

the western PENNSYLVANIAN



NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF
VOLUME 128 #4 SUMMER 2015



Congratulations Class of 2015

PG 4



2015
May Day
Celebration

PG 13



▲
Keep Calm
and Go to London

PG 5





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▲ Awards Day ceremony on June 11th at the Scranton School.

WPSD Dates to Remember



August

- 17 All 10-Month Staff Return
- 17-21 Staff In-Service Week
- 23 Residential Students Return
PSO Meeting/Welcome Back Picnic
3:30-5:00pm
- 24 First Day Of School

September

- 7 Labor Day - NO SCHOOL
Residential Students Return
- 8 CLASSES RESUME
- 19 Commitment To Community
Block Party & Talent Show
- 25-26 Rochester School For The Deaf
Homecoming
Soccer and Volleyball Teams

October

- 3-4 ESDAA Soccer Tournament @
American School For The Deaf
- 9 2015 WPSD Auction & Gala
- 12 Columbus Day - NO SCHOOL
Residential Students Return
- 13 CLASSES RESUME
- 16 ESDAA Volleyball Tournament @
Delaware School For The Deaf
- 19 SWCAC League Playoffs Soccer
and Volleyball
- 21 Transition Night @ WPSD 6:30 p.m.

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.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Latest News Around the WPSD Campus

Congratulations to the WPSD Class of 2015

Twelve students from seven Pennsylvania Counties (Allegheny, Fayette, Juniata, Lancaster, Lehigh, Susquehanna, and Westmoreland) celebrated commencement ceremonies on WPSD's Pittsburgh campus on Wednesday evening, June 10th. Seven of the 12 graduates of the Class of 2015 will continue their education in a university setting or technology school program. Two will participate in other post-secondary training and three students will work in home area business or workshops.

Board of Trustee Member, Denise Brown, delivered the commencement address reminding students "life is a journey with many opportunities along the way." Following her address, awards for leadership and scholarship were presented to members of the Class of 2015.

Ms. Megan Majocho, from Plum Borough, Pennsylvania, gave the Valedictorian Address. A WPSD student since she was three-years-old, Megan has been very active in a variety of clubs, student government and sports during her years at WPSD. Megan encouraged her fellow graduates to "overcome the obstacles and to follow their dreams." Megan will be attending Gallaudet University in Washington, DC majoring in Biology. ■

“We are very proud of our graduates and applaud their determination and success. We will miss having them as students, but we welcome them back as alumni.”

-CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER DON RHOTEN





Keep Calm and Go to London

That's exactly what students from the Class of 2016 did on Thursday, June 11th. Eight students and their chaperones flew to London for a weeklong adventure in the UK. While there they saw a wide variety of attractions and learned a great deal about the old country of England. They visited Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, Harry Potter Studios, the Museums of Science and Natural History and the terrific architecture of London's financial district. The students sampled British cuisine while in London. Their favorite was the ice cream at Fenton's.

In addition to visiting all of the important sites, the students visited Oak Lodge School for the Deaf in Wandsworth, London for an art exhibition followed by a picnic. Two days later they visited Oak Lodge again to make a presentation about WPSD and then Mr. Darryl Bedford, one of the technology teachers at Oak Lodge, showed the students how to create animation. The kids thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of the trip and felt that it was the opportunity of a lifetime. ■



Close Up

Two students, Katie Holtzman and Kai Miller participated in Close-Up in Washington, DC. They visited Capitol Hill and had the opportunity to tour the Supreme Court and Library of Congress. They met with the staff from Representative Mike Doyle, Senator Patrick Toomey and Senator Bob Casey offices and expressed their concerns and opinions about minimum wage, marriage equality, animal rights, and racial profiling. ■



Around the World and Close to Home!



The 10th grade World Cultures class took a trip the Strip District of Pittsburgh. The Strip is best known for its diversity and ethnic food markets and shops. Students had the opportunity to experience the food and culture of some places that they've studied. They stopped in places such as Stamoolis Brothers Company (Greek and Mediterranean Food), Pennsylvania Macaroni Company (Italian), Reyna Foods (Mexican) and Lotus Food Company (Asian Market). ■



Urban Ecosteward

The WPSD High School Urban Ecosteward took the final trip to Frick Park in May. Each group prepared creative presentations for their teachers about what they've learned during their year-long experiences as Urban Ecostewards. There were games, power point presentations, ABC stories, songs, skits, posters, etc. The students enjoyed presenting as well as watching their classmates present.

