

the western PENNSYLVANIAN



NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

VOLUME 132 #2 SPRING 2019



Lady Lions: ESDAA Champions
Pg 4



WPSD BotsIQ
Team is Back
in Action
PG 13
▼



▲
PG 27
WPSD Students Meet
Black and Gold
Superstar



Board of Trustees

Officers

Melissa Scheffler
Chair

Grace Shirk-Emmons
Vice Chair

Angelo Martini, Sr.
Secretary

Dean Kartsonas
Treasurer

Barbara Ann Boylan
Denise E. Brown
Laurel Echavarría
Andrew Fisher
Fred Griffin
Sharon Hall, Esq.
William F. Jones, Jr.
Chris McCrady
Charles McFadden
Leo A. McGowan
David Michener
Dr. Harold Mowl, Jr.*
Fatima Muhammad*
Greg Pollock
Heather Snyder

Emeritus Trustees

Rodney Danco, Jr.*
Wes Dickson*
Ross Farber
Dr. Mark Friedman
Jeffrey Hutchins
Laura Kesel
Dr. Harry Lang*
Dr. David Martin
Elizabeth Pollard*

*Graduate of WPSD

CONTENTS

the western PENNSYLVANIAN

WPSD Hosts 43rd Annual ESDAA Girls' Basketball Tournament

- 4 Pep Rally
- 4 Lady Lions: ESDAA Champions!
- 4 Making Good on a Promise!
- 5 Media Coverage
- 5 Boys' Team and Cheerleading ESDAA Results

What's Happening?

- 6 Halloween
 - 6 Trick or Treat Parade
 - 6 The Children's House Shows Off Their Halloween Spirit
 - 6 Enjoying the Beauty of Autumn
 - 6 Toddlers Dress to Impress in Halloween Costumes
- 7 Residential Students Take Haunted Campus Tour
- 7 High School's Spooky Celebration
- 7 Mummies, Monster Mash, and Middle School Merit!
- 8 Thanksgiving
 - 8 Toddlers Prepare Thanksgiving Dessert
 - 8 Residential Students and Staff Gather in Time-Honored Thanksgiving Tradition
 - 9 Children's Center Students Give Thanks
 - 9 The Wilksburg Chamber of Commerce Hosts Annual Thanksgiving Breakfast at WPSD
- 10 School Spirit Shines at WPSD's 20th Annual Homecoming
 - 10 Pep Rally
 - 11 Honoring Our Senior Students' Notable Accomplishments
 - 11 Hoops!
- 12 Battle of The Books

- 13 Building Breadth of Knowledge Through Academic Bowl
- 13 WPSD BotsIQ Team Is Back In Action!
- 14 Developing a Sense of Place Through The Geography Bee
- 14 WPSD Students Wow at Science Fair
- 15 Students Using Technology to Deepen Understanding of American History
- 16 High School Students or Future Forensic Scientists?
- 16 Preventing Substance Abuse Through Red Ribbon Week
- 17 An Hour of Code Offers Students a Lifetime of Skill and Opportunity
- 18 Deaf Military Enthusiast Visits WPSD For Veterans Day
- 19 Mr. and Miss WPSD Pageant Showcases The Poise and Purpose of Our Students
- 20 Celebrating the Holidays
 - 20 WPSD Girls' Athletic Association Hosts Holiday Party For Elementary Students
 - 20 VITAC Announces Holiday Card Finalists and Winner
 - 20 Annual WPSD Holiday Show Delights Its Audience
 - 21 Santa Spends Time With Our Littlest Learners
 - 21 Celebrating The Holidays In Song and Sign
 - 21 Children's House Brings Story To Life Through Acting
- 22 Youngest Learners Taught Ballet By The Best
- 23 Instilling a Love of Reading with Read Across America
 - 23 Children's Center
 - 23 Elementary School
 - 23 Middle School
- 24 Childrens Center Expansion

Famous Sights and Famous People

- 26 An Exciting Trip to The Big Apple
- 27 WPSD Students Meet Black and Gold Superstar

Transition

- 28 Shadowing a Dental Surgeon Brings a Smile to WPSD Student
- 28 Exploring the Field of Wellness
- 28 Volunteering Pays Off
- 29 Seeing Stars
- 29 Vocational Talents
- 29 A Knack for Attention to Detail

Athletics

- 30 Three-Time Champions Celebrated In School-Wide Rally
- 30 WPSD Basketball Teams Shoot For The Stars at OSD Homecoming Classic
- 31 WPSD Cheerleaders Collaborate with Gateway High School Cheer Squad
- 31 WPSD Hosts Basketball Clinic On Campus

In The Community

- 32 Children's Center Partnership With Attack Theatre Continues to Grow
- 32 Chick-Fil-A Partnership Includes ASL Community Event
- 33 WPSD Girls' Athletic Association Supports Breast Cancer Awareness
- 33 Dancing Toward Friendship
- 34 Building Communication Skills For Families With Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
- 34 Family Learning Weekend
- 34 WPSD Featured on KDKA-TV
- 35 Environmental Discoveries at Frick Park
- 35 Area Leaders Build Rapport Through Commitment to The Community Meetings

Staff Spotlight

- 36 Fabrienne DeRise-Spadacene

Retiree Spotlight

- 37 Dr. Colleen Sari

Student Spotlight

- 38 Aaliyah Sanders

Support Us

- 39 A Sign of Unity
- 39 Monthly Giving
- 40 150th Anniversary Auction & Gala Celebration



Editor: Dr. Steve Farmer
Managing Editor: Sarah Bartlebaugh

The Western Pennsylvanian is a publication of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. It is one source of communication with parents, alumni, teachers, friends of WPSD, and other schools for the Deaf.

WPSD Hosts 43rd Annual ESDAA Girls' Basketball Tournament



Pep Rally

A high-spirited pep rally kicked off the ESDAA Girls' Basketball tournament weekend, which was hosted right here on the WPSD campus! Five other schools traveled to WPSD to compete. SignShine opened the celebration with a moving ASL rendition of the National Anthem. The varsity girls' basketball team was recognized, along with their coaches. The boys' basketball team, the cheerleading squad, and their coaches were also recognized, as they took part in their own ESDAA tournament the following weekend at Marie Philip School -

The Learning Center. Dr. Farmer energized the crowd, challenging all students and staff to show their enthusiasm. The gym, filled with screaming fans, was electrifying. No WPSD celebration is complete without the 'wave', the Lion's Song and the School's legendary chant - "Always Remember, Never Forget, WPSD is #1!" ■



Lady Lions: ESDAA Champions!

WPSD's Lady Lions clinched the coveted ESDAA championship title in a nail biter of a game against Lexington School & Center for the Deaf on the final day of the tournament. Our blue and gold warriors emerged victorious by a score of 16 to 14! What an exciting finish! Congratulations to our team and to all the student-athletes and coaches who took part in the event. All tournament honors included Cheyenne S., Ryane S., and Danielle F. Cheyenne S. nabbed the MVP award. Congratulations to our champions! ■



Making Good on a Promise!

An important life lesson - keep your promises. WPSD's high school principal, Greg Mendenhall, did just that! Mr. Mendenhall made a deal with the high school girls' basketball team - if they brought home the coveted ESDAA championship trophy, he would allow them to shave his head and beard! After giving 110% on the court, the Lady Lions took home the championship title for the first time in School history! Mr. Mendenhall kept his end of the bargain. Enjoy these pictures from the fun festivities! The look of sheer joy on the girls' faces is priceless! Thanks to Mr. Mendenhall for being a good sport and for keeping his word! ■



Media Coverage

WTAE-TV news covered the pep rally to kick off the exciting weekend and the Pittsburgh Post Gazette was there at the buzzer of the championship game to capture our Lions rejoicing in the big win. Check out one of the photographer's outstanding pictures to the right, depicting the emotional end to a hard fought battle. ■



Copyright ©, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2019, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.



