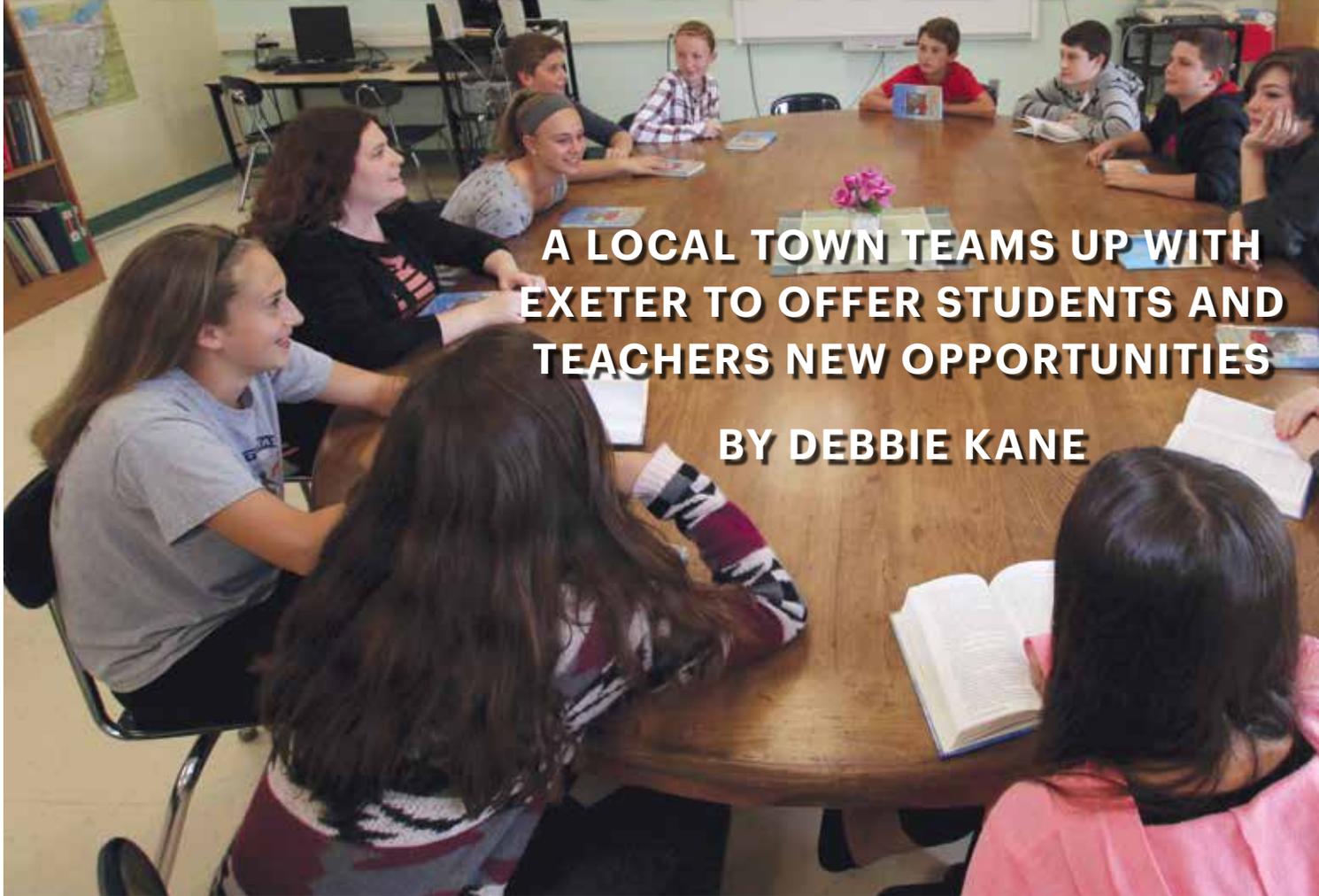


# HARKNESS IN THE COM



**A LOCAL TOWN TEAMS UP WITH EXETER TO OFFER STUDENTS AND TEACHERS NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

**BY DEBBIE KANE**

**Eighth-grade students in a Raymond Roundtables classroom.**

**R**aymond is a New England town in transition. Only 13 miles west of Exeter, it feels much farther away. Home to 10,000 residents, the community is rural but a commutable distance to larger New Hampshire cities such as Manchester and Portsmouth; the largest local employer is a Wal-Mart distribution center. Residents still greet one another on the town common for Raymond's annual July Fourth celebration, proud of its small-town character. Despite an influx of new residents in the past decade, the school district has limited resources to spend on academic enrichment.

John McDaniels, a retired investment lawyer and Raymond High School graduate, saw an opportunity to help. He wanted more Raymond students to have the opportunity to set and achieve high educational goals, including matriculating at competitive colleges and universities, like his alma mater, Brown. In 2007, he launched the Reach High Scholars Program, a nonprofit organization that helps provide direction and support to Raymond students, in part through collaboration with Exeter.

