Montour School District

STORY BY REBECCA FERRARO

Montour named among 30 districts worth visiting in the U.S.

By Justin Aglio, Director of Innovation

Tom Vander Ark of Getting Smart® named Montour School District one of the top 30 Districts Worth Visiting in the country. Ark referenced Montour’s new leadership team, university partnerships, innovative practices and learning communities as some of the district’s highlights. Districts were chosen for changing their community trajectory by working on blended, personalized and competency-based learning. Most are making career preparation, including communications, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration, a priority.

“This recognition is a direct reflection on the hard work and dedication of the Montour school community, including the board of education, administration, teachers, parents, community leaders, business owners and most of all - the students,” said Dr. Michael Ghilani, superintendent of the Montour School District.

Ark is CEO of Getting Smart®, a learning design firm and a partner in Learn Capital, an education venture capital firm investing in ed tech startups. A mission-driven organization, Getting Smart® is passionate about accelerating and amplifying innovations in teaching and learning. Previously, Ark served as the first executive director of education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Montour’s mission is to provide an exemplary and comprehensive educational experience that enables each individual to achieve maximum potential, to respect themselves and others, and to become a responsible and productive citizen. Montour School District’s Core Values include Putting Children First, and their creativity, inspiration and support. This year’s Champion of Learning awardees will be named at a banquet April 2 at the Pittsburgh Marriott City Center.

Dr. Michael Ghilani named Champion of Learning finalist

Montour superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani has been named a finalist of the Champion of Learning Award in the leadership category by the Consortium for Public Education. According to the CPE website, the award recognizes individuals, businesses and organizations that have brought excellence to education by providing memorable learning experiences to students using their creativity, inspiration and support. This year’s Champion of Learning awardees will be named at a banquet April 2 at the Pittsburgh Marriott City Center.

“This is really a tribute to the people who have bought in since I arrived here,” says Ghilani, who took over the reins at Montour in January of 2015. “The community has really rallied around the change I’ve brought. Everyone has welcomed me from day one and I couldn’t feel more supported by the school board and the rest of the community. When you have that level of support, it contributes to the great things we’ve been able to do in a short amount of time.”

Montour School District
Students raise $1,000 for St. Clair Breast Care Center

Members of the Cure Finders once again raised funds for breast cancer awareness during a “pink out” week in October, which has been designated National Breast Cancer Awareness. The students raised $1,000 by selling pink bandanas at Montour schools and during the home football game against Blackhawk on Oct. 16.

On Oct. 31, Cure Finders members presented Kristen Beattie, manager of organizational advancement for St. Clair Hospital, with a check for $1,000. The funds, Beattie said, support St. Clair Hospital Breast Care Center programs and services. Those include free mammograms for uninsured patients, education, treatment services and advanced diagnostic imaging technology in an environment of comfort and convenience.

Students presented Beattie with the check prior to the school’s annual Halloween costume catwalk contest, which was organized by April Fisher’s marketing and advertising students. Throughout the year, students in the class market and organize events in a competition to raise the most money to benefit a good cause of the winning class’ choice. The Halloween event raised $1,100.

Wind Ensemble performs at airport

Members of the Montour High School wind ensemble performed Dec. 21 at the Pittsburgh International Airport. Under the direction of Rob Roehn, students performed Christmas carols for visitors, family, friends and holiday travelers.

Montour students performed at Pittsburgh International Airport on Dec. 21. They are: (front row) Carolyn Young, Dina Condeluci, Michelle Ciamacco, Breanna Forney, (back row) Danny Skwarcha, Mitchell Bentley, Danny Meyers and Billy Cook.

Graphics technology students learn from Covestro branding

On Dec. 16, students in Bradin Jasin’s graphics technology classes and club had the opportunity to install new graphics on emergency vehicles used by Covestro. Formerly Bayer MaterialScience, Covestro is a publicly traded company operating under the Bayer umbrella. The new name and logo were announced in June. The company produces industrial products for a number of industries, including the automotive and electronics industries.

Montour School Board vice president Tom Barclay, a safety specialist at Covestro, arranged for the opportunity. Students were able to assist with developing the graphic, producing it and installing it on Covestro’s emergency vehicles. Students also worked with Dave Barringer, vice president of Allegra Pittsburgh/Image360, who, along with one of his professional graphics installers, assisted students with installing graphics on the vehicles.

This wasn’t the first time Barringer has mentored Montour students. In the past, he’s also worked with marketing students on projects that have provided them with similar real-world learning.
On Nov. 20, students in Christina Ferko’s biomedical innovations class presented models they had constructed during an emergency room innovation project to professionals in the field. The assignment required students to construct emergency rooms using what they had learned both in their biomedical classes leading up to the capstone course and from touring area hospitals. Students then presented their models to a panel of health care professionals and a member of a major architectural firm.

Ferko says that at the beginning of the course, students were presented with a scenario wherein a woman who arrives at an emergency room is misdiagnosed and passes away in the waiting room. Students had to identify the emergency room’s most important problems, research solutions and come up with a design that might have saved the woman’s life. Along the way, students toured emergency rooms at UPMC Mercy Hospital, St. Clair Hospital and West Penn Hospital. They also visited the Allegheny Health Network STAR Center, which simulates a real hospital to train medical students.