Boys' Team and Cheerleading ESDAA Results

The WPSD boys' basketball team came back from a 13 point deficit early in the second half in the first game of their ESDAA tournament to defeat New York School for the Deaf - Fanwood by a score of 53-47. It was an intense and exciting win! Following that victory, our blue and gold warriors lost two close games - one to Lexington School & Center for the Deaf - and one to Marie Philip School - The Learning Center. We are so proud of their efforts and positive attitude throughout. All tournament honors went to Chad D. Our cheerleaders performed wonderfully in the skills competition. Xiaoli C. earned the individual jump champion award and also landed a spot on the all tournament team. Congratulations to our Lions! ■



What's Happening?

Latest News Around the WPSD Campus

Halloween

Trick or Treat Parade

WPSD Children's Center and Elementary School students took part in trick-or-treating fun around campus on Halloween day. Children dressed up in a wide variety of costumes including princesses, superheroes, monsters, and much more. Each one was so excited to receive their treats from WPSD staff and volunteers on Halloween. Smiles were shared and candy cravings satisfied. It was a wonderful and interactive activity for everyone! ■



The Children's House Shows Off Their Halloween Spirit

The spirit of Halloween was alive and well at WPSD! Students in our Children's House took part in a smaller trick or treating celebration on Wednesday before heading to the main event on campus. Little princesses, police officers, and superheroes exchanged sweet treats and smiles with each other in the administration building before making their way around the School's main building, gathering their favorite treats from WPSD staff. A great time was had by all! ■



Enjoying the Beauty of Autumn

WPSD Children's Center and Elementary School students enjoyed the magnificent colors of the leaves and the crisp air while on hayrides around campus during the fall season. What a special treat on a beautiful fall day! ■



Toddlers Dress to Impress in Halloween Costumes

The WPSD Discovery Days toddler group were dressed up to the nines in their Halloween costumes last fall. The toddlers walked around campus with their teachers and parents, receiving goodies from staff who passed out special treats and made time to share smiles with the smallest of our trick or treaters. It was truly enjoyable event for all involved! ■





Residential Students Take Haunted Campus Tour

In celebration of Halloween, residential students visited several spooky spots around the WPSD campus in the hopes of receiving some special treats and perhaps a little scare. No Halloween would be complete without a stop at the legendary third floor corridor - rumored to be haunted by ghosts. Monsters and ghouls handed out goodies to the trick or treaters as they made their way through this space. After this nail-biting experience, the group traveled to the Health Center to get a quick read on their blood pressure. Next, the students visited the Independent Living Program space- what a scary sight! At the end of the night, the

group collected treats from Dr. Farmer and his family and enjoyed hot chocolate at the Lion's Den, recounting each spooky moment of their visit. ■



High School's Spooky Celebration

The high school Halloween party was a big hit! Thirty students took part in the fun event. The group participated in several holiday themed games including musical chairs, candy corn toss and hot potato. Dani F. and Antoine H. earned the most votes during one of these fun games. Their prize? Whipped cream in the face! Nick C. and Jarred L. suffered this same fate on the staff side. Laughs and paper towels were abundant! ■

Mummies, Monster Mash, and Middle School Merit!

By WPSD 5th Graders

WPSD Middle School students and staff enjoyed a Halloween merit party in the small gym and the Lion's Den. After lunch, we changed into our costumes and got together into Halloween teams. Then, we went to the small gym for eight spooky games. One of the activities was Eyeball Pong! We could see the eyeballs bounce and hear them "ping" and "boing" as they landed in the buckets. Another game was Creepy Crawlers. We dug through stinky, slimy spaghetti to find bugs. One student reported it tasted like sour milk! Gross Box was also a disgusting game that we enjoyed. Each box was labeled with body organs! We had to guess what food item was in each box by feeling what was inside without peeking. Anyone that walked into the gym could see tiny, flying spiders being shot into a web or long, white strips of toilet



paper being wrapped around students or skeletons being dug up from shredded newspaper. When we were finished, we went to the Lion's Den snack bar for costume voting, scary snacks, and Halloween line dancing. Thank you, teachers and students, for setting up this event. We all loved the Halloween party! It was so much fun and enjoyable! ■

Thanksgiving



Toddlers Prepare Thanksgiving Dessert

The toddlers in WPSD's Discovery Days group prepared for Thanksgiving by making some delicious mini-pies. First, they rolled out the dough. Then, they cut out circles and placed the dough in muffin pans. After that, they filled the crust with either pumpkin, apple, or cherry filling! What a delectable feast! Yum! ■



Residential Students and Staff Gather in Time-Honored Thanksgiving Tradition

By Mary Ennis

The WPSD Residential students and staff enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving meal at the end of November. The group dressed to the nines for the special event. Dr. Farmer stressed the importance of being thankful for all the good in our lives. Afterward, the Peer Mentors completed the traditional carving of the turkey. The students and staff feasted on a delicious meal. As the heavy wet snow came down outside, everyone recognized the the warmth of each other's company. ■





Children's Center Students Give Thanks

By Michelle Zelei

WPSD Children's Center students started off their Thanksgiving celebration by rotating between classrooms and enjoying several activities. They created a hand-print turkey decked out with feathers, played a Thanksgiving turkey toss game and made some turkey slime. The students enjoyed relaxing with Turkey Yoga and learned a new dance called the Turkey Pokey!! "All for Pie and Pie for All" by David Martin was read as well. When all the activities were finished, students met up in the small gym for a "dress your teacher" activity! Each teacher was dressed up like a scarecrow piece by piece as students raced on scooters! The celebration came to an end when the young Pilgrims and Native Americans met in the cafeteria for their annual Thanksgiving lunch! ■



The Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce Hosts Annual Thanksgiving Breakfast at WPSD

The Wilkinsburg Chamber of Commerce held their 54th annual Thanksgiving breakfast at WPSD last November. The Pittsburgh Urban Christian Middle School Choir and WPSD's SignShine group performed a joint rendition of "America the Beautiful" in front of a packed cafeteria. The Keynote speaker was Dr. James Withers from Mercy Behavioral Health and Pittsburgh Mercy Family Health Center. It was a wonderful gathering of friends and community members in a season of thankfulness! ■





School Spirit Shines at WPSD's 20th Annual Homecoming

Pep Rally

December 7th kicked off WPSD's 20th annual Homecoming weekend. The festivities began with a pep rally complete with an ASL performance of the National Anthem by SignShine, the crowning of the King and Queen - Chad D. and Cheyenne S., the Lion's song, and of course, the legendary chant - "Always Remember and Never Forget... WPSD is #1!!" Three schools for the Deaf traveled to WPSD to compete in this basketball classic - Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Ohio. The celebration helped to jump start the girls' and boys' teams as each went on to defeat every opponent they faced! Go, Lions! ■





Honoring Our Senior Students' Notable Accomplishments

December 8th marked WPSD's Senior Recognition Night during this year's Homecoming Basketball Classic. During this ceremony, WPSD honors the accomplishments of our senior student-athletes and recognizes the families for their support and commitment throughout the years. Congratulations to our seniors for their hard work and dedication to academic and athletic excellence! ■



Hoops!

Our WPSD Lions went undefeated in the homecoming basketball classic this year! The boys' team defeated Ohio School for the Deaf in the first matchup of the tournament by a score of 52-39 in a come-from-behind-win. Our blue and gold then went on to take on the Kentucky School for the Deaf. As the game progressed, WPSD was able to create a commanding lead by the time the final buzzer rang. Finally, in the last game of the tournament, our Lions secured a victory over the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf Panthers in a fast paced, well played matchup. All teams battled hard to the very end. Congratulations to all of the student-athletes who gave their all during this wonderful weekend!



The WPSD Lady Lions emerged victorious in the first game of this year's Homecoming Basketball Classic. Our blue and gold warriors defeated Ohio School for the Deaf in their first game of the tournament. The girls then took on Kentucky School for the Deaf and were able to secure the win. In their final game of the tournament, WPSD beat Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, continuing their undefeated streak. Congratulations to all teams on hard fought matchups! ■

Battle of The Books



By Mary Noschese

In November, the WPSD Middle School Battle of the Books (BOTB) teams battled their way through the preliminary rounds of the reading season. The Green team did not make it to the playoffs, but they had fun, supported each other, and worked hard. The Buff and the Blue teams advanced to the Playoffs; becoming one of the top fourteen teams in their divisions! This is the first time in WPSD history that three teams competed in the preliminary rounds and two teams made it into the playoffs!

