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First graders' time capsules safeguard thoughts for future

Union Pleasant students will reflect as seniors

Eleven years from now, today's first graders at Union Pleasant Elementary School will relive a moment in time. In February (on 2/2/22 to be exact), five classrooms of first graders made time capsules that went home for safe keeping, to be opened on 3/3/33, when they'll be seniors in High School.

They'll be prompted to make a connection between past and present by the content of their time capsule. The students of Heatherardino, Julia Dake, Andrew Pacifico, Sang Walh and Mindy Wolf will have a glimpse into how they've stayed the same or changed.

"It'll be a great experience for them to see where they were now and to reflect on life," Mrs. Mardino said.

Her colleague, Mrs. Walh, said this project gives students something to look forward to in the future and inspiration to achieve their goals. She hopes her students will gain an appreciation for a memory and insight into how they change over time.

Each teacher customized the form that their classroom's capsules took. Mrs. Mardino's students used cardboard tubes wrapped in tissue paper to hold their treasured thoughts. These include a letter

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So many ways to count 100 days

February brought the 100th day of school and with it the opportunity to creatively practice ways to count to that number. It was a learning celebration at Boston Valley Elementary School, as shown by Hayes Ellis in Amy Judge's kindergarten class.

Healthy habits, respect, safety are at teacher's core

One day he may be talking to fifth graders about vaping, the next, to kindergartners, about brushing their teeth. In his unique role as Hamburg's sole elementary health teacher, Joshua Koszuta has many topics to cover, in an age appropriate way, with many students.



Joshua Koszuta

It's worth noting that he's the only teacher at Hamburg who has the opportunity to connect with and impact every K-5 student at every elementary school in the district. In those four schools combined, that's about 80 classrooms full of youngsters.

"It's a challenge but I love it," said Mr. Koszuta, who joined the district

last September. During his career, he's served as a health and physical education teacher at the secondary level, behavioral specialist,

administrator and sports coach.

These days, he's deeply intent on helping students develop healthy habits, respectful ways and the know-how to keep themselves safe. It's far better for them to have health awareness early on than to try to break bad habits later, he points out. His proudest moments are when students talk to him about a healthy choice they've made, such as a youngster who related that he read a nutrition label and steered away from a particular food item.

"That's when I know I'm reaching them," he said. "They've realized they only get one body and a choice they make now can affect them for the rest of their life."

Mr. Koszuta is based at one of the elementary schools for roughly 10 weeks at a time, during which he "pushes in" to K-2 classrooms twice, and 3-5 classrooms three times, during the six-day cycle. He started the school year at Union Pleasant Elementary and is at Armor through the first week in March. Next up is Charlotte Avenue,

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Superintendent's Column

Schools, community resilient; priorities steer toward normalcy

On March 15, 2020, we closed schools in response to the uncertainty caused by a novel Corona Virus for which there was no known treatment. At the time, I recall reflecting often on a quote by Emerson. He said, "What lies behind us, and what lies before us are but tiny matters compared to what lies within us." Two years later, I am really proud of the fact that our school community proved this 150-year old wisdom right. It hasn't been easy, but "what lies within us" has helped our school community stick together and remain resilient through it all.

Helpful in keeping our forward momentum going is the removal of the New York State mask mandate that was made effective on March 2. Allowing for choice regarding mask wearing was an important step in returning to a more normalized learning environment. Importantly, we have been explicit about our expectation that every student and staff member will be respected for the choice they make regarding whether or not to wear a mask.

I wanted to use this space to reiterate the district's long-standing commitment to a few priorities:

Modern Learning — One of our elementary teachers told me once that if you can "ask Alexa" and get an answer, we may want to think twice about teaching it in school. A very common feature in all of our classrooms are learning experiences designed to:

- help students learn how to access credible information and analyze it
- assess the veracity of information by identifying its source
- learn how to draw thoughtful conclusions
- gain experience in suggesting responsible action based on their conclusions
- reflect on the impact of their actions
- rethink previous conclusions when new information becomes available.

