

The Grand Island Central School District BRIDGE

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The Community Newsletter for the Grand Island Central School District

Thank you! SRPs receive COVID Hero pin

To begin the 2021-22 year, school-related professionals in the Grand Island Central School District received a “thank-you” for their service during the ongoing pandemic.

At the GICSD “Welcome Back” school opening event held on Aug. 31, SRPs were presented with a token of appreciation from the district.



Grand Island Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Graham said Campus Construction and Young + Wright Architectural, who worked on the GICSD’s capital improvement project, helped the district purchase COVID-19 Hero lapel pins for all the school-related professionals.

“Thank you to all of our SRP for all that you contributed last year and this summer during the global pandemic. Your contributions and service are greatly appreciated!” said Graham.

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Grand Island first district to run Test to Stay pilot program

The Grand Island Central School District is the first district in Western New York to pilot a program that is reducing the disruption of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grand Island Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Graham reported to the Grand Island Board of Education during a November meeting that the district had been chosen to pilot a “Test to Stay” program, which would allow students who would otherwise be quarantined to remain in class after a negative COVID test.

The Test to Stay pilot program began Monday, Dec. 6. In the first four days of the program, all students who were tested received negative results for COVID-19 and remained in class.

“The Test to Stay pilot program will be available for any of our students who are identified as close contacts of a COVID-19 case from a school exposure and who are also not fully vaccinated,” Graham wrote in a letter to district residents announcing the start of the program.

Graham said a parent will have the choice to opt in to the Test to Stay pilot program. Before the beginning of the school day, a child will take a rapid antigen COVID-19 test. If the test result is negative, the student would attend school that day. If the test result is positive, the student would be excluded from school and placed in isolation at home. The student would continue getting tested for the duration of the child’s quarantine.

On Dec. 8, in an interview on WBEN’s morning radio show with Susan Rose and Brian Mazurowski, Graham said that the early results of the Test to Stay program were “a game-changer for students and families in our community right now.”

Students are tested in all the district’s five school buildings. After four days, none of those who have been tested are positive.

All the students, who would have otherwise been quarantined under the old program, remained in school under the Test to Stay program.

Graham thanked the Erie County Department of Health, as they provide the antigen tests, and the medical professionals from Buffalo Homecare for conducting the tests an hour before the elementary school day and half an hour before the middle and high school day. Both the Erie County Department of Health and Buffalo Homecare have been collaborative and positive partners in the pilot program.



Test to Stay at Kaegerbein Elementary School.

GI generous in so many ways

Dear Grand Island Community,

For the second year in a row, the Grand Island community showed its generosity in so many ways. Two of our DECA leaders took on the task this year and reached out with a call to the community to donate school supplies for our students in need this fall. Well, in true Grand Island fashion, anonymous residents stopped to see Fahim at Island Ship Center, get their #FahimFix, and donate quite a bit of supplies. The monetary donations came in as well from the Rotary, VFW, and even more generous unnamed residents of our dear Island.

On behalf of Megan Lavis, Bethany Kulikowski, and our entire DECA chapter, we want to applaud our residents. Thank you for always making a difference in the lives of others and truly making this a “grand” place to live and work.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Chamberlain
DECA advisor
Grand Island High School



Megan Lavis, at left, and Bethany Kulikowski show some of the donations they received during the DECA school supply drive that they conducted for Island students. They sorted the donations at Casey’s Corner school store in the Viking Mall of Grand Island High School.



Message from the Superintendent

District and its students are focused

Dear Grand Island Families:

We are so proud of all students, parents, faculty, staff and administration who have helped make the beginning of the school year successful. As we continue to operate schools during a pandemic, it is incredibly important to have our students back with us every day.

When I visit each school building and see our students fully engaged in learning, while following all of the non-pharmaceutical strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19, I am constantly impressed. Our students are focused on their education and our faculty and staff continue to provide the best educational experiences necessary for your children to grow academically each day.



Brian Graham, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

As you know, many of your children are also involved in extracurricular activities. Our high school band director, Mr. John Reed, has reinstated the Pep Band. If you were able to attend one of our home varsity football games, you heard the spirit and excitement resonating from our Pep Band during the games. Additionally, our middle school students performed “Lion King Jr.,” which was spectacular. Furthermore, our modified, junior varsity and varsity athletes all did a tremendous job. Many of our varsity teams competed for the Niagara Frontier League championships in the fall season and some of our athletes competed in Section VI and/or the New York state finals as well.

