Chris Tombari was halfway across the globe in February in Adama, Ethiopia, and, in a sense, fully aware of the surroundings in which he'd found himself.

Growing up, his parents, Martin and Carol, would regale him with stories of their initial union as Peace Corps volunteers. Their story began in a city and time far away from the bustling big-city atmosphere their son now witnessed on his six-day stay in Africa as part of a Sister Cities trip organized by the City of Aurora.

Yes, there were contrasts that still existed and harkened back to his parents’ time in that part of the world. Monkeys climbing fences. A hot springs serving as a respite for area citizens. Old mud huts passing for homes in poorer neighborhoods.

But there certainly was more of a pervasive jungle atmosphere back in 1968, when his parents were there. Decades later Chris’ father even had a ready prop he'd show his son that signified that moment in time.

A beat-up suitcase still in Martin's possession had two small holes bored into it permanently. It was with him when he was walking through some thick brush and a huge snake leapt up and grabbed the carry-on like it was hanging on for dear life.

Adama now has a superhighway that takes residents to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital city. Tombari, the chair of the Community College of Aurora’s English as a Second Language program, and the seven-person Aurora government delegation, plus 12 Ethiopian residents who paid their own way to join them, toured high-tech college facilities. They stayed in what would be considered a four-star American hotel, toured a state-of-the-art private hospital and Ethiopian Airlines. The latter trip featured an old plane that was being restored much like the one Tombari’s parents flew nearly five decades earlier; however, the airline’s home base now also has the latest luxury aircraft in and around its hangars.

“There was a feeling that my parents were here in the late ’60s and now I’m here,” Tombari said when he returned to CCA. “It was a totally bizarre feeling.

“All of a sudden, I felt like I was in two places at once – my parents’ history and now my new state, where I found myself in my family’s footsteps.”

Tombari’s trip to Adama had that historical backdrop in mind, but largely peered forward. The hope is that the stage is set for CCA to have future relationships with educational entities there, while Aurora strengthens its business and cultural ties.

Tombari’s thoughts on the trip were captured on the next six pages and his daily diary clearly recognizes the melding of present and past in Adama.

Chris Tombari ventured to Adama, Ethiopia, on a fact-finding trip with a contingent from the City of Aurora in February. The African nation wasn’t completely foreign territory to CCA’s chair of the ESL department, who returned home armed with a diary of his experiences to share with his colleagues.
The opportunity to go on this trip was presented to me in plenty of time to be able to make any and all necessary arrangements. One thing that stood out was how Aurora Sister Cities International, which led the trip, ended up buying non-refundable tickets because of the huge cost savings. As a non-profit, its director was concerned that this might be against state regulations. But Richard Maestas, as the vice president of Administration at CCA, put those concerns aside and made this advice ringing in my ears up to the departure day: “Well, don’t get sick.”

I'm prone to over-thinking and over-preparing, so I had plenty of time to consider other interesting questions, too: Which time difference will we observe? Ethiopia is 10 hours ahead this time of year (they don’t do Daylight Savings Time), but there is a custom followed by some that counts time only from dawn to dusk. Will the anti-malarial medicine cause weird side-effects like crazy dreams? (Answer from Kaiser Permanente: No, that was the old stuff.)

Finally, I found out that I only needed four shots, because many of the shots I got in the 1990s for my Peace Corps job in Mongolia still were good.

A week before the trip, the magnitude of the trip finally set in with my son, who suddenly was very worried for me, to the point of begging and tears. So we took some quality time together, to the point of begging and tears. So we took some quality time for me, to the point of begging and tears.

For our first evening in Adama, the Adama City Hall, there, we were welcome to call City Hall this morning to say that our delegation was welcome to call City Hall this morning to say that during the entire 13-hour flight you want to catch a movie, listen to music, listen to an audio book, or play a game. Addis Ababa, or Finfinay as the capital city is known in the Oromo language, looks beautiful as we approach at sunrise. It doesn’t matter that during the entire 13-hour flight it got maybe two hours of sleep. It suddenly hits me: I'm in Ethiopia, the country where my parents met. Honestly – and I’m going to use this in a speech on this trip – I guess I wouldn’t be here if it weren't for Ethiopia.

We landed right on time. Ethiopian Airlines could teach the world a thing or two about in-flight customer service (and I think it does, actually). But, wow, I'd forgotten what it was like to be this exhausted.

Walking around the terminal of Addis Ababa International Airport, being driven around the city of Addis Ababa, and walking and driving around Adama, nothing seems new when it comes to the people. Since one-third of the students in our college preparatory ESL program are from Ethiopia, I’m completely accustomed to hearing Amharic and Oromo spoken (I just don’t understand anything). It’s like walking the halls at CCA.

I've heard it time and time again: “Africa changes you.” I get it now. It’s not just Africa, because it happened to me in Peace Corps in Mongolia and also in Italy. Any place where you connect with people and they welcome you and they embrace you as family, that is a place that changes you because you feel like you belong where you didn’t know you belonged.

The first place we visited – before even getting to the hotel – was Adama City Hall. There, we were greeted by hundreds of cheering residents (the women were trilling). The mayor of Adama and the director of the Adama Sister Cities organization made it a point in their speeches in City Hall this morning to say that our delegation was welcome to call Adama our “second home.”

