This time of year has always been my favorite. It seems that most people are in better spirits, and the world is a better place. I often wonder what makes this time of year so much more exciting than the rest of the year. Is it because it’s the time of year when people give you presents? Are we all trying to make up for bad behavior so Santa will leave us presents? Although those things may be factors I believe that it is because people are more focused on friends, family and giving to others. I have always liked the saying “it is better to give than to receive” and I have found that it is true. I’m not just talking about giving presents to people; I’m talking about giving your time and energy to others. There are so many benefits to serving and helping the community you live in. Here are just a few of the benefits of giving to others:

- Serving others improves your health: You know that feeling you get when you know you have done the right thing, or when you have helped someone else? You feel great when you forget yourself and go out to serve others. Through service and giving you can become happier and feel better about yourself, which oftentimes leads you to take better care of yourself. There have also been studies that show that when someone is involved in service they are found to have less depression and despair and have fewer incidents of heart disease. (www.forbes.com/the benefits of giving back)
- Receive scholarships: There are many scholarships that require volunteer service. For example the Daniels Fund Scholarship, a scholarship that pays for all four years of college, values character, leadership and service. The BOCES housing scholarship, a scholarship that covers a student’s room and board at Casper College also requires a certain amount of hours of community service.
- Do better academically: There are a lot of college courses that require service learning hours, where a student serves in the community in a related field to the class. By completing these hours you will get a better grade in the class, as well as be more invested and involved in the class.
- Develop skills: Often times when you volunteer your time you develop skills that will help you be more successful both in school and at work. If you volunteer in a field you are interested in working in after college you can learn about that field through experience and have the skills necessary to be successful. You also gain skills such as communication, reliability, problem solving, and grow your understanding of the community. (www.servicelearning.umn.edu/info/benefits).

Giving back to others is a great way to be involved, make friends and be successful in your endeavors. So get out there, find a need and serve!
FAFSA
Website: http://studentaid.ed.gov/about

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid, more commonly known as the FAFSA, is a very important tool and is a must for all seniors to complete before going to college, and each year during college. The most important thing to remember is that this is a free tool and you should not be paying to complete it. For graduating seniors you will need to start thinking about the FAFSA and plan to fill it out after the first of the year and before April 1, 2014 to have the best opportunity for scholarships, grants and college MONEY!

“Federal Student Aid, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, is the largest provider of student financial aid in the nation. At the office of Federal Student Aid, our 1,200 employees help make college education possible for every dedicated mind by providing more than $150 billion in federal grants, loans, and work-study funds each year to more than 15 million students paying for college or career school. We are proud to sponsor millions of American minds pursuing their educational dreams.” (http://studentaid.ed.gov/about).

For assistance with filling out the FAFSA be on the lookout for FAFSA days at GEAR UP after the first of the year.

GEAR UP FOCUS EVENT

Construction Event!

Join GEAR UP for a hands-on learning experience. We will be exploring the different construction degrees offered at Casper College. Afterward we will be building a wood project that could be given as a gift for the holidays!

Who: All GEAR UP students welcome
When: Tuesday, December 17 at 3:45 p.m.
What: Construction degree and career exploration
Where: Meet at GEAR UP office (SH 102)
RSVP: By Wednesday, December 11 by calling 307-268-2047

SCHOLARSHIP CORNER

By Andrea Covert

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BIRTHDAY BOX

December

Seraiah Dobbins, Dec. 10
Kaitlyn O’Malley, Dec. 10
Desiree O’Malley, Dec. 12
Dylan Ellingson, Dec. 14
Liam Jones, Dec. 15
Anastasia Koountz, Dec. 15

Michael Schmitt, Dec. 16
Ariel Ramirez, Dec. 21
Damon Underwood, Dec. 23
Alden Triplett, Dec. 25
Michaela Eveland, Dec. 29
Alexander Corr, Dec. 30
School Name: Star Lane Center

School Motto: Thinking Outside the Box…

Mission: We are a whole community of learners not just a building full of students, textbooks, and teachers. Everyone has a place, and everyone is part of the family. We work together, we celebrate together, we honor differences, seek meaning in our knowledge, and think creatively. There are no limits to our learning when we are self-motivated, self-disciplined, and self-propelled. We want a quality education and to be better prepared to enter the world we will face.

GEAR UP Connection: We would like to shout out to JoLynn Clayton for all of her help coordinating our visits, inviting us to student presentations, and always being a friendly face at Star Lane Center. We would also like to thank George Vlastos for his help in our combined efforts putting on a spring Black Light Poetry event for the last two years.

Highlight: At Star Lane Center, students:

- Learn with a small, comfortable, close-knit group of people
- Network with professionals in the community and college instructors
- Learn by doing
- Get outside – go places
- Gain confidence in their writing and public speaking skills

Quotes: “They are small, hands on, and go out of the classroom experience into the real world.” – Sasha Palmer, GEAR UP Casper College freshman and Star Lane alumnus.