Although the pandemic continues to be a source of concern all throughout the country, our focus remains on providing the best educational opportunities for all of our students each and every day.

Thank you for taking the time to review this edition of The Bridge. I hope in the days and weeks ahead you are able to enjoy attending one of our extracurricular activities that demonstrate the many talents and skills our students possess.

Sincerely,
Brian Graham, Ed.D.

GICSD supports Neighbors Foundation holiday drive

So that others could have a better holiday, students from Grand Island High School DECA and Student Council and Veronica Connor Middle School Interact went to work for the Neighbors Foundation. Nineteen students met at the Knights of Columbus Mary Star of the Sea Council Hall on Dec. 9 to sort hundreds of pounds of donated food from Islanders to support the Neighbors Foundation’s annual holiday food drive.



Pictured, from Grand Island High School: Angelo Aiello, Eva Ahne, Kaylee Boyle, Sofia Bukahri, Natalie Carter, Natalyn Cordero, Eden Johnson, Payton Khadra, Megan Lavis, Sydney Martin, Marissa Mistriner, Lauren Ratajczak, Sophia Sobrino, Sophia Terlecky, Evan Walowitz, and Riley Weber. From Connor Middle School: Sienna Sarkees, Cassidy Kurtzhals, and Molly Fiebelkorn. Also pictured: advisors Cheryl Chamberlain of GIHS and Carley Antonelli of VCMS.



BOE recognizes student winner of national anthem contest

Grand Island High School student Jenna Hecht was honored at a Board of Education meeting in September after she was named the New York winner of the VFW Auxiliary's national anthem singing contest, "Get Excited for the Red, White, and Blue!"

The BOE meeting included the playing of the national anthem in the recording Hecht submitted for entry in the contest. According to the VFW Auxiliary website, "The contest highlights the vocal talent of young people while promoting patriotism."

Hecht, a sophomore at Grand Island High School, remembers going to a Buffalo Sabres game when she was young and concluding that the real first star of the hockey game was Doug Allen, longtime anthem singer for the NHL team.

Hecht said, "He was my favorite part when I went to a Sabres game once. I remember in the beginning I didn't really know who was singing. I hadn't heard about him, but when he sang, I was looking at my mom and said, 'He was so good! This is so cool!' And she said, 'We came for the Sabres game.' I was like, 'No, this is the best part, hearing the guy sing.' I've always just loved hearing people singing and watching performances. It's my favorite thing."

The VFW Auxiliary loved hearing Hecht sing the anthem, too. She won at the Ere County competition level and then again at the state level in the contest for youth in grades K-12. Contestants submitted a video of their solo vocal performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" in an arrangement and genre of their choice. Contestants could not change the words.

Hecht won \$25 for taking first in the countywide contest and \$50 for the statewide contest. She found out about the contest from Grand Island Central School District music teacher Renee Michki, who encouraged her to send in the video of herself singing the anthem.

Hecht is no stranger to singing. She's an alto in the Grand Island Concert Choir and she performs in musicals "outside of school wherever I can find them." Still, she had never sung the anthem solo for an audience before.

"It's probably the hardest song I've ever had to sing, and it's just so difficult," she said. "It gets so scary to sing it in public in case your voice cracks, or there's always a possibility it's not going to go perfect."

Singers walk the fine line of not changing the song too much from the traditional sound while still making the song one's own in certain ways.

"It's one of those songs you just shouldn't change too much, but overall, just making your voice sound like you have confidence when you're singing is important," Hecht said, adding that to hit the anthem's notes with good tone quality is also key. "I even surprised myself a little bit hitting the higher notes" in her contest video.

Hearing the anthem sung is inspiring to both the audience and the singer. "Just knowing they have the courage to go out in public and sing, which is a very terrifying thing to do, I always get very inspired by that," Hecht said.

"It's important to hear it and it's just a great feeling to be able to sing it," Hecht said of the anthem. "It's an honor to be able to sing something that brings pride to your country."



