Montour School District

School Board hires Dr. Michael Ghilani as superintendent

At its regular monthly meeting April 23, the School Board voted to hire Dr. Michael Ghilani as the district’s superintendent for a five-year term. An award-winning administrator, the board hired Ghilani as Montour’s acting assistant superintendent in January. Ghilani previously served as assistant principal and principal at Upper St. Clair High School for a combined 14 years.

The board said that they were impressed both with Ghilani’s tenure at Upper St. Clair and his work at Montour in these short five months.

“Dr. Ghilani has already put in place several academic and technology initiatives since he joined the district in January,” said Dean Caliguire, president of the school board. “He is instilling a culture of collaboration and cooperation in the district, which is a priority of the new board leadership. We eagerly anticipate continued progress and innovation with Dr. Ghilani as the captain of the Montour ship.”

Director of Curriculum Dr. Christopher Stone says that, upon arriving at Montour, Ghilani wasted no time assessing needs across the district.

“One of Dr. Ghilani’s first initiatives was to conduct an internal needs assessment and personally meet with teachers from all the buildings, as he recognizes the importance of relationships and trust,” said Stone. “These two critically important facets have historically been overlooked in the district.

Additionally, he has quickly set a tone for his vision relating to innovation and technology infusion into the curriculum in grades K-12 to help leverage student achievement.”

Stone calls Ghilani a “tremendous asset to the district” who holds a vision for Montour as a “premier academic institution in western Pennsylvania.”

Assistant to the Superintendent Jason Burik characterizes Ghilani as a perfect match for the district.

“Dr. Ghilani is exactly what the Montour School District needs,” says Burik. “His innovative ideas and collaborative approach will help lead our district into the future. I have been extremely impressed with Dr. Ghilani and have greatly enjoyed working with him so far.”

While at Upper St. Clair, Ghilani worked with teachers and staff to audit and rewrite the high school’s curriculum while adopting PA Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards. Admittedly a big proponent of robust STEM offerings and technology in the classroom, Ghilani says he is in favor of re-evaluating traditional classroom schedules and formats, as well as forging relationships with area industries and companies in order to facilitate learning opportunities.

One such program he helped pilot at Upper St. Clair had students consulting with Canonsburg-based All-Clad Metalcrafters to offer solutions to some of the company’s real-world problems. Teaming up with South Fayette High School Principal Scott Milburn, students at both schools worked together using collaborative 3-D printing software developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After a 10-week period, students presented their projects to company vice presidents. The program helped earn Ghilani a 2013 Principal of the Year Award from the Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, and Upper St. Clair is now home to a state-of-the-art fabrication lab.

“It’s a different way of seeing and learning,” says Ghilani, “but after seeing the kids learning in that environment, it’s the integration of everything we want them to learn: math, science, social studies, reading, presenting. The worth of that experience far exceeds anything we could give them in the traditional classroom.”

Ghilani comes to Montour as the district is at the forefront of utilizing both technology and STEM-based learning in its own curriculums. Last year, the school became the first in the state to integrate Project Lead the Way elementary-level STEM-based courses. The district is now offering four PLTW biomedical courses and six PLTW engineering courses at the high school.

Also last year, Montour rolled out Chromebooks for every high school student, and has installed digital interactive Promethean Boards across the district. High school students have access to an engineering lab with a 3-D printer, and the district is in the process of constructing a $45 million state-of-the-art elementary school.

Ghilani says he is encouraged by Montour’s utilization of technology in the classroom, and that the challenge moving forward will be to continue that integration.

“You really want to get to that transformative stage where without the technology you wouldn’t be able to do the things you’re doing,” he says.

Asked about what’s stood out to him thus far at Montour, Ghilani points to a couple of innovative classroom experiences he’s observed. At Burkett Elementary, he sat in on a new course entitled stability and motion: science of flight. Part of the PLTW Launch program, the third grade class is taught by Amanda Mascellino. During it, students use 3-D software to design model planes by applying principles of physics and then demonstrate those principles by flying them.

“I couldn’t believe kids were learning what a fuselage was,” says Ghilani.

Another class he mentions is Gina Ligouri and Rhonda Morasco’s co-teaching model in their 10th grade English class.

“I said, ‘You guys need to be on the road with this’, ” he says. “This is regional, national, state-level stuff, a co-teaching model that you should be out there presenting.”

Ghilani’s term with the district begins in July and runs through 2020. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Washington and Jefferson College, a master’s from the University of Pittsburgh, a doctorate in counseling and supervision from Duquesne University and principal certification from Carnegie Mellon University.