Now I get it.

For our first evening in Adama (after two days of traveling with no more than probably six total hours of sleep - all of it in 30-60 minute spurts and none of it REM), the city hosted a dinner for us. Now, I've eaten in many Ethiopian restaurants in Aurora and Denver, and they were all good. But eating at a feast in Ethiopia just doesn't compare. (Many people didn't hesitate to point out that all the ingredients came straight from the farm to this meal.)

In order to showcase Oromo culture, the community arranged for this dinner to have a live band, singers and dancers. And they made sure to present a wide variety of cultures from the area.

I must remember to say a heartfelt thank you to my old friend Hussen from Aurora, who taught us some helpful phrases in Oromo. Because of his lessons, I could recognize that the last singer was chanting “Thank you,” to the crowd as she finished her song. Some of the Ethiopian community members who traveled with us made sure all of us got up and danced. What a night.
Day 2 Itinerary (Feb. 15)

- Breakfast
- Meet and greet with regional president, Muktar Kedir
- Drive to Aurora Avenue
- Groundbreaking ceremony for Aurora village
- Coffee ceremony at groundbreaking tent
- Trip to AbaGada Hall, where delegation meets Deputy Mayor Derejee for the first time
- Lunch
- Tour of water facility in town
- Tour of water treatment plant outside of town
- Adama Medical Hospital and Public Medical College and Adama Hospital Private Clinic tours
- Dinner with Adama Medical Hospital and Medical College group at Rift Valley Hotel
- Bedtime

"I wonder what the Adama traffic report was like this morning?"

Oromo phrase of the day: Welcome – Baga nagaayan Dhufan; Response: Baga Nagaayan nu eeydan.

I’m learning more about Oromo culture and Adama policies than I think I ever would have dreamed of. Actually, I can’t say that before last August (when the Adama officials visited Aurora for Global Fest and the signing of the Sister Cities agreement) the name “Adama” ever entered my consciousness. But I’m picking up friendly phrases quickly enough. And many people speak English, so I’ve got a safety net for any mispronunciations.

Maybe not quite what Patrick Roy felt, but it was touching to see that the city of Adama had renamed a major boulevard “Aurora Avenue.” The mayor of Aurora, the mayor of Adama, and the president of the Oromia Region met to discuss the significance of our new Sister Cities arrangement. And at some point along the way from the hotel to our first dedication ceremony, the three of them stopped to hold a quick press conference on Aurora Avenue, stopping traffic all over that part of the city.

It was my first time causing a traffic jam, for sure.
Day 3 Itinerary (Feb. 16)

- Breakfast at hotel
- Adama Polytechnic College tour
- Goro College Preparatory School (and boarding school), grades 11-12, with musical performance
- Goro Secondary School, grades 9-10, public facility, tour
- Library and Youth Recreation Center
- Primary School
- Hot Springs, lunch and relaxing
- Dinner and Ethiopian Fashion Show, with grand finale of “This Land is Your Land”
- Bedtime

Above, students weld at the Adama Polytechnical University; below, sunset in Adama with a local church as backdrop. Right, tattered books.

“This education is your education” (apologies to Woody Guthrie)

We went to four schools today – kind of an education-themed day.

We started at the Adama Polytechnic College, which is similar to Pickens and Emily Griffith technical colleges. They have a contextualized program for teaching hospitality industry just like for the refugees at Emily Griffith. It made me reflect that teachers at Emily Griffith came up with this idea in Denver, and the teachers at the Polytechnic campus came up with this idea in Adama, and that teachers of contextualized training programs think the same.

One of the students showed me his manual on a brick molding and pressing machine. The students got the plans on the Internet and fabricated the machine themselves. He let me know he’s looking for funding to make it automated.

Then we went to a college prep school – grades 11 and 12 – which serves to prepare students for the entrance exams to college. (A university education here is free, but you have to test in.) Following that, it was off to the secondary school of grades nine and 10. (At 10th grade you take the exit exam: pass and you go to the preparatory school I just mentioned; fail, and you go to work or try to get into the Polytechnic College and learn a trade.)

Next was a youth center with a library in dire need of books and shelves and a special request for texts in braille. One recurring theme from yesterday’s medical college through today’s school visits – libraries are sparse and what few textbooks are there are outdated; the computers, too. It’s amazing how new books would have a major impact. Such a simple solution. The schools seem very confident in their faculty’s teaching abilities. It’s just the lack of quality materials.

We finished with a visit to an elementary school. (So, starting at the Polytechnic College and finishing at the elementary level – nicely planned, Jeglalo.) This school has a special program inside it for orphans to teach them life skills, including providing them 100 Birr a month into an account that they must learn how to manage. I got on video a little boy teaching an English lesson to us on the difference between active and passive voice. I will show this to my advanced grammar class when we hit this topic. Practicing my Oromo greetings was hilarious here, because kids had no problem laughing at my mispronunciation.

The second half of the day was at a hot springs resort for some relaxation. I got some quality time to just finally socialize with Aurora Mayor Steve Hogan. He’s the only one I hadn’t gotten a chance to get to know. We’re the only two males in this group who are not Ethiopian. Honestly, neither one of us was into getting immersed in the hot spring water, so we got our feet wet and retired to the bar to grab a couple of cokes. It was nice to just chat ... and sit.