Ferko says that the project is part of the course’s curriculum, which is designed by Project Lead the Way and was implemented last year. This year, Ferko says, she wanted to take the project a step further and have students create designs in 3D. High school principal Todd Price off-handedly suggested using Legos and to approach assistant to the superintendent Jason Burik. Some of the students created their designs with Legos, while others used the video game The Sims.

David Kish, executive director of emergency services at St. Clair Hospital, was among those present for the student presentations. “Each group demonstrated that they understood the problem, researched the literature, and then in conjunction with direct observations of several actual emergency departments, created very creative patient-focused designs,” he says.

Leda Heidenreich, trauma coordinator for UPMC Mercy Hospital, was also on hand. “It was interesting to see how they incorporated parts of the centers they saw to come up with a new innovative ER,” she says. “A lot of them combined specialties to create a tertiary care center. They were trying to develop a system where they could get the patient seen, evaluated, and a plan of care established to enhance patient experience.”

Also present for student presentations were Tania Lyon, director of performance improvement at St. Clair; Jason Hinds, an associate with the architectural firm IKM; and Michael Wystepek, a simulation education specialist at the Allegheny Health Network STAR Center.

Nicole Benigni, a student in the course, says she enjoyed the challenge. “From the original design and innovations to the final product a lot changed,” she says. “It was very interesting to see how much we had to fix and change as our thoughts grew and our research became more detailed.”

Student Nikki Webb says her favorite part of the project was visiting hospitals and seeing the differences between them, such as size, location and designation. Student Jordan Waltz says he enjoyed the creation aspect of the course in addition to the research and making a final presentation.

Also participating were students Alex Archey, Julia Disalle, Sara Fratangelo, Veronica Holzapfel, Anna Pan, Molly Pfarner, Sydney Vlasach, Clara Weibel, Keegan Ramser and Jennifer Sun.

“Mrs. Ferko did an outstanding job engaging students in this real-life problem solving project,” says Burik. “I was also impressed with the students’ emergency room innovations, effort put into designing and making the project and their final presentations. This project exemplifies what school should entail.”
Montour hosts fifth consecutive PLTW conference

Montour High School once again hosted the Project Lead The Way Western Region Conference on Nov. 19. The school invited educators from across western Pennsylvania to observe and interact with Montour students enrolled in classes utilizing PLTW curricula.

PLTW is a national nonprofit that designs curriculums in the science, technology, engineering and math fields. Montour has been implementing PLTW courses at the high school level since 2005 and now offers six courses in engineering and four in its biomedical science program. In 2014, Montour began offering PLTW courses to middle school students, and last school year began implementing elementary-level STEM lessons designed by PLTW that introduce students to engineering and robotics.

This year marked the fifth consecutive year that Montour hosted the conference, which has annually been sponsored by Chevron. The 145 educators at this conference marked its largest attendance to date. It also marked the first year that teachers presented courses and activities from all K-12 PLTW STEM pathways.

Throughout the day, attendees got to experience 35-minute classroom sessions in PLTW classrooms. High school principal Todd Price says the interaction gave educators valuable exposure to the courses.

“Attendees get to interact with students and get to know what they want to do after high school,” he says. “If you want to know something about what we’re doing well or not doing well, ask a student.”

Montour superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani says that the school received emails afterward praising the culture of learning at Montour.

“We got a few emails from other districts saying what a great culture we have and that we should be proud of our high school,” he says.

During the conference, PLTW detailed a new partnership with the College Board. David Darak, PLTW director of school engagement in Pennsylvania, says the partnership will develop college and career pathways built around PLTW’s existing program pathways - engineering, biomedical science and computer science - by combining AP courses with PLTW courses.

“The partnership will increase access to and expand college and career readiness opportunities, including in critical STEM fields, for students across Pennsylvania,” says Darak.

Among the teachers who facilitated by opening their classrooms to visitors were Amanda Mascellino, Nick Terpack, Jesse Langman and Megan Foxwell.

This spring, a group of Montour teachers and administrators will travel to Indianapolis to present at the national PLTW Summit. At the summit, Montour educators will sit on a panel and discuss their implementation journey.

Art project commemorates #MontourProud Twitter movement

Until a few months ago, high school principal Todd Price had never used Twitter. In the five short months since he set up the account @hilltopspartan for the high school, he’s gained over 500 followers, sent out over 1,000 tweets and encouraged hundreds of posts sharing positive news across the district with #MontourProud.

“It’s become something of a phenomenon in our district,” says Price about #MontourProud, which administrators came up with earlier this year. “I’ll have kids coming up to me asking if I’m Montour proud of them. Of course they’re saying it with a little bit of teen sarcasm, but there’s also some sincerity to it.”

Teachers, administrators and students now use #MontourProud to let Twitter users know about events, achievements, classroom programs, professional development, sports moments, news, daily events and more. Some posts stand out as more significant than others, but most - even the ones that could be characterized as diurnal - generally carry a positive bent to them. The #MontourProud Twitter feed is now part of the school’s new website, and Montour superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani says that it’s helping to keep administrators and teachers connected across the district.

“It’s taken off and been more powerful and impactful than I could have imagined,” says Ghilani. “Teachers have bought in and it’s sparking collaboration.”

Price says that when he initially forayed into the social media world of teens, he wasn’t sure how they would take to him. Some didn’t even initially know who @hilltopspartan was. Price started posting positive Tweets about happenings at Montour and the trend caught on from there. Now, he even posts trivia questions right before classes let out on Tuesdays. The first student who responds with a correct answer wins a gift card.