Jenna Hecht

Accolades

Amy Boutet

Amy Boutet, a teacher at Grand Island High School, is the 2021 recipient of the Clinton A. Reed Outstanding Business Educator Award, which recognizes a business educator for contributions to the advancement of business education through their own leadership, professionalism, honors, and awards.



The Clinton A. Reed Award in Business Education is intended to stimulate, encourage, and reward outstanding contributions to the advancement of business education by a member of the Business Teachers Association of New York State. The award is given to a person "who has made outstanding and meritorious contributions for the development and advancement of business and marketing education."

Matthew Leone

Erie 1 Boces Harkness Career and Technical Center has named Matthew Leone of Grand Island the Student of the Month.



Tereska Sorel

Tereska Sorel of Grand Island High School received the Spectrum Athlete of the Week award from Spectrum and a \$1,000 scholarship. In making the award, Spectrum said Sorel is captain of the Grand Island Vikings girls varsity volleyball team and "excels academically." She will graduate in June and plans to play volleyball at Clarkson University where she will major in environmental science.



Raistlin Huff

Raistlin Huff of Grand Island High School is creating a chessboard in the Connor Middle School courtyard as part of his Eagle Scout project.



Congratulations Jenna!

Diana Lipp named Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year

Huth Road Elementary School teacher Diana Lipp received the Citizen of the Year award for education from the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce in November.



Diana Lipp outside her classroom at Huth Road Elementary School.

Lipp received the honor at the chamber's annual award dinner at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Niagara Falls.

A native Islander, Lipp is a Huther through and through, teaching third grade in the same school building where she and her siblings went to school growing up.

Lipp first began a career as a dietetic technician at Millard Fillmore Hospital for 17 years. It was during those years that she discovered her true passion for teaching while volunteering for the PTA at Huth Road Elementary. She served as a volunteer for seven years as a reader and a parent leader with the Huth Road Bazaar. She decided to go back to school and earn a master's degree in elementary education. While preparing for her degree, she began working as a substitute teacher in Amherst and Grand Island. In 2001, Lipp was hired at Sidway Elementary School and later moved to Huth Road where she has taught second and third grades.

The chamber noted that Lipp and her students have been responsible for generating thousands of dollars in donations to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, the Neighbors Foundation, and the Huth Road Playground Committee as a result of her project-based Holiday Cookie Sale.

The letter nominating her for consideration for the Citizen of the Year award said, "Mrs. Lipp has inspired and influenced hundreds of elementary students to grow academically, socially and personally, each and every day. When her students are first exposed to the project-based holiday cookie sale, for many of them it is the first time they are engaging in a formal experience in community service."

"There are many proficient and dedicated leaders in education. There are also leaders who, because of their commitment to education and students, must be considered exceptional."

Huth Road PTA raises \$ in fun run fun-raiser

Huth Road Elementary School's PTA combined leadership training, fitness education, and fundraising a successful fun run on Oct. 28.

Apex Leadership visited the school in advance of the race date and did more than organize a race. They talked to the students in the days leading up to the run about such topics as aspiring to be a self-starter, character, and leadership.

"It stands to be probably our most productive fundraiser yet," said Huth PTA President Erin Rowley. Most of the money was donated online where each child had a unique webpage to accept pledges per lap completed or a flat amount, she said.

"This is our first year doing the event," Rowley said. "We had an idea as to how much we would raise, but we weren't expecting it to go as well as it did, which is wonderful. We are going to use the money for what we call our Enrichment Fund, which helps fund things like programming that we do here at the school."

Programming includes field trips, Field Day and end-of-year activities, as well as resources and equipment for classrooms, she said.



Huth Road Elementary students join with Oscar Wilson of the Apex Leadership team at the starting line of the first-ever Huth PTA fun run.





GHS announces Viking Values Students of the Month

Grand Island High School Principal Roger Broeker and assistant principals Hillary Kretz-Harvey and Jon Lattanzio have announced the Viking Values Students of the Month for September and October.

