



the FOCUS

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Official district newsletter

Volume 53, Issue 3

Turkeys & trimmings return to High School Holiday Food Drive

It's full steam ahead for Hamburg High School's annual Holiday Food Drive, with some familiar traditions returning. Last year, due to restrictions of the pandemic, the drive distributed gift cards to Hamburg school families in need. This year, the tradition of distributing turkeys and all the trimmings, along with food staples for several more meals, is making a comeback.

"Each year we add to it to make it better," said High School Counselor Kathy Battin, who coordinates the drive with the student Character Committee. She said more than 300 turkeys are needed, along with financial donations, to meet needs.

There will also be full student involvement again, something that was difficult last year due to school being in the hybrid learning model, with most students only on-campus two days per week. Students play a big part in organizing the food items for distribution.

Mrs. Battin said there is concern about supply chain issues but she's optimistic that she'll be able to
(Please turn to page seven)



Bring it on, Bulldog!

Who better than Spike, the infamous Bulldog, to pump up the crowd at Hamburg High School's Homecoming pep rally? Feeling the energy, *from left*, are sophomores Isabella Giardina, Maeve O'Brien, Veronica Hill, Abby Nikiel and Joey Carroccia. *See more photos on page five.*

School benefactor still a Bulldog at heart, booster through contributions

Friendships and fond memories of his time as a Hamburg student motivate Keith Fisher to give back to the school district that still plays such an important part in his life today. A successful businessman whose family has ties to the community dating back some 94 years, he is a relentless supporter of the Hamburg Schools through his personal donations, fund raising and Bulldog pride.

Most recently, he is championing the schools with a \$200,000 personal donation to the district's Discover 2021 capital improvement project — the single largest gift to the endeavor. The entrance to Howe Field will be renamed as the Fisher Athletic Complex in recognition of the contribution.

"Hamburg's been good to me and my family and I'm fortunate

enough to be able to give back," Mr. Fisher said.

He wants Hamburg to be a destination school district that continues to attract families because of exceptional academics and modern facilities.

"Times have changed," he said. "If you want to have the student body, you have to have the facilities that draw families to town."

A 1972 Hamburg High School graduate who played football and baseball, he still cherishes relationships formed at school and has strong connections to former classmates. He said he always "had a blast" as a student and three of his schoolmates — Mike Muirhead, Jay Rich and Gary Reinecke — are his best friends to this day. He

(Please turn to back page)



Superintendent's Column

Touch of normal returns with full in-person learning

I hope this edition of *the Focus* finds everyone well. While the opening of school was not without its bumps in the road, it was absolutely fantastic to have all of our students in school five days each week. I want to take this opportunity to thank our families, students, staff and Board of Education for your patience, understanding and partnership. We still have some obstacles to overcome, but we will do just that together.

I want to take a moment to thank our Board of Education, in particular. Board service in normal times is extremely challenging work. Members must develop understandings of school finance, school law, personnel processes and child development. They add to those understandings their life experience as parents and professionals in varied fields in performing their oversight function as a Board. In times such as these, Board members must also exercise restraint, empathy for both sides of any issue and an intense focus on always doing the right thing.

(See Connecting With Your School Board on page three)

The Hamburg Central School District Board of Education is recognized across Western New York as a model of school governance. Their commitment to our mission, vision and core values, as well as their laser focus on ensuring that our educators have everything we need to meet the unique needs of children and families, make them an exemplary group of leaders. Please thank Tom Flynn, Cam Hall, Richard Schneider, Laura Heeter, Robbin List, Dave Yoviene and Michael McGarry for

their service when you see them around town.

Please know how grateful we are for your support of our Discover 2021 Capital Improvement Project. By saying “yes” to this project, you said “yes” to a generational investment in the learning and growth of children that will impact programming in academics, social-emotional health, physical education and athletics, music, art, technology and nutrition.

We have launched into the design and development stage of the project to prepare for submission to the New York State Education Department Facilities and Planning Department. Once we receive the state's stamp of approval, we will begin putting particular aspects of the project out to bid and award the contracts.

Even though we are in the midst of another school year in the presence of COVID-19, there is a lot to look forward to. Most importantly is the fact that our students will be learning safely in-person five days a week in schools that operate much more normally than they have during the previous 18 months. Also critically important is the fact that our students, staff and families should expect to be able to enjoy band, chorus and orchestra concerts, plays and musicals, sports and other typical student activities. We may be limited at times by distancing requirements, but there will be no lack of enthusiasm and creativity on the part of our students and staff when it comes to making these events happen.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be your partner in the learning and growth of your children.