## **A ROAD MAP TO COLLEGE**

For seven years, Exeter has worked with Raymond teachers to offer Raymond Roundtables, a summer academic enrichment program for middle school and ninth-grade students in the town's public schools. Roundtables is a central initiative of the Reach High Scholars Program, which has

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CHRISTIAN HARRISON

recently taken over direction of the courses from Exeter.

Raymond High School now sends a greater percentage of graduates to competitive four-year colleges than most New Hampshire public schools. Dozens of Raymond High graduates attend such institutions as Brown, Dartmouth, Holy Cross, Hamilton and Skidmore; two have been named Fulbright scholars; and others are going on to top jobs and graduate programs. Most of them have received financial aid with minimal amounts of debt and need-based grants of up to \$62,000 per annum that, over four years, will have a total value of more than \$3.5 million.

This year, two former participants, Jon Lemay and Ginny Harmon, also alumni of Exeter's summer school (now known as Exeter Summer), returned to Exeter to teach in the program.

McDaniels attributes much of the program's success to the evolving partnership among Reach High, Exeter and the Raymond schools. "Exeter has given us the courage to do great things," he says. "We're so fortunate that the school is supportive and we have access to their amazing resources."

## FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING

McDaniels and Ethan Shapiro, then the director of Exeter Summer and now the Academy's dean of faculty, believed it was important to create a strong educational foundation for Raymond students before they reached high school. In summer 2010, they launched Raymond Roundtables, introducing summer math and English enrichment courses to 21 seventh- and eighth-graders at Iber Holmes Gove Middle School. In 2012, Raymond High ninth-graders were added, and in some years the program has had more than 40 students. Roundtables, featuring the intimate, individualized Harkness method of teaching, was initially taught by Exeter faculty; classes are now taught as well by Raymond teachers, who are trained and mentored by peers at Exeter.

The Raymond teachers attend Harkness teacher-training workshops, meet Exeter instructors and observe Exeter Summer classes on campus. Rebecca Sharrow, a seventh-grade language arts teacher, was one of the first Raymond teachers to participate in the training. "I loved it," she says. "It allows students to have their ideas validated by others and builds conversation in a respectful way. It's definitely motivating and engaging."

During the summer Roundtables, Sharrow teaches two sessions of language arts to a group of nine to 12 students. Her greatest challenge is building community among the students in a short period of time. Often quiet at first, they quickly become comfortable with the Harkness method of learning and start sharing ideas. "Roundtables is one of the very few opportunities our students have for enrichment," Sharrow says. "It gives them an opportunity to meet other motivated learners and it's intellectually fulfilling." Approximately 200 Raymond students have been through the program to date; about 15 percent have gone on to attend prestigious colleges and universities.

Sharrow now gathers students around her own Harkness table, donated by Exeter in 2012, during the regular school year. Despite the challenge of teaching to a mixed-level class of up to 22 students, she applies the Harkness method daily. "It engages my students and encourages thoughtful conversation," she says. "Some of my students wouldn't have a chance of being successful under a more traditional teaching method."

## SCHOLARS CONNECT DURING EXETER SUMMER

Reach High Scholars builds on the success of Roundtables by engaging Raymond High students in rigorous college preparation. Its Reach High Scholars Club offers like-minded high school students a supportive environment to explore higher-education opportunities. Beginning with freshman year, students take PSAT and SAT prep classes, pursue summer enrichment activities and visit colleges, opportunities not always available at under-resourced New Hampshire schools. All students are encouraged to attend academic programs such as Exeter Summer.



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“These are all really good, really busy kids,” says Deirdre Doyle, a high school English teacher and the club’s dedicated adviser. She helps students stay focused on college, encouraging them to sign up for college visits organized by Reach High and helping them with the admissions process. “Just taking hard classes and making good grades isn’t enough to get into competitive colleges, not if you’re from a small school in New Hampshire,” she says. “Summer programs like Exeter’s give our students an advantage.”

Since 2008, Reach High Scholars has sent a total of 118 students to summer programs at Exeter, St. Paul’s School, Brown and Dartmouth. Nearly all receive some form of financial aid to attend, making the programs accessible to more Raymond students.

Rising juniors in Reach High Scholars typically attend Exeter Summer, most as boarders. Anywhere between three to seven Raymond students have participated in the program annually since 2009. In addition to learning with like-minded peers, Exeter Summer participants experience living away from home, where they meet kids from around the world. “It really opens their eyes,” says Elena Gosalvez-Blanco, director of Exeter Summer. “They enjoy the diversity. Connecting with students from around the world is very important, especially outside the classroom. One student told me, ‘I feel like I traveled to 60 countries this summer.’”