The students and the departments that nominated them for September are, pictured, from left, front row: **Aya Mahmood**, freshman, Science Department; **Abigail Bentley**, junior, Physical Education Department; **Rocquelle Hy**, freshman, Math Department; **Bethany Kulikowski**, senior, Music Department; **Olivia Nucci**, senior, English Department; **Nico Macrides**, freshman, Science Department; **Sophia Black**, senior, Art Department; and Assistant Principal Hillary Kretz-Harvey. Back row: **Katherine Squires**, senior, Business Department and World Language Department; Principal Roger Broeker; **Jared Doebler**, senior, Technology Department; **Talan DelMonte**, sophomore, Social Studies Department; and Assistant Principal Jon Lattanzio.



The students and the departments that nominated them for October are, pictured from bottom: Kretz-Harvey; **Jacob Hamilton**, freshman, English Department; **Sydney Martin**, junior, World Language; **Ta'miah Wilkes**, sophomore, Business Department; **Chase Pyc**, sophomore, Math Department; and Broeker. Right column: **Berin Celik**, junior, Social Studies Department; **Evan McMann**, sophomore, Technology; **Salem Al Hajjaji**, junior, Art Department; **Zachary Leng**, senior, Science Department and Music Department; **Aiden Sobrino**, senior, Physical Education Department.

The Viking Values Students of the Month are chosen based on character, academic performance, effort, behavior, social relationships, and attendance.

Character: The student demonstrates the Viking Values of respect, responsibility, safety, and compassion.

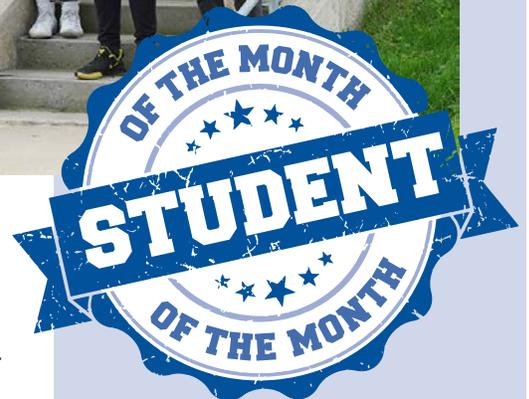
Academic performance: The student is passing all classes taken within the department; demonstrates excellent class participation and completion of assignments.

Effort: The student demonstrates good effort in class and works up to or exceeds innate ability.

Behavior: Both inside and outside of the classroom, the student obeys rules, shows respect to peers and adults, and is well mannered.

Social relationships: The student displays leadership, a willingness to help peers, and shows respect toward others.

Attendance: The student attends school regularly and arrives at school and classes on time.



All-Niagara Frontier League Honors

Girls tennis

First team: Kiersten Brown, singles; Mia Schiffmacher and Alicia Hunt, doubles
 Second team: Riley Weber, singles; Lily Koslowski and Claire LeFevre, doubles

Golf

Second team: Dylan Novak
 Girls cross country
 First team: Faith Caldwell, Liberty Novak, and Audrey Satterlee
 Second team: Alexandra Jensen, Riley Joseph, and Hannah Martinez
 Third team: Sophie Zentz

Boys cross country

Third team: Alex Szczepankiewicz, Ryan Saucier
 Girls volleyball
 First team: Natalyn Cordero, Tess Sorel
 Second team: Emma Santorio
 Third team: Anna Kurtzhaltz

Boys volleyball

Player of the Year: Nick Karnath
 First team: Eddie Kwarciak, Jonathan Simpson, Paul Wynne
 Second team: Jared Doebler
 Third team: Talon Newton

Girls soccer

Co-Player of the Year: Avery Mondoux
 First team: Payton Khadra, Adiana Cotroneo, Adison Fike, Bella DeGlopper
 Second team: Jessica Whitfield, Morgan Khadra, Victoria Thauer, Emma Besl, Alexis Nguyen
 Third team: Arden Randle, Noelle Linenfelser, Rebecca Schultz

Boys soccer

First team: Sean Graham, Anthony Amato
 Second team: Sam Jayme, Jacob Jayme
 Third team: Kyto Magee, Angelo Aiello
 Girls swimming and diving
 Second team: Morgan Malush, 100 freestyle
 Third team: Anna Donlon, 500 freestyle

Banner fall sports season for Vikings

Grand Island High School athletic teams won five championships during the fall 2021 sports season.