As others from the group filed in, I found out something interesting about another member of our group: He was able to name a woman in one of these Ethiopian tourist posters hanging in the bar. (Those posters are meant to encourage travel to Ethiopia and feature a person, usually a woman, who would represent a particular ethnic group and be dressed in a very traditional fashion.)

The woman gracing this particular poster’s name is Denebe, and she’d be in her 70s or 80s now. That’s how old this advertisement is. But our Ethiopian traveling companion was planning to track her down because she’s from his village, and he’s going there next week. He explained that back in
the ’70s, the national tourism office gathered pictures from visitors and took some themselves of people all around the country. But they barely paid the individuals anything. Recently, there was a story on the news about how the government is trying to reach out to these people and pay them restitution for using their pictures being featured so prominently all these years.

(Speaking of previous connections, I must remember to connect one of our traveling party, who was a student of CCA faculty Maria Halloran’s back in 2007. He now owns a computer store near Chambers and Mexico in Aurora.)

The day ended with the party, actually a formal dinner/fashion show/live music concert.

Now I’m used to using “This Land is Your Land” for years to welcome refugees to the United States from my days working at Spring Institute. So tonight, at the end of the evening of live music and a fashion show about Ethiopian cultural dress, the emcee said he was going to point to one of the Aurora delegation to come up and sing a song in English. He pointed to one – she shook her head adamantly. He pointed to the next – she nodded her head tentatively.

What in the world should we sing? So I asked the Emcee to ask the band if I could use a guitar for a song. We all sang (and danced) to “This Land is Your Land.” (Yes, I know it was originally a protest song, an angry response to Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America,” but who’s gonna know that level of trivia here?) The band picked up on my bad chord changes and tempo, and away we went.

What an end to the evening. Our Ethiopian hosts and guests were all dancing. The best part: Two of the four of us singing were Ethiopian students of mine back at Spring Institute when they’d first arrived as refugees and sang this same song with me all those years ago.

Some final words for the day. I awoke the previous night to this crazy laughter. I asked at the breakfast table if anyone else heard the crazy woman, and nobody knew what I was talking about. As I described the noise, they laughed at me.

No Ethiopian woman would be out at that hour. It was a hyena. Huh.

Day 4 Itinerary (Feb. 17)

• Breakfast at Rift Valley Hotel
• Spinning factory tour
• Coffee break at hotel owned by spinning factory
• Private hospital and private medical college tour
• Lunch hosted by private medical college. Meeting with Department of State PR Officer Daniel Kennedy

Meshing the old with the new: a windmill farm sits atop the hill as cattle are ushered down the pavement.

And now for something completely different

Oromo phrases of the day: Akkam? (how are you?); Nagaa (good); Naqaa! (hello).

Today was a study in contrast because we saw what private investment is doing.

We started at a textile factory that was employing financial and manufacturing practices that were no different from what I’ve seen in the U.S. The Adama General Referral Hospital and Medical College (actually a private medical facility) stood in stark contrast to the medical clinic and college we’d visited two days ago. This one made me feel like I was at St. Joseph’s. And their medical college was using simulation methods (not the robotics that we use at CCA). Their library still was very understocked for such a large school. I have to send pictures to Emily Griffith, Pickens, and especially Renie Del Ponte, Beth Lattone, and company at the Center for Simulation.

In the lead-up to this trip, I was tasked by the two Sister Cities organizations to write a speech to deliver to the Adama Science and Technology University (ASTU). I was psyched.

I interviewed quite a few people at CCA to explain to ASTU who CCA is and what we do.

In the end, there must’ve been some miscommunication because I didn’t make the agenda. Jeglalo got permission for Mayor Horgan and I to each make a few remarks, though. So I got to use my line finally about how I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for Ethiopia. That was a hit.

Chris Tombari’s Adama Diary

• Oromiya Special Boarding School tour
• Shopping excursion
• Dinner at Executive Hotel with members of boarding school and medical college attending
• Bedtime

Local children cheerily wave at the foreign visitors.

Oh, and our pictures from our flight aboard Ethiopian Airlines made it onto the company’s Facebook page.
Day 5 Itinerary (Feb. 18)

• Breakfast
• Tour of Langano and Shaala National Parks
• Beach resort
• Return to hotel for city-hosted farewell dinner and Oromo dancing. Exchange of gifts.
• Group discussion
• Bedtime

“In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida”

Oromo phrases of the day: Jirta? (how’s it going?); Fayee (peacefully); Obboo Kantii bu (Mr. Mayor); Haa deem nuu (let’s go); A kasee! (Oh, really!); Na ngalle (I don’t understand.)

Today was a day dedicated to being tourists; although, still on a tightly monitored schedule. We drove three hours south to the Shaala National Park, where we saw ostriches, wart hogs, and gazelle running wild (I don’t envy their compatriots in the Denver Zoo).

We also saw Lake Shaala, the deepest lake in Ethiopia at 260 meters. The time in the car gave me lots to think about.

Every now and then I glance out the front window. A trip to Africa puts life back in perspective. There is a lot of crazy passing around huge trucks on these small roads.

Throughout the day, it was fun to talk and to listen. There’s a certain rhythm to the Oromo language, and I’m hearing a lot of repeated “d” and “g” type syllables. For example, the city hall is called Abagedda, after the Oromo word for leader.