### Exeter Summer alum and teacher Jon Lemay.

This year, seven Raymond High students attended Exeter Summer. Their enthusiasm was evident when they returned to school this fall. McDaniels says that’s typical: “Every year, they come back telling [their] teachers how they should teach. They’re more Harkness than Edward Harkness!”

## STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

The hard work by Raymond students and their mentors is paying off. Jesse Hardman, a 2015 graduate of Skidmore and an Exeter Summer student in 2010, received a Fulbright Scholarship (the first for a Raymond student) to study in Germany. A second Fulbright Scholarship was awarded last year to Charles DeBenedetto, a recent graduate of Hobart and William Smith and 2011 Exeter Summer student. DeBenedetto is currently teaching English in Taiwan. Below, we share stories of three others who are thriving.

### JON LEMAY

When Jon Lemay arrived at Raymond High School, he knew he wanted to attend college; he just wasn’t sure how to get there. Home-schooled until eighth grade, he was still adjusting to public school when he learned about Reach High Scholars. “When I heard about opportunities to attend advanced summer programs at St. Paul’s and Exeter, it was something I wanted to do,” he says.

Lemay attended Exeter Summer in 2009, then the Advanced Studies Program at St. Paul’s the next year. “It was an amazing experience,” he says. “I knew I wanted to attend a college that felt like Exeter.” One of three Reach High Scholars to graduate from Skidmore in 2015, with a bachelor’s degree in English, Lemay is now a teacher at Lausanne Collegiate School in Memphis, Tennessee. He returned to New Hampshire this summer to teach English in Raymond Roundtables. He also taught detective fiction to rising 8th- and 9th-graders at Exeter Summer.

“I identified with the kids in so many ways,” Lemay says. “These programs can make such a difference in their lives. I told them ... it’s really what you make of it.” Lemay has passed his experience along to family as well: His younger brother, Josiah, a former Roundtables participant, attended Exeter Summer this year.

## GINNY HARMON

GINNY HARMON, who graduated from Raymond High School in 2013, attended Exeter Summer in 2011 as a rising junior, and St. Paul's the next summer. "My Exeter Summer experience was incredible," she says. It was her first time meeting students outside of Raymond and experiencing the Harkness method. "I was always the one in school who raised her hand," she says. "That summer I learned how to listen."

Harmon, a senior at the University of New Hampshire majoring in international affairs, Spanish and political science, returned to Exeter Summer this year as a teaching intern. She co-taught a world literature class for seventh- and eighth- graders with an Exeter mentor, Greg Rossolimo. Like Lemay, she wasn't much older than her students (her sister, Anna, an Exeter Summer student this year, introduced her as "Miss Harmon" to friends on campus). Although teaching for the first time was nerve-wracking, it brought Harmon back to her own Exeter experience. "It was so rewarding to see what each student brought from their background," she says. "There was an innocence that really made me want to create a safe place for them to learn together. I didn't want them to worry about being right."

Harmon is considering teaching after graduation, acknowledging that she wants to pursue a career that challenges her "to think and do good." Asked if Exeter Summer and Reach High Scholars have shaped who she is today, she answers emphatically, "Yes, in every single way."

## AMI NEEPER

Raymond High graduate Ami Neeper attended Exeter Summer in 2009 and Summer@Brown the following year. A 2015 graduate of the College of the Holy Cross, Neeper earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry with a concentration in pre-health and a minor in visual studio arts. She learned about Reach High Scholars from Deirdre Doyle and other classmates. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do after high school, and the program gave her a sense of direction.

Neeper's classes at Exeter included astronomy and marine biology; her favorite was ceramics. "We used the potter's wheel every day," she says. "That was something RHS didn't have. It was a completely different experience for me." The course inspired Neeper to continue taking fine arts classes throughout high school and college. She's now pursuing a doctorate in pharmacy in an accelerated program at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in Manchester, New Hampshire. She also recently married Stephen Diamond, a fellow Raymond High graduate and Reach High Scholar who's a software engineer at BAE Systems in Nashua, New Hampshire.

### Newlyweds and former RHSP participants Ami Neeper and Stephen Diamond.



JENNA GALLO PHOTOGRAPHY

McDaniels, Doyle and the Raymond High students credit the Exeter partnership, through Raymond Roundtables and Exeter Summer, for much of the success of Reach High Scholars.

"I'm so grateful to my teachers and everyone who made this happen and held me accountable," Lemay says. "What would've happened if they hadn't said 'Do this, you'd enjoy it'? It really did make a difference in my life."

McDaniels, who is working to create programs for adult mentorships and stimulating summer jobs within a 35-mile radius of Raymond for students during their college years and after graduation, would love to see RHSP expand beyond Raymond: "Reach High Scholars Program is a model that could be replicated in other communities to address the much-publicized issue of excessive student debt — and to give students who might not otherwise imagine it the encouragement and guidance they need to reach their potential." ■



Exeter Summer intern Ginny Harmon (left) with sister Anna, a 2016 student.