Afterwards, the Ecostewards celebrated with a pizza party and a hike through the park. The students learned so much and will miss the program, but they know they will continue to be good stewards for our parks in the future. ■



2015 Spring Olympics

WPSD was very proud to host the 2015 Spring Olympics. All of the student athletes performed to the best of their abilities and demonstrated the true meaning of the event! ■



Project Fast Forward

Students in the Project Fast Forward NTID Environmental Science class took a field trip to the International Science and Engineering Fair at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in downtown Pittsburgh. They met some amazing high school students from all over the world and discussed their research and remarkable ideas with them. The students from the United Arab Emirates showed the glasses they invented that help patients with ALS communicate by blinking. They met another student from Canada who invented a coffee travel mug that can charge your phone while you drink. The future is bright and our WPSD high school students are a part of that future. We can't wait to see them shine! ■



A Camping Adventure in the Laurel Highlands

By Kathy Bartholow, Kathy Betz, Michael Prezioso

On April 28th, the Modified/Applied Studies Group started out on the annual camping trip. The first stop was the Somerset Historical Museum. The students were able to tour early colonial homes and see artifacts from that time period. They had wonderful questions about the life of the pioneers. The next stop was the Quecreek Mine Rescue site. The owner of the property explained the entire rescue to the group and then led us on a tour of the property. From there we went to our destination, Laurel Hill State Park lodge. The group was in awe of the lodge, where we enjoyed a nice relaxing dinner and a campfire.

The next morning, after breakfast and making sandwiches for lunch, we drove to Waterbasin Trail and for a hike to a man-made waterfall. The falls were a mile into the woods, but we decided that another hike would be fun and found a trail nearby with small bridges to cross over the river, but we weren't finished yet. We loaded up the vans for a hike on the Great Allegheny Passage. Once that hike was finished everyone was hungry so we headed to Hoss' Restaurant for dinner and then back to Laurel Hill for the last campfire of the trip and delicious mountain pies over the open fire.

On the final day of camping, we packed up after breakfast and headed out to the 7 Springs Mountain Resort. There we enjoyed the beautiful indoor pool and played pool basketball. A nice way to wrap up our Laurel Highlands adventure. ■



Space Camp 2015

Three students from WPSD were chosen to go to Space Camp for a week in Huntsville, Alabama. Middle school students Rosie and Derek were on Team Calypso, while high school student Nick Bertone was able to be in the Advanced Academy. They all learned about the history of space travel and the realities of living in outer space. They completed several missions, experienced a variety of simulators and enjoyed some fun rides.

Each team participated in multiple science experiments. One highlight was building and launching their own rockets. Being in the Advanced Academy meant that Nick was able to go scuba diving and compete in the Aviation Challenge. All of the students seemed to agree that the best part of Space Camp was meeting other Deaf students from around the country.