Michael Cornell
Superintendent

SHOWCASING GARDEN-BASED LEARNING — Hamburg's Farm-to-School initiative and garden-based learning were showcased when Assemblyman Jon Rivera (*second from right*) visited two schools in September. At Armor Elementary's outdoor classroom, teachers James Mason and Jonathan Pawlowski explained the vision for “growing” the outdoor learning space with such possibilities as a soothing water feature, shade and improved surfacing. Then it was on to Union Pleasant Elementary's Giving Garden, which has offered experiences for children to connect where food comes from, eating healthy and caring for the environment for the past 12 years. Hosting the garden tours were Anne Rich, the district's Food & Nutrition Services Director, and Tricia Miller from the Farm-to-School team. Also pictured are Superintendent Michael Cornell and Armor Principal Leslie Bennett.



Connecting with your School Board

The Hamburg School Board consists of seven volunteer members who dedicate their time and energy to the best interests of the students of this district. As the community's representatives, they work in partnership with the administration toward a shared vision of education. Who are these individuals and what motivates their public service? This edition of *the Focus* continues a series of individual board member profiles to better acquaint you with these school leaders and how they're engaged in their work.

Meet Richard Schneider



Occupation:

Owner/President
at Crane Home Care, Inc.
ATC Healthcare Staffing-Buffalo, LLC

His family:

Beth Schneider - Director of Operations at Crane Home Care, Inc.
Dr. Jessica Geiger, DPT - Physical Therapist
Heidi Schneider - Doctoral student at SUNY Stony Brook, Musical Arts - Voice
Erica Schneider - Pursuing career with NYS Police

What initially prompted you to run for the School Board?

My wife and I were very pleased with the education that our children received from the Hamburg Central School District, and I wanted to share my time and talent to ensure that new families would have the same experience.

What's your favorite part of being a board member?

Knowing that I serve in trust for the community and contribute meaningfully to a board of education that is completely committed to creating and maintaining the highest quality public education for our community, and the development of our children.

What's surprised you the most about serving on the board?

The poor opinion Gov. Cuomo had for our public school system and how he used his overreaching authority to punish school districts (not downstate) by withholding state funding.

What's been your proudest moment as a board member?

Attending our graduation ceremonies and watching the children cross the stage to receive their diplomas!

How has being a board member helped you grow personally/professionally?

Personally, I've had the honor of meeting some wonderful people who have made educating children their lifelong passion. It truly is inspirational to work with people who love their careers. From a professional perspective, I've enjoyed learning from my colleagues over the past 5-6 years. Our board consists of people who are like-minded, but open to challenging the status quo and routinely practices problem solving through active listening all while interacting with respect and courtesy towards one another.

What are the biggest challenges facing the district?

State funding will always be a concern, as well as keeping the financial tax burden to our community stakeholders as low as possible.

What would you like the future to hold for Hamburg Central?

For the district to always teach our children the fundamentals of education that will help them to become successful adults in our society, while nurturing them to become good and caring people.

Senior citizen "gold card" provides free admission

Hamburg Central offers "gold cards" that entitle district residents age 60 and older to free admission to school events. The card provides complimentary admission to school plays, musicals, concerts and home sports events.

Once the card is issued, it is valid indefinitely. Senior district residents may obtain a card by calling the Community Relations Office at 646-3200, ext. 7212.

After-Hours Homework Help continuing



Hamburg's Virtual After-Hours Homework Help is continuing this school year. The program, started last December, provides free academic assistance for Middle School and High School students with teachers in four subjects via Google Meet.

Homework assistance for Grades 6-12 is offered in English Language Arts (ELA) and science from 6-7:30 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays; math and social studies on

Tuesdays and Thursdays. Students are required to sign up ahead of time via a link on the homepage of the school websites (hamburgschools.org) and can submit their questions, as well. The link can be found in the drop-down menu under the "Students" heading.

Finalist for NYS Teacher of Year guides students in exploring, growing

Her focus is preparing special education students to transition from the school setting to the work setting. Lynn Sajdak, Life Skills/Workforce Development teacher at Hamburg High School, believes that every student has a bright future and it's her role to guide them to fulfill their potential.

For her work in ensuring that students leave high school with skills to thrive in the world, Mrs. Sajdak was recognized in September as one of four finalists for 2022 NYS Teacher of the Year by the NYS Board of Regents. Nominated by Jennifer Barker, Director of Pupil Services, Mrs. Sajdak said she was "honored and humbled" by the recognition.

In her 27th year as a special education teacher with the district, Mrs. Sajdak coordinates work-based learning opportunities for students, along with academic and social learning activities. The emphasis is hands-on, exploratory experiences.

