

# SYNERGY TIMES

The Newsletter of Synergy School

Spring 2024



Synergy's Founders: Katherine Czesak, Russ Messing, & Jill Stocks



Alums Simone Edwards'20 & Delaney Howe'20

## 50th Anniversary Celebration

by Darya Mead, Synergy Trustee and Alum Parent

On a sunny afternoon in April, current Synergy students, staff, parents, alums, and community members joined together to mark the momentous occasion of 50 years as an educational cooperative committed to modeling collective leadership, cooperation, and collaboration. What began as a hippie dream has evolved into a remarkable institution.

We were all lucky to have the three co-founders—Russ Messing, Katherine Czesak, and Jill Goffstein Stocks—in attendance and were regaled with tales of the early days. In true Synergy fashion, the Big Room was packed to the

gills as rambunctious kids gravitated to the hard yard, whooping and hollering. Reunions and nostalgia for many, for others a chance to tap into the collective power and history of Synergy's commitment to diversity and progressive education.

My children are now in college and grad school, but I continue to serve on the board for many reasons, primarily because I love the community and the mission of the school. I didn't think I would get emotional, but when we watched Kevin White's and Ian Carr's masterful video and reconnected with parents and

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“Reunion and nostalgia for many, for others a chance to tap into the collective power and history of Synergy's commitment to diversity and progressive education.”



Speaker Derek Rosenfield '78  
Alum Parent



Middle School Performance

kids from bygone eras, many I spoke with felt equally verklempt. The tribute to Tammy Damon was particularly moving and meaningful.

Photos and albums of classes from the 70s, 80s, 90s, 2000s, 2010s, and current graduates dotted the downstairs. The images and albums brought back beautiful memories of past snow trips, stars of the week, grandparents' days, spring concerts, and cherished relationships. A musical performance opened the program and warmed our hearts; boy do I miss those concerts. Yummy vittles, colorful flower bouquets, refreshing beverages, and a spread of mini cupcakes guarded deftly by Ebony "the cupcake protector", made the afternoon even more delectable. Derek "O'Malley" Rosenfield '78 spoke, a voice of the entire arc of the school as a student, parent, and deeply involved community member. The founders reminisced and marveled at what they and the collective group had achieved. Russ, wearing his trademark Sergeant Pepper coat— flanked by Jill and Katherine— along with

Arlene, who was the beloved emcee of Farm School for so many years, lit up the Big Room with their camaraderie and memories. Alums Simone Edwards and Delaney Howe, both Class of 2020, spoke— just a few years out from Synergy— about how the seeds sown in their K-8 years have been fed and watered and are now blossoming in the world. I can attest to that, seeing how much the Synergy years have impacted my boys' trajectories.

fabric of the school and the ability to adapt to a changing society while honoring the past work and vision, the future is bright for the little school that could. The now mature and developed educational model continues to prepare children—one whole person at a time— for the rigors of the 21st century. An educational and life ethos with legs; the world could use more Synergy graduates. Happy 50th Synergy School! ∞

"The founders reminisced and marveled at what they and the collective group had achieved."

Sweatshirts, mugs, water bottles, and other swag were on display and sold; you can get yours online at the Synergy School Store to honor the 50th and show your school spirit. I must say the design and color combo for the 50th logo is quite fetching!

Mostly, the gathering was an affirmation—following the difficult COVID years—that the Synergy school and community are thriving. With the history woven into the

Synergy 50th gear is available to purchase online & pick up at school: <http://synergy-school-store.square.site/>

Watch the 50th Celebration online: [vimeo.com/938853149](https://vimeo.com/938853149)

View the 50 Years of Synergy video created by Kevin White, Alum Ian Carr '02, and Justin Mears online: [vimeo.com/896609247](https://vimeo.com/896609247)