Gada is the system of government of the Oromo people that involves a leader, supported by an elder, who can, in turn, consult with an even older mentor. (This was suppressed starting with King Menelik in the late 19th century. But it is practiced in some Oromo communities and villages in the south. And some people follow the philosophy in some communities in the U.S.) Galma abbaa gadaa is the office of local leadership. Then there is the Oda tree, prominently featured on all Oromo flags, which was where the Gada happened. All of these sounds for some reason have Iron Butterfly’s acid rock song, “In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida,” running through my head.

Many of the signs in Adama are in three languages: Oromo (using the Roman alphabet), Amharic (in the Ge’ez script), and English. So it’s not surprising to see a sign, like this one from a bread company, where there is a phrase in English like, “Quality is our identity.” And there was one on the road that was only in English: “We are open,” with a raspberry picture signifying some kind of farm.

Another thing side-by-side here? Religion. Islam and Orthodox Christianity exist side by side. I hear the call to prayer from the mosque every morning.

Now that the trip is winding down, I’ve realized that the Aurora group is a lot of fun to travel with. The Ethiopians from here – some of whom I’ve known for a long time – are a funny group.

The folks from Sister Cities and the City of Aurora are also sophisticated world travelers. We all know what we’re doing, take our international responsibilities very seriously, and know how to relax, let go, and enjoy the moment. I can’t imagine traveling with a better group.

Some other thoughts about our delegation: I don’t speak Oromo, but from the inflections of the voices and the amazed types of interjections, I am reminded that in some ways people like Hassan and Hussen are tourists here too. They haven’t been here in decades.

One of our group, Biruktu, is an architectural engineer who graduated from the University of Maryland. He had lots to say during the trip about the inefficiencies of building construction in and around Adama.

Overall, I sense some level of optimism here on the part of the Aurora Ethiopians.
Day 6 Itinerary (Feb. 19)

- Breakfast
- Drive back to Addis Ababa
- Ethiopian Airlines tour
- Foreign Ministry meet and greet
- Lunch/Shopping
- Cultural show at Addis restaurant
- Airport departure

"Alice: How long is forever? White Rabbit: Sometimes, just one second." – Lewis Carrol

Favorite English phrases our hosts tried on us: It’s okay. It’s okay? How is it? It’s all organic here.

What was that line in the play, "Barefoot in the Park?" Six days does not a week make?

I don’t think we even got six days in Ethiopia because we used up two calendar days getting to Ethiopia and one going back. (And they say time travel is for science fiction.)

I have my elevator speech all prepared for answering the question, "How was it?"

"Exhilarating and overwhelming with a heavy dose of perspective."

I was not looking forward to multiple flights going back, and because I was so tired (the farewell party went very late), I found myself prone to obsessing on details I couldn’t control.

Things like, "What if we get stuck in Chicago? What if they decide in Heathrow or O’Hare that my bag is overweight?"

Jeez. I just wanted to get home in time because in time (Feb. 20) meant I was technically home on my daughter’s 12th birthday, and I could give her some Ethiopian jewelry.

Well, the travel gods were benevolent (except that I finally got to have my bout with a stomach thing on the first leg of the flight), and we arrived home as scheduled.

Now I’ve got the weekend to enjoy the beginnings of jet lag, re-enter life in Aurora, finish my homework for school, and, most importantly, enjoy being back together with family.

By the way, everyone was fine after I left. No tears.

And with the fairly reliable wireless Internet access in my hotel room, I could email and Skype with family every day. For free.

Editor’s note: Chris did make it to his first class in the States bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, by all reports.
CCA held a send-off event March 12 for the 16-person student delegation headed to the National Model United Nations Conference in New York during spring break. Clockwise from top, Joseph Krantz gives a taste of his speech as one of the college's Ethiopian representatives; Aurora Mayor Steve Hogan and Congressman Mike Coffman listen intently; delegate Sarah Daniels looks over an itinerary with her aunt, Pamela Anderson; Vladislav Andreev is part of the student introductions to the assembled crowd in the Student Centre Rotunda.
Clockwise from top: Delegate Vallery Lupunde shares a lighter moment with his father; Aurora City Councilwoman Molly Markert laughs with members of the local Ethiopian community; Congressman Coffman shakes hands with guests; Gloria Curtis, a former Peace Corps worker in Ethiopia, sports traditional garb at her table; delegate Patricia Stephens chats with Mayor Hogan; delegate Jessica Pineda takes a cellphone photo with her guests; delegates Jordan Taylor and Keyara Lawrence listen intently; Political Science faculty Dr. Bobby Pace does a television interview with Telemundo. CCA’s delegation ended up winning three awards at the MUN conference March 21-27: an honorable mention for Distinguished Delegation; Outstanding Position Paper in Committee during the second General Assembly; best delegate (Hector Varela-Sierra) in the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
Pumping new blood into “Life”

Nascent team already making quick inroads in a short period of time

Kathryn Sturtevant and Regina Edmondson have only worked a few months as the director and assistant director, respectively, in the Office of Student Life. Already, they are like-minded in the future direction of their department.

“One of the biggest differences is that there’s shared responsibility,” said Sturtevant, who joined CCA in mid-January after working five years in a leadership and service center at Texas A&M University.