Her students can be seen planting and harvesting in the Giving Garden, learning on-the-job by working in the High School's Bulldog Corner Store, manning the snack shack at sporting events and participating in internships in the community.

"In this ever-changing world, it is more important than ever to offer our students opportunities that extend beyond the classroom," Mrs. Sajdak said. "Those real life experiences allow students to learn, to make mistakes, to grow, to explore what the world or community has to offer them, and those experiences show them where they will be able to succeed and how they can make a difference."

Mrs. Sajdak is credited with initiating the Work Readiness Program to help students develop employability skills and restructur-



Lynn Sajdak

ing the 12:1:1 Life Skills/Workforce Development Program. She also serves as the High School's Student Government advisor.

She said that making connections with students and their families is one of the best parts of her job, along with seeing her students learn and grow from their interactions and community experiences.

"Lynn has literally changed the life trajectory of each child in her care," Superintendent Michael Cornell said in recommending Mrs. Sajdak for the award. "Each of her children lives a more productive and fulfilling life outside of school today, and will continue to do so after they've left school, because of her."

Her willingness to collaborate and communicate with colleagues, staff members, parents and outside agencies that interact with students is also appreciated.

"Lynn is always willing to help others," colleague Kim Zawadzki wrote in supporting documents for the award. "No matter how busy she is, Lynn is always willing to listen and offer suggestions. She is always there to help collaborate on how we can provide new and better experiences for our students."

Students harvest culinary skills for Jr. Chef Challenge

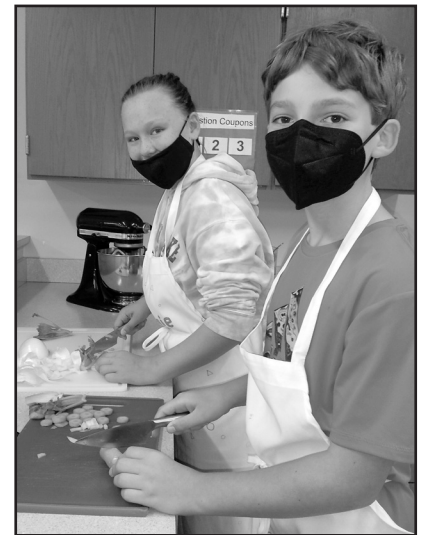


Zucchini bites were served by the Family & Consumer Science Club.

lunch menu this winter. Serving as judges were Les Draudt of Draudt Farm, Wendy Wilson of Linoaken Apples, Jimmy Butera of Butera's Restaurant, Becky O'Connor of the Cornell Cooperative Extension Farm to Institution, Superintendent Michael Cornell, Erie 1 BOCES culinary instructor Lauren Sikora and Hamburg High School Student Government rep Ava Sargente.

The Hamburg Farm-to-School Jr. Chef Challenge at Hamburg Middle School had all the winning ingredients for a "soup-er" evening in October. From soup judging to blender bike cider slushies, it showcased New York harvest ingredients tastefully prepared by culinary students.

Four teams of eighth graders in Sheri Gund's culinary program went to work in the classroom kitchen prior to the event to prepare soup entries using local ingredients. The chunky chicken noodle soup prepared by the team of Megan Germono, Eric Neff, Maghan O'Leary, Loran Pace and Izzy Pares was declared the winner by judges and will be featured on the school



Eighth graders Maghan O'Leary and Eric Neff prepped ingredients for their team's winning soup entry.



Senior spirit with a smile — from left: Bridget Moore, Maddie Hurley, Grace Kusmierz, Alexa Steffen, Mia Ceriani.



Homecoming royalty: Queen Amelia Bottoms & King Derek Moelbert

Homecoming kindles school spirit

Spirit Days, outdoor pep rallies, a parade and football brought students, staff and community together to show their passion for purple as Hamburg High School celebrated Homecoming in September. Student Government sponsored the festivities.



Seniors Ava Sargente, left, & Cailyn Hine carried the colors.



Airborne cheers



All for one and one for all as the varsity Bulldogs took the field for a win over Amherst.



High School teachers Sally Couzens, left, and Samantha Hodgson were good sports for “Pie Your Favorite Teacher in the Face.”



Loud and proud

Photos courtesy of High School yearbook staff



The student Silver Pals are pictured at a recent in-person visit with residents of Orchard Heights independent apartments. Hamburg students, *in back from left*: Ella Yeager, Ashlie Hansen, Clarissa O'Connor, Natalya Jones, Jim O'Connor, Grace Pavlovich, Abby Sauda and Kaylee Koch. *Not pictured*: Olivia Hansen.

