Hello everyone and welcome to the first issue of the Taft Times, the first newsletter from Lorado Taft. We plan to send out several issues a year of the Taft Times with news about happenings at Taft, thematic articles and activities that can be used in the classroom. This first issue has been devoted to all of the new happenings at Taft (including the newsletter!).

Over the past few months, those of you who have been to Taft probably noticed some of the facility improvements that have been undertaken. They are now completed and we would like to extend a big “Thank You!” to all of you who had to make adjustments last spring and this fall due to the construction. We hope that you will all agree the wait was well worth it! Brand new fire and smoke detection systems have been placed in all the dorms, new stairs leading from Taft House down to the river and the new roof on Heckman dorm are some of the projects completed but they have definitely added to the comfort, safety, and accessibility of Taft.

As for improvements and additions to the programs here at Taft, we have been hard at work there as well. The basement in Taft House has been refurbished! The walls have been painted, new lights have been installed and a chalkboard has been created to give us a water ecology classroom. A new Astronomy evening program has been created and, in an effort to bring the “ort” concept home, a vermicomposting lesson (complete with worms!) has been developed.

We hope that you enjoy the first issue of the Taft Times. Any feedback on the newsletter would help us out tremendously! Look for a new issue in January. If you have any ideas, topics, activities or themes that you and your students have taken from Taft and expanded on in the classroom, please send them in and we will include them in our next issue!

Thank you,
Taft Staff

New Evening Program Brings the Sky to Life

Have you ever looked up at the sky and wondered what people from long ago thought when they looked at the stars? Maybe you’ve just always wished that you could find Orion, the North Star, Cassiopeia, Scorpio or any constellation for that matter. The new Astronomy evening program at Lorado Taft will have your students searching the stars for these answers and more!

Your students will experience the formation of stars through games and simulations. They will hear stories and learn how constellations stored the religious and historical information of a culture. Through the construction of a planisphere, students will explore celestial navigation and how stars have been, and still can be, used to

Continued on page 3

Contributors to this issue:
• Cheryl Thompsen, EE Coordinator
• Charlotte Melson, EE Asst Coordinator
• David Yuhaus, EE Asst Coordinator
• Melanie Costello, former EE Asst. Coordinator
We Say Goodbye To An Old Friend…..

Many of you are beginning to think about re-turning to Taft again this year – thinking about mak-ing lists, changes that need to be made, organizing activity equipment, setting up meetings, etc. For some of you, that’s a ways off, but still something to consider as you prepare for the new school year.

As always, there will be some new faces to meet at Taft, but some of you who have found me to be a constant for the last 6 years maybe surprised to hear that I’m not there. I left Taft this summer to settle down in my new house with my husband and start a family. We bought a house in Stillman Valley (just a bit northeast of Oregon) and moved in last November. I am hoping to find a new position in environmental education, which doesn’t require the overnight stays. Unfortunately, this proved to be more difficult than I thought. After a long hard search, I have gotten a job as an educator at the Discovery Center Museum in Rockford. If you are ever in the area, stop by and say “Hi!” It would be great to see familiar faces!

So, for the first time in 6 years, I am not thinking about the new school year at Taft. At least not in the way I used to – preparing for staff training, cleaning and setting up the pioneer cabin, getting schedules in order, etc. This year, I am just missing it some. Remembering the excitement and tension in the air as we counted down to the start of staff training and then to the first school to arrive. Thinking about the way the whole atmosphere changed and energized when the busloads of kids arrived. Remembering the friends I made in some of the teachers I worked with and how I looked forward to working with them again. Was every moment of every day wonderful? No, of course not. But I remember the first time I thought to myself, “I can’t believe they pay me to do this.” And I’ve thought it many times over the years since then.

The Worlds’ Most Poisonous Spider! NOT!!

Harvestmen, better known as Daddy Longlegs, appear in abundance in the fall. We see them everywhere, but do we know much about them? I have heard many interesting pieces of information over the years. What is true? What is myth? Below are some facts about these fascinating creatures:

Harvestmen are spiders. FALSE: Harvestmen have eight legs and, like spiders, are part of the Arachnid family. Unlike spiders, who have two body parts, Harvestmen have only one body part. They are closer relatives to scorpions, ticks, and mites.

Harvestmen do not have antennae. TRUE: They use their second pair of legs, which are incredibly sensitive, to “feel” their surroundings.

Harvestmen are highly venomous, they just don’t have a mouth big enough to bite humans. FALSE: Harvestmen lack the glands needed to produce venom. This is just an “urban myth”.

Harvestmen eat beetles, flies, and snails. TRUE: Harvestmen eat a wide variety of foods, including small insects, earthworms, decaying plant and animal matter, and fungi. They have even been known to eat human leftovers from a picnic, like small bits of bread and butter.

For more information, search online or visit the following websites:
http://www.backyardnature.net/longlegs.htm
http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/nw02/1007harvestmen.htm
My Class Has Worms!

Students always leave Lorado Taft with many memories. Often, one of the most lasting memories that students carry with them is of the food and in particular, the ort report. A good way to build on the students’ memories and interest in waste reduction is through vermicomposting or worm composting. Composting with worms is a natural and efficient way of recycling organic kitchen waste. Vermicomposting can reduce household waste by as much as 25%! Plus, you get a great organic soil builder and plant fertilizer!

In an effort to get everyone excited about worms and vermicomposting, upon request, Lorado Taft will provide a start-up kit to use in the classroom. The kit will consist of an information packet and enough worms to start your composting adventure. All you will need to do is supply the home! Please be sure to contact your coordinator with any questions!

Astronomy is New Evening Program

Continued from page 1

find their way through the night. Each student will then be able to take home their portable star finder so that they can navigate their way even after they leave Taft! Depending upon the weather, students will also be able to observe the depths of our solar system and beyond through one of the Lorado Taft telescopes.

The Astronomy evening program is designed to take this subject beyond a segment of a night hike and allow your class to explore the universe with more depth. If you have any questions or would like more information please give your coordinator, Cheryl, David, or Charlotte, a call.

Charlotte Melson is joining the Lorado Taft Staff as the new Environmental Education Assistant Coordinator.
2004-2005 Lorado Taft Environmental Education Staff

Front Row (left to right): Cheryl Thompsen, Charlotte Melson, Jennifer Sublett, Katie Navin, Tracy Vahlkamp,

Back Row (left to right): David Yuhaus, Erin Stark, Krista Prokosch, Walter Sams, Dave Weber, Jason Thompson