“I do think historically Student Life has facilitated numerous events on its own, which is good, but it also presents some challenges. Now, there’s more of a shared responsibility, and Regina has done a good job of sharing those expectations ahead of time.”

The base idea is that faculty and staff are genuine partners in the planning of events. But providing increased campus collaboration – one of Edmondson’s main tasks – is only one a small part of the overall strategy that’s already been implemented by the new leadership team.

Other student-centered goals include clearly defining the structure within campus organizations and facilitating the development of student leadership (see sidebar). Sturtevant’s background dovetails into those particular areas. She has a master’s degree in Higher Education Administration from the University of Denver.

“Kathryn’s come in and added so much in just a short period of time,” said Edmondson, who moved over from the CCA Foundation to Student Life last August.

“The results, processes and procedures that she’s implemented have already been beneficial. I think in terms of our desired goals and outcomes for students, I think our visions align, our work styles align, and overall … we have a really great team and an opportunity to take Student Life in a great new direction.”

Student Life at CCA until recently has historically been a more service-oriented department – providing health and wellness resources, connecting to the community in terms of housing options, and facilitating campus identification cards. Those services – as well as student conduct – have shifted to other areas. A Student Services Board that once existed has also been eliminated and its functions absorbed into the new structure.

All those changes have allowed for Sturtevant and Edmondson, under the guidance of Dean of Students Tamara White, to be bold in shaping their goals for the department.

The mission statement for Student Life now trumpets “intentional programming, student organization participation and the building of meaningful relationships within an inclusive learning environment,” while pledging to develop “student leaders who are committed to personal growth and dedicated, involved and engaged in their community.”

Sturtevant not long ago was attending a small mountain college in North Carolina and facing many of the same challenges she sees among CCA’s students. She not only was going to school full time, but also worked two jobs – in retail and on campus – to put herself through college.

“I think I can relate to a lot of the students here,” she said. “A lot of my students work. Almost all of my students work, and they’ve shared with me during my short time here that they struggle with that. ‘How do I work? Then I also do this and have a family.’

So for me, it’s helping them with time management and reminding them why they’re here.

“In that way, I can connect with them.”

Edmondson’s connection to CCA is longstanding, having worked for the college’s Foundation for nearly three years. But many may not have known that in her private life she has served for the last seven years as a national program director for Jack and Jill of America, whose focus is on cultural, educational and leadership development for African-American youth.

Now, her personal life and professional life have morphed together. And she’s enjoying that balance.

“The thing I appreciate most about Regina is that intentionality and then being able to communicate it,” Sturtevant said. “Some people might be really intentional about how they want to plan or do things, but they might assume that people already know that or don’t know how to communicate that.

“But Regina is able to very clearly communicate expectations, what our role is going to be in order to enhance an event or program.

“That’s why I think we’ve seen so much success in numbers with collaboration because she’s developed relationships, reached to people and shared what Student Life is about and making those relationships so that we can have awesome events for students.”

The work of Edmondson and Sturtevant is buttressed from a support staff that includes graduate assistants Paige Mills and Molly Sarubbi, administrative assistant Traci Fiedlen and work-studies Tiffany Christian, Fatema Amin and Georgia Olivas.

“We’re a new baby team,” Sturtevant said. “We’re young, but we’re growing by leaps and bounds.”
“Math Day for Girls” isn’t just about demonstrating cool technology and experiments. It’s about showing the possibilities.

A group of 108 students participated in the Feb. 20 event on the Lowry campus, hailing from six local schools – APS Online High School; Noel Community Arts School; Aurora West College Prep Academy; Vista Peak Preparatory School; High Tech Early College; and Venture Prep High School.

The students were immersed in exercises that focused upon art and design, science, technology, computers, and engineering.

Gabriel Alsina, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) teacher at Vista Peak, liked what he saw and heard during the half-day event.

“Students that normally don’t get time together in the classroom are meeting other girls with similar interests, which is huge for them, because sometimes they feel kind of isolated in a STEM classroom that’s almost totally boys,” said Alsina, who brought a group of mostly freshmen and sophomores to experience the hands-on exercises.

“I’ve already heard them having conversations about going to college, about what they want to study, and kind of having that forward-thinking mentality about what’s after high school and what they need to do now to prepare for life,” Alsina added.

“It’s good to get them in that head space, since it’s not something they really think about until they’re seniors. And it’s good for them to have that mentality now.”

Alex Girard, Celia Miller, Tom Dillon, JoAnn Burkhart, Robert Woods, Victor Andersen, and Jennifer Harrell comprised the CCA faculty leading the student activities during the half-day event.

There was work on computer coding, tracking and managing an outbreak – even a venture entitled “The Great Pluto Rescue,” in which students needed to encase a light bulb in aluminum foil, then surround it with Legos.

Each of the groups were timed and needed to keep their structures light and durable, while still achieving the experiment’s ultimate measure of success: whether the bulb would still light after dropping the project off of a fire escape onto concrete at a height of about 10-12 feet.

All the students groups ended up succeeding in that task.

“Coming here showed me that there are a lot more things you can do with STEM that I thought at first,” said Amber Lamphere, a freshman at Vista Peak. “You can do almost anything in STEM. It can be almost any career you want. Coming here just showed me it’s easier to do anything you want.”