50th Celebration Picnic & Alumni Reunion



Founders' Day

## 50th Picnic and Founders' Day

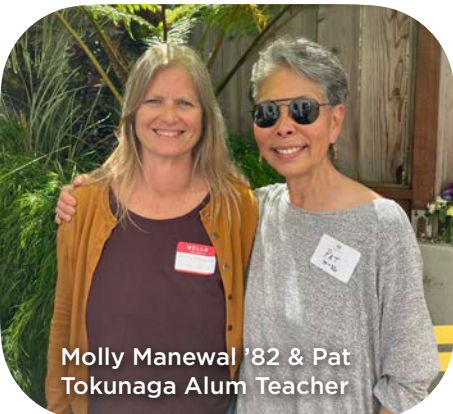
by Liz McDonald

### 50th Celebration Kickoff

Synergy celebrated our 50th anniversary throughout the school year. We started the year with a gathering in Precita Park for our whole community. It was great to see old faces and new families come together to celebrate Synergy. We all took hold of a rope led by Music teacher Mahala Bundy and formed a giant circle. In the center, alumni, along with Russ Messing and Arlene Naschke held onto a parachute. It truly was a synergistic experience and a wonderful kick-off of our 50th year. ∞

### Founders' Day

In October, we honored our founders with a ceremony at school. Russ Messing, Arlene Naschke, Katherine Czesak, Jill Goffstein Stocks, and Elena Dillon visited classrooms, answered students' questions about Synergy's founding, and told stories from our past. Arlene spoke with the 8th-grade students about farm school and students reflected on the traditions that still continue today. The school gathered in the Big Room and enjoyed a slideshow of images depicting Synergy from 1973 to the present. Music teachers Mahala Bundy and Kim McClain led a choir of third grade to middle school students and musical performance by seventh grade, and fourth and fifth grade sang with the kindergarten class. It was a magical day remembering our past, and our guests enjoyed seeing how vibrant Synergy is today. ∞



Molly Manewal '82 & Pat Tokunaga Alum Teacher

### Class of 2024

This year's eighth grade class was accepted to a wide range of public, parochial, charter, and independent high schools:

- Archbishop Riordan High School
- Convent School of the Sacred Heart  
San Francisco
- Drew School
- Immaculate Conception Academy
- International High School
- Lick-Wilmerding High School
- Lowell High School
- Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of  
the Arts
- Sacred Heart Cathedral Preparatory
- San Francisco University High  
School
- St. Ignatius College Preparatory



Elena Dillon & Tammy Damon at Ocean Beach Clean Up

## In Memoriam: Tammy Damon 1948-2023

By Tanya Baker, Director of Administration, Star Room Teacher

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Tammy Damon, who died peacefully Thursday, December 7, 2023. There will be a memorial to honor the wonderful life of our dear Tammy in the late summer or early Fall of 2024.

There have been few people as special as Tammy. For over 35 years, Tammy's leadership, love and devotion transformed Synergy from an idea to a thriving, vibrant school community. As a teacher, Tammy taught both math (in the early years), and middle school humanities. Through both subjects she challenged students to use critical and analytical thinking skills by solving problems and viewing the world through different perspectives. Tammy was innovative and introduced team teaching. Team teaching is connected to the school's value of collaboration. Tammy's pedagogical approach was always grounded in Synergy's mission and values. Most importantly, the children were at the center of

everything she did. Tammy would bandage a small cut with the same care and concern as she crafted the annual budget.

As the Director of Administration and Finance, Tammy stewarded Synergy's resources. She deeply understood the importance of balancing finances and people power. Under her leadership, Synergy's class sizes grew and we added the middle school, and throughout remained financially stable.

As a Board member, Tammy embodied the concept of trustee. She modeled collective leadership. As the staff and families looked to her for guidance, she included all voices in the decision-making process. After she retired from teaching and her administrative role, Tammy continued to serve on the Board and other committees. She both honored Synergy's traditions and made space for growth. We are forever grateful for Tammy. Her voice and vitality will be missed.

Fifty years ago, the seeds were planted for Synergy School. Tammy was a constant gardener nurturing, pruning, weeding, and planting new seeds...rest well thy good and faithful servant.

We send our love and support to Tammy's life partner, Elena, and their family. ∞

In Tammy's own words from a 2017 article: "Synergy has been everything I dreamed of and more. I realized right away that the cooperative structure created an environment that brought out the best in everyone, promoting dedication, inspiration, creativity and responsibility to each other, our students and families."