The son of two teachers, Ghilani currently lives in South Fayette with his wife, an Upper St. Clair teacher, and two children.
Junior Grady Butler achieves perfect ACT score

By Julia Pravlouchak, Editor-in-Chief, Montour Monitor

In February, junior Grady Butler achieved a perfect score of 36 on the American College Test. The assessment is a standardized test that is used to assess students’ readiness and aptitude for college, using curriculum-based questions to assess their knowledge. Based on a scoring range of 1 to 36, 36 being the highest possible score, the average national score is between 20 and 21. Out of the approximate 1.8 million who take it per year, only about 1,000 students manage to score a perfect, making it an impressive rarity. Because of his perfect score, Grady will have many opportunities for different academic and merit scholarships, and the likelihood of him being accepted into any college of his choice has increased.

Grady gained knowledge of his perfect score before it was announced publicly but didn’t think much of it at first. On this, he stated, “I was just really surprised when I found out my score. It definitely shook things up a little, especially when the counselors pulled me out of class to tell me. That’s when I realized it was more of a big deal than I thought.”

The ACT has four sections, including English, reading, mathematics and science. It takes just over four hours to complete, not including an optional writing section. Grady felt most confident on the English section because it included spelling and grammar, which are his strongest points. However, he felt least confident on the science section, because it was more about interpreting and analyzing data.

When taking the exam, students are given the option to take five minute breaks between sections; however, Grady did not. He felt that it was better to finish everything straight through so he would not lose his mindset.

He revealed, “I think I did well because when I went in, I didn’t feel super pressured. I thought this test can be one of many. No pressure made more confidence. They offered the ability to break, but I did all of the sections consecutively to gain more time.”

In preparation for the exam, Grady used online tools that the school has students complete in class, such as Method Test Prep. Before taking the test, he thought he was going to at least score in the upper range, due to district’s long term preparation of students for the ACT. The only questions the school’s prep did not help Grady with were comprehension questions, because those questions cannot really be practiced. He said, “I think it gave me an idea of what to expect.”

After high school, Grady plans to pursue a career in either computer science or computer programming. He has not yet decided which. He also does not know where he will attend college, but he wants to attend a school similar to CMU, which is renowned for its science programs.

Referring to Grady’s rare achievement, his counselor, Dr. Eric Sparkenbaugh, stated that he has never seen a student score so high on the ACT. He exclaimed, “It is a remarkable accomplishment, and he scored better than over 99 percent of the people who have taken it nationwide!”

To conclude, Grady offered this advice to future ACT takers: “I would just stay calm and determined. Don’t let not knowing the answer go to your head, because when I was taking it there were a lot I did not know, but going back to them at the end I was able to figure out in a couple seconds what I was doing wrong before. So just take a step back, compose yourself and keep going.”
Annual public notice to families posted on district website

Montour School District has posted its annual public notice to families on the Pupil Services page on the school district’s website at www.montourschools.com. The notice is posted under the Departments tab under Pupil Services.

High school students come out atop Penn State math competition

Ten Montour students represented their school at the annual Penn State Beaver math competition March 24, with five of them coming away on top in group competition. During the event, students competed individually in two rounds of high-level mathematics questions, as well as in a team competition that combined the scores of five teammates.

A team made up of junior Hunter Smutney, sophomore Rosh Bharti, junior Jay Mantini, senior Eric Lowden and senior Alan Kuffner took first place, beating out two Moon Area High School teams and nine other schools. Each of the students on the winning team received a certificate for a $1,000 scholarship to be used toward tuition at PSU Beaver.

Sophomore “tech guru” taking online Harvard technology class

By June of this year, Mitchell Vacco will have become a junior. He will have also likely completed his first online course through Harvard University.

He started taking the class, introduction to technology and programming, earlier this year, at the suggestion of incoming acting assistant superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani, who was recently named school superintendent. That suggestion came about after Vacco saw an article in a newspaper about students at Elizabeth Forward School District utilizing collaborative 3-D printing software developed by Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Admittedly a technology enthusiast, Vacco approached Ghilani about the possibility of obtaining the software at Montour, only to learn that Ghilani was already familiar with it.

“He’s a big technology guy,” says Vacco. “He’s been a huge help to me since he came here.”

With Ghilani’s help, Vacco has been working to interface the software with the high school’s 3-D printer, and Vacco says he’s looking to obtain a grant to purchase the additional equipment needed. He says he’s been taking the Harvard course to better familiarize himself with html coding.

“It’s an area that I’m not as familiar with,” he says. “I’ve always been more into the equipment.”