For many of the students, just coming onto the CCA campus was a hint at what could be in store for their future academic careers. Seeing a college atmosphere and the variety of options was eye opening.

Sharing with girls from other schools was equally important, suggested Mara Ortiz, a middle-school counselor at Aurora West.

“It’s always good to throw students into new environments,” Ortiz said. “It makes them have to adjust to other students who are there. They kind of get comfortable in their own environments. So they have to adjust to new faces, new personalities, new classroom, new teacher. I think it’s good for any student to be exposed to that.”

“Having concrete experiences in STEM is huge,” especially at the middle-school level.

“Our students come from financially unstable backgrounds and they may not be able to experience things like this in their normal day-to-day lives, and especially for girls, that’s so important to keep them interested in STEM and motivated for their future,” added Brynn Robles, a fellow counselor with Ortiz at Aurora West.

The American Association of University Women recently did an extensive report about women in STEM fields entitled, “Why So Few?”

The report found social and environmental factors shaped girls’ achievements and interest in math and science, and that the college environment and bias continue to be obstacles – even while women have made progress in other historically male fields such as business, law and medicine.

“If you have the problem you have to address it,” said CCA’s Andersen. “We’ve tried ignoring it for 50 years and that hasn’t worked. So, I look forward to the day when a STEM Day for Girls is not necessary anymore. But I’d rather do it than not.”

Sarah Machacek, a ninth-grader at Vista Peak, appears to be tuning out all the noise. She’s already considering the field of architecture as a future career. Experiments and building things intrigued her even at a young age, and she’s steadily tried since to advance her studies in science.

But Machacek added that, from her experience, she’s not the norm among her peers in her passion for STEM.

“I hope that more girls get interested in it, because not a lot of girls are. They are just like, ‘Well, that’s something I can get my hands dirty or feel it’s out of reach,’” she explained. “But girls need to realize you can do all kinds of things. You can do design or hit stuff that more guys would do than girls, like maybe doing cars or creating NASA rockets.”

Math Day for Girls opens eyes, minds to possible STEM careers
**Building a potential APS-CCA-DU pipeline**

### What is AMA?
Access in Mathematics for All (AMA) supports work underway at the University of Denver (DU) to develop a program in mathematics education designed specifically to improve access and opportunities for underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities and low-income students. The primary goal of AMA is to develop capacity at DU through a partnership with Community College of Aurora to significantly increase the number of diverse and low-income students graduating from DU with an undergraduate degree in mathematics and a teaching license in secondary mathematics.

To accomplish this goal, the work of AMA will be devoted to developing an infrastructure that provides significant academic and social supports for these future students to be successful at DU. After developing the capacity that is needed at DU to ensure the success of low-income, diverse students in Secondary Mathematics, DU plans to pursue about $1.2 million in scholarship funding through the National Science Foundation-funded Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program for future mathematics students.

### Process
Students who apply for and are accepted to be AMA Fellows are strong math students interested in becoming math teachers in Aurora. These fellows will receive academic and social supports so that they can succeed at DU and beyond. Some of those steps include:
- All AMA Fellows will receive supplementary instruction by well-trained, dedicated faculty to ensure success in math courses at DU.
- AMA Fellows will have special access to programs at DU that are designed specifically to support them socially, while integrating students into the DU community. AMA Fellows will have ongoing access to DU faculty and student role models who will also help them be successful at DU.
- AMA Fellows are part of the AMA team that includes not only DU faculty, but also graduate students who will make sure students are part of the team and that their accomplishments are recognized and celebrated.
- AMA Fellows will have special access to programs at DU as undergraduates and financial aid once entered into the Teacher Education Program at DU.

### What should interested CCA students/APS high school students do?
Currently enrolled CCA students should remain in close contact with his or her advisor to help plan coursework aimed toward an Associate of Science degree in Math. For current high school students, it’s suggested that interested parties talk to their counselors about taking college credit through the Concurrent Enrollment (CE) program. Earning 12 credit hours of CE credit will help students get their first year of college at CCA paid for through the ASCENT program. (In particular, it will be important to complete college algebra and trigonometry prior to finishing high school.)

Students may have to pay for another year at CCA to earn an associate degree before transferring to DU. But regardless of when the students transfer to DU, the plan for them is to apply for a scholarship program that would help pay for them to go to DU.

AMA Fellows at DU will pursue an undergraduate degree in Mathematics, then pursue a master’s degree and teaching degree in Secondary Mathematics before finally becoming a teacher in, what the National Science Foundation calls, a “high need” middle school or high school in APS. Jobs in Aurora Public Schools already are waiting for program graduates to fill.

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**Unexpected part of the equation**

Like many concurrent enrollment students, Crystal Armas came to CCA wanting to save money and get a head start on core college courses.

What she never envisioned was that less than two years later, she not only would be on a path to an associate degree — currently needing just seven more credits to finish, but already with a career choice and job in hand. And, with it all, comes a real opportunity to earn a master’s degree and teacher’s license with scholarship help from the University of Denver, too.

That step-by-step process is designed to finish with Armas taking guaranteed future employment in a “high-need” Aurora Public Schools middle or high school.

“It’s just incredible,” she said. “I feel like my life is at the top, and I can’t imagine if I’m able to actually finish this how much better my life will be.”