On December 14, Gallaudet Youth Programs announced the National Teams for the Middle School BOTB. Our Buff team clinched their spot in the Elite Eight! We are so proud of all three of our teams this year. Most of the students were new to BOTB this year, so it was a great accomplishment to make the top fourteen and experience the playoffs!



We wished good luck to our Buff team as they traveled to Washington, DC in March to battle their way through four new books! Our WPSD students closed the 2019 Battle of the Books Nationals weekend supporting their opponents in the championship round. Zaid A. earned a spot on the All-Star squad! It was well deserved as he earned nearly a perfect score for his performance this weekend. Thank you to our director, Marybeth Lauderdale, for our new lucky "book" socks! Thank you to all THREE families for traveling to DC to support us! And thank you to The Gallaudet Youth Programs for always putting on a great event and integrating fun reading themes! We were lucky enough to enjoy a night tour of the city! What a great experience! ■





Building Breadth of Knowledge Through Academic Bowl

The 2019 Gallaudet University's Regional Academic Bowl competition held at WPSD proved to be an exciting event for all 19 schools involved! While the Lady Lions did not nab a top spot to get into the nationals, they came oh so close! Our blue and gold also earned the much coveted Sportsmanship Award along with Lexington School & Center for the Deaf. Colleen M. earned all tournament honors. We are so proud of their efforts, hard work and positive attitude throughout the weekend! Congratulations to all! A special shout out to the first place team - Maryland School for the Deaf! ■



WPSD BotsIQ Team is Back In Action!

By John Foust

The WPSD BotsIQ students are at it again! They have been hard at work designing and machining parts for their robot in preparation for their first competition at the Westmoreland County Community College just south of Greensburg.

WPSD has partnered with the New Century Careers teaching machine shop in the Pittsburgh Southside for almost thirteen years now. Under strict supervision, the students are permitted to set up and use the shop's machines and equipment to fabricate each component according to the design prints. This hands-on experience gives them a taste of a day's work at a machine shop. In this way, the students can honestly determine if they would like to pursue post-graduate training in the career field of machining or a related manufacturing occupation.

Some of the machines and tools that they have been using faithfully are a milling machine, horizontal and vertical band saws, drill press, dial calipers, parallel bars, various clamping devices, grinders and tap sets. They have learned to measure to thousands of an inch with the dial caliper and with the milling machine graduations to maintain robot-like accuracy.

But all in all, the most important skill that they are learning and will continue to learn is how to problem solve and to stay on course throughout this entire BotsIQ experience!



UPDATE!

Our WPSD Lions gave their all on March 15 at the Southwestern Pennsylvania BotsIQ preliminary competitions held at the Westmoreland County Community College. They won one out of three matches. The group was back at it right after their last match trying to determine how best to fix a few technical glitches that occurred as a result of their fierce competition. They are working hard to be a force in the finals. We are so proud of the team's hard work, effort, good sportsmanship, and positive attitudes. What a wonderful and committed group of students and advisors! We are with you all the way! ■





Developing a Sense of Place Through The Geography Bee

By Megan Kirby

WPSD Middle Schoolers participated in a USA states and capitals geography bee in November. The students had been practicing memorizing the states and capitals for a month. Ms. Kirby had been motivating them to know all 50 states and capitals since the beginning of the year! The winners were **Sami R.** as the defending champion and 1st place winner, **Isolde R.** as the 2nd place winner, and **Walker R.** as the 3rd place winner. Congratulations to all for their efforts! ■



WPSD Students Wow at Science Fair

By Erin McNeil-Mascaro

The WPSD Middle School and High School students recently completed their science projects for the 2nd Annual Dylan Zurawski Science Fair. Scientific inquiry is an integral part of the PA state science standards. But more importantly, students complete their science fair projects because their teachers want them to love science and to stay curious about the world around them. Students have been working on their projects since August. They came up with topics that interested them, researched the topic, created experiments with an independent and dependent variable, and carried out the experiment. After analyzing their data, they created a conclusion based on their hypothesis. This was many months of hard-work and accountability. There were so many interesting and well thought out projects presented and we had a panel of qualified judges from a variety of fields. Erik Pintar is a software engineer at Google Pittsburgh. Amy Litteri, Ph.D. obtained her doctorate from Gallaudet University, attending school 12 years after she graduated from high school! Zachary Michael is the Program Director for Soccer Shots.

The winners of the high school science fair this year were:

- 1st Place: What do your lungs look like? Shaila R. (9th grade)
- 2nd Place: Which heating element is faster for boiling water? Xiaoli C. (11th grade)
- 3rd Place: Do Potatoes Create Electricity? Jasmine B. (12th grade)



Honorable Mention projects:

- Apparent Motion: Jade P. and Rebekah Q.
- Homopolor Motor: Valerie D.
- Paper Airplane: Samuel P.
- Do preservatives really stop the growth of bacteria? Wade D.

The winners of the middle school science fair this year were:

- 1st Place: When will the Hamster Run the Maze? Isolde R.
- 2nd Place: The Effect of Music on Cats – Ashley P.
- 3rd Place: Rising Yeast – Kierra O.

Honorable Mention:

- Up Up & Away – Walker R.
- A Batch Made in Heaven – Sarah V.
- Eggshell Geode Crystals – Carlene M.
- What Makes the Ice Melt Faster? Aiden M.



Congratulations to all of our students who worked hard to take part in this annual event! ■



High School Students or Future Forensic Scientists?

By Julie Ann Mountain

In the WPSD high school forensics science class, students are conducting presumptive blood tests. Several liquid samples are present. The students must determine if the liquid is blood based on its pH level. Once a sample is determined to indeed be blood, more testing must be done to determine the type of blood. This next step helps narrow down suspects in a crime. Extensive testing is required to reach accurate results. One must not base conclusions on limited data. What an interesting, hands-on experiment! Students passing the class will even earn college credit through NTID. ■



Preventing Substance Abuse Through Red Ribbon Week

In recognition of the spirit of Red Ribbon week, WPSD middle and high school students gladly accepted and proudly wore their red ribbons around campus. Red Ribbon Week is an alcohol, tobacco, drug and violence prevention and awareness campaign that is observed annually in the United States. The mission of the Red Ribbon Campaign is to present a unified and visible commitment towards the creation of a drug-free America. By wearing these ribbons, students symbolized their stand against drug and alcohol abuse. Throughout that week, if students were seen wearing the Red Ribbons and were able to explain why they had made and continued to make choices not to use drugs and alcohol, they were given small rewards for their efforts. ■





An Hour of Code Offers Students a Lifetime of Skill and Opportunity

Students of all grade levels participated in The Hour of Code at WPSD this year. The Hour of Code began as a one-hour coding challenge to give students a fun first introduction to computer science and has become a global learning, celebration, and awareness event. The Hour of Code provides students an opportunity to become familiar with the construction and development processes of games and apps. Activities require no experience and can be run on browsers, tablets, and smartphones. The Hour of Code takes place every year during Computer Science Education Week, the first week in December. Computer science is changing every industry on the planet.

Every 21st-century student should have the opportunity to learn how to create technology. Computer science concepts also help nurture creativity and problem-solving skills to prepare students for any future career.

WPSD was thrilled to host a special visitor in connection with this movement. Shireen Hafeez is the founder of "Deaf Kids Code," a nonprofit that promotes design thinking, computer science, and technology skills to Deaf and hard of hearing children. She believes that the "Digital Age is the Great Equalizer" and that, more than previous generations, our kids have an increased ability to contribute to our world socially and economically.

WPSD and SSDHHC 6th and 9th graders had an opportunity to create their own project using a motor with a battery and recycled items. Some students crafted a washing machine, an airplane, and a submarine! Afterwards, they took part in an activity with Dash,



a robot. This exercise gave our students the opportunity to navigate using an iPad and a coding program.