He says that thus far he’s only managed to get halfway through the course, due to a busy schedule that includes football, school and his own landscaping business. He’s also helping to set up Smart Desk software on the school’s computers to help teachers and students tackle technology problems, building a broadcast studio in a room at the high school, and figuring out a way to televise Montour’s football games by beaming a signal from the press box.

After a few sessions in the control booth at the Athletic Center, he’s now programming the switchboard and hoping to get new lights installed, not unlike those used at Consol Energy Center. He took a backstage tour of the complex earlier this year.

As Montour continues to integrate technology into its curriculum, Vacco is playing a larger role in maintaining and managing that technology. Faculty aren’t shy about saying that they’ll have him for a couple more years, while Vacco says he’s having fun learning about existing technology and trying to bring in more.

“Mitch is a very hard-working and creative student,” says Jason Burik, assistant to the superintendent. “I have never met a 10th grade student who is so mature and passionate about technology. He greatly enjoys problem solving and researching. He has been a tremendous resource.”

Burik notes that Mitch regularly makes appointments with administrators to discuss technology and new program ideas.

“A few weeks ago, he was here on a Friday until 5 p.m.,” says Burik.

According to a survey by BrightBytes:

- 62% of teachers at Montour School District administer digital or online assessments to their students on a regular basis. Frequent digital assessments provide teachers with faster feedback about students’ performance, allowing them to build formative curriculum that addresses gaps and grows strengths over time.

- Of that 62%, 16% administer digital or online assessments to a majority of their students weekly, and 46% monthly. Comparatively, in the state of Pennsylvania, 49% of teachers surveyed said they never administered digital or online assessments.
Holocaust survivor gives presentation to 10th grade English students

Earlier this semester, 10th grade English students read the graphic novel “Maus” by Art Spiegelman. A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the book uses a range of storytelling techniques to retell Spiegelman’s father’s experience of surviving the Holocaust.

On Feb. 26, students followed up on the reading by listening to an hour-long presentation from another Holocaust survivor, Fritz Ottenheimer. The visit was arranged through the Holocaust Center of Greater Pittsburgh.

A Pittsburgh resident, Ottenheimer and his family were living in Konstanz, Germany when Hitler came to power in 1933. Ottenheimer’s family helped Austrian Jews escape to nearby Switzerland, and his father, a decorated World War I veteran who fought for Germany, was arrested and sent to Dachau concentration camp for a month.

Sponsored by relatives living in America, Ottenheimer’s family immigrated to the U.S. prior to Germany invading Poland in 1939. He graduated school with an engineering degree and volunteered for the draft.

The presentation gave students a first-hand account of the circumstances under which Hitler came to power, and how both Jews across Europe and non-Jewish Germans suffered as a result. Though subjected to state-sponsored propaganda and terror, Ottenheimer concluded his presentation by calling Germans of the era bystanders to the deaths of 16 million Jews. He warned against repeating that same mistake in regards to humanitarian atrocities currently taking place around the world.

“What an amazing experience we were able to provide for our students!” says English teacher Gina Ligouri. “To hear the personal story of a Holocaust survivor was truly incredible. Our students have a new appreciation for ‘Maus’ and for the Holocaust. This experience is one they will not soon forget.”

Mike Pintek show broadcasts live from high school library

“This isn’t your typical library,” was how high school librarian Pam Diiani put it to KDKA 1020 news radio host Mike Pintek during a live broadcast his show from the library April 23.

Kicking off a three-hour broadcast that touched on a range of topics, Diiani and high school principal Todd Price talked about how Montour is utilizing technology across the district. As if to illustrate, while the live show broadcasted from the middle of the library, students in an adjacent room streamed live lessons on Mandarin as various groups sat in the middle of a study sessions with their Chromebook laptops.

Technology, gay rights, politics and bullying were just some of the topics addressed during the show, which featured various Montour student groups and faculty. KDKA Promotions Manager Jessica Berardino says that the show visits about two schools per semester and that it tends to promote discussion on a range of topics, including hot-button issues.

“Sometimes students will talk about issues that are affecting them that they wouldn’t necessarily approach a teacher with,” says Berardino.

Students from April Fisher’s marketing and advertising class went on air to talk about their recent anti-bullying campaign, and bringing “The Voice” star Chris Jamison to the school for a live concert. The Montour Straight-Gay Alliance went on air to talk about issues confronting gay students, in light of a recent anti-gay movement at McGuffey School District. Vocational students kicked off the day to talk about their courses of study at Montour and Parkway West Career and Technology Center. The day finished off with members of the girls soccer team discussing their WPIAL-winning season.