In November, art students commemorated the #MontourProud phenomenon with a display in the high school. Using repurposed picture frames and digital prints, students in Anita Marsico and Kim Roehn’s 3D art and design and design and drawing courses decorated a wall in the school representing #MontourProud Twitter moments. Students used Photoshop to enhance photos and matted the prints themselves. Price asked every department, from English, to world languages, to the custodial and the paraprofessional departments, to send the classes a photo representing a #MontourProud Twitter moment. Each art student took on a different department.

“The idea behind it was to take that hashtag and show that we’re Montour proud of everybody who has an impact on the kids,” he says.

Price says that the movement has helped show students and the community how social media can be used in a positive way. The following art students created frames for the school’s departments: Rachel Reiff (English), Katie McGregor (social studies), Savanna Svihula (math), Cecilia Esposito (science), Tyler DiGiulio (technology education), Emily Koritsky (business education), Grady Butler (world languages), Kerry Dietrich (art), Meagan Maurer (music), Olivia Trevenen (family and consumer sciences), Meagan Maurer (special education), Katie McGregor (library and technology coaches), Mikayla Ulizzi (school counselors) and Deanna Gray (school nurses).
FBLA sponsors third annual Change for a Change toy drive

By Gina Ligouri, FBLA Faculty Sponsor

December was a very busy month for the Future Business Leaders of America at Montour High School. For the third consecutive year, FBLA members sponsored a service-learning project to benefit patients at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. Students worked to collect coin change and monetary donations from their peers, teachers and community to purchase toys from a wish list for patients at Children’s Hospital.

This year, Montour FBLA members organized a Change for a Change coin battle among homerooms at the high school. Students contributed coin change to boost the totals of their homeroom collection. This year’s Change for a Change coin battle winner was Trent Karlik’s homeroom, which collected a total of $76.63 in coins. Not far behind was Robin Shaffer’s homeroom, with $59.51 collected in coins.

Again this year, Nicole Stagl’s child development classes were active participants. The class’ preschool-aged students worked with high school students to craft piggy banks from water bottles, which were then used to collect change donations. In all, Stagl’s group collected over $125 in piggy bank contributions. The class also donated toys from the wish list to help the campaign.

Additionally, FBLA high school students worked industriously to gather sponsors to support the service-learning project. With all contributions collected, FBLA student members took to stores to purchase items from the suggested wish list. In conjunction with donations from their peers, FBLA gave a donation of over $3,500 worth of toys and entertainment to the Child Life Program at Children’s Hospital. Students also gifted $500 to the oncology department, in loving memory of four-year-old Charlie Rowe, who passed away earlier this year. The son of Montour teacher Natalie Rowe, Charlie suffered from a rare form of pediatric cancer.

The toy drive was one of a number of philanthropic efforts undertaken by students and teachers during the holiday season. In addition, the Montour Interact Club coordinated a food drive with the Parkway West Rotary that helped collect 3,600 cans of food in two weeks. David E. Williams students and counselors also hosted a toy drive to benefit Toys for Tots.

“We want our students to understand the importance of giving to the community,” says Montour superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani. “We want them to understand people in this world don’t have the luxuries they do. More than any community I’ve seen, this school really rallies around good causes.”

Honors English 10 students engage in authentic learning opportunity: JFilm of Pittsburgh

For most high school students, the unit of study regarding the Holocaust can be challenging to process. Honors English 10 teachers Gina Ligouri and Tiffany O’Shea wanted the experience to be relevant and meaningful for their students. While reading the nonfiction graphic novel “Maus,” students studied the Holocaust on many diverse levels. Through collaboration with the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh, Ligouri and O’Shea were able to engage their students in real-world, relevant learning experiences that took the unit beyond the classroom. One opportunity provided through the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh included a partnership with JFilm: Teen Screen. Offered through the Pittsburgh Jewish Film Forum, the program facilitates exploration of important and oftentimes difficult topics through film.

Students traveled to the South Side Works Cinema to see a screening of “Blood Brother,” a documentary about Pittsburgh native Rocky Braat, who ventured to India to lend resources and care to struggling children in an orphanage. Honors English 10 students were provided a unique opportunity. A friend of Braat’s, Lisa Tedde, was in town during the screening. Tedde came to Montour to discuss social action with Honors English 10 students prior to their viewing of “Blood Brother.” Meeting Tedde made the documentary much more real for students.

“JFilm was a valuable experience for our students because they were able to get emotionally invested in Rocky’s story,” said O’Shea. “They left the theater surprised, awestruck, and inspired by what they watched.”

The JFilm experience also inspired Montour students to make strides toward changing a problematic concern in society.

“Matt Hamilton [of the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh] has been very instrumental in providing resources and opportunities for our students,” said Ligouri. “They are able to apply what they’ve learned about the Holocaust to 21st century social action projects which they will be completing throughout the year. Our experience with JFilm sparked the interest of our students to make a difference in the world.”
DEW students capture first place in all three categories in South Hills Lit Fest
By Bobbie Cegelski, Coordinator of Gifted Services
Sixteen gifted/accelerated students from David E. Williams participated in the Second Annual South Hills Lit Fest on Nov. 23 at Baldwin High School. Seventh grade participants were Paige Vergenes, Megan Suess, Nicholas Schindehette, Jamie Lanuka, Vanessa Rodgers, Katie Liu, Julianna Paulin and Brendan O’Leary. Eighth grade participants were Delaney Broad, Ben Lander, Maysen Moll, Bella Tirone, Isabella Mannino, Rachel White, Gabby Trojan and Eliza Zwikl.