Silver Pals bond through pandemic with handwritten letters

When the pandemic first isolated many senior citizens from family and acquaintances, two Hamburg High School students stepped up to create new friendships and put a smile on their faces through hand written pen pal letters. Organized in summer 2020 by Clarissa O'Connor, now a senior, and Jim O'Connor, a sophomore, the Silver Pals grew to include some of their classmates who have been exchanging letters for more than a year

with residents from Orchard Heights independent apartments.

They recently met in-person to visit and enjoy refreshments together.

The interaction has been a wonderful experience for the students and independent residents alike, said Lori O'Connor, the student organizers' mother. A geriatric occupational therapist who saw patients at different local senior care centers, she told her children how difficult it was for seniors to be alone in the heart of the

pandemic last year.

"Many would grab my arm and ask me to please stay after I was done treating them," she said. "It was heart-breaking."

Her children's idea to write letters and to involve their peers so they could reach as many residents as possible was an immediate hit that has endured.

"Everyone involved can't wait to receive their next letter and the life advice the seniors give the kids is just amazing."

Middle School student cited for archival research

Desmond Behm, an eighth grader at Hamburg Middle School, has received a certificate of merit in the New York State Archives Student Research Awards program. The program promotes and recognizes excellence in student research. It encourages students to explore historical records repositories in New York State and fosters collaboration between schools and organizations that administer historical records useful for education.

In May 2021 as a seventh grader, Desmond worked with librarian Joseph Patzner from the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library, who shared the provenance of Capt. Daniel Turner's Congressional medal and sword.



Desmond Behm and social studies teacher Jason Steinagle

Students commended in scholarship program

Hamburg High School seniors Clara Forehand and Alyssa Riter have been named as Commended Students in the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program. The designation recognizes students for high performance on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. Commended Students placed among the top 50,000 students who entered the competition.

Student artwork adds to School Board recognition

Members of the Hamburg School Board were praised at their October meeting for always being focused on what's best for children as the district marked School Board Recognition Week. Superintendent Michael Cornell thanked board members for their unwavering support and each was presented with a student artwork in thanks for their service.

The contributing student artists were: Capri D'Agostino, Reilly Herbert, Chris Ramos, Hamburg Middle School; Natalie Evans, Katherine Tothoro, Hamburg High School; Derek Gill, Kiersten Koch, Union Pleasant Elementary; Estelle Drier, Armor Elementary; Benjamin McGinley, Boston Valley Elementary; Guilianna Iocco, Charlotte Avenue Elementary.

Hamburg's board members are: President Thomas Flynn, Vice President Cam Hall, Laura Heeter, Michael McGarry, Robbin List, Richard Schneider and Dave Yoviene.

High School student leader takes all opinions into account

Strongly motivated for a 'fantastic year'

No idea is a bad idea for Hamburg High School senior Ella Melcher, the Hamburg School Board's 2021-22 student rep and President of Student Government. She makes it a priority to consider every viewpoint or new idea from the school community and to build off of that in her capacity as a leader.

"I feel honored when students, teachers and parents come to me with questions, advice or even requests that they have because they trust me to stand for their word," Ella said. "I want to make sure to take each and every opinion into great consideration and create trust between me and those I am speaking for."

The High School is her second home and she feels a responsibility to make it a better place. She recognizes that the pandemic and health regulations have taken a toll on those who learn and work in the school. She said every



Ella Melcher

member of Student Government is determined to come up with ways to work around obstacles and make the best of the situation, with a focus on unity.

"I feel comfortable saying that this virus has taken a toll on many of us but we are motivated to not let it hold us back from having a fantastic year. There are many new health rules that make this year's events difficult to plan, but we have managed to succeed so far."

This included celebrating September's Homecoming in creative ways. The pep rally was held outside this year despite the unpredictability of weather, and such new activities as "Pie Your Favorite Teacher in the Face" and "Musical Chairs" were a hit.

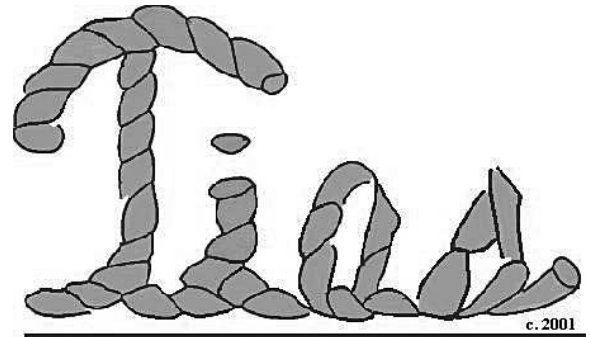
As for her service on the School Board, Ella said she has gained an appreciation of how much the board aids in everyday school life and she's honored to be a part of it. She welcomes the opportunity to speak for students and their families.