Some of our high school girls helped the younger students in their coding adventures!

The students who took part in this event received completion certificates signifying the end of the Hour of Code. What a wonderful, interactive learning experience for our students! ■



Deaf Military Enthusiast Visits WPSD For Veterans Day

By Dana Dailey

It has always been Keith Nolan's dream to join the military. He even went as far as attending ROTC training classes and successfully completed the first two levels of training. However, he was told that he could not continue on to the third and fourth levels because of his deafness. Since then, he has been fighting for the rights of Deaf people, and all citizens with disabilities, to join the military. A bill was even introduced into Congress. It's been a tough road, but he has not given up, and he has gained many supporters along the way. In honor of Veterans Day, Keith Nolan visited WPSD to share his inspiring story with our students. Our students presented an American flag to Mr. Nolan as a meaningful tribute to him. Afterward, he taught students and staff the proper form for both sit ups and push ups. He also led the students in some marching and salute drills. Thank you, Keith, for all of your hard work and for sharing your story with us! ■





Mr. and Miss WPSD Pageant Showcases The Poise and Purpose of Our Students

By Mary Ennis

On November 15th, five contestants took part in the annual Mr. and Miss WPSD Pageant. Congratulations to Aaliyah S., Xiaoli C., Maddy T., Braden E., and Austin G. for a job well done during their platform presentations and talent performances. Each gave outstanding and heartfelt renditions of his/her chosen specialty. Contestants took center stage to strut their stuff in the formal wear competition and demonstrate their depth of insight on various topics and current events in the on-stage interview segment. We were so impressed with their poise and extent of knowledge. The event was hosted by our wonderfully polished emcees, Olivia L. and James C. Judges included Angie Gallo, Mandy Kinnaird, and Joanne Sharer. Thanks to our auditor - Patrick Henry. Kudos to Pageant Coordinator, Venita Smith, for her hard work with all the contestants in preparation for the event. This marked her 19th year of involvement in the Pageant! In the end, first place honors went to Braden E. and Maddy T. Congratulations to our winners! ■



Celebrating The Holidays

WPSD Girls' Athletic Association Hosts Holiday Party For Elementary Students

The WPSD Girls' Athletic Association (GAA) hosted a Holiday party for the Elementary students before the holiday break. First, the students constructed and decorated their own craft for their Christmas trees at home. Afterward, the students took part in a "Pin the Heart on the Grinch" game. Next, they enjoyed receiving copies of 'How to Catch an Elf' by Adam Wallace, signed by the GAA members. Following these fun activities, the Man (and Woman) of the Hour arrived - Santa and Mrs. Claus - along with a few elves! They greeted the excited children and then



Santa invited each one to come up and share their Christmas wishes with him. Each student also received a present! The party ended with cookies and milk. It was a great yuletide event for all involved! ■

VITAC Announces Holiday Card Finalists and Winner

WPSD was thrilled to welcome VITAC to campus on December 14. The company recognized six students who created amazing artistic designs for the company's holiday card this year. The ceremony began with an ASL performance of the National Anthem and Jingle Bells by WPSD's Signshine group - Hand Vibes. Of the six finalists, one grand winner was chosen. Congratulations to Cam'Ron B. (who unfortunately was absent that day so he is not pictured) whose work of art topped the tree on VITAC's holiday card this year! The



other finalists' creative designs also adorned the tree. This is the 28th year VITAC and WPSD have partnered for this project. VITAC or VITaL ACcess provides closed captioning for national television programming. VITAC generously made a donation to the WPSD Art Department and all six finalists received certificates and awards for their achievements. Congratulations to all who participated! ■

Annual WPSD Holiday Show Delights Its Audience

By Amy Alverson

The WPSD students put on another successful Holiday Show on December 14th. This year was extra special because it was written by the High School Drama Class. "Noelle Saves Christmas" was performed in front of a packed auditorium. It included 1st through 4th grades and High School students. A fantastic job was done by all. The students brought laughter and love to all those who attended. ■





several holiday-themed songs such as "Silent Night" and "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" - both in song and sign. It was a beautiful night celebrating friendship under the lights! ■

Santa Spends Time With Our Littlest Learners

Santa arrived to WPSD just before Christmas to visit with some of our youngest students and their families. The children had their faces pressed against the window, wondering what Santa had for them in his sack of toys. As he entered the cafeteria, Santa was greeted by a roomful of excited children. What a way to get in the holiday spirit! A huge thanks to Santa for taking time out of his busy schedule to stop at WPSD and spend time with our littlest learners. ■

Celebrating The Holidays In Song and Sign

WPSD's Middle School SignShine along with Pittsburgh Concord Elementary School led by Gretchen Eckroat (a great friend to the School and our students), performed Wednesday at the 51st annual Holiday Choral Program held at the Allegheny County Courthouse. The collaborative group entertained the crowd with a variety of Christmas songs - both in song and sign. It was a lovely sight of togetherness, truly celebrating the meaning of this holiday season! Just a few days later, the collaborative group entertained the Kennywood crowd with



Children's House Brings Story To Life Through Acting

WPSD students in our Children's House preschool put on a wonderful performance depicting the book, "The Mitten," by Jan Brett, for their parents and staff. Each child was responsible for various character roles and did a superb acting job! What a fun and entertaining program! Afterwards, the students had the opportunity to show their parents some of their favorite class activities! ■





Youngest Learners Taught Ballet By The Best

By Dana Dailey

Some of our littlest learners in the Children's House here at WPSD were honored to meet and be taught by Corps de Ballet dancer of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, Jonathan Bright. He taught the students various ballet positions, movements and the appropriate ways in which to bow and curtsy. The kids loved every minute! Mr. Bright joined the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater this year from the PBT School Graduate Program. With PBT, he has performed in Swan Lake, The Nutcracker, Alice in Wonderland, Beauty and the Beast and many more. He is also the son of WPSD paraprofessional Linda Bright. What a unique and exciting experience for our students!



Instilling a Love of Reading with Read Across America



Children's Center

By Michelle Zelei

Students in the WPSD Children's Center celebrated Read Across America. The day was spent focusing on the Pete the Cat series. First, Dr. Farmer and Director Carrie Rain read a fun and interactive version of Pete the Cat & His Magic Sunglasses to the attentive students. Later on, the enjoyed a reading of Pete the Cat's "I Love My White Shoes," constructed a Pete the Cat and his four groovy buttons craft along with a Pete the Cat hat, and maneuvered an obstacle course to find his missing buttons! What a fun way to celebrate reading! ■

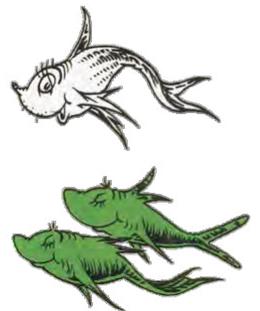


Elementary School

By Sheri Morgan

The WPSD elementary students and staff celebrated Read Across America by wearing their pajamas and taking time out of their day to

read! The afternoon kicked off with John Fenicle reading "One Fish, Two Fish" by Dr. Seuss. Val Wojton, Todd Behanna, Kallie and Greg Mendenhall were the guest storytellers, presenting three different stories in ASL, as well. The stories were followed by activities related to each book read. Afterwards, the students gathered in the elementary hallway where they read to one another. Upon completion of each book read, students wrote the title and author's name on a paper fish and hung it on the fishbowl. The fishbowl was filled by the end of the day! While reading, students enjoyed a special snack of goldfish and a bowl of blue jello with Swedish fish! ■



Middle School

By Mary Noschese

The WPSD Middle School celebrated Read Across America. Students were motivated to read a variety of books on their level and score at least 80% on Accelerated Reading (AR) quizzes to earn tickets to the silent auction. Prizes ranged from award winning novels, WPSD swag, computer mice, treats, and school supplies. Students could also "purchase" an Oakmont donut with a ticket they earned. Many of our students partner read with our Applied Studies students and took the AR quizzes together. They exhibited true acts of compassion and selflessness. Thank you to all of the Middle School staff who gave up their planning periods and breaks, read to students, helped keep our kids on



track, coached them to keep trying, and allowed us to celebrate reading for the entire morning. Students and staff were all engaged; sharing what they learned after each book and motivating each other to learn and earn more. Happy Reading!! ■



Work on the Children's Center Expansion continues...