Guided by our HCSD Strategic Plan, we act each day on our District Vision of "educating modern learners who create, care, solve and discover." Our educators offer learning experiences that promote creativity, critical thinking, civility, student agency and self-efficacy so that they are empowered to carve out a place in the economy, and in their community. We want school to be a place where each student and staff member finds joy, value and connection. In Hamburg, all of our elementary students are learning to code while they are forming fundamental skills of reading, writing and math. These transportable competencies and foundational skills are those that are most likely to lead them to being successful in school. They will also enable them to add value to the colleges that admit them, to the businesses that hire them, and to the mil-

itary branches that induct them after they graduate from school.

Learning-Centered Partnerships — We continue forming partnerships with local colleges, universities and firms, so that we embed authentic off-site experiences into our academic programs.

For example, our P-Tech program, in partnership with Erie 1 BOCES, allows students to graduate from high school with a diploma and an Associate's Degree in Auto Tech or Auto Collision (at no cost to the student). In most cases, students have multiple job offers that would pay them more than \$50,000 per year. While many students still prefer to attend a four-year college after high school, programs like this help us to open doors to entering the workforce right after high school, to the military, and to two-year schools that offer an increasing array of degrees and micro-credentials. We also offer multiple opportunities for students to earn transcribed col-

lege credits through agreements with higher education partners that include Hilbert College, Syracuse University and SUNY Albany.

Capital Project — We are beginning the design phase of our \$68 million capital project. When completed, this project will update our instructional spaces to support modern learning in the arts, technology, sciences and other areas of the school experience. It will also update many of our outdoor Physical Education and Athletics spaces. We are really excited to begin construction on these vital capital investments in the spring of 2023.

The next edition of *the Focus* will be the annual Budget Edition. While all of the details will be in that edition, I wanted to offer a few things to keep in mind between now and then:

- The 2022-2023 budget is difficult to develop due to persistent underfunding by New York State. In fact, the 2022-2023 (next year) school year will be 17th consecutive year that we are underfunded by New York State. Our current estimate is that our Foundation Aid for 2022-2023 will be roughly \$1 million less than it should be.
- Since 2007-2008, our district has received approximately \$80 million less in state aid than we should have.
- We estimate that our levy increase will be close to 2.3%. Since we have 7% inflation, we will experience some budgetary pressure that we'll have to plan for.
- As we have for the last several years, we expect to propose a budget to the Board of Education that funds all current programs and positions.

Please always know that we appreciate the opportunity to be your partner in the learning and growth of your children. Thank you for your continued trust and confidence.



Michael Cornell
Superintendent



Boston Valley fourth graders Natalie Ecker, left, and Maya Ferro used the coolness of ice cubes as a calming technique.



The Ambassadors team of, from left, Matigan Fitzgerald, Flynn Harper, Molly O'Brien and Meghan Kruszka led Kelly Reading's second graders through coping techniques at Boston Valley.

Student Ambassadors teach coping techniques to elementary peers

Relaxation strategies are focus of classroom visits in February

There are many ways to reduce stress and manage emotions. Not every strategy works for every person. So when Hamburg's High School/Middle School student Ambassadors visited elementary classrooms in February, they led the younger children through coping skills that ranged from deep breathing to a short spurt of intense exercise.

This interaction between older and younger students is tradition at Hamburg, with the topic changing from year-to-year

and the Ambassadors themselves deciding how to present the information. This year's focus on coping skills dovetails with one of the district's priorities —the mental and emotional health of its learners.

There are about 40 High School and 10 Middle School Ambassadors. They completed a full day of training in December and another half day in January to prepare. Then 10 Ambassadors teams, overseen by social workers, school counselors, a psychologist and instructional coaches, went into more than 70 classrooms at four schools over two days.

Each session started and ended with "Fist to Five," a check-in where every person used their fingers on a scale of one to five to rank how they were feeling at the moment.

In Kindergarten to Grade 2 classrooms, the Ambassadors taught "balloon breathing" and "calm down hot cocoa" deep breathing techniques. Grades 3-5 experienced TIPP techniques: temperature, intense exercise, paced breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.

For the temperature technique, they held plastic ice cubes on their forehead or wrist to lower body temperature, reduce heart rate and release dopamine, which lowers stress and anxiety.