To read more see: [synergyschool.org/so-whats-your-story/](https://synergyschool.org/so-whats-your-story/)

-Tammy Damon, teacher, former Director of Administration and Finance, Alumni parent, and Trustee



## Remembering Tammy Damon

*By Darya Mead, Synergy Trustee and Alum Parent*

Tammy Damon devoted so much of herself to Synergy and the education of many generations of students. Our family met her in the latter half of her career. Tammy and her partner Elena Dillon were integral to our now twenty-year experience with the Synergy community. At first blush, Tammy seemed serious, even stern—my boys, Sasha, Class of 2013 and Niko Crawford, Class of 2018, said she had a quiet authority everyone understood—but Tammy revealed her warmth, generosity, and joyful spirit slowly and deeply over the years. I knew she hailed from New Hampshire, and I later learned she went to school with one of my mother's good friends, whom I knew throughout my childhood. Tammy had a ruggedness, a decidedly not frilly demeanor; I can only imagine one has to develop some toughness to handle the New Hampshire winters. She always had something deep and meaningful to impart about our boys, and I remember looking forward to teacher conferences.

Of course, I loved learning more about my sons' academic and social lives, but I also enjoyed conversing with Synergy teachers. Tammy was always prepared and forthright; deep in my marrow, I felt she got my kids and our family.

My most indelible Tammy memory was on a Synergy snow trip. She was one of the staff members who loved and spearheaded the outdoor ed program, one of the many reasons we chose and loved Synergy. I, too—having grown up on the East Coast—loved snow play and cleared my schedule to be a part of the biennial expedition. I helped Tammy run the cross-country ski sessions on this trip. Not only was it an activity I adored, but teaching kids who had never done it—let alone seen snow—was such a delight. Sure, some kids had to be coaxed and would have preferred a board game and hot cocoa in the lodge. After many successful sessions, Tammy declared she would take all the more advanced skiers on a

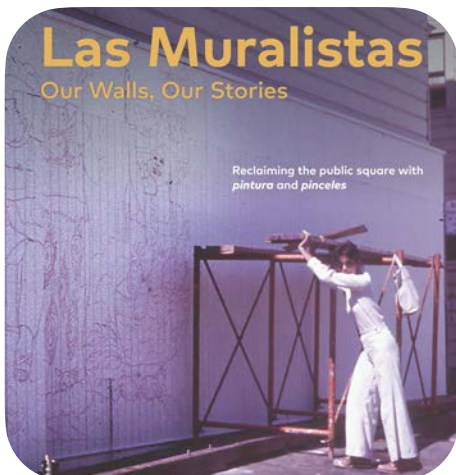
tour behind the Clair Tappaan Lodge. I was nervous about my skill level, but Tammy was encouraging, as encouraging with me as she was with all the scared, grumpy, or cheeky students. What ensued was a magical few hours where I pushed myself and loved every minute of the outdoor adventure. At every juncture, Tammy was supportive, but in her inimitable way, she got me to the next peak or downhill stint. It was a memorable experience that I will forever cherish.

My other deeply meaningful encounter with Tammy—beyond her very calm, capable daily presence—was in the mid-2000s at the height of the recession. I was sure we would have to take our kids out of Synergy. Tammy showed such incredible compassion. I entered her office and burst into tears, an utterly uncharacteristic outburst born of financial stress. Tammy was instrumental in helping us have both our boys spend nine years at Synergy. I will be forever indebted to her and the school,

and I continue to be a part of the Board of Trustees years after my children have graduated. In some ways, it is an attempt to give back and honor the dedication and commitment of educators like Tammy and continue supporting such an amazing learning environment.

It is with great sadness that I write this—I had hoped to see her again. Since their retirement, I have often thought of Tammy and Elena on cross-country adventures with their beloved dogs. I had many conversations about dog agility training, and they were enthusiastic about it. I often smiled and nodded—not fully understanding—but I knew how much Tammy loved it, and her joy was palpable and infectious.