Armas was identified in the Fall 2014 as a potential candidate for an exciting new program, “Access in Mathematics for All (AMA),” whose goal is to take locally talented math students who hail from Aurora high schools and create pathways that eventually lead them to become secondary mathematics teachers in their old neighborhoods.

Armas isn’t just taking advanced coursework, such as Calculus II this spring, she’s actually serving as a “secondary math teacher,” essentially a teacher’s aid at Hinkley High School. She has been working with freshmen and sophomores who aren’t necessarily headed down a math track.

It hasn’t taken her long to see herself at a young age in many of those students.

In the fifth grade, Armas received the lowest-possible score on statewide testing in math. She felt she was terrible at the subject. But in sixth grade, two teachers helped her learn tips and tools that raised her from under proficient to advanced in just one year.

“I just started liking math,” she recalled.

“It was a thing I was best at. I understood it. It was like a puzzle to me, and from then on, I just started trying to understand everything.”

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It took fastidious note-taking and asking loads of questions to keep advancing to where she is now—in CCA Math Chair James Gray’s Calculus II class.

And now, she’s the go-to person for other students. At Hinkley, she is one of three CCA students currently embedded within the lower-level math classes. Representatives from CCA and DU go to upper-tier math classes in an effort to recruit students to the AMA program.

Armas’ strategy in the high school is trying to provide encouragement for students to take notes and make an effort to study so that they can eventually make steady gains.

“It reminds me of when I was in their shoes,” Armas explained. “It’s different, because they want to give up right away. They’re like, ‘I don’t get it. I don’t want to try.’ But I know what it feels like not to understand math.

“I try to motivate them. I try to give them tips that I would want to be able to understand. And I really like the opportunity because I feel like I can help them out. I already see some kids changing. They’re trying a little harder, focusing a little more. And even though I’ve only been there a short time, I see changes in student performance and the ability to want to learn.”

Armas gets called into action at CCA by students who are flummoxed by calculus’ heady concepts that, at first, scared her, until she learned more techniques that allayed any concerns.

“Some of my classmates had difficulty and would always ask me for help, and I started to see that I really enjoyed helping them, and they were able to understand,” she said. “It motivated me. I never got tired of helping.

“And then James one day said to me that it really seemed like I enjoyed helping people and he brought up the idea of what I want my future career to be. He said, ‘Have you ever thought of being a math teacher?’ I hadn’t, but I started thinking about it and it was really something I do love doing. It makes me happy.”

The AMA Fellows program was broached shortly thereafter.

For Armas, the thought of attending a prestigious university like DU seemed like a pipe dream only months earlier, but is quickly becoming a reality.

For DU, it’s a way to continue striving toward a more diverse student base.

“For us,” said Rick Kitchen, a DU Mathematics professor and Kennedy Endowed Chair for Urban Education, “it’s an equity-social issue.”

Former CCA President Dr. Linda Bowman first broached the partnership between CCA and DU while she was employed at the Morgridge School of Education.

It took about two years for the National Science Foundation (NSF) to issue a grant to get the program off the ground. Another huge step is expected soon.

“I think we’re doing well. I think we’re off to a good start,” Kitchen said. “In August, we apply for scholarship funding in the range of $1.2 million, something like that, and most of that money will go to students to fund their teaching degree so they can get a teaching license at DU and a master’s degree. We’ve already signed an agreement with APS for those students to then get jobs as secondary math teachers, so they can be role models for other members of the community.”

Armas, no doubt, is a role model already in her own home. Her mother’s education went no farther than high school. She didn’t know her father and was raised by a grandfather who worked in construction before recently passing away.

Alvaro Garcia, who Armas considered her father figure, got to see the strides she was making academically before his death.

“He said he was really happy,” Armas remembered, wiping away tears. “I would stay up late to do homework and he’d be like, ‘Oh, you’re doing your homework again. And he was like, ‘Your work is finally paying off. I’m really proud of you.”

One of the messages Armas heard frequently was not to get trapped in a profession she disliked, like many of her relatives. That seems unlikely, given her current track.

The money CCA is receiving through the initial NSF grant is being used to pay for the supplemental instructors, release time for faculty who are actively recruiting in the high schools, and other activities—such as a recent math lecture held on the CentreTech campus.

“Success for us is being able to develop a pipeline,” Gray said.

“This is our first year try-
The play “Mockingbird” took center stage at the Larry D. Carter Theater from March 12-21 and brought the audience inside the world and mind of Caitlin, a girl with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The production tackled labels of misunderstanding and judgment, as Caitlin and her father dealt in their own way with the school-shooting death of their brother and son, Devon.

Pictured clockwise from top, Caitlin (Rachel Gawlikowski) escapes through mind and body via a ‘fabric dance’; Breanna (Brittany Pollard) nurses a black eye and cries while teacher Mrs. Johnson (Stephanie Nieto) tries to get the class to behave; Caitlin has a Tantrum-Rage-Meltdown (TMR) while her counselor, Mr. Brock (James Brunt) attempts to console her; the first-grade class demonstrates the food pyramid (Pollard, Shannon Lee, Jessica Czapla and Jake Henderson); Dad (Trevor Stubbs) comforts Caitlin after she’s finally able to cry over the family’s devastating loss.
Richard Maestas, CCA’s vice president for Administration, will be leaving the college at the end of May to assume the position of regional vice president of Colorado Mountain College. In announcing the move, Dr. Betsy Oudenhoven said March 27 that Maestas has been a VP at CCA for more than five years and he has done a wonderful job managing the college’s financial resources. The college is close to completion of a facilities master plan, is significantly improving its technology infrastructure, has signage and landscaping projects going on at Lowry, and has received clean audits every year.