Students prepared for the competition by reading four selected books. They also produced a movie trailer and created a movie poster for a film version that they imagined based on one of those books. Students additionally participated in a book trivia challenge. As part of the Lit Fest, students also had an opportunity to meet with author Heather Terrell and screenwriter Elise D’Hoene.

DEW eighth grade students Isabella Mannino, Rachel White, Gabby Trojan and Eliza Zwikl created and produced a movie trailer based on the book “The Night Gardener.” The trailer won first place for students’ creative production and artistic adaptation.

DEW seventh-graders Vanessa Rodgers, Katie Liu, Julianna Paulin and Brendan O’Leary also designed a movie poster based on the book “The Night Gardener.” Their team took first place for their artistic rendering and creativity. The team also went on to capture first place in the book trivia challenge, which was based on content and knowledge of the required readings. Students received award certificates, gift cards and prizes for their first place wins.

Congratulations to the students for their outstanding efforts being recognized for their creative and academic talents.

Montour lends a hand to Kiss FM Stuff-A-Bus toy drive
For Bob Wagner, Montour’s director of transportation, most days consist of making sure the district’s school buses stay in working order and students get to where they need to be on time, among a host of other responsibilities. Making sure toys get delivered to families in need isn’t part of his regular job description, but he made it such in December.

Throughout the month, school counselors and students at David E. Williams Middle School coordinated a toy drive that coincided with the Kiss 96.1 FM Stuff-A-Bus program. Throughout the week, Kiss FM collected toys at Robinson Town Centre for the local Toys for Tots program. Student members of DEW’s Team Leadership Core made posters, signs, flyers, morning announcements and even a music video to help market the drive. To transport donations, Wagner approached the Montour School Board for permission to use the school’s buses the week of Nov. 30. Wagner also arranged for Kiss FM to use two of the school’s buses to load with donations throughout the week. Donations were packed into buses and then loaded onto a tractor-trailer.

By the end of the week, though, the tractor-trailer was filled to the brim. When the station reached out to Wagner again for help with transporting donations to a warehouse on Pittsburgh’s North Side, he lent out another bus.

“Kiss FM was very pleased with the outpouring of the western communities,” says Wagner. “We were thrilled to be a part of it since we were sort of the home team.”

In all, the 2015 Stuff-A-Bus toy drive filled 54 buses worth of toys that will be distributed to local families in need. This year marked the first time Kiss FM hosted the drive at Robinson Town Centre, but it was the fifth year that DEW hosted their toy drive. DEW school counselors say students enjoy participating in the drive each year and that this year some students donated upwards of 17 toys. Students who donated were encouraged to also submit their names, which were randomly drawn at the end of the week. Winners were selected to drop off donations and meet Kiss FM DJs Mikey and Big Bob, who aired their morning show from the drop-off at Robinson Town Centre. Williams says Kiss FM regularly mentioned Montour on the air.

DEW raised a little over 400 toys for the drive and 60 students participated in the toy delivery. School counselors say it is touching to see how excited students get to take part in the Stuff-A-Bus drive and to give to those less fortunate. They say they felt blessed to work with such generous families and staff members.
ELA class illustrates both STEM and literary concepts

Sixth grade English language arts teacher Mary Noel developed a way to integrate STEM learning into her accelerated reading class this past semester. As Noel’s students were reading the novel “Hatchet,” she developed activities from the book to help illustrate STEM concepts.

In “Hatchet,” the novel’s adolescent protagonist, Brian, becomes stranded in the remote wilderness after a floatplane in which he was flying crashes. Brian survives using only what he can scavenge and a hatchet he was given by his mother.

After students completed the novel, Noel provided them with materials to develop their own floatplane and bows to shoot arrows. Students evaluated which designs were successful and compiled lab reports, which will be used in a subsequent writing project. During the activities, students utilized aeronautical and engineering terms and tested their designs. Noel measured how far their floatplanes traveled and students tested out their bow designs by shooting Q-tips at targets modeled after animals that Brian encounters in the book. The bows students constructed were about six inches in length and made from tree branches and dental floss.

Noel says that in addition to illustrating STEM concepts, the activities also helped students connect with Brian’s plight in the book and its man versus nature conflict. She says this is the first time a STEM component has been integrated into an ELA class and that students enjoyed the activities. She’s planning similar activities for when students read the book “Tuck Everlasting” later in the school year.

David E. Williams
Middle School TLC Club
By Student Writers Josh Knapp and Vanessa Rodgers

American author, speaker and pastor John Maxwell once said, “Leaders become great, not because of their power, but because of their ability to empower others.”

When faced with projects or work that involves collaborating with other people, there is one crucial quality that leads to success: leadership skills. Especially in a school atmosphere, leadership qualities are important. Every day, students with differing personalities and work ethics are brought together and expected to work as a team. At times, this can be seen as exhausting and that is part of the reason why David E. Williams Middle School students formed TLC, or Team Leadership Committee.

Organized by DEW guidance counselors Jennifer Stacey (fifth grade), Andrea Verdream (sixth and seventh grade) and Jodi Williams (eighth grade), TLC was formed as a service-learning group dedicated to “bringing positive initiatives school-wide.”

According to Verdream, “We hope to improve the school culture by promoting worthwhile activities that engage the entire building in positive action.”

