

# “DREAM OVER DRAMA”

*Inspired by MLK, Dr. Pamela Peters returns to SCDS as the new SEL counselor*

BY LAUREN LU

Country Day’s new social and emotional adviser, Pamela Peters, is familiar with the impacts of social stress and the importance of having emotional support.

When she was 10, she told her father she wanted to be a Girl Scout, so he took Peters to the headquarters of the Girl Scouts of America to enroll as a Brownie.

The leaders turned Peters away.

The teachers who led the group said that they would quit and parents would pull their kids out if they let a Black person into the Girl Scouts, Peters said.

It was one of the first times she had ever experienced racial discrimination.

Although the shock of rejection stung Peters deeply, she and her family refused to capitulate. Martin Luther King Jr. — a close friend of the Peters family — accompanied Peters and her father on numerous failed attempts.

“I remember crying in the arms of Dr. King, and with tears streaming down my face,” Peters said. “And, I said the worst thing I ever heard myself say — ‘I hate white people!’”

However, she did not truly mean it, and King helped her realize that.

“I need you to focus on the dream, not the drama,” King said.

He explained to Peters that hatred only bred more hatred, and Peters was instead encouraged to forgive and work together.

In fact, King influenced her decision to become a teacher.

“His mentoring of me when I was young and his help in making me the first Brownie Girl Scout in the area where I lived made me decide to be a teacher,” Peters said.

As a teacher, life coach, and counselor, Peters helps her students identify the thoughts, beliefs and judgments that serve as a mental barrier preventing them from attaining their goals.

Simply developing awareness and preventing oneself from entertaining those negative thoughts is the first step to releasing judgments, both personal and about others, and

overcoming “monkey mind.”

According to Peters, monkey mind is the aggregation of fear and negativity that is a major source of stress on the mind, hindering growth and progression.

She has experienced firsthand the mental toll that heeding monkey mind takes.

“I noticed, even as a little girl, my judgment towards the people who were judging me, and I became extremely angry and frustrated,” Peters said. “So when Martin Luther King [Jr.] said to me, ‘We just have to teach them that we’re not so different from them,’ I realized the value of being a teacher.”

With her central purpose in mind, Peters has led countless workshops on

forgiveness, meditation and even effective parenting.

In addition, she is a certified counselor and life coach who has worked with students of all age groups and for various corporate and non-profit organizations.

Peters is returning to the Country Day stage after 13 years.

She initially taught theater and directed school plays at Country Day from 1998 to 2009. In addition, Peters played a role in counseling and educating students, teachers and administrators on social and emotional intelligence — which is now her sole focus as she returns in part-time capacity.

“I went into classrooms, teaching conflict resolution and mediation, as

well as mutual respect and appreciation, and we got the entire school on the same path,” Peters said. “At the time I was teaching parenting classes and teaching all grades similar foundational things, so we were all speaking the same language.”

These lessons allowed the Country Day family to grow closer and improve communication through attentive listening and mutual respect, Peters said.

Returning to Country Day after over a decade, she witnessed and is proud of the tremendous increase in attention to students’ social and emotional needs, diversity, and the diligent efforts of the administration, staff, and faculty to build a strong, academic community, Peters said.

However, Peters recognizes that she can add more.

“I want to support the Country Day community to feel even more like a big family, but a family where we are awake and aware of how we are interacting together and how we’re treating one another,” Peters said.

“I want us to be the kind of family that’s not blowing out each other’s light but protecting the light.”

Lastly, Peters wants to assist students in finding the most effective tools to support their mental well-being and overcome the negativity of their monkey mind.

“Giving them the tools to become better will keep them from a future of bitter,” Peters said. “Right now, I see some of the challenges that the high school and middle school are having, and I want to teach them.”

Patching up emotional injury will allow students to develop into well-rounded, confident individuals and become aware of their dreams.

It has worked for her.

“My dream was to become a Girl Scout,” Peters said. “What community leaders like Dr. King gave me to do — to focus on the dream, not the drama — eventually got the Girl Scouts of America to make an apology. We helped start brand new troops, where anyone was welcome.”