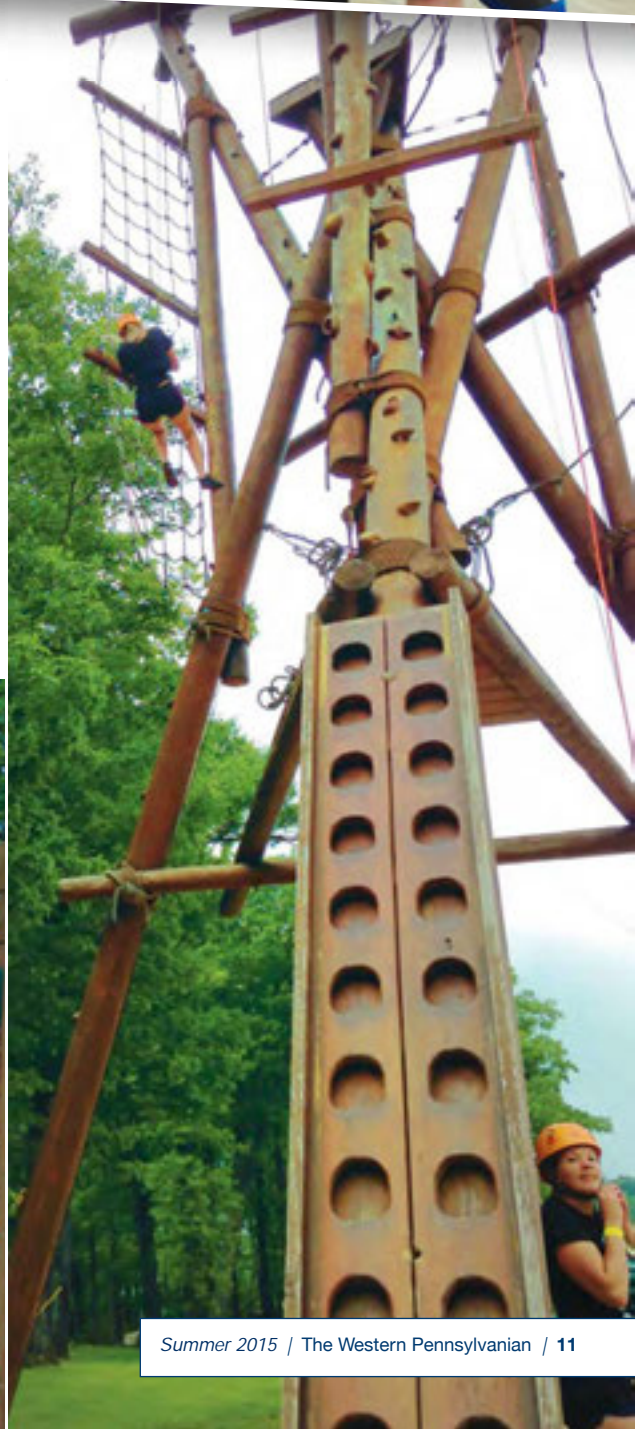
On the last day, the students attended a graduation ceremony and were given team awards. Out of all of the Advanced Academy students, Nick was chosen for "The Right Stuff" award. This is an incredible honor, and we are very proud of him! ■





GAA Celebrates a Successful Year!

The students and advisors of the 2014-2015 Girls' Athletic Association (GAA) celebrated the end of the school year with a weekend camping trip to Keystone State Park and Seven Springs. On Saturday, the girls participated in a variety of adventures, including climbing a 50 foot obstacle course and belaying down! Kai and Alyssa fearlessly climbed to the very top, and Alyssa was even nicknamed "Squirrel" by the instructors because of how quickly she scurried up to the top! The group took a chairlift to the top of the mountain and rode the Alpine Slide down (Janaya raced down!), took paddleboat and paddle bike rides, climbed a rock wall, and jumped and flipped on a trampoline! On Sunday, the group hit the lake to kayak and learned how to row on a paddleboard. It was a beautiful weekend filled with fun and adventure. ■



Schell Games

Schell Games is a full-service Pittsburgh-based game design and development company, specializing in transformational games and innovative, interactive experiences. Their goal is to create games that change people for the better AND they are fun!

WPSD Economic students had the opportunity to visit Schell Games and discuss the business aspects of their studio. Specifically, they discussed how the business started, what the processes were, its struggles, its successes and any lessons learned along the way. After the discussion and a tour, the students were able to play some of the games that were developed right there in the studio! It was a fun and educational

experience. One senior even expressed interest in working there in the future! ■



Kindergarden Play & Graduation

Families and friends were invited to attend the 2015 Kindergarten Class Graduation and Play in the WPSD auditorium. The students received a standing ovation for their performance of "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs." Then they received their graduation certificates and presents. Congratulations to the students and their parents as they take the next step in their exciting journey! ■





2015 May Day Celebration

WPSD welcomed families and alumni for the traditional May Day activities on the WPSD campus. Families had the opportunity to visit the classrooms, watch the crowning of the May Queen and enjoy the outstanding WPSD drama classes performance of "The Land of OZ".



Congratulations to the 2015 May Queen, Sarah Bender



Follow Your Words!