Members of TLC consist of students throughout the fifth through eighth grades who have been recommended by their teachers. DEW students have shown such strong leadership abilities that TLC has grown to 60 members.

TLC meets every Monday and holds additional meetings when needed, especially around a TLC-sponsored event. Many of these meetings consist of members discussing how to improve the school’s social atmosphere. TLC also hosts popular school events such as Red Ribbon Week, Stuff-A-Bus, Kindness Week and fourth grade orientation.

TLC is geared up to launch and promote more events throughout the rest of the year.

Let’s Go To the Hop
By Student Writers Nathan Knause, Josh Knapp, Austin Schaltenbrand and Jack Pockl

Seventh grade students at David E. Williams Middle School collectively read the novel “The Outsiders” by S. E. Hinton in their English language arts classes. The novel revolves around two rival groups, the poor Greasers and the rich Socs, fighting out their differences. The rivalry takes a turn after a Greaser named Johnny kills a member of the Socs named Bob in self-defense. Johnny does so after the Socs threaten to drown Ponyboy, a fellow Greaser, and beat up Johnny.

On Nov. 13, teachers and students celebrated the conclusion of the novel with a traditional Soc Hop, funded by the seventh grade Penny War hosted earlier in the year. Participants dressed up in 1950s style clothing, drank ice cream floats and danced the hand jive and the twist. The hop continued with a hula-hoop contest and a carhop relay.

The day concluded with much merriment as individual and class winners were announced. The winner of the twist contest was Kirk McHugh and Piper Russell. Winners of the hula-hoop contest were Josh Narehood and Taylor Grimes. Winning the carhop relay were Jon Tokarczyk, Paige Vergenes, Megan Suess, Nik Dettling, Vanessa Rodgers and Domenic Hoffman. Best dressed Greasers were Grayden Jackson and Nixie Winning. Best dressed Socs were Nino Ciaburri and Sarah Trosky.

The winners of the Penny War were, respectively, Jason Ruscitto and Jessica Christiansen’s homerooms.

The Soc Hop was a fun and memorable experience for all.
Number one contest, number one performance

By Jamie Chiarelli, Sixth Grade Math Teacher

Sumdog is a free educational game that motivates students to practice math, reading and writing. Sumdog games engage students in multiplayer games against other students from across the world. Questions on Sumdog are aligned to Common Core skills. The program tailors questions to students’ individual needs. Sumdog’s math questions are free to use with no time constraints. Sumdog offers countywide and national contests in which students can compete against other classes in their school as well as classes in other school districts.

The first Allegheny County Sumdog Contest for the school year was held Oct. 16-22. A total of 44 countywide classes made up of 974 students participated. A total of 272,962 questions were answered correctly.

David E. Williams did an outstanding job. The top three finishers in the contest were Jamie Chiarelli’s block 2 (877), block 3 (832), and block 1 (633). The top 10 class finishers included Dana Rongaus’s block 3 (511), Juliana Carr’s second grade class from Forest Grove (476), and Rongaus’s block 1 class (401). Daily winners included Chiarelli’s block 2 on Oct. 18, Carr’s second grade class on Oct. 20, Chiarelli’s block 3 class on Oct. 21, and Rongaus’s block 3 class on Oct. 22.

Because they won the contest, Chiarelli’s block 2 classroom was awarded a subscription to Sumdog for the remainder of the year. This entitled them to premium membership perks such as more games, more items for their avatars and rooms, and teacher reports.

All students who placed in the top ten were from David E. Williams Middle School. They are: Nicholas Zezza (first place, Chiarelli), Mason Sike (second place, Chiarelli), James Caputo (third place, Chiarelli), Isabella Hoffman (fourth place, Rongaus), Salem Minear (fifth place, Rongaus), Dylan Sparkenbaugh (sixth place, Chiarelli), Brooke Carver (seventh place, Chiarelli), Marcus Cetrone (eighth place, Chiarelli), Om Arora-Jain (ninth place, Chiarelli) and Zackery Gatts (10th place, Chiarelli).

Other Montour students who placed in the top fifty were: Blake O’Malley (12), Taryn Shutika (14), Morgan Hayes (16), Nicholas Trojan (17), Jessica Molitoris (18), Abigail Dischner (19), Gavin Rawski (20), Tyler Lavelle (24), Mackenzie Frederick (25), Aaron DeLuca (27), Dante Deltondo (28), Harley Kletz (29), Brian Schultz (30), Robert Kelly (31), Aidan Streily (32), Ryder Blyzwick (33), Darius Pollnac (37), Luke Smarra (38), Belle Ellis (40), Owen Jordan (41), Hayleigh Brinza (42), Ryan Snyder (45), Jordan Edleblute (46), Henry Orlandini (47), Ryan Black (48).

Burkett students of the month for November

Third-graders Meghan Ranier and Quinn Dalverny, along with fourth-graders Sterling McCleaster and Charles McMahon, were chosen as Burkett Elementary students of the month for November. Students of the month are recognized for exhibiting appropriate behavior, performing random acts of kindness, demonstrating improvement in academic areas, exhibiting self control, or deserving of recognition despite a quiet disposition.

Kindergarten and fourth grade students “hang out”

How can fourth-graders at Burkett Elementary “hang out” with kindergarten students at Forest Grove Elementary a few miles away? The answer is simple: through Google Hangouts! Using this technology resource, students in Heather Athanas’ fourth grade class at Burkett Elementary virtually visited their younger peers at Forest Grove. Fourth-graders composed magical fairy tales by writing their own words to the classic wordless picture book, “The Snowman” by Raymond Briggs. Then they were live on screen, reading to kindergarten classes. The students were very proud of their written work. Some even had the chance to read to their previous kindergarten teacher’s class.