CCA’s new student orientation for the Summer and Fall 2014 sessions required that participants buttress their initial introductory course with a second information session on campus. That move has resulted in increased retention and graduation rates from Fall to Spring, according to preliminary tracking data compiled by the Center for Outreach and Recruitment.

The spring retention rate of 83 percent was 17 percent higher than the overall college numbers. The average GPA of those participating in part two of the new student orientation was 2.95, compared to the full population’s 2.5 average.

Gauging the Fall-to-Fall retention and GPA data is the next step in the process.

Part two of the new student orientation focuses on impacting the retention of first-time, new students with a curriculum that includes study skills, writing classes for 19,358 credit hours.

The latest figures released by the Office of Concurrent Enrollment show a total head count of 3,044 students, taking 5,881 classes for 19,358 credit hours on CCA’s campuses and at its partner high schools during the period beginning in Fall 2014 and ending Spring 2015.

There have been sharp spikes during that same period in head count, classes taken and credit hours nearly across the board among the college’s area CE partners: Aurora Public Schools, Cherry Creek School District, Denver Public Schools, and others.

Yet those figures need context. New students may account for some of those gains, but year-long courses at the high school level appear statistically only in CCA’s spring accounting and likely create a bigger impact.

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Debt and Default Management Coordinator Mary Anne Hunter cautioned that CCA must remain vigilant on this issue, despite the progress made. But she added that the Office of Financial Aid will continue to monitor and implement proactive changes and monitor and fine tune existing enhancements that have proven successful. Official CDR figures will be released in September, but the draft and final numbers typically remain the same.

The current 11.9 percent CDR within that time frame represents the lowest rate among Colorado Community College System institutions. The 10.1 percent decline from 2011 figures ranked third among the 13 member colleges.

A Feast For The Eyes

CCA’s spring art show is entitled “INDULGE” and runs on weekdays through April 10. The works displayed are described by organizers as: “Sinful Craving for the Mind: Delicious. Delightful. Delicious.” The gallery is located at 9202 E. Severn Place, Denver (in the Lowry North Quad). The show is free and open to the public. Ultra-realistic drawings and process works by Kate O’Donnell and CCA Drawing II students are the featured attractions. Among the students whose work is displayed are: Maricarmen Palacios Saucedo, Nolan Castanon Banuelos, Cynthia Chacon, Teyawna Debose, Alexander Garcia, Julita Hatcher, Rachel Heath, Brandon Johnson, Andrea Linn, Julie Malmlov, Stephanie Mayoral, Abraham Montes, Hayley Pearson, Jesus Pulido Davila, Alegre Sissom, and Kim Hunjh. For more information, please contact Celia Miller-Morissey at ceila.miller@ccaurora.edu.

Arapahoe County Commissioner and former CCA faculty member Nancy Jackson was named “Woman of the Year” on March 6 at the Aurora Chamber of Commerce’s 60th Annual Awards Dinner. Jackson taught speech and communication and customized training during 20 non-consecutive years at CCA.

The college was Jackson’s first employment opportunity out of graduate school and her last job before her election to commissioner, where she’s currently serving a second term representing District 4. Nancy’s daughter Sara previously has been a Geography adjunct at CCA as well.

The CCA Education Expo was held March 14 at Lowry. Attendees toured the campus, asked questions, and met faculty, who explained to them why the college made sense as part of an educational journey.

Dr. Robert Stencel, a University of Denver professor of astronomy and astrophysics and director of the historic Chautauqua and Mt. Evans observatories, will be this spring’s featured speaker at the bi-annual Sherlin Lecture Series. His subject matter: “Astronomy in a Time of Climate Change.” The event is scheduled for April 24 at 7 p.m. in the Fine Arts Forum on the CentreTech campus. CCA’s observatory will be open after the lecture for viewing of the first-quarter moon and Jupiter, weather permitting.

Emelda Jones, head of the International Advising Program, left CCA after a 15-year career. Jones’ work touched the lives of hundreds of staff and students.

Aurora Ogg, director of Constituent Services for Congressmen Mike Coffman spoke at the Center for Workforce Development March 30. "Backstage" magazine recognized the Colorado Film School in a recent article on the 14 best regional film schools.
Clockwise from top, Tamara White, CCA’s dean of students, makes a point during the “Moving Beyond Ferguson” discussion Feb. 26, while panelists Dr. Bobby Pace, Dr. Ann Dondapati Allen, Quincy Hines, and Dr. Miguel De La Torre observe; Dr. Terrence Blackmon from the University of Denver presents “What Is Number Theory” at a Feb. 26 lecture presented by the Math Club; Anna Jansen, Dr. Derrick Haynes and Dr. Elena Sandoval-Lucero share a lighter moment at the CCA table during the Spring Transfer Fair at Lowry on March 3; Jill Szynzkie is the guest of honor at a baby shower in A108 in early March; two CCA students study for an anatomy test with a little help from a friend.