“I like how what you do at Star Lane reflects you and the community. The little tutor groups made for quality learning and group bonding, making a strong supportive community.” – Hawkins Daniels, GEAR UP Casper College freshman, Star Lane alumnus, and Young Authors winner for poetry.

A special thank you to Keefe’s Flowers for honoring Star Lane Center by donating a bouquet of flowers!
WHAT HAPPENED LAST MONTH

Candice Papke, Kristine Silveria, and Jacob Collier worked as a team to make a costume using balloons at Destination Imagination.

Amber Bennett and Revea Kirk enjoyed our youth event at the Casper College Medical Simulation Lab.

Emily Halberg and Kaylee Dunihoo made jewelry out of balloons during Destination Imagination.

Talon Smith and Jacob Collier also enjoyed themselves at our youth event at the CC Medical Simulation Lab.

SEATING CHART PUZZLE

Across:
3. A baked dish of fruit, or meat and vegetables
5. A thin layer of ice that forms on the ground
7. Piece of ice formed by the freezing of dripping water
10. Full of high spirits
11. Either pushed or pulled, drawn by horses
13. Wet, white
14. A single ice crystal or an aggregation of ice crystals which fall
16. An evergreen coniferous tree
17. A jellied sauce made from ________

Down:
1. The coldest season of the year
2. A cake made with bits of fruit
4. A soft rich candy
6. Thin strips of shiny metal foil
8. A chill
9. A hollow metal musical instrument
12. A small sweet cake, typically round
15. A drink made from a mixture
COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Location: Vermillion, S.D.
Population/Class size:
  Total enrollment: 10,284
  Undergraduate: 7,690
  Graduate: 2,594
Tuition and fees (out-of-state): $10,104 per year
Housing cost: $3,784.90 per year
Meal plan: $2,909 per year
Website: http://admissions.usd.edu
Virtual tour: http://admissions.usd.edu/visit-campus/virtual-tour.cfm
Student/Faculty ratio: 17-1
132 undergraduate programs
62 graduate programs
Fun fact: The state’s designated liberal arts university, USD is also home to South Dakota’s only law and medical schools, college of fine arts, and AACSB accredited school of business.

PARENT PIECE

By Stephanie Marker

On Saturday, Dec. 7, 2013 GEAR UP will be meeting our families at Mercer Family Resource Center for an Elf Shop. This is a great opportunity for our families to shop with an elf and pick out a gift for each member of their immediate family. The presents will also get wrapped at the Elf Shop, completely ready for your holiday celebrations. There will be cookies and cocoa as well as pictures with Santa. We encourage parents to bring their GEAR UP students to this event. It is fun for the whole family.

GEAR UP students and families have their own time slot at the Elf Shop. Meet the GEAR UP staff at noon to discuss financial aid information, attend a short budgeting workshop, and shop for your family members. Once again, GEAR UP events are ALWAYS FREE to our families. Please call our office at 268-2047 for any questions and to RSVP by Thursday, Dec. 5, 2013. We look forward to seeing you there! For good luck wear something green or red!

MEET THE GEAR UP STAFF

From left to right: Andrea Covert (Program Specialist), Chelse DePaolo-Lara (Site Coordinator), Lisa Brown (Student Success Advisor), Anna Skimbova (Administrative Assistant), and Stephanie Marker (Student Success Advisor)
## Holiday Crunch

**Ingredients:**
- 1/2 cup popping popcorn kernels, or two bags tender white popcorn
- 1 (12 oz.) bag vanilla candy melts (such as Wilton Candy Melts)
- 1 1/3 cups broken pretzel pieces
- 1 (12 oz.) bag green and red Milk Chocolate or Mint M&Ms
- Red, green and white sprinkles (I used Jingle Mix Nonpareils)

**Directions:**
- Pop popcorn in a popcorn popper into a large bowl (or alternately in the microwave if using microwave bags of popcorn) according to manufacture’s directions. Remove any unpopped popcorn kernels. Toss in broken pretzel pieces and M&Ms.
- Melt vanilla candy melts in a microwave safe bowl on 50 percent power in 30 second intervals, stirring after each interval until melted and smooth. Drizzle half of the melted chips over popcorn mixture, then stir, tossing gently a few times with a rubber spatula. Then drizzle remaining half of melted chips over popcorn, and gently stir mixture until evenly coated (don’t over stir though or your sprinkles won’t stick if the white chips begin to set and harden). Pour mixture into a single layer onto wax paper. Sprinkle entire mixture evenly with sprinkles (as many as you’d like) before vanilla chips set. Allow to cool and harden, then gently break into pieces and store in an airtight container.