Teachers were eager to try the new resource, too. They were quite surprised at how simple it was to use Google Hangouts for this virtual connection with extra help from the district’s technology department. A special “thank you” goes out to them.

Students at Burkett and Forest Grove plan to “hang out” a little more often now that they know how to use this great tool.
Fourth grade students in Linda Ewonce and Beth Deley’s math and science classes became galactic inventors in a recent technology-based project. The project centered around a transmission from the mayor of City X from a faraway planet detailing social problems with which they needed help. The problems the new civilization were encountering related to health, safety, communication and transportation. Fourth grade students had to solve one of the planet’s problems by learning about an assigned citizen and their dilemma. They brainstormed solutions, created a model from clay, provided and received feedback from peers and ultimately designed inventions that citizens on City X could build using 3D printers.

Students used 123D Design, a 3D creation and editing tool that supports 3D printers. After they completed their initial 3D design, they printed a model on a MakerBot 3D printer. Students will have an opportunity in the near future to give presentations on their creations along with an explanation of how their invention solved a City X problem.

An example of a City X invention was the Project Environment. Marin Torrens created the product to help citizens protect themselves from a nearby asteroid belt. Marin’s plans involve sucking asteroids into a tube, where workers break down the asteroids into usable raw products. If the pod becomes too full, another tube ejects the extra material. He theorized the device would keep the planet from being destroyed or damaged by asteroids.

Lillian Rishell designed an invention called the Proventor, which would help Planet X with its high occurrence of accidents. The Proventor stops accidents caused by wind by using strong currents to blow away tornados. The device also uses currents to prevent car crashes and other similar accidents.

The City X project provided fourth grade students with an opportunity to use the scientific method, problem solving skills and their imaginations. As the end projects continue to print out in the classroom, students are continuously learning about the impact of new technology in education and the opportunities it provides them.

Local Author Visits Burkett
By Marianna Greenaway, Third and Fourth Grade Librarian

For local author Todd Vicker, it all started with a drawing of Snoopy. That was what Vicker told students at Burkett Elementary when they were treated to a visit from the Robinson resident Nov. 23. Vicker visited to talk about his newly published book, “The Hunt for Luke’s Bone,” which he wrote and illustrated. The enjoyable children’s story follows the journey of a dog named Luke who is looking for his lost bone. Along the way, he meets other animals who try to help him in his search. As an added surprise, Vicker brought along Luke, his Cavalier King Charles spaniel. Students were thrilled to meet the feisty, adorable inspiration for the book.

Vicker began by reading his book to students. He then discussed the yearlong process of getting the book published, from the beginning stages of putting his ideas on paper, to creating illustrations to go along with the text, to finally going through the publishing process. Vicker said he related to students and that he was in elementary school when his passion for art began. He said one of his teachers hung up a drawing of Snoopy that he created and the drawing was eventually published in a local newspaper. That sparked his lifelong passion for drawing and art. Earning an award in high school for four years of excellence in art led him to earn an associate’s degree from The Art Institute of Pittsburgh in visual communications. He explained that the process of illustration is complicated but doable with enough motivation.


Students were able to ask Vicker questions and many were curious to learn more about Luke and the kind of dog he is. They also wanted to know when Vicker would write another book. The visit ended with a few words of wisdom from Vicker about having a dream and working hard to achieve it, which is always worth the effort. Luke is also connected on social media. Follow him on Facebook /thehunt4lukesbone and on Twitter @hunt4lukesbone. Copies of Vicker’s book can be ordered at http://bookstore.xlibris.com or by emailing thehunt4lukesbone@verizon.net.

Imagination and 3D printing facilitate a problem-solving project

Fourth grade students in Linda Ewonce and Beth Deley’s science class became galactic inventors in a recent technology-based project. The project centered around a transmission from the mayor of City X from a faraway planet detailing social problems with which they needed help. The problems the new civilization were encountering related to health, safety, communication and transportation. Fourth grade students had to solve one of the planet’s problems by learning about an assigned citizen and their dilemma. They brainstormed solutions, created a model from clay, provided and received feedback from peers and ultimately designed inventions that citizens on City X could build using 3D printers.

Students used 123D Design, a 3D creation and editing tool that supports 3D printers. After they completed their initial 3D design, they printed a model on a MakerBot 3D printer. Students will have an opportunity in the near future to give presentations on their creations along with an explanation of how their invention solved a City X problem.

An example of a City X invention was the Project Environment. Marin Torrens created the product to help citizens protect themselves from a nearby asteroid belt. Marin’s plans involve sucking asteroids into a tube, where workers break down the asteroids into usable raw products. If the pod becomes too full, another tube ejects the extra material. He theorized the device would keep the planet from being destroyed or damaged by asteroids.

Lillian Rishell designed an invention called the Proventor, which would help Planet X with its high occurrence of accidents. The Proventor stops accidents caused by wind by using strong currents to blow away tornados. The device also uses currents to prevent car crashes and other similar accidents.