The Vikings won Niagara Frontier League titles in girls tennis, boys volleyball, girls soccer (all undefeated), and girls cross country (tied for first overall and winners of the NFL meet). The Vikings football team were Section VI Football Federation A North Division champs without a loss and advanced to the Section VI Class A playoffs.

The boys soccer team won its division and were runners-up in the league championship match, and the girls volleyball team was third in the NFL.

In postseason competition, the girls cross country team finished runners-up in the Section VI Class B meet. The girls soccer won the Section VI Class A title and played in the Far West Regional.

In individual events, Faith Caldwell qualified for the state cross country meet in Chenango Valley where she was second among Section VI runners in her race and 15th overall.

Kiersten Brown qualified for the state tennis championship for the third time.



The Grand Island Vikings girls soccer team is pictured after winning the Section VI Class A2 title. They won the overall Class A title in their next match to advance to the Far West Regionals.



The Grand Island girls cross country team is pictured after winning the Niagara Frontier League meet at Beaver Island State Park, which earned them a share of the league championship.

Eleven Vikings athletes sign letters of intent

Eleven Grand Island High School student-athletes signed college letters of intent to play collegiate sports during a ceremony held Nov. 17.

The athletes and the colleges they committed to, from left: Olivia Fox, Slippery Rock University women's lacrosse;

Ella Koslowski, Slippery Rock University women's lacrosse; Beth Kulikowski, Clarkson University women's lacrosse; Molly Leggett, Neumann University women's hockey; Tereska Sorel, Clarkson University women's volleyball; Sean Graham, Medaille men's soccer; Avery Mondoux, Nicholls State University women's soccer; Bella DeGlopper, California University of Pennsylvania women's soccer; Rebecca Schultz, Daemen College women's soccer; Victoria Thauer, King University women's soccer; Adison Fike, Nazareth College women's soccer.





GIHS tennis courts dedicated to Julie Roth Neville

The Grand Island Central School District dedicated its refurbished tennis courts at Grand Island High School to alumna, student-athlete, coach, and teacher Julie Roth Neville.

GI girls tennis coach Don Pray said at a dedication ceremony held on Nov. 18 that the courts and signage will “remember a wonderful person, coach, colleague, teacher, athlete, friend, daughter, sister, mom, wife, person.”

The court is lined in pink, the color that symbolizes breast cancer awareness and that honors survivors, and those, like Neville, lost to the disease. Signs identify the complex as the Julie Roth Neville Memorial Tennis Court and add “Beloved Viking: Student, Athlete, Coach, Teacher, Parent.”

“Each of these terms embodies who Julie was and why she was loved and cherished by all the people she came into contact with: her family, her teammates, her students, her colleagues, her friends, the athlete she coached, and the entire Grand Island Viking community,” Pray said.

Pray said he was privileged to have Julia in his Global Studies 9 class the first year he taught at Grand Island High School.

“As a new teacher, seeing her smiling face and her willingness to learn put me at ease,” Pray said. “Dedicated and hard-working, Julie worked ardently at her studies. ... She always had a smile on her face and put forth 100 percent effort in all the assignments

she had. This was a trait that she definitely displayed in everything she did on and off the court. She was loved and respected by all the faculty and staff here at GI.”

Pray said Neville “embodied the concept of student-athlete.” Neville was Grand Island’s first 1,000-point scorer for girls basketball, still holds the career wins record for the girls tennis program, and was named all Western New York in softball. She earned a scholarship and played Division I tennis at Xavier University, competing at first singles and first doubles her senior year, and earned multiple recognitions to the Atlantic 10 commissioners honor roll for her academic success.

In 2000, Julie began teaching fifth grade at Huth Road Elementary School on Grand Island. “Grand Island is lucky because many of its finest students come back to teach within the district,” Pray said. “We were very lucky to have Julie as a teacher, a colleague, in our district. Just like everything else, Julie was passionate about teaching and her students.”

Neville was the varsity tennis girls tennis coach for 10 years and the junior varsity girls basketball coach for eight years. Pray said Neville coached with the same passion with which she played and taught. She led the girls tennis team to two Niagara Frontier League championships and 87 wins overall.