“I was very impressed with Montour and its students,” says Pintek, “especially the partnership between the academic program and the vocational/technical school off campus, the high degree of digital and technological integration throughout the school and the anti-bullying efforts. I’m equally impressed with the level of understanding and engagement of current issues by the students; it’s always enlightening to hear their fresh perspective.

A very pleasant, upbeat and stimulating visit…kudos to Montour!”
This year, Montour School District welcomed a new acting assistant superintendent, Dr. Michael Ghilani. After moving into his office, Ghilani promptly requested some artwork from talented Montour students to decorate. Erin McCleary, a senior who will be attending Edinboro University to study art education, was chosen to create a large-scale painting depicting the colors and ideas of Montour.

Excited to be selected, McCleary set about making a Jackson Pollock-inspired abstract painting with Montour's black and gold school colors and a stenciled “M.” Her artwork now hangs in Ghilani’s office.

Artist Edgar Degas once said, “Art is not what you see, but what you make others see.”

With that in mind, the Montour High School Art Department hosted its first student art show in March. In conjunction with Montour High School’s Music in our Schools Month, high school art students, along with art teachers Anita Marsico and Kimberly Roehn, curated the show. Over 110 works of art, consisting of drawings, paintings, sculptures and ceramic pieces were placed on display outside of the high school auditorium from March 4-11.

“We wanted to showcase the immense artistic talents of our students,” says art teacher Kimberly Roehn. “Our students were very excited to have the public be able to look at their work, too. We were so impressed with how many students submitted artwork for the show.”

The art show was open to the public on evenings during the high school choral and band concerts. In addition to allowing students to showcase their talents, the show also became a learning experience. Throughout the entire process, students learned how to successfully curate an art event. During class, students were taught the importance of matting, hanging, and displaying artwork within an area. This allowed students to experience the entire art process, from creation of the work to the final display.

“The students were an integral part of the entire process,” says Marsico. “We are so proud of the students’ accomplishments and their successes in creating their artwork. And I am extra proud of how they came together as a team to help put the show together. It was truly a success!”

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High school art department holds first show

Art Students take second place in competition

Superintendent welcomed with original painting

Student essays honor Montour teachers in Barnes and Noble My Favorite Teacher contest

On April 11, four Montour High School art students competed in the annual Pat Catan’s Iron Crafter Challenge. A team comprised of senior Joanne Fowkes, junior Arizona Teel, and sophomores Deanna Gray and Katie McGregor took second place in the competition. Students were chosen to compete in the competition by high school art teachers Anita Marsico and Kimberly Roehn.

Art students Joanne Fowkes, Arizona Teel, Deanna Gray and Katie McGregor teamed up to take second place in the annual Pat Catan’s Iron Crafter Challenge on April 11.

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Student essays honor Montour teachers in Barnes and Noble My Favorite Teacher contest

Teachers who innovate, inspire, encourage and push were all subjects of student-written essays submitted to the 2015 Barnes and Noble My Favorite Teacher Contest. Of the 150 Montour School District students who submitted essays to the annual contest, two nominated a teacher who won, while six received honorable mentions. Jayne McDonald of Blackhawk High School was named the winner at the Settlers Ridge store, while Montour David E. Williams teacher Jamie Chiarelli was named the winner at the South Hills store. McDonald was nominated by Montour High School student Lauren Bosco, a former student of McDonald’s. Chairelli was nominated by DEW student Alexandra Mannino.

According to Barnes and Noble Community Business Development Manager Selina Blinn, 50 percent of the decision to award teachers is based on qualities stated in the essay. One-quarter is based on the sincerity of student and one-quarter on writing quality. Though each store only names one winner, Blinn says they began awarding honorable mentions to recognize more nominated teachers.

(continued on page 27)
My Favorite Teacher contest, continued

“Many stores only recognize a store winner, but since our goal is to recognize great teachers, it doesn’t make sense to us to only award one winner!” says Blinn. “That’s why we started awarding honorable mention awards and making the event as large as possible.”

On April 14, students whose essays earned their nominated teachers honorable mentions read those essays at the Barnes and Noble Settlers Ridge location. Students also presented their nominated teacher with a certificate. The following Montour students and teachers received honorable mentions: Nicole Stagl, nominated by Hannah Delon; Denise Zeller, nominated by Kelli O’Toole; Jason Boring, nominated by Robert Walker; Robert Lukondi, nominated by Jared Ranalli; Amy DiClemente, nominated by Mackenzie Pifko; Angela Fazio, nominated by Kara Pilarski.

“Each of the stores sends their winner in to our regional contest and then the regional winners go on to the national contest where a national My Favorite Teacher is crowned,” says Blinn.

