

# MECCS

*A newsletter for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School to share its successful traditional and innovative programming.*

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**MECCS is on Facebook!**



**Find driving directions and more at [www.meccs.org](http://www.meccs.org)**

## Community Engagement with the WPCA

As one of 13 charter schools in Alberta, it is important for MECCS to engage with the larger community and to share information on how the school makes a difference for its students. Equally important is that MECCS students gain an understanding of the world around them. The school plays an important role in making sure students understand their own heritage and culture but also that of the larger world for which they are being prepared.



*Adam Bull learns how to throw the stove into the back of a chuckwagon.*

One of the other hats that Superintendent Ed Wittchen wears is that of President of the World Professional Chuckwagon Association (WPCA). Through this connection, students have been able to learn about this unique heritage sport up close and personal.

Maxine Hildebrandt and her grade 3/4 students, for example, recently had the chance to visit professional chuckwagon driver Cliff Cunningham and his wife Wendy on their ranch just north of Devon. There they had the chance to learn about horses and the chuckwagon way of life. The smiles on the faces of our students shows just how big of a hit Cliff and Wendy were. They made fans for life.

When asked what their favourite experiences were,



*Left: Maxine Hildebrandt and her grade 3/4 class visit the horses in the barn on Cliff and Wendy Cunningham's ranch.*



*Clockwise from above: Lazura Roan pets a horse on the Cunningham ranch; Adrianna Bull shows how girls can drive the wagon too; the grade 3/4 class shows off the lucky horseshoes everyone got as a gift from Cliff and Wendy; River Letendre and Adrianna Bull prepare to feed Cliff's horses.*





*Dogs are fun too: Adam Bull and Rinzin Bird in the barn.*



*Blair Brerton in the wagon: "I want to be a driver like Cliff!"*

students offered a variety of responses, including mixing feed, feeding the horses, loading the stove, sitting in the driver's seat, getting a horseshoe to take home, checking out the travelling barn (also known as the liner), and of course Wendy's hot dogs and donuts.

Maxine had her own special highlight: getting her first wagon ride in Cliff's training wagon!

The students prepared for the visit ahead of time by reading the *Spectator Guide* by author, historian and broadcaster Billy Melville, watching videos of last year's races, reading several issues of the WPCA *Turning the Barrels* newsletter and learning the parts of the thoroughbred horse. After their visit, the students all wrote letters to Cliff and Wendy to let them know what they had learned and what they had liked.

One week later, MECCS students in grades 3 to 6 were able to visit professional chuckwagon driver Troy Flad and his wife Shannon on their farm west of Warburg. Troy was joined by their son Blaid Flad, also a professional wagon driver, on a tour of the Flad chuckwagon facility and farm operation. In addition to racing wagons, Troy also seeds over 1,000 acres.

Troy and Blaid made fans for life after introducing the students to the horses, showing them the liner, taking a couple of

the adults for wagon rides, and showing them the farming equipment and explaining how it all works. They also posed for photos, signed souvenir posters and ended the day with a wiener roast.

Once again, when asked about highlights of the visit, students shared a few different experiences, including watching the training runs, petting the horses, meeting Oops the miniature horse, checking out the hydraulic liner, picking rocks from the track to protect the horses' hooves, getting signed posters from Troy and Blaid, and learning about the very large farm implements Troy showed them.

Even the adults felt it was two of the best days of the year. Mark Hildebrandt and Naomi Ethier got to



*With Troy and Blaid Flad and the hydraulic liner.*



*Clockwise from above: Mark Hildebrandt gets his first wagon ride; Troy Flad explains how the wagon wheels are made; horses on the Flad ranch excited to meet the students; Naomi Ethier is probably thinking “Why did I ever agree to try this?”; Tristan Breriton, Adam Bull and Blair Breriton see just how big the tires are on a farm; time to meet Oops the miniature horse.*



experience their first chuckwagon ride. Principal Erin Danforth said it was so great to see the kids learning and loving the whole experience.

As much as these two special days resulted in making fans for the wagon drivers, they also resulted in the drivers becoming fans of the students. These tough cowboys were completely won over by how polite and enthusiastic the MECCS students were, the way they asked good questions and how quickly they learned to love the horses just the way the drivers do. Students came away with newfound knowledge about another aspect of western Canada heritage as well as a new understanding of what is involved in a big farming operation. They have already been invited back to both places next year.