Neville was a devoted wife, daughter, and mother. As well, she was a beloved Viking



who “embodied every Viking Value from an early age” with humility, Pray said.

“I’m sure she wouldn’t want all this fuss today,” Pray said. “But I know that she’d be honored by the sign dedication ceremony and seeing everyone come together to share their remembrance of her.”

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Graham thanked Pray and the girls tennis team for organizing the tribute ceremony. He added, “Julie left a legacy of love and compassion, and she had a positive energy second to none. Julie was an amazing human being who served as a wonderful role model for all of us. Julie was a precious daughter, an exceptional wife, mother, teacher, and friend. She touched so many lives, helped so many people, and positively influenced countless students, athletes, parents, colleagues, relatives, and friends. May this sign and this tribute serve as a long-lasting reminder that we have all been truly blessed to have known Julie. Julie’s legacy will always live in our hearts.”

The ceremony concluded with a release of pink, blue, and white balloons.



WEB pulls students up

Pulling people up to stand together is part of the WEB program at Veronica Connor Middle School.

WEB is a year-long program in which eighth-grade leaders mentor sixth-graders new to the school. The program started on Day 1: Veronica Connor Middle School teachers Deanna Przepiora, Jillian Stapleton, and leaders from Where Everyone Belongs were among those who greeted the students at the school door on the first day of classes in the Grand Island Central School District this year. WEB leaders continue to meet their sixth-graders monthly, usually on a WEB Friday, with activities designed to build each other up.

Stapleton demonstrated the point about pulling people up during a WEB rally at VCMS on Aug. 30. Standing on a chair in front of a gym full of middle-schoolers, Stapleton was pulled by a student off the chair, but when Stapleton and the student switched places, the student couldn't pull the teacher up to stand side by side. Stapleton explained to the assembly: "Unfortunately, it's easy to hold other kids down. It doesn't take much. A sarcastic comment, a funny look, excluding them from being in your group at lunch. It doesn't take much to pull somebody down. It's a lot harder to build somebody up and to pull somebody up. But when we work together, we can continue to hold each other up. And that's what we're all about here at Veronica E. Connor Middle School."

Przepiora said the WEB relationship development would help sixth-graders become "more acclimated with the middle school."

"You belong here. We want you to be a part of the school," Stapleton said. "So it's all about forming relationships between the eighth-graders and the sixth-graders. They, the eighth-graders,

Pep Rally returns

The return of the in-person Pep Rally and an outdoor Homecoming dance were highlights of the Spirit Week 2021.

Friday during the school day on Oct. 1, the much anticipated Pep Rally brought Blue and White Day to a fever pitch. This year, the pep rally was held at Gene Masters Field and included all the much-anticipated elements, such as Deal or No Deal, tug-of-war, and the naming of the Homecoming Court.

The Vikings football team beat Starpoint later that night on their way to winning the Class A North Division of Section VI Federation Football.

The Homecoming Dance took place on Oct. 2 in a tent outside the school.



Homecoming king and queen Tyler Figliola and Adi Cotroneo.



Seth Cox of the boys varsity soccer team does a backflip during the Pep Rally.

obviously have been here. They know how middle school works. They can give them tips on how to be successful with what they learned throughout their time here. I think this year, more than ever, it's super-important after a year and a half of a pandemic where the students, some of them, haven't been in the school setting in over a year."

Sixth grade at Connor Middle School is also the first time since attending Sidway that all of the kids who attended Kagebein and Huth Road schools come together as one class. WEB activities reinforce the philosophy that the students aren't separate Kagebeiners or Huthers, but they are one Connor Middle School.

Stapleton gave the students admonitions at the first WEB assembly: Promise to work together. Promise to be an influencer for good. And when you see a classmate slipping a little, be the person who pulls a classmate up and never be the one to pull people down. It makes learning more fun and makes Connor Middle School a better place.



The Grand Island Pep Band, under the direction of John Reed, performs during a Vikings football game.

Grand Island High School's reborn Pep Band plays at football games

Grand Island is putting the band back together.

The 2021 football season saw the return of the Grand Island Pep Band, which had gone silent after the 2008 season. The band is led by John Reed, a teacher in the district's Music Department.