Marketing students bring Chris Jamison to Montour for exclusive concert

Each school year, students in business instructor April Fisher’s marketing and advertising classes face off against each other to see who can raise the most money to benefit a worthy cause. Students who raise the most money get to choose what their collective funds will benefit. While in years past those dollars have gone to a particular organization, students this year took it upon themselves to raise awareness about a social issue at their school.

“We tried to show that, while bullying still goes on, some ways people perceive it is different,” says one of Fisher’s students, Garrett Freese. “For instance, you might not take joking around to be bullying, but someone else may see that as bullying. Their tolerances are different.”

Freese’s class raised in excess of $700 this year, the most of any other marketing and advertising class. With those funds, his class elected to find a way to bring attention to bullying.

Students in Freese’s class planned a week’s worth of activities. One day, they had students take color-coded cards on their way to lunch and asked them to sit at the corresponding color-coded table. Freese says this was an effort to get people to sit with someone who they usually would not. Another day they had students stand in front of a camera and answer the prompts “I am” and “I am not.”

On Thursday of that week, the class went on Star 100.7 FM with radio host Bubba Snider. For the last two years, Snider has been traveling to schools with his daughters, Brianna and Michelea, talking with students about bullying. While in middle school, Brianna and Michelea were both verbally and physically harassed by classmates.

To help Freese’s class raise awareness about bullying at Montour, Bubba agreed to come to the school with Brianna and Michaela. He didn’t stop there, though. He also arranged for “The Voice” star Chris Jamison to perform.

After a powerful presentation by Bubba, Brianna and Michaela, Jamison climbed on stage to perform an exclusive concert for Montour students.

“Twenty-four hours ago he was performing in front of 12 million people on ‘The Voice’ with Wiz Khalifa,” Bubba said. “Now he’s here.”

Freese says that the money raised by his class will be used to purchase a plaque dedicated to Snider’s Shine a Light on Bullying campaign, thereby continuing to raise awareness about bullying.
“Montour High School put its talent on display in April with six performances of this year’s musical, “The Wedding Singer.” Based on the movie of the same name, the show’s premise evolves around jilted wedding singer Robbie Hart as he tries to recover from being dumped at the altar. Set in 1985, the show got plenty of laughs with anachronistic references and witty banter. Alex Archery and Julia Dewit shined in the lead roles, with a strong supporting cast made up of Daniel Crawford, Megan Cook, Alina Sheykhet, Coleton Edwards, Frankie Grenick, Megan Cook and Isabel Scrabis.

The show was directed by 2008 Montour graduate Ryan Collins and choreographed by Brian Corey-O’Conner. Nick Stamatakis was the show’s vocal director.

Montour High School Marching Band, under the direction of Devin Householder, visited and performed in Nashville, Tennessee during the band’s spring tour. Also known as Music City, Nashville proved to be the perfect destination for the high school performing group. From touring the legendary RCA Studio B to visiting backstage of the Grand Ole Opry, the band spent three days immersed in the music of the city.

On its first day in Nashville, the band explored the historic grounds of The Hermitage, president Andrew Jackson’s home away from the White House. Following lunch at BB King’s House of Blues, the band took in the sights of downtown Nashville and visited the Johnny Cash museum. That evening, the Montour Marching Band enjoyed a private dinner party at the Wildhorse Saloon, followed by live music and dancing.

On the second day of the tour, the group toured the Ryman Theater, better known as The Mother Church of Country Music and the birthplace of bluegrass music. The band spent the afternoon in the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, where they learned about the roots and traditions of American popular music. The band enjoyed seeing famous artifacts from America’s musical history, including Elvis Presley’s solid gold Cadillac. They also saw instruments and personal memorabilia from Kenny Rogers, Alan Jackson, Dolly Parton and Taylor Swift, just to name a few. That night, the group went on a haunted ghost tour in Nashville.

The final day of the trip included a backstage tour of the Grand Ole Opry and a visit to the Gaylord Opryland Resort. The highlight of the trip came that evening, when the band performed in front of the Grand Ole Opry prior to attending that night’s Opry concert. The band played a 20-minute selection from their 2014-2015 marching band repertoire and proudly represented their school by playing Montour’s alma mater and fight song.

As they performed, a large crowd of Opry patrons gathered to watch and listen. The Montour Marching Band was again recognized for their outstanding performance during the Grand Ole Opry live radio broadcast that evening.

On Feb. 26, Nicole Stagl’s early childhood development class welcomed Marcy Fenell from Animal Friends. Fenell brought along an English spaniel named Oakley to help teach children about dog safety. Using a projector in one of the library’s classrooms, Fenell gave a presentation to pre-K students about the best ways to approach, pet and interact with a dog, as well as the function of an animal shelter. To help Animal Friends in their mission, Stagl’s class also collected pet supplies such as food, toys and blankets.