Feedback from students was encouraged throughout the presentations. In Kelly Reading's second grade at Boston Valley Elementary, for example, Ambassador Flynn Harper gave an overview, then Meghan Kruszka asked students what made them upset or sad. She also invited the second graders to state a healthy habit and demonstrated balloon breathing. Matigan Fitzgerald led the hot chocolate breathing exercise. Molly O'Brien showed them how to scrunch their muscles, then "let it go," as they practiced progressive muscle relaxation. She also asked the students to talk about a trusted adult in their life who they could reach out to if something was bothering them.

Stress may be an unavoidable part of life, but as a result of the Ambassadors' outreach, Hamburg's elementary students now have some lifelong skills to help them cope.

Kindergarten & PreK registering for 2022-23

Enrollment is under way for Hamburg Central's Kindergarten and PreKindergarten (PreK) programs for the 2022-23 school year.

The district offers full-day kindergarten for children who are legal residents on the opening day of school and who are or will be five years old on or before Dec. 1, 2022.

The PreK program, housed at Charlotte Avenue Elementary School, is for children who will be four years old on or before Dec. 1, 2022. There is no cost to families who reside in the school district and no income eligibility restrictions. There are both full-day and half-day PreK class options. For more information on the program, see the PreK section of the school district website (hamburgschools.org).

Registration forms for both Kindergarten and PreK are also available on the district website. Registration is by online only. See the Enrolling Students icon on the homepage of the district website. Contact the Central Registration Office for more information at 646-3200, ext. 7217 or email centralreg@hcsdk12.org.



Ella Ballowe



Molly Connolly



Madelyn Harrison



Jenna Jablonski



Ayden Link



Ella Melcher



Delaney O'Brien



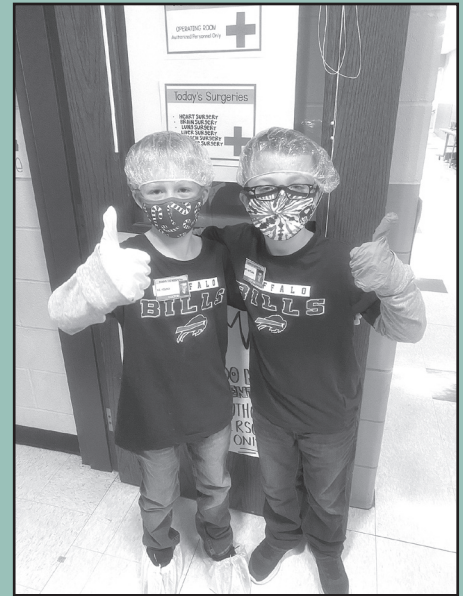
Bryce Zeltman



Brooke Zimmer

Southtowns Regional Chamber spotlights Student Stars for character

The Hamburg High School seniors pictured above were recently recognized by the Southtowns Regional Chamber of Commerce as 2022 Student Stars for actively demonstrating exceptional character and making an impact in school and community. This annual recognition celebrates students from seven area high schools. This year, in lieu of a dinner gala, the honorees received gift cards from local businesses.



Liam Young, left, and Blake Pietrzak were ready to dissect math problems.

Student surgeons perform math "operations" at Union Pleasant

Is there a doctor in the house? Turns out there were many when Amanda Destro, a third grade teacher at Union Pleasant Elementary School, recently converted her classroom into operating rooms and had student surgeons "scrub in" to work on their math skills.

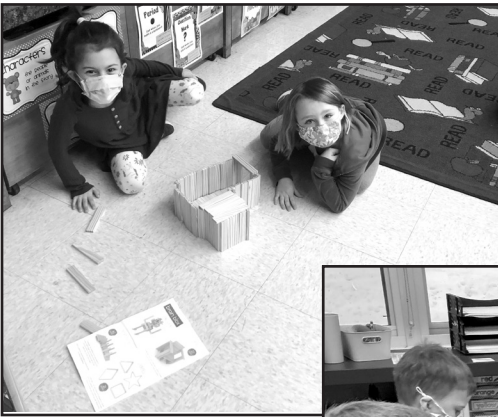
A review for an order of operations math lesson provided the occasion for the transformation. The classroom featured six "operating rooms." Each of these stations was an opportunity for students to practice their math skills. Students scrubbed in and were assigned to surgical teams to dissect the problems.

