," says founder Tina Giombetti.

Mike Toelle, principal of Amherst Elementary, believes the Tomorrow River Community School has the potential to benefit the district in other ways, in addition to providing an alternative educational experience. "Hopefully those kids



"The founders of the Tomorrow River Community School from left to right: Chamomile Nusz, Shannon Korger and Tina Giombetti, not pictured Rebecca Towne."

would stay with us as a district," says Toelle. The charter school's philosophy is a good fit for parents who previously homeschooled their children, and it also has the potential to draw students from other districts in the state thanks to Wisconsin's open enrollment policy. The hope is that after attending Tomorrow River Community School, those students will continue on at Amherst Elementary, Middle School and High School. Toelle also points out that even if they don't, the tax dollars and grants brought in to the charter school could benefit the entire district.

Both Toelle and the founders want all the schools to work together to ensure the students will have no trouble transitioning from one school to another. Toelle says they are anticipating certain times when both schools will come together, such as activities at the Tomorrow River School Forest, so that students will be able to interact and work together.

Initially, there was some concern from teachers about the effect the charter school may have in the district. Toelle says a lot of the concern and confusion was cleared up by getting the school board's approval, which the founders actually did before they received all the signatures they needed from teachers. The founders also visited staff meetings to let teachers know what was going on, and how the charter school would be a benefit to the district. "Is there still some hesitation? Yes, there is," says Toelle. But communication was very helpful in eliminating a lot of the initial concern, he says.

The closest Waldorf School is as far as Milwaukee, and the founders have received a great deal of interest when they announced the possibility of a charter school in the Tomorrow River area. They are currently researching sites for the school in Nelsonville.

For more information about the Tomorrow River Community School, visit tomorrowrivercommunityschool.org, their Facebook page, or join the founders at their public forum on Friday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>.



**Robert Rausch** was presented a plaque and gift certificate at the February Amherst Business Association meeting. Bob served several years as the association's president and coordinated several of their events. The new president, Butch Pomeroy is on the left making the presentation. The Amherst Business Association has several new energized members. The Association meets quarterly at the Jensen Community Center. Sponsored events include the spring Rummage O Rama, Celebrate Amherst in September and the Amherst Village Christmas in early December. Additional events are being considered. Membership is open to anyone interested in enhancing and improving our business community.

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