High school librarian Pam Diiani says she got the idea to contact Animal Friends after seeing a videoconference the shelter broadcasted.

Stagl’s class offers morning and afternoon services to pre-K children in the district. High school students in the class develop and utilize educational programming in a multi-faceted educational setting. Classes are full for the 2015-2016 school year, but a waiting list is open.

For more information, email stagln@montourschools.com.
Recently, Joelene Holdemy, a family consumer science teacher at David E. Williams Middle School, had the privilege of attending the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Educators annual statewide conference held in State College from Feb. 22-24. The theme of the conference was “Working Together to Support Pennsylvania’s Children: One Student at a Time.”

Holdemy enjoyed her time networking with other middle level educators. She attended round-table discussions on best practices, strategies to best help students succeed, and the various emotional needs of students. Breakout sessions included: new classroom technology features, movement and fun in the classroom, STEM/STEAM initiatives, grant writing, sustainability and more.

On the last day of the conference, schools newly honored with the Schools To Watch designation gave presentations. North Hills Middle School - Holdemy’s home district - discussed their organizational structures and processes, and Pleasant Hills Middle School presented their many ways of ensuring academic excellence.

Holdemy was also honored to be nominated by DEW Principal Dominick Salpeck to receive the PAMLE Promising Practitioner Award. The award is presented to new middle level teachers who meet certain criteria. Qualifications include: enjoys teaching middle school; makes a positive difference in the school; seeks professional development and to implement new ideas; and meets the needs of individual students using effective practices such as incorporating activity-based learning, integrating higher order thinking skills, using a variety of assessment tools, and developing lessons based upon the needs and talents of her students.

Holdemy says she loves being a teacher at DEW and hopes to live up to the criteria of her award each and every day.

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Montour Wins Big in Allegheny County Sumdog Contest

By sixth grade math teacher Jamie Chiarelli

The second Allegheny County Sumdog Contest for the school year was held February 13-19. Due to inclement weather causing two days of school closings, teachers were not able to encourage participation in the contest. Many Montour students however took it upon themselves to use time at home to practice their math skills while competing against other schools in the process.

Students from David E. Williams Middle School, Burkett Elementary School, and Forest Grove Elementary School all took part in the math-based contest. A total of 27 countywide classes consisting of 779 students participated. In all, 247,786 questions were answered throughout the duration of the contest, and of those, 206,509 were answered correctly.

Montour did an outstanding job. The top two finishers in the contest were Jamie Chiarelli’s DEW block three and two classes, with scores of 935 and 922 respectively. Chiarelli’s block one class finished fifth, Brian Schrenker’s block three DEW class finished eighth. Christia Castelluccio’s Burkett class finished ninth, Jill Hardy’s Burkett class finished 11th, Natalie McGowan’s Burkett class finished 12th, Juliana Carr’s Forest Grove class finished 13th, Janine Zozo’s Forest Grove class finished 23rd, and Jacqueline Postufka’s Forest Grove class finished 24th.

For winning the contest, Chiarelli’s block two class will receive 30 free subscriptions to Sumdog.

A number of sixth grade Montour students placed in the top ten. They were: Julianna Paulin, first place with a score of 997; George Francis, third place, with a score of 989; Jacob Bonato, fourth place with a score of 979; Aidan DeLuca, fifth place, with a score of 967; Vanessa Rodgers, sixth place, with a score of 966; Domenic Hoffman, seventh place, with a score of 959; Jamie Lanuka, eighth place with a score of 958; Austin Schaltenbrand, 10th place, with a score of 957.

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A number of sixth grade Montour students placed in the top ten. They were: Julianna Paulin, first place with a score of 997; George Francis, third place, with a score of 989; Jacob Bonato, fourth place with a score of 979; Aidan DeLuca, fifth place, with a score of 967; Vanessa Rodgers, sixth place, with a score of 966; Domenic Hoffman, seventh place, with a score of 959; Jamie Lanuka, eighth place with a score of 958; Austin Schaltenbrand, 10th place, with a score of 957.
Students take second in Allegheny Intermediate Unit challenge

Seventh grade gifted students at David E. Williams Middle School participated in a STEM Design Challenge at Duquesne University on April 8. The competition, sponsored by Fisher Scientific and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, challenged students to create a K’Nex structure that could move a ping-pong ball from one side of a table to another, lengthwise.