Reed is just the man to resurrect the Grand Island Pep Band. A native Western New Yorker, Reed attended college at Louisiana State University where he was a member of The Golden Band from Tigerland that played at Southeastern Conference athletic contests. While attending LSU, Reed performed at two national championship football games in which the Tigers played.

After college, Reed spent a decade in Texas where he taught in Houston and Austin. He taught at the fifth largest high school in the state of Texas with 4,800 students.

"In Texas, we had one of the most competitive marching bands in the state. We had 350 kids in band," Reed said.

He's in his second year teaching in the Grand Island Central School District.

Putting the band back together was a mission for school spirit. Reed said it was the community and the district that put the Grand Island Pep Band back in the stands at Masters Field.

"Dr. Graham wanted to see it come back, and so did the school board," Reed said. "And then every alumni that I talked to, the Pep Band was one of their most fond memories of the Grand Island High School band program."

The list of benefits of Pep Band are long, Reed said.

"There's the school spirit, there's the camaraderie within the band program, there's the excitement and the enthusiasm that the kids bring to the game through their music," Reed said. "And then the effect that they have on everybody's spirits at the game because of their presence and what they offer."

Ridership is up in bus transportation

The Grand Island Central School District has experienced an increase in ridership even with such things as mask mandates and assigned seats as part of COVID-19 contact tracing protocols.

"We anticipated a 10 percent drop in ridership. I have to tell you, our buses are full," said Transportation Supervisor Theresa Alizadeh of the Grand Island Central School District.

"Every year before all this, we would have 10 to 20 percent not riding because they were just going to drive. We expected 10 more percent off of that," Alizadeh said. "I think we're right about where we were two years ago. Our ridership is high, especially at the elementary schools. I'm quite impressed with the fact that our ridership is high, but it's the safest way to travel."

Alizadeh said ridership to off-Island schools is higher this year too. The Transportation Department goes to 45 schools on and off the Island and has a fleet of 70 buses.

If ridership is at all indicative of satisfaction with the service, students are showing support for their transportation system, which is essentially provided by a roster of drivers composed of their neighbors.

Most of the drivers come from the Island community, and many drive the same bus routes year after year, Alizadeh said, adding, "A lot of our drivers take their old runs and they get very familiar with the kids."

"Our staff here are very experienced drivers," she said. "They're professional. These are all professional people who take their job seriously."

The district could use more of them. Like a lot of industries during the pandemic, the help wanted sign is out.

"There's responsibility, but it's a rewarding job. They love the kids. What comes with it is a lot of joy, a lot of expectation, but a lot of joy," Alizadeh said of the job.

"I'd like to think that we are doing something right," Alizadeh said. "We are committed to efficiency and safety."

To join the team, visit the district website under "Employment Opportunities" and fill out an application, or visit the Jack Burns Transportation Department at 2451 Baseline Road (behind Sidway Elementary School) and pick up an application.



A student shows one of the signs Connor Middle Schoolers



Veterans Parade returns

An indoor parade through the halls of Veronica Connor Middle School and Grand Island High School on Nov. 10 honored U.S. veterans from the local community.

Veterans from the Grand Island American Legion Post 1346, Charles N. DeGlopper VFW Post 9249, and the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station took part. Students from both buildings lined the halls in support, many holding U.S. flags, holding signs, cheering, and thanking the veterans.

Before the start of the parade, the veterans gathered in the middle school library, where VCMS Principal John Fitzpatrick told them: "We really want to say thank you, we appreciate you. During this particular time, as a district, we're moving forward. And although we have a lot of restrictions and regulations, it's important that we preserve some of the traditions that we have established over the last couple of years."

As students left their classrooms to line the halls, VCMS Assistant Principal Adam Buffomante said over the public address system: "Veterans Day is a day to pay tribute to all the veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good. The families of our veterans serve too, as they stand behind and support their service members. Don't forget, a veteran is a person who is currently serving or those who have served for our country and for our freedom. Today, we are fortunate to have veterans coming to visit us and spend some time on our campus. This is an important and very necessary time to both recognize and thank our veterans for all of their service. I am proud and honored that they'll be with us today. Let's show all of our veterans how much we appreciate them."