"We had a blast," reports Ms. Destro.

Family Reading Night on March 25 invites all ages

"Reading is Magic" is the theme for Hamburg Central's Districtwide Family Reading Night set for Friday, March 25 from 6:30-9 p.m. at the Middle School, 360 Division St. This free event will kick-off with Hawk Creek's Harry Potter owl program. Activities for every age will include Kool Karaoke, Mail a Postcard, Story Walk, Buoyant Foil Boats, Harry Potter Kahoot, family board games and coloring contest, plus a book swap, door prizes, refreshments and live music by students.





Above, Magda Cerrone and Clara Huff put their heads together to construct a house using wooden building planks. At right, the challenge for Tyler Ricey, Chase Fermani, Gavin Fermani and Sam Proudman was to make winter items (snowflake, mittens, earmuffs) using Play-Doh.



Charlotte Avenue's before-school STEM challenges students to think outside box

Try, try again. For students in the STEM before-school club at Charlotte Avenue Elementary, there are always different ways to solve the challenge.

"It's all about thinking outside of the box and learning that mistakes can often lead to great successes if we don't give up," said teacher MaryBeth Diggins, who coordinates the club with colleague Jessica Gainey. "Most students enjoy having the flexibility to be creative and not having to find one specific solution to a problem."

The club, which started in January and will run until April break, is for kindergarten to second graders. There are two groups with eight or nine students in each who meet either before school on Tuesday or Thursday.

Typically, students are presented with a challenge that they try to solve through building, creativity, imagination, design, art and engineering. They may be given building materials and asked to create a bridge that can hold a certain

amount of weight. Or they'll receive materials to design a maze for a robot. And, if their approach doesn't work the first time, that's OK. It's simply an opportunity to circle back, rethink it and find a new way.

Second graders connect with Bills quarterback on growth mindset

Josh Allen has a fan base at Union Pleasant Elementary School, where Jenea Smith's second graders see his football career as a perfect example of growth mindset, the concept that abilities can be improved through effort and practice.

In February they dashed off letters to the popular Buffalo Bills quarterback sharing the growth mindset characteristics they learned from him. Their study of the concept focused on such traits as courage, effort, making mistakes, taking risks and persistence. Each lesson was paired with a book and activity.

"The children have really absorbed this unit and I love watching as they start to apply it to their lives," Mrs. Smith said.

The letter writing was a culminating activity she brainstormed with student teacher Madison Reardon. Ms. Reardon developed the lesson plan, including a book about his football career timeline and clips of the final playoff game



Student teacher Madison Reardon and teacher Jenea Smith with the class.

to discuss how he showed a growth mindset.

"I suggested writing letters to Josh Allen because his story falls in line with a lot of the things we have been talking about with growth mindset and because our class loves him this year," Mrs. Smith said. Students were provided with a scaffolded writing prompt that required them to use their vocabulary words. They also provided three details explaining why he reflected that trait. They ended with a concluding sentence of why he inspired them to have a growth mindset.

"The kiddos blew us away and truly captured exactly what we were hoping from the lesson," Mrs. Smith said.

A connection to someone who works in the Bills organization will help get the letters to the intended recipient.

"We're hoping to receive a response but I told them I'm not making any promises."



Clara Strack, center, was honored at the start of a game in February. Joining the celebration were her parents Betsy and Ron Strack, sister Daisy Strack, aunt Becky Nahrebeski and grandparents Bonnie and Robert Kolsin.

Basketball standout surpasses 1,000 points, breaks season & single game school records

It's rare to see someone as talented on the basketball court as Hamburg High School junior Clara Strack. In February, she scored her 1,000th point – breaking a school record for most points scored in a single season.

Clara came into the game on Feb. 2 at home against Depew with 969 points. She scored 43 points that night to make her new total 1,012.

Her reaction to achieving the milestone?

“It feels good to finally have accomplished something that I have worked for,” Clara said.

This has been a season of firsts for her. She also scored more than 40 points three times in the season, including a game in Jamestown where she notched 47, which broke the single game scoring record at Hamburg, for both boys' and girls' teams.