In the years since our boys became alums, we have stayed connected to the school as a family. Both boys have worked at Synergy Summer, and I remain on the Board. I always looked forward to seeing Tammy. It is hard to think of Synergy and the world without such a complete, caring, thoughtful, giving soul. I hope she is off on a backcountry ski trail somewhere in the great beyond. I will forever feel deeply connected to Synergy, particularly the outdoor ed program, because of Tammy... godspeed. ∞



Myisa Plancq-Graham from SFMOMA and Mural Artists Irene Perez, Smokie Arce and Susan Cervantes

## Mission District Women Muralists

by Pam Heyda, Visual Arts Teacher

On Wednesday, October 25th, students in the Sun Room, East Enders, Skylights and Middle School attended a special assembly. Everyone gathered in the Big Room to watch the film *Las Muralistas: Our Walls, Our Stories*. It's a documentary produced by SFMOMA about the women muralists of San Francisco's Mission District.

I learned about this film from alum parent Maria Sanchez, mom of Ana and Antonio. She connected me with Myisa Plancq-Graham, content producer of SFMOMA. Since May, we had been working to coordinate a day and time to share this inspiring film with our students. She invited featured artists, Susan Cervantes (founder of Precita Eyes), Smokie Arce, and Irene Pérez to join us for the screening!

After the viewing, the artists introduced themselves and the students had some time to ask them questions. These artists have been painting murals in the community for decades, and all

three had worked on the murals of The Women's Building.

Las Muralistas was made as a part of a larger digital publication called Proyecto Mission Murals. On the site you'll find oral histories, pictures of existing and archival murals, a mural map, essays about the Mural Movement of the 1970s and 80s, as well as a 50-minute "Audio Zine" hosted by writer and book store owner Josiah Luis Alderete and writer Olivia Peña, which takes listeners on an immersive walking tour of murals and other special sites in the Mission. ∞

Here is a link to the film: [sfmoma.org/watch/las-muralistas-our-walls-our-stories/](https://sfmoma.org/watch/las-muralistas-our-walls-our-stories/)



Synergy Fans Meeting with Bonastre Tur



Author Sketched Beloved Characters

## Comic Artist Miriam Bonastre Tur Inspires at Synergy

by Susanne DeRisi, MLIS, Librarian

On September 7, 2023, Synergy School welcomed Spanish comic artist and author Miriam Bonastre Tur. This visit was part of the author's U.S. tour, promoting the third and final installment of her bestselling graphic novel series, *Hooky*. Our sincere thanks to Folio Books for making this engagement possible.

As soon as Bonastre Tur arrived at Synergy, a group of student fans gathered, eager to meet her and

*Harry Potter* series, the Studio Ghibli animated movie *Kiki's Delivery Service*, the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series, and various manga especially those about magical girls. The author also described how she first conceived of *Hooky* while in art school for a contest sponsored by Webtoon. Although she didn't win the contest, it led to her publishing *Hooky* as an online comic on Webtoon which then led to

based on partial sketches and hints. The students were spot-on, from telling Dani apart from her twin Dorian based on their facial expressions to identifying Princess Monica by her mischievous eyes. The author also shared some quirky insights into how she simplified her character designs -- like her decision to fashion Carlo, Dorian's magical pet, as a "dragon frog" rather than a full dragon, based on the advice of her fellow art student, also named Carlo, who liked frogs and suggested they were easy to draw. ∞

"The author also described how she first conceived of *Hooky* while in art school for a contest sponsored by Webtoon."

share their enthusiasm for the world of *Hooky*. For the 4th and 5th graders and Sun Room students, Bonastre Tur provided an engaging overview of the series and the creative process behind it. She delved into her inspirations for the story and characters of *Hooky* including many that our students know and love like the

publishing the series in print graphic novel format.

The audience was captivated as Bonastre Tur began to sketch her beloved characters. She shared insights into her character design and invited students who had read the books to play a game, guessing each character's identity

Check Out  
Synergy School  
Photos:

[synergyphotos.smugmug.com](https://synergyphotos.smugmug.com)  
Password: bestpics



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## Board of Trustees: Strategic Plan

by Shari Dickstein-Staub, Board of Trustees member

In anticipation of Synergy’s watershed 50th Anniversary, the Board of Trustees began a multi-year cycle of strategic planning in August 2022, guided by an essential question: *How can Synergy remain true to its founding vision, philosophy, and approach for another fifty years while continuing to evolve in students, staff and physical space; adapt to changing social, cultural and political environs and contexts locally and globally; and remain responsive to external pressures and unanticipated challenges?*