The parade route took the veterans from the middle school library and through middle school classroom hallways, ending at the Grand Viking Theater of Grand Island High School. There, the veterans heard a musical performance by the high school's chorus and band performing patriotic music, including the "Armed Forces Medley," the songs of each branch of the United States military.

Following the festivities, veterans enjoyed a breakfast prepared by district food service staff.



Military personnel wave to students cheering them during the Veterans Parade in Connor Middle School.



Chess Club back across the board

The Grand Island Chess Club was back across the board in its first competition since the pandemic started, and the club met with great success.

In the Western New York Scholastic Chess Tournament, JP Szczublewski was undefeated in the U.S. Chess Federation-rated section and took first place. Tanner Hawley won best for Under 1000, and Hayden Garey took second place in the unrated section.

The Grand Island Chess Club had another outstanding performance at the WNY Fall Classic Scholastic Chess Tournament, which was hosted at Grand Island High School on Oct. 30. Both the high school USCF-rated team and the Veronica Connor Middle School unrated team took first place in their respective divisions. Eight other schools from Western New York competed in the rated division, and six other schools competed in the unrated division.

In addition, Szczublewski and Hawley tied for second and third place, individually, in the USCF-rated section, and Mithil Kara took third place in the unrated section.

Over 50 chess players competed throughout the day, and all participants were thrilled to be playing across the chessboard again. Furthermore, the team would like to thank Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian Graham and VCMS Principal John Fitzpatrick for their continued support, and all parents who donated their time and much-needed supplies to help make this chess tournament such a success.



Grand Island Chess Club members are pictured after they competed in the WNY Fall Classic Scholastic Chess Tournament, hosted by the Grand Island Central School District. The club includes: High School USCF Rated Team Players: Tanner Hawley, Jierui Jiao, John Paul Szczublewski High School Unrated Team Players: Mehar Arora, Matthew Burridge, Haden Garey, Mithil Kara. Middle School Unrated Team Players: Andrew Apon, Beau Bergeron, Charles Dalbo, Benjamin Matthew Doxtator, Josh Flynn, Malcolm Hannibal, Sean Higgins, Ismail Masoodi, Lucas Mondoux, Colin Morgan, Grayson Shelp, Harry Singh, Trenton Tyrell.

Broadway actor presents workshop at GIHS

Grand Island High School theater students took time out from rehearsals for the high school musical “Wizard of Oz” to receive teaching from a Broadway actor on Dec. 20.



Christopher Rice-Thomson, a cast member from the national touring company of the musical “Hamilton,” visited GIHS to present a workshop called “Acting Through Song” on the Grand Viking Theater stage.

Rice-Thomson worked for an hour teaching the workshop, and then spent another half-hour after the workshop for a Q&A session.

“Our students are so excited to have a professional come to work with us,” said Amy Boutet, producer of the GIHS musical, which runs Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Feb. 3, 4 and 5. Showtimes are 7 p.m. Feb. 3 and 4, and 6 p.m. Feb. 5. Before the finale performance on Feb. 5, a meet-a-greet with the cast will start at 5 p.m.

Spotlighters perform Tales for Tots

Spotlighters, the drama club of Grand Island High School, returned to the Grand Viking Theater stage on Nov. 12 and 13 with a children’s theater presentation of “Tales for Tots.”

This year’s shows were “Cinderella” directed by Sophia Bobeck; “Wizard of Oz” and “Winnie the Pooh” directed by Spotlighters President Leah Harper; “The Bee Movie” directed by Kathleen Krawczyk, Caitlin Fay, and Jessica Kam; and “Tacky the Penguin” directed by Spotlighters advisor Magdalene Miller Kennedy.





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Pearl, Mrs. Dunbar return to Sidway

On Friday, Oct. 1, retired Sidway Elementary School principal Denise Dunbar visited her former school with her therapy dog, Pearl. Students in various kindergarten and first-grade classrooms had the opportunity to read to Pearl as part of a therapy program in partnership with the SPCA, which offers specialized training for selected dogs and their owners.



Pearl, a therapy dog owned by former Sidway Elementary School Principal Denise Dunbar, made a return visit to her old stomping grounds.

Pictured, students in the first-grade classrooms of Julie Fuchs and Janine Schroeder read to Pearl.