The City X project provided fourth grade students with an opportunity to use the scientific method, problem solving skills and their imaginations. As the end projects continue to print out in the classroom, students are continuously learning about the impact of new technology in education and the opportunities it provides them.
PTA purchases laser engraver for elementary schools

The Montour Elementary PTA approved the purchase of a mobile laser engraver in November. The $17,000 piece of equipment will be used in Project Lead the Way launch classes, which introduce students to physics and engineering. Earlier this year, students and teachers first had the opportunity to use laser engravers in PLTW classrooms when the elementary schools were visited by the Carnegie Science Center Mobile Fab Lab. The visit was also made possible by the PTA.

Montour participates in Mini Maker Faire event

Burkett Elementary teachers Kelly Butera and Amanda Mascellino showcased some of the exciting projects happening at Montour at the Mini Maker Faire at Barnes and Noble in November. The two educators gave the public an opportunity to become cosmetic scientists and make their own lip balm. The project stemmed from one developed earlier this year by Burkett students who used the design process and STEAM concepts to develop a project for the Carnegie Science Center Girls Rock Science event. With such positive feedback, Montour teachers were asked to bring the activity to a “Meet The Makers” portion of the Mini Maker Faire. They also made the recipe available online and encouraged others to share their results on Twitter.

STEAM was incorporated into the project in the following ways:

- **Science**
  - Identify changes in states of matter when materials are heated;
  - chemical properties of compounds;
  - changes in materials when materials are mixed.

- **Technology**
  - Design and print labels for marketing.

- **Engineering**
  - Use the design process to define the problem, research how others have solved the problem, test various solutions and evaluate solutions to develop a final product.

- **Art**
  - Design labels and mix color and flavor combinations to determine an aesthetically appealing combination.

- **Math**
  - Use measurement, ratios and math to formulate a duplicable recipe.

**Ingredients:**
- 1 part beeswax pellets
- 1 part coconut oil
- 2 parts sweet almond oil
- 8-10 drops essential oil or icing flavor oils (for flavor)
- A sprinkle of shimmer powder for cake decorating (for color)

Heat the beeswax, coconut oil, and sweet almond oil together. Stir until melted and mixed thoroughly. We found it easiest to use a crock pot for melting. You could also use a double boiler or a microwave-safe container.

Scoop some of the melted mixture into a smaller container. Stir in your flavor and color. Carefully pour into your lip balm container while still in liquid state. Let stand for 15-20 minutes until it becomes firm. Close lid and add label to your lip balm container. Enjoy!

This was the recipe that several fourth grade girls experimented with and ultimately chose as their favorite. Readers are encouraged to use the design process to research and test different variations of the recipe to see which they like best. Have fun experimenting and share results on Twitter with #MontourProud.

Any children attempting this recipe at home should have an adult present due to the heating and handling of hot wax. This recipe contains nut products. Substitutions can be made for people with nut allergies.
Positive reviews for the Daily 5 framework

In a classroom at Forest Grove Elementary School, students are meeting for a mini-lesson. Once the lesson is over, they scatter throughout the room. Some sit at a desk while others get comfortable on a beanbag chair or other creative seating that a teacher has incorporated into the classroom.

To outsiders, this might not seem like a traditional literacy classroom, but it has been one at Forest Grove since teachers started utilizing the Daily 5 framework at the start of the year. The framework involves leading students through rounds of short lessons on skills and concepts. They are then given their choice to work on one of five center activities. The process repeats throughout the literacy block.

The Daily 5 framework supports the new Montour School District Core Value of Putting Children First, Supporting a Growth Mindset and Creating a Learning Culture. The framework allows students to make choices about their learning path and lets them work at their own independent level with the support of a teacher in small group instruction.

So far, the framework has been met with enthusiasm from students while teachers are seeing an uptick in student productivity and learning.

“There has been a buzz throughout the school because students enjoy the Daily 5 so much,” says Forest Grove principal Jennifer Kosanovic. “Students cheer when teachers tell them it’s time to start the Daily 5, and the level of engagement and enthusiasm for learning is higher than I’ve seen in recent years.”

Teacher Holly Rippole says she’s been amazed to see how excited students are to read and write every day.

“The students have real books in their hands,” she says. “They are writing about topics of their choice.”

Teacher Karen Bell says that the framework’s mini-lessons, which have taken the place of longer lessons, keep students’ attention better. Teacher Sommer Keaton says that the Daily 5 framework allows her to meet students’ diverse strengths and needs by working with individuals and in small groups.

“The Daily 5 allows my students to engage in meaningful reading and writing choices they look forward to and enjoy,” she says. “My students spend far more time engaged in reading, writing, and book discussions through the Daily 5 framework than with previous literacy structures.”

Kindergarten teacher Lori Banaszak says that she’s seen more productivity among her students since she started using the framework.

“The Daily 5 has given my students the opportunity to write independently on a daily basis,” she says. “Several students have filled one writing journal and are well into the next one. In the past, it has taken until January or February to finish one writing journal.”

She says students are also locating high frequency sight words in a variety of print sources, including directions on their daily papers, in Scholastic: Let’s Find Out magazine and on informational flyers that are sent home.

“I have seen an increased enthusiasm for reading and writing independently,” she says.

Students say that the framework helps them read and write better, making both more fun. They say they like the freedom to pick what they are interested in learning and that the small groups allow them to get to know each other and learn to work together.

Red Ribbon Week

During the week of Oct. 26, Forest Grove Elementary students participated in a number of activities in support of Red Ribbon Week. Topics of discussion were directed at K-2 students and focused on making healthy choices and doing good things.