Middle school teacher, Mary Noschese, gave each of her students seven paper hearts. The student's had to recall a vocabulary word they had learned this year from each one of their classes. Then, they had to write its definition, provide examples, or write sentences for each word. The hearts were then posted on the bulletin board in the hallway. As you can see, they learned a lot! ■



WPSD Broadcast Production

WPSD broadcast production classes receive real world experience through opportunities to interview and learn from local celebrities like Stephen Cropper from WPXI and artist and former Steeler, Baron Batch.



WPSD Kindergarten Students Participate in Statewide Visual Phonics Literacy Research Project

During the 2014-2015 school year, WPSD kindergarten students participated in a visual phonics literacy research project conducted by the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), led by national researcher, Lana Edwards Santoro. The study was to learn how the use of visual phonics with research-based reading instruction would help the reading growth of elementary grade students (K-3 instructional level) who are deaf or hard of hearing. Additionally, the project hoped to increase effective reading assessments and classroom instruction, examine student progress and add to professional development. Visual phonics is a system of 46 hand movements/prompts that look like the sounds (phonemes) they represent. It is a visual tool that may support struggling readers through the development of decoding skills or figuring out unknown words; writing through the development of spelling and word study skills; and speech through the development of articulation skills.

Throughout the year, the kindergarten class did a variety of phonics-based activities to strengthen their reading and writing skills. The students practiced visual phonics in game format using a snowman

that used visual phonics to spell out gifts, white boards and magnetic letters to spell words and make new words by simply changing a letter. Kindergarten played games using the cues to find and read words on a game board. The kindergarten class learned about new word families each month. Each student read on his or her own daily up to six minutes a day. It was a record for a kindergarten class. The students used all their great new skills to write words and sentences.

The project showed that students improved on their letter naming skills. Most students met grade level goals, and some students went beyond goals on assessments such as the Kindergarten on Word Identification. Students, who began the year behind their classmates in skills, showed a higher rate of growth than students on grade level on both phonological awareness and alphabetic understanding measures.

The student assessment outcomes did show a high connection of the use of visual phonics with research-based effective instruction, and student reading growth. At this time, no link between visual phonics and student outcomes could be made. It is hoped that more research will continue in this area of literacy with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. ■

9th Grade DC Class Trip

The ninth grade class enjoyed their field trip to our Nation's Capitol. ■



Join Us on the Red Carpet!

We're changing things up for the 2015 WPSD Gala & Auction on Friday, October 9! The theme of this year's event is "The Red Carpet." If you'd like to join in on the fun for the School's annual gala, please contact Vicki Cherney at vcherney@wpsd.org or call 412.244.4207. ■

Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf
AUCTION & GALA



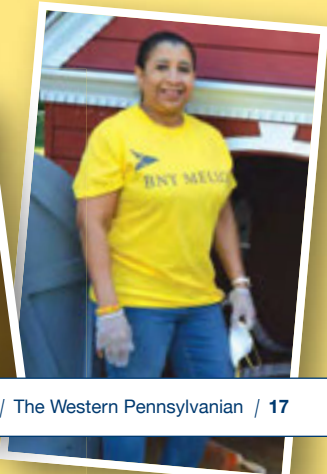
BNY Mellon Employees Clean-Up at WPSD!

For the second year in a row, BNY Mellon employees volunteered a day to work around the WPSD campus. Nick Comega, a deaf employee at BNY, organized his fellow staff (a mixed group of deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing adults) to lend a hand beginning at 8:45 am on Friday, June 5. They were welcomed to the School by Mr. Don Rhoten, who gave a brief background and history of WPSD. Nick and Cheyenne, two students from WPSD's Student Ambassador program, spoke about their experiences on campus and what the School has meant in their lives. Aaron Noschese, Chief Operations Officer, arranged the work orders and the group set off for the Children's Village. Cleaning teams tackled each building, scrubbing the inside and outside with attention and care. During the School's lunch, the group gave a short presentation to the students, talking about why they were on campus and about their desire to help WPSD. The

School provided lunch to the BNY Mellon volunteer workforce in the Alumni Pavilion.