As of press time, she only needed 17 points to become Hamburg's all-time leading female scorer in school history.

Amy Steger, girls' varsity basketball coach, calls Clara the most efficient player she has ever worked with; someone who returns after each off-season noticeably better.

“She puts in countless hours to better her game and it has paid off,” Mrs. Steger said. “She scores quietly and effortlessly, while also being one of the best passers on our team.”

Clara's demeanor also earns her praise.

“One of my favorite things about Clara is watching how excited she gets for her teammates. She is humble and loyal, and we are so grateful to have her in our program.”



Wall of Fame returns; Nominations sought

After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19, the Hamburg Alumni Foundation announces the return of the Wall of Fame Award Ceremony, set for Saturday, Oct. 1 at Michael's Catering and Banquets, 4885 Southwestern Blvd., Hamburg. This event honors Hamburg's standout alumni and educators in the following categories:

- Sports Wall of Fame
- Team of Distinction
- Coach of Distinction
- Distinguished Alumni
- Distinguished Educators

The Wall of Fame Committee is once again seeking nominations. Nominations must be received by April 15 to be considered for the 2022 class. Nomination forms can be found at hamburgalumnifoundation.org under Events at the top of the home page. Please attach with the form any additional information or details you have about the honoree. Sports nominations can be emailed to scottobenshain@yahoo.com and distinguished educators/alumni to Roberta Bemiller at roberta@rlbcoaching.com. Submissions can also be mailed to Hamburg Alumni Foundation, P.O. Box 174, Hamburg, NY 14075.

Sports Legends — Any former Hamburg athlete graduated from Hamburg at least 10 years, a coach or an athletic director. Team of Distinction is eligible for this honor at least 10 years after the completion of their season.

Distinguished Alumni — This award honors Hamburg High School alumni who have achieved outstanding success in their chosen careers, have made outstanding contributions to the community, country or society, and whose reputation can or does serve as a positive example to Hamburg High School students.

Distinguished Teacher/Educator — This award honors educators who have a history of outstanding contributions to the Hamburg Central Schools. It considers the nominee's ability to inspire intellectual development of students, foster critical thinking and independent inquiry. The nominee may have mentored students in and outside of the classroom.



Second grader Timothy Emmerling shows the QR code in an interactive display that connects to his recording of a friendship recipe. Outdoor Snow Day is also pictured.

Friendship frames February at Armor Elementary

What does it take to be a good friend? Students at Armor Elementary School explored that theme during Friendship February.

Door and hallway decorating, some having interactive elements, set the tone in the first week of the celebration. This was student-directed, which energized the activity, said Principal Leslie Bennett.

Kindness Week followed, with a focus on how friends treat everyone with kindness and respect. Announcements and daily themed dress-up days, sponsored by Character Club, spotlighted the trait.

Friends Enjoy Playing Together was center stage for Week 3, with Valentine's Day celebrations, airing of the school musical "Annie, Jr.," as well as interviews of those involved in it, and an outdoor Snow Day. Cozy Comfort Day with pj's and movies ushered in mid-winter recess.

The culminating week, Making Music with Friends, featured the schoolwide recording of Armor's new song.

The Armor School Song

Refrain: We are together paw and paw, we are the bulldogs!

We are on Abbott Road,
Where all of us are in learning mode.
Our friends at Armor are really kind,
And the teachers help us use our mind.

Refrain: We are together paw and paw, we are the bulldogs!

Small or tall.
Doesn't matter at all.
Everyone shines bright
with purple and white.

Refrain: We are together paw and paw, we are the bulldogs!

B-b-b-b bulldogs, bulldogs, bulldogs! B-b-b-b bulldogs, (bark bark) bulldogs!

Refrain: We are together paw and paw, we are the bulldogs!

Armor fifth graders harmonize to create new school song

The three fifth grade classes at Armor Elementary were "together paw and paw" when it came to writing a new school song. Under the direction of vocal music teacher Kelly Ersing, they developed a catchy tune that the entire school came together to sing and videotape as a culmination to Friendship February.

