

## She helps facilitate real-world learning



SEPTEMBER 25, 2012 5:56 PM • [JENNIFER HUFFMAN](#)

“I love education,” said Peg Maddocks, Ph.D., the executive director of NapaLearns. “I feel passionate about freeing teachers to unlock the creativity and excitement kids should have for learning.”

NapaLearns is a nonprofit that provides extra funding to schools so they can accelerate the implementation of technology and project-based learning, Maddocks said.

“Our vision is that every student in Napa County is prepared for college, career and a contribution to the community,” she said.

### What is project-based learning?

A way of teaching that is integrated with a real-world project. The kids answer a question, such as “How can we bring more commerce to Napa Valley?” or “How do we grow a sustainable garden?” The teachers integrate that question with the curriculum of that grade. At the end they create a presentation or a book or play. It’s much more engaging to do that kind of work than just memorize a fact from a book.

### How many people are on your staff?

Me and my admin. Our board members are very involved in our work.

### How are you funded?

Most of our funding has come from individual donations and the Napa Valley Vintners.

### What’s new at your organization?

We are going to start a volunteer resource bank where we ask people from the community to participate in project-based learning as experts to provide kids information about their field. They can be the subject-matter experts. We can use the help of the community to help the kids of Napa Valley succeed.

### Which three people would you most like to have dinner with?

Hillary Clinton, Barbra Streisand and Benazir Bhutto — all strong leaders who are (or were) creative, candid, courageous, passionate, successful and very smart. I would love to talk to them about how they consistently pursued their visions in spite of challenges in complex social and political landscapes.

### **How did you get into this business?**

I started my career as a public school kindergarten teacher, principal, and director of a gifted program, and then changed careers after receiving a Ph.D. from Michigan State. I spent 25 years in business environments but then landed in Mississippi and Louisiana after (Hurricane) Katrina to lead an \$80 million educational transformation project for Cisco. The experience rocked my world and brought me full-circle back to public education.

### **What is the biggest challenge your business has faced?**

The biggest challenge we face is getting everyone in the community to appreciate that providing a solid education for all students in Napa County is the foundation for a thriving community, and gaining their support for increasing funding through the initiatives on the November ballot and also by contributing to NapaLearns.

### **What's something people might be surprised to know about you?**

I was a competitive ice skater from 3 years old until I was 14. I won my first speed-skating race in the Boston Garden arena when I was 5. Then I moved on to figure skating with a goal to reach the Olympics, but I just wasn't good enough.

### **If you could be anywhere right now, where would you be?**

On my good friend's sailboat in Vanuatu traveling around the South Pacific.

### **Which other business person(s) would you like to see featured in "10 Questions for..."**

Jason Luros, attorney.

Brenda Perry, Napa Valley Accounting.

Lauren Ackerman, Ackerman Family Vineyards.

### ***More from Maddocks***

### **What job would you like to try/not like to try?**

Try: I would love to be a commercial pilot on a day full of thunderstorms.

Not try: Painting the Golden Gate Bridge — I'm not good with heights, in spite of my love of flying.

### **What was your first job?**

I was a clown and puppeteer at children's birthday parties when I was a teenager. My friend and I did everything from setting up the decorations and serving the refreshments to entertaining and then cleaning up — all in clown costumes and makeup.

### **What's the worst job you ever had?**

Being a clown at children's birthday parties. We did this in Beverly Hills for one summer. We made a lot of money but we were treated badly, both by the kids and their moms. This was during the '60s, so I hope things have changed for those who like to help moms and dads make

birthdays memorable.

### **If you could change one thing about your business, what would it be?**

To strengthen what we are already doing, it would be wonderful to collaborate with all the other nonprofits that are working in the education arena in Napa County to shoot for a common goal — closing the achievement gap starting with early childhood and going all the way through college. We call this “collective impact,” and we are already working on this goal.

### **What was your childhood ambition?**

I always wanted to do something in the theater, movies or television, such as directing or producing shows. I wrote and directed a few shows in high school, but my attention got diverted to teaching kindergarten, which turned out to be a bit like directing a show after all.

### **What is one thing you hope to accomplish in your lifetime that you haven't yet?**

Since I keep being drawn back to education, I know it is my calling. I would love to help Napa County prove that every single child in our schools can become engaged in a personalized way and reach their highest potential.

### **What's on your to-do list?**

I hope to stay in Napa for many years — I love it here. When I retire I'd like to leisurely drive an RV around the country to see all the great sites — natural and man-made.

### **Whom do you most admire in the business world?**

Meg Whitman, because she was a pioneer woman leader in Silicon Valley as head of eBay, has been very successful in many different leadership roles, knows how to balance career and family, and has a great sense of humor.

Reach Maddocks at 265-2711 or [peg@napalearns.org](mailto:peg@napalearns.org).

## **10 Questions**

Peg Maddocks, Ph.D. of NapaLearns

—

Ask your own question

Readers are invited to ask their own questions of our local business people.

Next in 10 Questions:

- Robb McDonough, photographer

If you have a question for this person or have an interview suggestion, email [jhuffman@napanews.com](mailto:jhuffman@napanews.com) and your suggestion could be featured in an upcoming column.