In the afternoon, the group continued their day in the Quiet Garden outside the Children's Center, pulling weeds, raking mulch, and cleaning the gazebo and walkway. All of their efforts helped to prepare the campus for graduation and ensure things were in order for the upcoming outdoor summer activities.

WPSD is grateful to Nick, his team of volunteers, and to BNY Mellon for choosing the School as a recipient of their volunteer and donated effort and time. We appreciate and continue to build relationships with organizations, like the partnership with BNY Mellon, for the good of the students, the School, the future of the working environment for deaf and hard of hearing adults and the community around us. We thank everyone for their participation. ■



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Dana Richter - Class Of 2007

Dana Richter was born in New Kensington and enrolled at WPSD when she was 2 years old. Her favorite memories of WPSD are the Academic and Math Bowl competitions because she likes to make new friends. In fact, she is still in touch with some of those people. Dana was also involved in SignShine, and counts the performance of the "Star Spangled Banner" and "God Bless the USA" at PNC Park as one of her fondest memories.

After graduating from WPSD, Dana attended RIT/NTID but decided it wasn't a good fit for her and returned to Pittsburgh. She attended CCAC for some general studies classes and then, after researching several area colleges, chose Carlow University for undergraduate study. She says, "I wanted to apply to another college in Pittsburgh but for some reason, Carlow University was calling me. It was the best decision I ever made and I am happy to say that I am now a Carlow University Alumni!"

"At first, it was very difficult to be a deaf woman at Carlow University, but I had support from faculty, administrators, and my fellow students. I felt welcome there. They believed that I have strong potential and determination and that I could graduate with high honors as a Deaf person. I think it also helped my hearing classmates to see my perspective as Deaf Social Work student, because now they know more about what its like to be a deaf person in their world. I also gave some presentations at Carlow about Deaf Culture and my experiences. I don't let my deafness stop me.

One thing I struggled with at Carlow was that my writing wasn't Standard Written English. In the first year, I had some failing grades because even though I answered test questions correctly, teachers didn't understand my writing. I felt hopeless. I decided to ask for help

through an independent course with an instructor. Over four years my writing skill has improved so much. Reading books is helping to improve my writing skill as well."

Dana chose Social Work as her undergraduate major because, "I want to help and advocate for other people who are struggling." She credits her involvement with the Junior National Association for the Deaf for four years and WPSD Student Body Government for one year, for teaching her lessons about leadership. Those high school experiences led to involvement with PA Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) and National Association for the Deaf (NAD).

Last summer, she was one of six contestants that competed for the Youth Ambassador Program position, with the NAD. She was the first-runner up in the competition.

Dana says that her proudest accomplishment was being on Carlow's Dean's List seven times in a row. Another accomplishment was an award from the Social Work Department for Excellence in Field Education - proving to herself, and others, that she can do anything a hearing student can do.

This summer, Dana is working at Milestone Centers, Inc. as a part-time therapist in the Deaf Day Treatment Program. Beginning in August she will be attending the 3-year Master's Degree in Social Work program at Gallaudet University. She says that she doesn't have a plan right now for what

happens after getting her Master's degree, "but I am sure I will find a great career somewhere."

Dana would like to tell current WPSD students to, "Do what you believe in, don't let others stop you from your dreams. Set your goals and keep going. It is okay to make some mistakes because you will learn from it and move forward for the better." ■



“Do what you believe in, don't let others stop you from your dreams. Set your goals and keep going. It is okay to make some mistakes because you will learn from it and move forward for the better.”

-DANA RICHTER

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

Laurel Echavarria - WPSD Board of Trustees

WPAN had the opportunity recently to speak with WPSD parent, supporter and board member, Laurel Echavarria. She has been a member of the WPSD Board of Trustees since 2002 and is currently serving on the Executive Committee.

How did you first become involved with the School?

I've been associated with the School since my daughter, Andrea, enrolled as a five year old back in 1993!

What is your proudest accomplishment as WPSD board member?

That would have to be completion of the new Residence. It's a beautiful, home-like environment for the kids. I know they love it and the parents, I'm sure, feel comfortable knowing their children are safe there.

What surprises you about WPSD?