It was decided that Armor should have a school song because if there ever was one, it was so long ago that no one remembers it.

"The kids were very motivated and inspired knowing that they could possibly leave a legacy and that students could be singing this song for many years to come," Mrs. Ersing noted.

It's the kind of song that sticks in one's head after hearing it.

"The entire school is in love with this song," Mrs. Ersing said. "K-2 students ask to sing it every music class and they have even come up with movements for the refrain."

To start this project, the fifth graders read different school song lyrics and found things they liked about them. They categorized the ideas and came up with a verse of rhyming line for each category. This resulted in a lot of lyrics, so they voted for their favorites to put into verse/refrain format. After that, Mrs. Ersing chose lyrics from each class for the final version.

"For the actual music writing, we did a little improvisation with each class. I then took their ideas and created a melody. The classes voted and all somehow agreed on the type of accompaniment to add."

With that, plus a little bark, there was harmony in celebration of learning, friendship and Bulldog pride.

Time capsules *(Continued from page one)*

to their future self, hopes for their career aspirations and words of advice. There were writing prompts to get them started that included such phrases as "I hope you are..." and "When things get tough just remember to..."

Mrs. Martino measured each of her students from head-to-toe and snipped a piece of yarn to length to add to his/her capsule. She also penned a letter to her students.

What does she think their reaction will be when they open their capsule?

"I think they'll probably laugh at their handwriting and how they spelled things," she predicted.

Mrs. Walh had her students complete a questionnaire, then folded it into an envelope. She added a letter expressing how proud she is of them, their photo and a picture they drew. The envelope was placed in a plastic bag for preservation.

It's tradition for Hamburg High School seniors to go on a memory walk to their former elementary school in June so they can see how far they've come and feel good about their future as graduation approaches. The time capsules will be a stepping stone onto that path.

It's Mrs. Martino's hope that she can help inspire those students who today see themselves as future teachers to realize that goal when they depart Hamburg Schools. Time will tell.



With their time capsules are Owen Young (seated) and from left, Emmy Fischer, Brett Gibson and Addy Richardson.



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Healthy habits *(Continued from page one)*

finishing off at Boston Valley.

It's unusual for a school district to have a teacher who's fully dedicated to elementary health education, noted Patrick Cauley, Hamburg's Director of Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

"We value the education, physical and mental health of our youngsters from the moment they enter our schools," Mr. Cauley observed.

He said of Mr. Koszuta, "His knowledge base is outstanding. His patience in his teaching and the level of attention he gives to every student are also very remarkable."



Armor second grader Salvatore Mesi concentrated on writing a caring word.

"He's already developing relationships with all these students. What he's doing now will be a positive for years to come."

One of the ways in which Mr. Koszuta is bonding with the more than 1,500 elementary students is to call each by name.

"I make a point of it," he said. "The kids all call me by my name and it shows respect to call them by their name."

On a typical day, there's a lot of interaction during his time with students. On one day in February, for example, he talked about friendship, feelings, kindness and respect with Destiny Puchalski's second graders at Armor. Students eagerly offered thoughts about what it means to have a friend and to be a friend, what adults they could reach out to if they were upset and how they could show kindness and respect to others.

To have them think about using their hands to be helpful, Mr. Koszuta had them write a caring word and color a "hand of friendship," which he later used to decorate his office door.



Mr. Koszuta checks in with students at Armor Elementary.

He told the students that the next time he visited, it would be to talk about germs, eating healthy and taking care of their bodies.

Typical topics he covers with K-2 students include self-confidence, emotions, hygiene, nutrition basics and stranger safety. With Grades 3-5, some of the same topics are addressed more in-depth, adding body growth, Internet safety and etiquette, safety when home alone, vaping, drugs and alcohol.

With the older students, the amount of time spent home alone and access to digital devices is a concern that's increasingly on the radar.

"The kids are exposed to so much on the Internet. They need to know what's safe and what the red flags are."

Mr. Koszuta calls his job at Hamburg a dream come true because he knows that he's making a difference in children's lives. Just prior to joining the district, he was Dean of Students at the Charter School for Applied Technologies for three years. As an administrator, he missed daily interaction with kids.

"Seeing their smiles – I need that," he said.