Crews have been working throughout the winter and spring months to transform the former Red Wing, which is directly above the current Children's Center, into new classrooms and teaching spaces, which are desperately needed by the Children's Center due to its growing enrollment.

The renovation will bring exciting new additions to the Children's Center including two new classrooms, an art room, an ASL room, a sensory room, and a performing arts/presentation space. In addition, there will be dedicated program space for Choices for Children, our statewide early intervention program serving children from birth to age 3, Discovery Days, the toddler group providing early intervention for children from 12 to 35 months, and the Children's House, a Montessori based program for d/hh and hearing children.

The walls are going up, rooms and hallways are taking shape, and painting is underway. New windows have been installed, giving each room more natural light. Later this spring, furniture will be installed and the space will be fitted with the latest in communication and computer technology.

We are really excited about all the work being done to create this new learning environment and experience for our smallest students! The Children's Center at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is building brighter futures for every student who walks through its doors.

Our fundraising campaign to support the Expansion project continues to the end of June. We are deeply grateful to so many who have generously supported this project over the past several months. If you have not had an opportunity to join the campaign, would you consider a gift to support this important project? A gift of any amount can be made through the enclosed envelope or online at wpsd.org. ■







Famous Sights and Famous People

An Exciting Trip to The Big Apple

By Pauline Dunbar

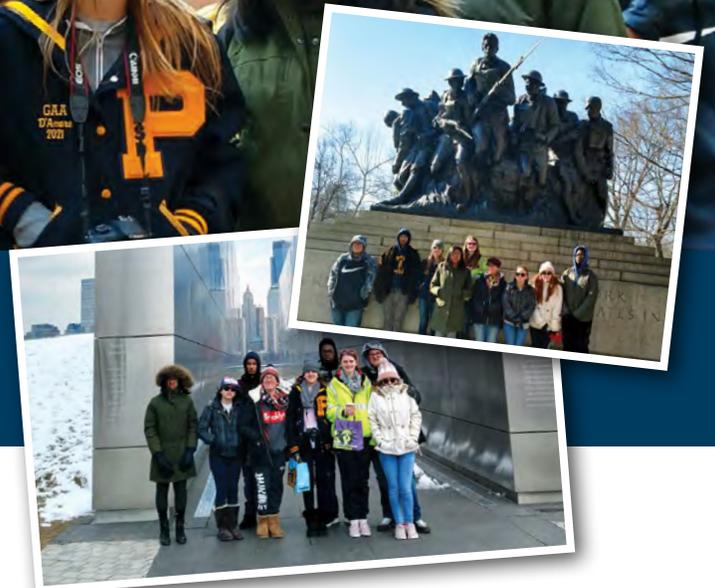
Some very fortunate WPSD 10th graders were recently making their way around the Big Apple. They sure have been busy!

On Tuesday, the group visited Central Park and Rockefeller Center along with a stop at St. Patrick's Cathedral. The students and accompanying staff explored Times Square and ate a delicious meal at Bubba Gumps restaurant while there. In the evening they journeyed to the Top of the Rock, learning about the history of Rockefeller Center. The group took many pictures and videos atop the building and learned more about the geography, names and origins of the buildings in the city. It was incredibly cold, but the beauty and fascination of our surroundings outweighed the sting of the chilly temperatures.

On Wednesday, the students enjoyed another packed day of sightseeing and learning. They visited the 9/11 museum, spending hours reading and watching videos. The group learned more about the victims through a special memorial room. It was an incredibly humbling and somber experience. They then traveled to Wall Street where they learned about the NY Stock Exchange and the financial district. The next stop was Battery Park in the Hudson River area to take in Lady Liberty and Ellis Island. The students and staff shopped in the Little Italy section of the city and ate at a popular local restaurant, called Puglia. A highlight of the restaurant was a local fixture - a man who sings and plays an organ. Patrons join in with the singing and dancing - the students and staff did too! Stay tuned for

more of their adventures as they enjoyed their last day there. The entire trip was a wonderful educational opportunity in the great American city that is New York!

On the last day of the 10th grade trip to New York City, WPSD students and staff took the ferry to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. They learned new information about the United States immigration history. The group then took a second ferry to see the Statue of Liberty in all its glory. We walked up the stairs to the pedestal of the statue. The view was breathtaking. It was a beautiful, clear day, albeit very cold. It was a great way to end a wonderful trip! ■





WPSD Students Meet Black and Gold Superstar

Some very fortunate WPSD students were thrilled to come face to face with one of the biggest black and gold football stars in this Steel City. JuJu Smith Schuster took time out of his schedule to sign autographs and take pictures with fans at Dick's Sporting Goods store in Cranberry Township. When the WPSD group's time came, JuJu was very kind to our students, taking pictures with each one, taking time to autograph a variety of items, and even asking to learn how to sign, "My name is JuJu," in ASL. What an sensational opportunity!

Read what some of the WPSD students who attended the event shared about this experience! ▀

Josue F.

"It was amazing to meet him!"

Aaliyah S.

"What a great experience!"

Xiaoli C.

**"I used my phone to communicate with JuJu. He saw my statement on my phone, grinned and wrote back -
"Thank you so much!"**

James C.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me!"



Transition

Shadowing a Dental Surgeon Brings a Smile to WPSD Student

By Victoria Vitullo, Transition Coordinator

Antoine H., a WPSD senior who is from the Pittsburgh area, job shadowed dental implant surgeon Dr. David Andros in early November. Antoine learned that medical professionals specialize in specific fields such as dental implant surgery. Dr. Andros attended Dental School at Temple University and then took part in additional specialty schooling in order to become an implant surgeon. The take away was that you don't have to be good at everything to be successful. Antoine enjoys repairing things and found that Dr. Andros uses many small hand tools to craft a great smile



for his customers. Antoine asked many thought provoking questions and both he and Dr. Andros really had great experiences during this job shadow. Antoine's Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf, Megan Dippold, along with the WPSD Pre-Employment Training Services Program is a great success! Thank you, PA OVR, for offering our registered students many unique experiences. ■

Exploring the Field of Wellness

On October 25th, two WPSD seniors and one junior traveled with Transition Coordinator Victoria Vitullo to visit with Shadyside chiropractor Dr. Justin Foltz and two of his physical therapy assistants. The students wanted to learn about what both of these professionals do in this type of setting and the level of education that is required to perform duties in these roles. The students also had one-on-one time with Dr. Foltz. The students learned he set up his own private practice. Dr. Foltz did not earn any money to pay himself for more than eight months as he needed to pay his staff. He went on to say that owning your own business can be unpredictable



in nature and if you are a person who relies on receiving the same amount of money each month, this would not be the correct career choice for you. He said he experiences "feasts and famines" - busy and slow periods. Dr. Foltz went on to say that he is doing exactly what he loves - helping people feel better on a daily basis. (Students pictured: Jasmine B., David H. and Antoine H.) ■

Volunteering Pays Off

By Victoria Vitullo, Transition Coordinator

Josue is a new sophomore to WPSD this year, via the Dominican Republic. He seems to take learning English and ASL in stride and has a very humorous personality that allows him to not stress about anything. Josue has been volunteering since the start of school with Kraynick's Bike Shop, located on Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh. Kraynick's employs only volunteer bike mechanics and most of the staff are not American born. This shop serves as a place of relaxation and learning for those newcomers to America. Workers can learn English, tell jokes, and poke fun at themselves all while learning a valuable skill such as bike assembly and bicycle mechanics. Store manager, Rocky (Peter) Cristobol mentioned that Josue is a natural at this job and he takes instruction well. The store was heavily involved in giving away bikes for charity due to the holiday season being upon them.