I shouldn't be surprised by anything after all these years but it still amazes me how loving the staff are and how committed they are to the kids' success.

What do you tell people about WPSD?

I tell people WPSD is a leader in educating deaf and hard of hearing students and we're blessed to have it right here in Pittsburgh. Then I invite them to come and see it!

Tell us about yourself.

I have a bachelor's degree in journalism from the William Allen White School of Journalism at the University of Kansas. I've been married for 30 years to Christian. Andrea has a twin brother Alex and an older sister, Lauren. We live in Sewickley where I garden (a lot) and enjoy paddle tennis and tennis.



The Western Pennsylvanian would like to thank Mrs. Echavarria for taking the time to speak with us and serving on the WPSD Board. ■



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A Great Day on the Course!

Monday, June 22nd turned out to be a beautiful day for the WPSD Golf Tournament at the Edgewood Country Club. This year's event represented the final fundraising effort for the new Residence at WPSD. Thanks to the support of friends and organizations, we have raised close to \$2 million to offset the construction costs for the \$9.8 million project.

The success of this event is dependent on the support of many people. Words cannot express how much we appreciate your generosity, friendship and support of our School and our students! "Thank You" to everyone for their help:

- The wonderful people with the New Vision Pioneers. This group has been donating their time and energy to WPSD for more than 20 years.
- Ron Frank, at Penn Hills Trophy, for donating the plaques for the first, second and third place teams.
- The awesome staff at the Edgewood Country Club for their willingness to do whatever was needed.
- The members of the WPSD staff who are always willing to pitch and lend a hand.
- LionWorks Printing & Graphics for all of the print materials from the "Save the Date" card to the sponsor signs on the course.

To the 24 individual players who came out to support the School: Thank you so much for joining us!

An extra BIG THANKS to our sponsors and their guests, without you this event would not be possible!

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Philanthropy Corner: A Strategic Way to Support WPSD

In the past year, friends of WPSD have offered their support to our programs and our building campaign in ways that benefit them financially and tax-wise, while helping the School to improve and expand its services. Beginning with this issue of the WPAN, we are sharing some of the stories of new strategic contributions that can help both the donor and the School.

This approach is called Planned Giving, and recent gifts to WPSD have included bequests, through wills, of a portion of a donor's estate; gifts of appreciated stock; and, most recently a new and interesting method of assigning a small life insurance policy to the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf.

Early in 2015, a young couple with two young children wanted to help WPSD by supporting the Residence Campaign and contacted our Development Office. Even though they were starting out on their careers, they had discovered a way to provide a planned gift that would benefit the School in the future, while providing them with a tax deduction each year. Taking out and gifting a small life insurance policy has become a popular method for people of any income level – large or small – to assist the nonprofit organizations that they value.

With this method of giving, a planned gift in the form of a whole-life insurance policy is jointly executed with the donor and the recipient organization. The policy is issued in the name of the donor, with the recipient organization as the owner of the policy. The most recent gift to WPSD, made by this young couple, was a \$25,000 life insurance policy with State Farm Insurance. Under this system, WPSD pays the \$340 premium of the policy once each year. The donor makes a tax-deductible annual \$340 contribution to WPSD, and receives the tax write-off for the contribution. After one to two years, the policy builds cash value, which earns dividends. Since this is an open-ended whole-life policy, WPSD can hold the policy until it reaches its \$25,000 value, or can continue to pay annual premiums beyond that time and allow the value of the policy to grow even further. Or, if the School wants or needs to take the cash value of the policy for capital or program expenses, it is free to do so at any time.

The donor (the insured person) receives the tax deduction for the annual

charitable contribution (with each annual donation that they make the School will make the premium payment on the policy to the insurance company).

Some donors choose to pay for the entire whole life policy up front and it becomes a guaranteed asset. In this case there would be no annual payments. As an example, a donor born in 1985 could take out a single-premium life policy for a one-time, up-front, tax-deductible contribution of \$5,000. At the time of the donor's death, this policy that was bought for \$5,000 would be worth \$25,600. The nonprofit organization could then book the entire policy as an asset.

Also, the nonprofit receiving the policy is free to make a single premium payment to pay for the policy and the annual premiums would be over with.