After a year of data collection, reflection, and planning, Trustees launched the school’s 2023-2027

Strategic Plan focused on evolving administrator roles and strengthening resources to set Synergy up for fifty more years of success. Hiring Byron Spain, Synergy’s first dedicated Director of Finance, was a crucial first step in implementing the Strategic Plan. Byron has a strong foundation in financial planning, strategy, and analysis, as well as creating and managing financial models and budgets. His presence and role have proven to be a phenomenal asset to the school. We look forward to meeting the plan’s key milestones and updating and partnering with the community as our work progresses. ∞







## Synergy School 2022-2023 Annual Report

### Gifts to the Synergy Annual Fund

Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$437,363 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2022-2023. Our Board participation in the Annual Fund was 100%, and Synergy families' participation was 95%.

### Ways to Give to Synergy School

Synergy School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law. Donations are accepted in the following ways:

Mail your donation to:  
Development Office  
Synergy School  
1387 Valencia St  
San Francisco, CA 94110

Donate online or download a pledge card  
at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

Gifts of appreciated securities are gladly  
accepted. For more information, please  
contact Liz McDonald at 415 567-6177 or  
[liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org)

Many employers have a matching gift  
program that allows an employee's gift  
to be matched by 1:1. Ask your employer  
about their matching gift guidelines.

For more information about including  
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please contact Liz McDonald.

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 Marion Cross in honor of Jasper Cross  
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 Kayla Terwey  
 Karen and John De Lara in memory of Joy De Lara  
 Patricia S. Dinner in honor of Steve Grand-Jean  
 Noel and Terry Hefty in honor of Russ Messing  
 Dale Katzif in honor of Lucie and Zoe Fix  
 Karen Klein and Benjamin Golvin in memory of  
 Eli Golvin-Klein  
 Dennis Lanterman in memory of Julie Lanterman  
 Abby Lehrman in honor of Rafael Newman  
 Alan Markle in honor of Russ Messing  
 Constance Matthiessen in memory of  
 Eli Golvin-Klein  
 Kim McClain in honor of Quentin Noverio

Alison Kim and Christiane Medina in honor of  
 Isa and Gabriel Medina-Kim  
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 Tammy Damon  
 David and Elaine Orr in honor of Maggie Orr  
 Rabab Tawfik and Marc Garvey in memory of  
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 Sophia and Zander Hoare  
 Helen Wood in memory of Tammy Damon  
 Diane Zacher and Howard Gelman in memory of  
 Eli Golvin-Klein  
 Carolyn Zecca Ferris in honor of  
 Steve Grand-Jean

## Fund- A- Need

Thank you to all who contributed to the Fund-A-Need over the past two years, our classrooms have been transformed! The second year of the Fund-a-Need for Flexible Furniture raised \$55,800. Last year, we piloted a selection in the Little Room and Learning Specialist Office, and we started the new school year with the next installment of tables and chairs. The soft seating has arrived now as well as the rest of the tables, including specialized lab surfaces for our Science Room. We really appreciate the freshness and flexibility afforded to us with all the sturdy new furniture and storage.

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 Sandy Barra and Pete Dardis  
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Donors who made gifts to the school between September 1, 2022 and August 31, 2023 are listed in this annual report. We have tried to provide accurate and complete information for this report. Our apologies for any names omitted or listed incorrectly. Please contact the Director of Development, Liz McDonald, to correct any records.

Thank you for your generous support!



Return Service Requested

## Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published twice a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome.

Editors: Cynthia Louie, Liz McDonald

Photography: Russ Curtis, Liz McDonald, Barbara Lobb

Our mission is to nurture the intellectual, creative, and emotional potential of every child in a community dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit educational cooperative, wherein students, parents, staff, and teachers cooperate together to further a rewarding education for each child. We are a vibrant, diverse community with 190 students in transitional kindergarten through eighth grade located in San Francisco's Mission District.

## Synergy Annual Fund



## Every Gift Counts

The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating a student at Synergy School for a full year.

The support we receive from our community of parents, friends, alumni and grandparents helps Synergy to maintain the strength of our program while keeping our tuition affordable and offering financial aid to at least a third of our community.

Every gift counts. Donate online at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at [liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org).

Thank you for your support!