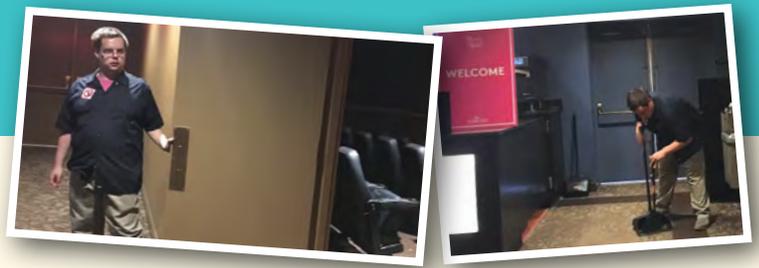
Rocky mentioned that it has been wonderful for all of them to learn about unique ways to communicate with someone who is not only Deaf but new to English. Josue has a Boogie Board communication device that they write and draw pictures on. Rocky, who has a very gentle and chillaxed personality commented that Josue ALWAYS conveys humor and makes everyone laugh. Kraynick's gifted Josue with a gorgeous Giant brand bike which came as a huge surprise to Josue and WPSD. Volunteering is a very valuable tool which allows anyone to learn new skills without putting added pressure on them, and is one more way that WPSD's Transition Department helps our students to gain much needed vocational skills. ■



Students with Unique Abilities

By Victoria Vitullo, Transition Coordinator Seeing Stars

WPSD Senior Keith S. is seeing stars! Movie stars, that is! From the time Keith met newly employed Transition Coordinator Victoria Vitullo, Keith would stop to let her know he had a goal of working in a movie theater. Through the partnership of his PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor Scot Ferre and WPSD Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS), Keith landed a WBLE (Work Based Learning Experience) at the Manor Theater. The goal of the WBLE is to determine if this is a setting where a student could be employed successfully. Manor Theater manager Geoff Sanderson had worked with WPSD PETS to employ a student as a direct hire last year. The experience was so positive that Geoff decided to partner with WPSD for the WBLE with Keith. Keith has a job coach who is fluent in ASL. Over the course of several months,



the job coach has cut his time he spends assisting Keith in half, which shows the great progress Keith is making. If you happen to visit the Manor Theater, you just may be greeted or waited on at the snack bar by Keith. He communicates with his customers using a Boogie Board, an assistive accommodation that costs between 10 and 20 dollars. Keith is doing a wonderful job and is happy to be working in the welcoming community of Squirrel Hill. We are proud of Keith's success in this role, thankful for the partnership of OVR and the Manor Theater, and hope this experience proves how Deaf and Hard of Hearing people have successful employment experiences with appropriate accommodations. ■

Vocational Talents

Senior Kendrick R. has some hidden talents that one may not know he has unless they are part of the WPSD family. WPSD teacher John Foust noticed Kendrick's mechanical gifts when he taught him in summer school. Mr. Foust requested to have Kendrick in his vocational classes, where he has learned milling machine, drill press, and vertical saw skills over the past four years. Mr. Foust also knew Kendrick would be an excellent steward of all of WPSD's robotic equipment in the BOTS program, where students design and create robots to battle against other schools' teams. When something is missing, Kendrick always knows where to find lost parts and he guards the equipment as if it were his very own. Kendrick is always motivated to attend any type of meeting, practice session and competition for his BOTS team. He has experienced great success in this area of his education and it is translating to potential job marketability. Kendrick recently took a field trip with Transition Coordinator Victoria Vitullo to tour Accrotool Enterprises, Inc. and



Versafab in New Kensington, PA. Assisted by interpreter Dan Conley, Kendrick asked various questions during his tours. AccroTool Quality Manager Chris Day was intrigued by Kendrick's passion for work in machine shops and has inquired about accommodations for potential employment upon Kendrick's graduation. Instances like this one, where companies focus on someone's abilities rather than what they may not be able to do, are becoming more prevalent for a variety of reasons. It makes good business sense and WPSD is thrilled to partner with companies who value differently abled employees. ■



A Knack for Attention to Detail

Katelyn F. is known to be one of the best hotel room inspectors for The Doubletree Hotel! Who knew that there is such a job as Room Inspector?! This job requires someone to go behind the housekeeping staff with a checklist and look for any type of mistake or duty that was overlooked while cleaning a hotel room. Katelyn knows how to tell whether bed

sheets were indeed changed. Doubletree Hotel manager Josh Von Hagel showed Katelyn exactly what to look for while inspecting a room. Katelyn knows how many sets of towels should be in a room with a queen size bed versus a king size bed, how many coffee cups, and where to place paper and a pen in the room. Katelyn's training was sponsored by The PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Katelyn has a job coach who is fluent in ASL who makes sure she understands her role and responsibilities. In time, the job coach is phased out and employees learn to work independently. Work Based Learning Experiences (WBLES) are one of many services PA OVR offers for clients who are determined eligible for their services. ■



Athletics



Three-Time Champions Celebrated In School-Wide Rally

We mentioned in our last edition that WPSD's varsity soccer and volleyball teams clinched the ESDAA championship title, in their respective sport, for the third year in a row. School history was made! Enjoy a few more highlights from the school wide celebration rally recognizing the extraordinary achievements of our blue and gold warriors! Three-peat wonders! We are so proud of these student-athletes! Always Remember, Never Forget...WPSD is #1!! ■



WPSD Basketball Teams Shoot For The Stars at OSD Homecoming Classic

In February, the WPSD boys' and girls' basketball teams traveled to Ohio School for the Deaf for their Homecoming Classic. Besides OSD and WPSD, the other teams involved in the tournament included Michigan and Light Homeschool. Overall, our boys' and girls' teams each won two games and lost one. A huge milestone for one of our own was achieved during this tournament. Chad D. scored his 1000th career point against Ohio School for the Deaf! What an amazing feat he has accomplished! We are so proud of him and all of our blue and gold warriors. ■



WPSD Cheerleaders Collaborate with Gateway High School Cheer Squad

By Linda Langer

"Get rough! Get tough! Don't let 'em score!" That's one of the chants that our cheerleaders learned from the Gateway High School (GHS) cheerleaders at the mini cheer clinic held there in November. Thirteen cheerleaders and one mascot from WPSD enjoyed learning and practicing new cheers, sidelines, and stunts from the girls at Gateway. WPSD taught the Gators their cheers and Gateway taught WPSD their three cheers inserting the word "Lions" instead where "Gators" would be. They can't wait to put these new techniques into action at the basketball games this winter! What a great and beneficial partnership with Gateway High School! ■



WPSD Hosts Basketball Clinic On Campus

By Val Wojton

Exciting news! WPSD held a basketball clinic in November, which was run by the coaches of the boys' and girls' teams. The players focused on developing several important skills including dribbling, triple threat, rebounding, passing, give'n'go, and pick'n'roll. Our Lions also practiced perfecting offensive plays and various defensive styles including the 1-3-1, 2-3 zone, 2-3 collapsed, and 3-2, among others. Honing these techniques helped our blue and gold warriors prepare for their upcoming seasons! ■

In The Community

Children's Center Partnership With Attack Theatre Continues to Grow

The Children's Center at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf has enjoyed a wonderful partnership with Attack Theatre. A few new exciting developments have recently occurred. The University of Pittsburgh's School of Engineering offers an undergraduate course in the "Art of Making." The professor and a group of students expressed an interest in collaborating with the Children's Center and Attack Theater on a special project. More details to come! What's more, the WPSD/Attack Theatre residency is being included in a short documentary video for Remake Learning. This video will highlight five innovative education projects in our region. We are thrilled with the WPSD/Attack Theatre collaboration and its benefits for our students! ■



Chick-Fil-A Partnership Includes ASL Community Event

WPSD was thrilled to welcome Chick-Fil-A to campus at the end of October. The restaurant generously presented a donation to the School, which reflected 10 percent of their sales from a promotion on September 24th. On this day, the Monroeville restaurant hosted an ASL Family night event. Several employees who work at this location are friends and family of WPSD staff and students. In fact, one of the employees is WPSD's very own student - Xiaoli C. Activities that night included an ASL story time that featured several different children's books presented in American Sign Language to families shared by WPSD staff members including our CEO, Dr. Steve Farmer. What a wonderful community partnership WPSD has with Chick-Fil-A! We are so thankful for their generosity and support! ■