Students had two hours to build their structure, which had to be made only from K’Nex pieces, and were limited to using 1,400 K’Nex pieces.

Delaney Broad, Isabella Mannino, Maysen Moll and Rachel White, under the team name Steel City Girls, placed second out of 39 teams. Their structure used a motor to tap a ping-pong ball into a zig-zag patterned ramp leading into a holding tank. From the holding tank, a rotating claw picked up the ping-pong ball and placed it into a cage.

Middle School students compete in battery-powered car race

By Student Writer Katie Liu

David E. Williams sixth-graders participated in a battery-powered car competition March 2. The competition was organized by the Ingomar Middle School gifted department and took place in the Duquesne University ballroom. To participate, students were required to use STEM-based principles to build a car powered by a motor consisting of one or two AA batteries. Cars were required to have a body, frame, eyelet(s), and at least one wheel. Students were allowed to work in teams of two to four to construct their car. They were also required to create a PowerPoint presentation that included a title page, design drawing, materials list and numbered assembly procedures. A description of a performance-related feature, explanation of a problem and solution the team encountered, as well as pictures of the team all needed to be included as well.

Sixth grade students in Dena Baron’s accelerated science class worked in groups of two to three and spent roughly five weeks of class time building their battery-powered cars. Once the cars were built, each group with a working car participated in a tournament to determine which of the ten fastest cars would compete at the Allegheny County race.

Battery powered cars entered in the competition have to run approximately 20 meters on a wooden floor in the Duquesne ballroom on one-meter wide lanes. An eyelet on each car attaches to a fishing line sitting 1.5 centimeters off the floor. Cars run in heats of eight. A starter from the team starts the car while holding a piece of wood in front of it and releases the block to start the race. A catcher at the end of the fishing line facing the starter catches the car after it runs past the finish line. The time it takes for the car to reach the finish line is recorded as the team’s score. The first three trials of each car in the preliminary heats decide which 16 cars go onto the semi-finals.

Ten cars from DEW Middle School participated in the preliminary round, and two groups went on to the semifinals. Blair Shick and Nicholas Dettling, along with Katie Liu and Julianna Paulin, participated in the semi-finals. Sixteen cars then raced in double elimination rounds until four cars were left to race in the finals. Julianna and Katie’s team won an award for best design document.

Performing with the high school band

Several of Rob Roehn’s David E. Williams Middle School band members performed with the Montour High School concert band March 12. DEW students Isabella Mannino, Taylor Froehlich, NiNi Curcione, John Hric and Nathan Delsanto performed “Aggressivo” with the high school band to close out the 2015 Music In Our Schools Month band concert.

David E. Williams students Isabella Mannino, Taylor Froehlich, NiNi Curcione, John Hric and Nathan Delsanto performed with the high school band in March.
Fifth grade gifted students Luke Smarra, Dylan Sparkenbaugh, Nicholas Zezza, Miles Tirone, McKenna Robinson, Hannah George, Suzy Safko, Morgan Hayes and Olivia Lyscik earned a special merit award for their participation in the Phipps Conservatory Fairchild Challenge. The award acknowledged students’ “delightful and informative performance” in challenge number four: eco-scientist skit/mini-musical. The award earned students 194 out of 200 points.

As part of the challenge, students were required to research the life and work of a scientist whose work had focused on a significant environmental issue. They were then asked to reimagine their chosen environmental scientist as a superhero. Rachel Carson, an environmentalist who fought to have pesticides regulated by the government, was chosen. A music video students created integrated elements of research, singing and performance.
Forest Grove students recognize local military personnel with Operation Ziploc

Beginning in February, students and staff at Forest Grove Elementary began collecting items for “goody bags” for 911th Air Reserve Station troops. The cause was one of particular importance to a second grade student whose father is an Air Force reservist.

Kennaday Martindale wanted to do something special for her father, Marshall, and the other servicemen and servicewomen who are deploying from the 911th. She and her teacher Holly Nicastro organized an effort to collect convenience items that troops can take overseas. Each grade level designated items to collect, including gum, trail mix, eye drops, lip balm, post cards, candy and more.

Once all items were collected, second grade students filled one-gallon Ziploc bags for each person who would be deployed. Students took great pride in this task and couldn’t wait for them to be collected!

Students also wrote letters and drew pictures to be included with the goody bags. Sentiments conveyed in the letters indicated that they understand the sacrifice these servicemen and women make when deployed and have to spend many months away from their families.

On Tuesday, April 28, Martindale and others from the 911th visited Forest Grove. Students lined the halls and cheered the men on, waving flags and chanting “USA!” Many students stopped them to thank them for their service to their country and for protecting them. It was a tremendous tribute and send-off for them!