Aside from her leadership roles, Ella is a member of Spanish Honor Society, Art Society and Health Science Academy. She participates in varsity soccer, and varsity track and field.

Her ambition is to serve in the military, drawing on the leadership skills she's acquired in High School. She's also interested in the FBI and its role in protecting the country. She will apply to West Point, Mercyhurst, Syracuse and other colleges in hopes of majoring in legal studies so she can help others.

She said Hamburg has many characteristics that make it an astounding school, including its involvement with the surrounding community and activities with students from the Middle School and elementary schools.

"I have lived in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Germany and many more places but no other school I have gone to compares to Hamburg," she said. "Hamburg is very inclusive and welcoming to our new students. Our administrators are amazing and they create bonds between students that you can't find anywhere else."



Together Including Every Student

Attention: Hamburg Central Families

Would you like your child to join in an after-school program, community sponsored activity or pursue a hobby? The Together Including Every Student (TIES) Program provides trained volunteers to support students with developmental disabilities from Grade 3 to the age of 21 so that they can successfully participate.

Volunteers are students within the school district in Grades 8-12, who attend a workshop that presents information about the importance of belonging, disability awareness, friendship building and effective support strategies. Participants are paired with volunteers based on similar interests and desired abilities. The volunteer attends the activity with your child and provides support with physical, social and/or language needs.

The Hamburg Central School District participates and supports this program for its students.

For further information, please contact Nancy Hawes, TIES Coordinator, by email at nhawes@hcsdk12.org or (716) 225-4247.

Career milestone for speech therapist

Congratulations to Marie Hennessy, Union Pleasant Elementary School speech therapist, for marking 25 years of service with the district.

Turkeys & trimmings

(Continued from page one)

secure what's needed.

"Everybody always comes together for this. It really picks up the spirit of the season, which is all about giving."

Donations are being accepted until Friday, Nov. 19. Checks payable to "HHS Character Committee" should be sent to Mrs. Battin's attention at Hamburg High School, 4111 Legion Dr. Mrs. Battin can also be reached at 646-3300, option #4.



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Keith Fisher, *center*, was inducted as a Distinguished Alumni into the Hamburg Alumni Foundation’s Wall of Fame in 2018. With him, *from left*, are family members Aaron Lilga, Jocelyn Bos-Fisher, Michele Fisher, Molly Kyne Schmitt, Heidi Bos-Fisher, Hadley Bos-Fisher.

Benefactor *(Continued from page one)*

keeps in touch with many others on social media as they near the 50-year reunion mark.

That connection to school has also translated into years of involvement raising funds to benefit current and future generations of students. Mr. Fisher is one of the original board members of the Hamburg School Foundation (2001), which merged in 2011 with the Hamburg Bulldog Alumni Association to become the current Hamburg Alumni Foundation (HAF). This not-for-profit entity generates and distributes funds to benefit the school experience. Mr. Fisher recently stepped down as HAF President but will remain on its board, continuing to spearhead the annual golf tournament and grants. That golf tournament raised \$27,000 this year for the schools. The organization distributes about \$24,000 annually in grants to benefit the district and \$4,000 per year in scholarships.

A long-time benefactor of Hamburg Schools, Mr. Fisher personally donated \$50,000 toward the entryway to Howe Field, dedicated in 2016; \$6,600 toward the High School digital sign; and \$2,000 for the new baseball scoreboard. The Fisher Bus Scholarship has been awarded to Hamburg students for more than 20 years, amounting to about \$80,000. He also is a dedicated contributor to the High School’s annual Holiday Food Drive. And, together with his cousin, Molly Kyne Schmitt, their JESKAF Family Foundation contributes to charitable causes in the district.

Dollars and cents aside, Mr. Fisher is proud of his family roots in Hamburg. His grandparents, Albert and Etha, started the legacy in 1927 when they launched Fisher Carting & Moving.

Mr. Fisher is perhaps best known for carrying on the family busi-

ness, Fisher Bus, which has provided transportation in the district since 1948. The school bus service was sold in 2018 but Mr. Fisher remains in the motor coach business by serving as CEO of Niagara Scenic Tours.

While retirement and time in Florida may loom in the near future, Mr. Fisher said Hamburg will always be in his heart.

“I’ll continue to support the district however I can.”

The Hamburg Alumni Foundation invites you to join its e-mail list to receive the latest news, events and updates (<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/E37gkMi>). The Foundation, a not-for-profit organization, contributes to the growth and development of the Hamburg School District; recognizes alumni contributions; and informs, involves and serves members of the Bulldog family.