WPSD Girls' Athletic Association Supports Breast Cancer Awareness

The Girls' Athletic Association at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf hosted its breast cancer awareness fundraiser at the end of October. The girls sold shirts, hats, socks, bandannas, bracelets, pins and accepted donations. 100% of the profits made from this fundraiser will go directly to ACS (American Cancer Society) and the Bright Pink Organization. What a turnout for our annual picture on the front steps of the School! WPSD students and staff joined together to support the effort! ■



Dancing Toward Friendship

In February, the SignShine Troupe - Hand Vibes - traveled to Sewickley Academy to perform and participate in a Sadie Hawkins Dance sponsored by the Sewickley Academy ASL Club. We are so thrilled and honored the club asked WPSD to be a part of the event, which was a fundraiser for our School! Hand Vibes performed an ASL rendition of Natasha Bedingfield's song - "Pocketful of Sunshine" - and then explained to the Sewickley Academy students why ASL is so important. Students from both WPSD and Sewickley Academy mingled with each other and danced together. A great time was had by all! ■

Building Communication Skills For Families With Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

Family Literacy Workshops
By Sheri Morgan

WPSD recently hosted two Family Literacy and American Sign Language Workshops. In November's workshop, parents learned about reading, writing and ASL to help prepare them for working with their Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Sheri Morgan, Reading Specialist, and Christie Homell, ASL Specialist presented. "Rocket Writes a Story" was the book discussed among the group. The workshop was designed for children ages birth through the 4th grade and their families. There were 36 participants including 16 adults and 20 children. All who attended enjoyed the workshop's presenters and interactive activities. It was a very successful, informative, and family centered fun-filled day!

In January, seven families attended the Family Early Literacy and American Sign Language Workshop hosted by Reading Specialist, Sheri Morgan and ASL Specialist, Christie Homell. The workshop focused on how parents can encourage early literacy and language at home to better prepare their child for preschool and school age. Parents learned about



the importance of reading aloud to their child and asking questions while they read. They then learned ways to tell the story using ASL classifiers and facial expressions. "Duck and Goose" by Tad Hills was the book that was given to the families to use at home to practice reading and signing with their children. A beach ball activity made the workshop interactive as the parents used ASL classifiers to show where the duck and goose characters were in relation to the ball in the story. Finally, the children joined the rest of the group and Christie Homell told the story using American Sign Language. Overall, everyone enjoyed themselves and learned a lot! ■

Family Learning Weekend

By Sally Wellman

Families from all across Pennsylvania attended our annual Family Learning Weekend in March. On Friday evening, families had a chance to enjoy activities at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum. Our students showed off their De'VIA artwork that was displayed there in March. Jeanne Fair from Tennessee School for the Deaf presented fun activities related to "Brain Gym." Parents had an opportunity to interact during a coffee social and to talk with vendors representing various agencies pertaining to children with hearing loss. A Literacy Workshop was presented to parents to develop language and ASL skills with their children. It was a very fun, informative weekend!! ■



WPSD Featured on KDKA-TV

Dr. Steve Farmer was interviewed as part of KDKA's "The Sunday Business Page" program on December 13. WPSD was thrilled and honored to be given this unique opportunity to introduce the School to new faces. Dr. Farmer discussed our mission, the wonderful students we serve, who we are as an organization and previewed WPSD's 150th Anniversary. It was a truly exciting experience! The piece aired on December 16 on KDKA. ■



Environmental Discoveries at Frick Park

By Erin McNeil-Mascaro

25 WPSD High School science students have been busy this school year! The group became High School Urban Ecostewards (HSUES) and learned why urban ecosystems are valuable and how we can become responsible stewards by helping maintain the biodiversity of the ecosystem in the park. On their first trip, they brought some muscle and energy to a volunteer service project by removing an invasive species, the Bush Honeysuckle. This plant species diminishes the available food supply for animal life in the woods and prevents native plant species from growing. On their next trip, the students learned about the importance of birds in the ecosystem and how to properly use binoculars. The group hit the trails for a bird watching and a winter nature hike. The students saw many birds, such as Hairy Woodpeckers, Red Belly Woodpeckers, Blue



Jays, Northern Cardinals, and even a Hawk! It was a beautiful, albeit cold, day to visit the park! The students headed back to the park in March and again in April to continue to learn the value of parks in an urban area and how they can help out and make a difference. Thanks to Pittsburgh Parks for enlightening us! ■

Area Leaders Build Rapport Through Commitment to The Community Meetings

WPSD's Commitment to the Community meetings bring together local leaders, residents and business owners to share good conversation and company. In December, Mr. John Irwin, interim President of the Wilkesburg Chamber of Commerce, presented to the group on the good work the WCC is doing along with upcoming events including its 125th anniversary celebration set for February.

Al Condeluci, Ph.D, CEO of CLASS, also addressed the crowd with a moving presentation on the importance of building and sustaining relationships with those around you. CLASS is a nonprofit organization that offers different services to individuals of varying abilities. Originally chartered as UCP of Pittsburgh, CLASS has grown into new regions and continues to expand its services. CLASS is driven by organizational values that foster community inclusion for people with disabilities. The organization offers a variety of individualized services ranging from independent living skills training in the classroom to community-based case management for social, recreational, and residential supports. Dr. Condeluci also discussed the ways in which maintaining good relationships with others can lead to increased health benefits. Positive relationships can result in less stress, which can in turn, make for a healthier, and perhaps longer, life.

On March 28, WPSD was pleased to host the third quarterly Commitment to the Community meeting of the School year. Representatives from Allegheny County Economic Development spoke on the potential future of the old Carrie Furnace site as well as the Department's efforts in the commercial cores of both Wilkesburg and Braddock, and other efforts the government organization is undertaking in the neighborhoods



surrounding WPSD. The Wilkesburg Police K-9 officers discussed the importance of their role on the force and performed two very interesting demonstrations - an article search and obedience drills. Pittsburgh Urban Christian School discussed the launching of their new preschool and their renovation project taking place in the former Boys and Girls Club building. What a packed, informative and exciting meeting! ■

Staff Spotlight

Fabienne DeRise-Spadacene

A WPSD Staff Superstar Receives Special Honor

One of WPSD's very own staff superstars was recognized at the 6th Annual St. Patrick's Day Party for the Bob O'Connor Foundation. Fabienne DeRise-Spadacene received the Bob O'Connor Spirit of Pittsburgh Award at the Sokol Club on East Carson Street. WTAE News Anchor Mike Clark emceed the event and took time out to pose for a picture with her - check out the picture! We are so proud of Fabienne and all that she has given to WPSD for the past 18 years. We found out more about this prestigious award from Fabienne herself and how much this honor means to her.

What does this award mean to you?

This recognition more or less had me "stand out". Until I found out I won the award, I never thought of myself as someone who overcame many obstacles in life and still gave back to the community. To be recognized by my colleagues and by the community is phenomenal.

How does the criteria for this award fit into your career here at WPSD?

Overcoming obstacles!

Every one of our students faces some sort of obstacle one way or another.

Whether it's communication barriers or physical barriers, it's about breaking free of barriers and obstacles.



What would you like to say to your WPSD family?

I've said this before and I'll say it again, I am truly lucky to be surrounded by and working with people who are dedicated and committed to making WPSD the best educational placement for our students. One of the reasons why I love working for WPSD is because of people I work with. I've always been treated with respect and for that, thank you!!!

What message would you like to convey to the WPSD students?