The insurance policy is executed jointly, between the School and the donor. The only stipulation is that the donor (the insured party) must have an "Insurable Interest" in the charity he or she is supporting (in this example, WPSD). People who qualify as having an insurable interest include employees, board members, executives, and donors who have made contributions to WPSD in the past.

Many organizations have raised needed income through life insurance policies on behalf of donors. The young couple in our example, which made their life insurance contribution this year, hope that other donors will follow suit, and they have offered to explain their method to others who might be willing to follow suit.

To learn more about tax-reduction methods of making charitable contributions, please contact Matt Campion, Director of Institutional Advancement at 412.371.7000, or by e-mail at mcampion@wpsd.org. ■





WPSD Sports 5th Annual Perfect Pitch Softball Clinic



Allegheny Valley Baseball Club Inc. (AVB) hosted the student-athletes of the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf on Saturday, May 2, at the All American Baseball Center in Penn Trafford.

In addition to the 37 WPSD students, AVB's players and coaches, WPSD staff and interpreters, and other volunteers, were on hand to provide instruction in baseball and softball fundamentals like hitting, base running, pitching, and fielding. The student-athletes will also go through a dynamic warm-up to teach them the importance of proper stretching.

Pirates great and World Series champion Grant Jackson assisted with the coaching and posed for pictures with the kids, as did the Pirate Parrot.

The Pittsburgh Pirates were a tremendous support for the clinic, donating prizes and providing tickets for all the participants to the May 6th game against

the Cincinnati Reds. This year, three student-athletes had the once in a lifetime opportunity to be on the field prior to the start of the game. Nick Bertone performed the National Anthem in American Sign Language, Alyssa Hume threw out the ceremonial first pitch to catcher, Justin Cristina.

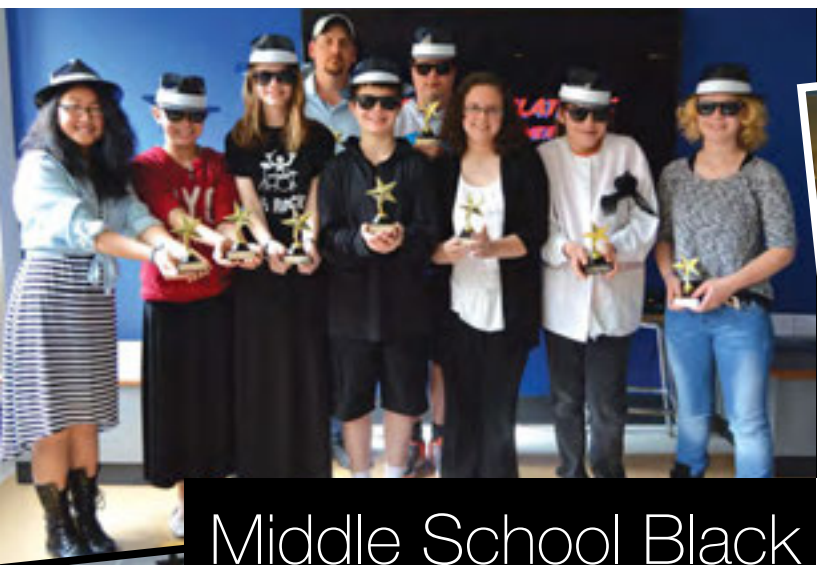
"We always tell our guys that you don't have to go pro to give something back to and through baseball," Kevin Giza, AVB's Founder and Head Coach said, "so we think it's really good for our guys to build character and to build chemistry within our team. Being able to give back has been tremendous."

For more information, including information and photographs from past "It's your perfect pitch"™ camps, visit www.avbpa.com. ■

A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2003, Allegheny Valley Baseball Club, Inc. manages a Tri-State Collegiate League baseball team, college-aged players from around the greater Pittsburgh area. In addition to striving to achieve the ultimate level of baseball excellence on the field, since its inception, AVB has dedicated itself to giving back to the community and growing the game of baseball through its partnerships with the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, the Miracle League of South Western PA and the South Hills, and a number of other great organizations.



The Picture Page



Middle School Black & White Semi-Formal