On Monday, students participated in a family day activity. As research has shown, spending quality time together, especially around the dinner table, opens up pathways for positive communication with children. This activity encouraged families to take time to sit down together, focus on each other and talk. Forest Grove teachers participated in this activity by sharing snack time and eating lunch with their students in their classrooms or the cafeteria, thereby fostering the idea that the classroom is a family. As part of the activity, students were also able to donate canned goods to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Students filled eight large boxes with donations.

On Oct. 28, students wore their silliest socks to “sock it to drugs” while donating school supplies to the Homeless Children’s Education Fund. Students donated seven large boxes filled with supplies that will help children who have been displaced from their homes.

Each and every day, Forest Grove encourages students to be kind to each other as part of the school’s anti-bullying campaign. Every child in the school has signed its kindness contract and every morning the kindness pledge is recited. Students promise to be kind and help others.

“As the school counselor, it is my responsibility to make sure that our students not only say these words every day, but understand what they mean and why we say it,” says guidance counselor Danielle Langdon. “These activities offered a chance for students to see that they can make a difference. Their small acts of kindness - whether it was the donation of a can good or school supply - will have a great impact on those in need.”

“A huge thank you to our Forest Grove families and teachers for always being supportive and showing us just how great it is to be a part of this community!”
In an attempt to promote pro-social behaviors, acceptance and friendship at Forest Grove Elementary, Danielle Langdon, school guidance counselor, has been organizing a Mix It Up Lunch over the past two years.

Mix It Up Lunch is a national campaign that was launched by Teaching Tolerance over a decade ago. The program encourages students to identify, question and cross social boundaries.

Teaching Tolerance has identified, via student surveys, that the cafeteria is a place where divisions are most clearly drawn. Mix It Up Lunch occurs nationally on the last Tuesday of October, but at Forest Grove it takes place at least twice annually.

Teaching Tolerance encourages students to move out of their comfort zones and connect with someone new over lunch. It’s a simple act with profound implications. Studies have shown that interactions across group lines can help reduce prejudice. When students interact with those who are different from them, biases and misperceptions can be overcome.

At Forest Grove, each class is assigned a color and encouraged to wear it for Mix It Up Lunch so that they can easily reassemble as a class following lunch. Once in the cafeteria, they choose a student from another class to sit with, preferably someone they don’t know, so that new connections and friendships can be made. Lunch tables have questions cards and conversation starters on them, just in case the students are unsure of how to begin talking to someone unfamiliar. Most students, however, don’t need them.

The program has been a huge success and students look forward to it. After the first Mix It Up Lunch of the year, students always ask when the next one will take place because they can’t wait to meet another new friend. Hopes are that attitude will carry on throughout their school careers and adult lives.

Go to: www.montourschools.com for the latest district news
The Montour varsity hockey team took first place in the Chiller Thanksgiving Classic tournament in Columbus, Ohio over Thanksgiving weekend, following a dramatic comeback in the final minutes of the championship match.

With just 10 minutes left in the third period, the team found itself down 3-0 to Upper Arlington from Columbus, Ohio. After capitalizing on a power play, the team took over momentum and scored four answered goals. Though Montour had previously played in the tournament, this marked their first championship win. Along the way, they faced difficult opponents in Trinity from Louisville, Kentucky; Watterson from Cleveland, Ohio; and Gahanna from Columbus, Ohio.

As of the holiday break, the team’s record stands at 11-1-1. With nine regular season games remaining, hopes are high for the playoffs.

Spartan Athletics News

Baseball players to continue careers in college

Four Montour baseball players have signed letters of intent to continue their careers in college. Brady Minetti, who played second base at Montour, will play for Lake Erie College. Left-handed pitcher Brian Dabney will play for Seton Hill University, catcher Adam Celidonia will play for Lock Haven University and shortstop Kailen Grimm will play for Indiana University of Pennsylvania. An all-conference selection last season, Kailen was also a two-year starter on the football team. Brady Minetti, Brian Dabney, Kailen Grimm and Adam Celidonia all signed letters of intent to continue their athletic careers at the collegiate level after playing baseball for Montour.

Numerous fall athletes named to all-section and all-conference teams

This past fall athletic season, well over a dozen Montour athletes earned all-conference and all-section honors. Soccer players Nolan Hutter, Matt Slesinger and Noah Meehan were all named to the first team all section. Brian Duggan earned an honorable mention while Hutter and Slesinger were also named to the all-WPIAL team.

Additionally, soccer players Maura Hickey, Samantha White and Ally White were named first team all section.

Eleven members of the football team were also named to the all-conference team. They are: Tyler Carswell (first team athlete and defensive back), Mike Arnold (first team tackle), Roman Macek (first team guard and honorable mention as defensive end), Tom Sylvester (first team defensive back and honorable mention as wide receiver), Dave Haseleu (first team running back and honorable mention defensive back), Zack Jablonski (honorable mention offensive and defensive lineman), Brayden Jones (honorable mention linebacker), Austin Deutsch (honorable mention inside linebacker), Trent Vietmeier (honorable mention defensive end), Alex Jozwiak (honorable mention center) and Nolan Hutter (honorable mention kicker).

In addition, seven volleyball players were named as all-section selections. Selected for the first team were Cecilia Esposito, Alexa Mitro and Dominica Niccolai. Named to the second team were Alaina Buechel, Victoria Norton and Rosie Esposito. Named to the third team was Amalia Esposito.

Hockey team wins Chiller Thanksgiving Classic

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