Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Find Me a Mentor
by Deena Burke

The mentoring program began 2 years ago when, during the VASTA meeting at the ATHE conference in NYC, my friend and colleague, Mark Enright, suggested that this was precisely the kind of service VASTA should be offering to its members. From his articulate urgings VASTA’s mentoring program was born. Since that time, 18 mentors have volunteered their services and we have had interest from 28 “mentees”. I am happy to report that we have had some very successful pairings. The program is chugging along and, based on the response from mentees and mentors alike, I think I can say it is a success. This August I stepped off the board after 3 years, turning the program over to the very able Ginny Kopf. I know she will be a superb successor and steward for this burgeoning program. However, before I let go entirely, I want to mention something that will help the program continue to grow and become an even greater success.

We need more mentors to serve the needs (and locations) of our diverse membership. I appeal to anyone who feels they have something to share with a newer, developing member of the voice and speech field. If you have concerns that you don’t have the time, that the job will be overwhelming or that you have nothing to offer, let me allay these fears. Our program offers an opportunity to develop a unique relationship based on the needs of the mentee and the expertise of the mentor. There is no “one way” this partnership must be. Briefly, the process works like this:

- Mentors fill out the mentor form (located on the VASTA website http://www.vasta.org/mentor.html) and e-mail it to Ginny Kopf, or they simply contact Ginny to say they are interested (I encourage filling out the form).
- A mentee contacts Ginny with info about themselves, their training and what they are looking for.
- Ginny goes to her list of mentors and, based on location and criterion from the mentee, she tries to make the best fit possible.
- Ginny contacts the mentor to see if they are still willing to take someone on. She sends whatever info she has on the potential mentee so the potential mentor can get a sense of the person they would be working with.
- When she receives an OK from the mentor, she contacts the potential mentee with the mentors info and lets them get in touch.
- If the fit is right, then they begin their partnership as they define it. If not, the mentee can re-contact Ginny and she goes back to the drawing board.

Generally, mentees are looking for someone in their area. However, depending upon the individual situation, it is quite possible to do much of your mentoring by e-mail and phone. Some people meet occasionally, others have a student working side-by-side with them, shadowing them at coaching sessions and helping in the classroom. The models are infinite. Some mentees merely need some guidance on where to do further study; others want help with a job search and doing a CV. In some instances they are interested in changing from one field to ours but wish to incorporate the work they already do (ex; a movement person wanting to integrate voice work into their teaching). The possibilities are endless. There is no obligation for either party. If you talk (or e-mail) and the fit isn’t right, you simply decline and the mentee goes back to the overseer (Ginny in this case).

I have heard back from mentees who feel so grateful and inspired by the guidance provided to them and from mentors who speak of how fulfilling it is to mentor and, as is so often the case, how they learned as much as they taught. So, I strongly encourage you to jump in. The rewards are rich and Yenta is waiting.

Reflections on the Lessac Summer Intensive Workshop 2002
By Nancy Krebs

Our formal final dinner had been lovingly prepared by the Mercersburg Academy dining staff. In fact, the entire staff had been so hospitable to us for the entire month of our stay. This dinner was their farewell to our Lessac Summer Intensive. I looked around the table at the engaging faces of our participants and listened to them express how much they felt they had gained from these four weeks of training. “My voice is fuller”; “my throat feels so much better than when I first arrived”; “I feel healthy!” Thanks to this workshop, they were leaving with an enhanced ability to feel when their voices were working properly; feel physical energy qualities working for them. They were leaving tomorrow with “Body Wisdom” as Arthur Lessac says.

I thought back to the first day of the workshop. I am always moved to hear why people are attracted to the workshop. This body of work created by Arthur Lessac is not just for actors, or even acting instructors, but for anyone from any field—communications, education, fitness and sports, speech pathology, business. I met, on that first day, individuals from all walks of life with a variety of reasons for embarking on this journey. And what a journey it is.

We begin in our body-training classes by introducing the basic concept that there is a natural, organic, optimal way that the body wants to function. Over time, we often lose the ability to recognize this optimum, settling for minimum usage. In class, we re-learn how to communicate with our bodies in order to achieve natural functioning. We
tap into Energy states: Buoyancy, Potency, Radiance and Inter-involvement. We use these physical states to give ourselves organic instructions—from within—rather than rely on outside imagery, rote drill or imitation. Voice Work is also Body Work: the two are entwined, inter-related, and synergistic. Each Vocal Energy is introduced as a musical experience, and then we apply the musical quality of vowels, consonants and the voice itself—to words, to phrases, sentences, paragraphs, then to extemporaneous speech. We move into exploration of texts, and giving extemporaneous speeches for one another and we continuously explore texts both prepared and impromptu up to the very last minute of the workshop.

The days are full; of classes, of individual coaching and with experimentation with a “buddy”—another participant with whom to explore the daily work. And we live together; faculty and participants, on the same campus. We eat our meals together, so the learning, the observing, the questioning never stops. We bond as a group in this setting; far from the hurly-burly of life, which engenders trust very quickly and early in the training process; especially at Mercersburg, with its retreat-like setting.

Along the way, adverse body and voice conditions that had been considered by our participants to be chronic and somewhat handicapping are relieved and/or eliminated as the gentle, relaxing and energizing work melts away long-held tensions and constrictions. Athletes discover that their performance improves, teachers discover how and why the voice works, accents become reduced; actors discover a new and exciting way to approach scripts; and a sense of well-being permeates each gathering. And by the end, at our final meal, we laugh and we cry. For we are all moved by this four-week journey—individually and collectively.

BOARD MEETING MINUTES
San Diego State University, San Diego, CA
July 28 2002

Present at the meeting were Eric Armstrong (EA), Deena Burke (DB), Kate Burke (KB), Rena Cook (RC), Rocco Dal Vera (RDV), Kate Devore (KD), Craig Ferre (CF), Marlene Johnson (MJ), Ginny Kopf (GK) Christine Morris (CM), Jeff Morrison (JM), Janet Rodgers (JR), Dorothy Runk Mennen (DRM), Karen Ryker (KR), Phil Thompson (PT), Kate Ufema (KU), Judylee Vivier (JV), and Lisa Wilson (LW).

Sunday, July 28
9:00 A.M. Meeting called to order.

The board bid farewell to outgoing Board members Deena Burke, Karen Ryker, and past president Janet Rodgers. The board welcomed new board members, Eric Armstrong, Ginny Kopf and Lisa Wilson.