



# local/state

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META4, INC. CONNECTS COMMUNITIES WITH CLASSROOMS

## New education networking group launched

A new non-profit organization in Midland wants to connect the knowledge and resources of the Great Lakes Bay Region's businesses, industries and community organizations with local classrooms.

Meta4 Inc., a 501(c)3 organization, has been officially launched by its five principal members, all residents of Midland: Christine Brillhart, Denyse Clayton, Darcy McMahon, Kristiina Pilnik and Cathie Stewart.

"Meta4 works hand-in-hand with educators and businesses to help provide active, real-world experiences to students that enhance school curriculum and meet student needs," said McMahon, Meta4, Inc. CEO and director of education strategy. "We're a think tank for networking opportunities in education. We're trying to build a structured yet dynamic education partnership between communities and classrooms using innovation and research-based education practices."

Current projects include a math mentoring program, S.M.A.R.T., at Midland Public Schools that connects members of the scientific community with middle school students; a series of theatre classes as part of the after-school program at St. Brigid Catholic Church in Midland; and a "green energy" career program for students, which is under development with MITECH Plus for fall 2010.

In addition, Meta4, in collaboration with Creative 360 in Midland, is launching a children's theatre arts program called The Flying Pig Theatre Academy, a 14-week program designed for 7- to 14-year-olds that opens Feb. 1 (see related story).

Funding for Meta4 programs comes from grants, private donations, tuition and professional fees, and Meta4 also relies upon

### Flying Pig Theatre Academy opening Feb. 1

A new theater school designed for 7- to 14-year-olds is opening in Midland on Feb. 1.

The Flying Pig Theatre Academy is a partnership with Meta4, an educational networking organization, and Creative 360: Stage, Studios & Gallery. Classes will take place at Creative 360, 1517 Bayliss St., Midland.

The 14-week program costs \$155 and registration is available online at [www.becreative360.org](http://www.becreative360.org), or by calling Creative 360 at (989) 837-1885. Classes begin Feb. 1 and meet once a week. Students can choose either 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Mondays or 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays. Scholarships are available.

Midland residents Denyse Clayton and Kristiina Pilnik will instruct the students. Clayton and Pilnik have directed numerous plays such as "Rap Rap Rapunzel," "Hansel and Gretel," "Olivia!" and "There's a Monster in My Closet" for Peanut Gallery at Midland Center for the Arts.

"There's nothing quite as wonderful as watching a group of enthusiastic kids creating a vision for a show," Pilnik said. "Our objective is to coax that creativity out of every participant and then guide them so that they are able to use their newly learned abilities to construct a cohesive production."

volunteers from the community to successfully implement programs. For more information, visit [www.meta4edu.org](http://www.meta4edu.org).

#### Staff Biographies

Christine Brillhart is chief financial officer and director of community relations. Brillhart taught science in the Midland Public School system for 13 years as well as designed curriculum and provided professional development for educators. She created and coordi-

nates a math mentoring program (S.M.A.R.T.) with more than 50 volunteer community members for fifth and sixth grade students. Currently, Brillhart networks and develops partnerships with schools and other educational agencies to re-tool, create and expand existing programs, as well as assist with marketing, grant writing, scheduling and development of summer camps and after school programs.

Denyse Clayton is director of

Co-instructor Clayton said, "We feel the children in our community who love theatre should have an opportunity to participate all year long without having to audition. We have seen the number of aspiring actors, make-up artists and set designers grow at every play audition at the Center for the Arts. Unfortunately, there are never enough spaces to accommodate those numbers. Flying Pig Theatre Academy is here to fulfill that hunger of all those with a love of theatre."

The Flying Pig program curriculum includes story and character study, stage movement, voice, improvisation and pantomime. In addition, students will learn how to plan and build sets and properties; design make-up, costumes and wigs; and decide which sounds and lighting will bring their show to life. At the end of the 14 weeks, students will showcase their newfound theatrical skills in a final performance for their friends and families.

The name, Flying Pig Theatre Academy, pays homage to professional director Rodger Henderson, who loved theater and pigs. Henderson was a familiar presence in the Midland theater community, directing a number of plays and musicals.

For more information, visit [www.meta4edu.org/flying-pig-theatre-academy.html](http://www.meta4edu.org/flying-pig-theatre-academy.html).

theatre programming. Clayton has been teaching children's theatre classes for 10 years, primarily in Midland and Bay City. She has also directed dozens of shows at Midland Center for the Arts including Peanut Gallery, Theatre Guild and Music Society productions, as well as venues in the Detroit area. She is a past board member of Peanut Gallery, was the drama coach at Jefferson Middle School in Midland, and is currently the drama coach at St. Brigid Catholic School in Midland.

Darcy McMahon is chief executive officer and director of education strategy. McMahon has more than 16 years of teaching and administration expertise in education. As an entrepre-

neur, through TMB Consultants, she has developed and published curriculum and conducted professional development programs. She taught science and English at Jefferson Middle School in Midland for five years and served and chaired many committees for Midland Public Schools. Most recently, McMahon was the director of education and volunteers at the Midland Center for the Arts and continues to serve on the school of distinction committee at St. Brigid Catholic School.

Kristiina Pilnik is chief operations officer and director of arts and marketing. Pilnik has designed and taught English language courses for children and adults; designed and coordinated after school arts programs; been a foreign correspondent for television; written as a freelance journalist for newspapers and magazines; and won awards as public relations account executive for Ogilvy and Mather in Brazil. In addition, Pilnik has been involved in children's theatre in Midland for almost 10 years, co-directing Peanut Gallery productions at MCFTA with Denyse Clayton and teaching children's theatre classes and summer camps.

Cathie Stewart is director of communications. In addition to doing freelance writing and editing, she has worked in a variety of organizations as a writer, editor and web and publications designer, including small businesses, Fortune 500 companies, municipal government agencies and other non-profits. Stewart will coordinate and implement grant writing, marketing, public relations and other communications initiatives. She is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Mid-Michigan chapter.



Christine Brillhart



Denyse Clayton



Darcy McMahon



Kristiina Pilnik



Cathie Stewart