Being faced with obstacles in life is not necessarily a bad thing. For me, facing obstacles in my life and overcoming those obstacles has made me a better person. With each obstacle you can face, learn from it and find ways to conquer it. And no matter what obstacles we face, it's important to always maintain a sense of humor. We don't have to look hard to find things to smile about. When I started at WPSD in 2001, the school's motto was, "Be the Best You Can Be." Do your best and reach for the sky no matter what challenges come to you. ■



Retiree Spotlight

Dr. Colleen Sari

After contracting with WPSD for nearly 21 years, Dr. Colleen Sari, a school psychiatrist, recently retired. She is ready to begin the next chapter of her life, but as we learned, WPSD will always be a special place to her.

How does working with Deaf children and their families differ from working with hearing children and their families? Direct interaction with families is crucial to the mental health care of all students. The intimate milieu at WPSD and the deep understanding staff have of the students is like a super-sized family surrounding the students with support and care. The consistent expectations and consequences provided at WPSD provide structure as do good parents, allowing the children to blossom. The excellent interpreting services and how well the staff knew the students offered tremendous insight into the thoughts and feelings of the students, allowing me to fully appreciate the life and mind of the child.

Can you describe your approach with Deaf students and their families?

Providing psychiatric care in a school setting, especially a boarding school, is very different than the typical outpatient clinic. Parents don't usually come to WPSD on a regular basis. However, I requested parents to attend in person my initial meeting with the student and by phone for subsequent meetings. As with all medical care, parents are the legal guardian and must provide consent for treatment. But they are also part of the therapeutic team and the student's greatest ally. In addition, school personnel from nursing, psychology, counseling, the dorm as well as teachers and aides attended each meeting. This entire-team approach is potent medicine.

How did you benefit personally and professionally from working at WPSD?

The team approach I described is not only a powerful intervention but an excellent educational opportunity for all participants. I learned about deaf culture, boarding school life, and how education fosters growth and progress for special needs students. I was shown the same respect and support by WPSD personnel that the students receive and felt equally loved and cared for. It was a joy to watch students develop and families thrive. And to see staff mature as professionals, allowing my deep trust and friendships with great people. It's been a wonderful blessing.

What would you like your legacy to be at WPSD as you leave for a new chapter of your life?

I hope I have erased the stigma and mystery of psychiatry as a medical discipline. I know there was some trepidation by WPSD staff to get involved with a shrink! But more importantly, I envision the continued camaraderie of the entire-team approach and the absolute necessity of everyone on the team having a voice to provide information and ears to accept feedback.

I miss WPSD terribly. Thanks for everything. ■



Scan to follow us on Facebook and learn more about WPSD



Student Spotlight

Aaliyah Sanders

Sophomore At WPSD And Budding Actor

I'm Aaliyah Sanders and in the 10th grade at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. This year is my second year of high school. Honestly, this year is definitely the best sophomore year ever! I've been wanting to become an actress since I was 10 years old. I was really fascinated. During the summertime I always watched the Disney Channels on television all the time, but it always bothered me and I wondered, "Where were the deaf actors and actresses in the movies and TV shows?" The reason I wanted to start acting was to expose hearing people to include more Deaf actors and actresses. I told my mom many times that I want to be able to act. My mom said "Well.... You know it isn't easy... If you go out into the world to become an actress, you have to work so hard and become a better actress." I wanted to take drama classes so I looked on the Internet to see if there were any acting classes. The problem is, that I have been focused on my education, so I really have not had the time to look on the Internet for acting classes and get more information.

In the fourth grade, many students at my old school plus my classmates said that I am really good at acting and using facial expressions. Deaf Culture tends to use body language, mouth movements and facial expressions. It comes naturally for me. I thought this was not a big deal, but most people said "I know! But look at you!" "You're really good at it!" "You should act, because your expressive skills are great!" I got many positive comments from people. People were shocked. I started to analyze myself and think about what people were telling me. I started to not believe what they said! I saw people telling other people the same thing so I thought it wasn't true. A few months later, I realized that people were right and I was wrong. They suggested I join acting where I could.

During my freshman year I transferred to WPSD, I was overwhelmed and everything because it was my first year of high school. On the first day of school, I got my first semester schedule and I saw they had drama class! I was so thrilled to joined this class; at the same time I was nervous because I didn't know some staff and students. Amy Alverson is my drama teacher and she is the coolest person I ever met! First of all, we had Christmas and May Day plays in 2016-2019. My show was called "**A Year Without a Santa Claus.**" My character was a doctor.

I also acted in two other shows at WPSD. One was "**Monsters Inc.**" where I played Henry Waternoose III and "**Noelle Saves Christmas.**" My favorite play was "**Noelle Saves Christmas**"

because it allowed me to become more expressive and get into the character's role in depth. Many of my friends and teachers were all in awe.

Recently, I was given the opportunity to participate in a professional play in Pittsburgh at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company! I practiced with the cast for a few months! The play was called "Savior Samuel." It's about an African-American family who moved to the midwest, post-Civil war era when suddenly they face an obstacle in their lives. The family has to figure out how to communicate with my character, Essie, who is deaf. On opening night, I felt more confident and did not even think about the audience. The cast really enjoyed learning sign language and made me feel like I belonged. I was sad when my performance ended. Just wow.. I had a great experience and made good memories with them. And also, I'm really thankful for the writer for searching for and selecting a Deaf person to portray a Deaf role in the play! I'm glad to be part of the whole experience! ■



Aaliyah received a lot of media attention for her performance. Many well-known publications spotlighted her including the Pittsburgh Post Gazette and the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. Our very own superstar at WPSD! We can't wait to see what she does next!!

The WPSD Family came out in full force to support Aaliyah in her professional debut. Many staff members and all of the students who live with Aaliyah in the School's Residence traveled to take in her performance. What a fun experience for everyone!



A Sign of Unity

Recently, WPSD was pleased to host the Jewish Chronicle on campus. Following the tragic events at the Tree of Life Synagogue in October, the students at WPSD wanted to show their support for the victims, their families and all of those affected by this horrific mass shooting attack that left 11 people dead and seven others injured.

The entire student body gathered for a picture in a symbol of unity using their hands to communicate "I Love You" in American Sign Language.

The school then framed that picture and gave it to WPSD's longtime school doctor, Dr. Isaac Levari.

Dr. Levari was very touched by the students' act of kindness and contacted a reporter, Adam Reinherz, from the Jewish Chronicle, to share this picture of total support with him.

Mr. Reinherz expressed interest in doing an article for the Jewish Chronicle on this story and we invited him to visit WPSD. Mr. Reinherz spoke with Dr. Steve Farmer, Ms. Marybeth Lauderdale, WPSD Health Center nurses - Nancy Possumato and Gina MacDonald (who work closely with Dr. Levari), Dr. Levari himself, and our students. Through these



conversations, he became more familiar with WPSD, its mission, vision and its continuous desire to be a community partner. He wrote an outstanding article capturing the essence of these interactions, beautifully detailing what the School is all about. Visit the link below to read this wonderful story. ■



<https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/students-at-western-pennsylvania-school-for-the-deaf-show-support/>

Monthly Giving

An Easy Way to Support Our Students!

Make a difference every month! Investing in the achievement and success of the students at the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is now easier and more affordable than ever through our monthly giving program.

WPSD offers the opportunity to make contributions automatically through a credit card. Monthly giving provides a convenient, individual, and affordable way to support the School and its students.

How do I begin to make a difference each month? Simply determine a donation that fits your budget - \$5, \$10, \$20, or more. For the amount of money you might spend on a pizza each month, a lunch date, or a night at the movies, you can impact the quality of the academic and extracurricular programs and services that the students receive at WPSD.

Becoming a monthly donor is simple and easy. Click on DONATE NOW and choose an amount and frequency that fits best within your budget and goals. Every donation is a tax deductible contribution. Your donations can be stopped at any time by contacting Matt Campion - mcampion@wpsd.org. ■



Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf
invites you to

The 2019
Auction & Gala

Celebrating 150 years of excellence

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2019
5:30 - 10:00 PM

The Westin Convention Center, Pittsburgh

Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf

Register NOW!
Visit wpsd.org for more information.

Contact Sarah Bartlebaugh at 412.244.4207 or sbartlebaugh@wpsd.org