Through the effort, the Forest Grove community once again demonstrated its thoughtfulness and generosity.

Technology adds to Read Across America Month

Members of Montour High School’s Future Educators of America visited Forest Grove Elementary School on March 2 to celebrate Dr. Seuss’ birthday and kick off Read Across America Week. FEA members and sponsor Lauren Langman visited each classroom, reading a Dr. Seuss story and facilitating an online story-writing activity. Utilizing the Seussville Story Maker on seussville.com, FEA members helped elementary students choose their own backgrounds, sounds, characters, and dialogue to create a narrative. They were then able to watch their story unfold on interactive digital Promethean Boards.

The rest of the week, Forest Grove students decorated the school’s hallways, welcomed guest readers, dressed as Dr. Seuss characters and constructed Seuss-themed art projects. Kindergarten students created Seuss-themed rhymes and art projects while solving Seuss-themed math problems. They also ate green eggs and ham.

First grade students decorated the hallways in honor of their favorite Seuss book, “The Lorax,” while second-graders participated in a Google Hangouts session and were read to by students from David E. Williams Middle School.

This year marked the third that students utilized technology to virtually read to each other. They also completed Seuss-themed games, puzzles and learning activities. Additionally, they enjoyed a reading picnic and a book exchange.

Once again, the celebration was a huge success and students had fun learning how to love the gift of books.

Third-graders get visit from Robinson Township K-9 unit

On Feb. 6, Burkett Elementary third-graders welcomed Robinson Township K-9 Officer Frank Bryan and his police dog, Sarik. After having previously read a story about a police dog, Burkett students were able to build on their understanding of the role of a police dog by seeing one in person. Bryan gave a presentation to students about his and Sarik’s role within the department and then took questions. Questions ranged from Sarik’s age to his favorite toy. Bryan also passed around to students a bullet-proof vest that Sarik wears and a protective sleeve officers use during dog training. Bryan explained to students that he enjoys making presentations like the one at Burkett, and students in turn appreciated the visit.
Burkett fourth-grade ELA students utilize Legos in collaborative exercise

Kelly Butera and Kristin Zyskowski’s fourth grade English language arts students at Burkett Elementary School recently worked collaboratively to depict a “snapshot” of a story they had read. Students from each class teamed up with peers from the opposite class and chose their favorite scene to write about in a summary. Students then used Legos to construct a story model accompanying their summaries.

It’s not often that classes get to work together, but with the availability of the STEAM Lab at Burkett, the possibilities are endless. STEAM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, art and math. Burkett’s STEAM Lab opened last school year, with the intention of creating a multi-purpose space utilizing creativity and technology in a collaborative atmosphere.

For this recent exercise, students were each assigned a story but were not told with whom they would be paired. By working with someone less familiar to them, they were able to share ideas while learning how to compromise in their decision-making. Because Lego kits were being shared, students had to get creative and be problem solvers with their snapshots. Some elements needed to be built from scratch.

The exercise required collaboration, communication, creativity and problem solving. With that philosophy in mind, Lego kits were introduced at Burkett last year to enhance ELA resources via the Lego Education Program. The program was headed by Assistant to the Superintendent Jason Burik and Director of Curriculum Dr. Chris Stone.

“I was open to the idea of working with someone from another classroom, but I didn’t know who I was working with,” says fourth-grader Brock Janeda. “I also didn’t want to be stuck doing all of the work.” Student Elise Brobeck said that despite knowing students from the other class, she was still a little nervous to find out who her partner would be.

As part of the exercise, students were also asked to collaborate on a written paragraph. They were required to use vocabulary words from the story’s lesson to explain their constructed Lego scenes and use sensory details to describe what was occurring. Some of the stories students had to describe were read at the beginning of the school year, which required them to refresh their memories.

“It helped me better understand what was happening in the story,” says student Ty Reed in reference to using Legos to depict a scene.

At the end of the activity, students displayed their Lego creations around the lab and completed a “gallery walk.” While observing their peers’ work, students enjoyed trying to guess which story each group’s snapshot depicted. Both students and teachers are looking forward to the next time they can collaborate with one another and work with Legos.

“The activity was a super fun way to learn,” said student Autumn DuMontier. “I would like to do it again!”

Science is fun: elementary students make wonderful science fair projects!

Over 100 kindergarten through fourth grade students at Forest Grove and Burkett Elementary schools completed and displayed projects of their choosing during the 2015 Montour Elementary Science Fair on March 13.

Project topics included physics of a curve ball, capillary action in celery, color changing carnations, pop rocks, crystal formations, bread mold, fertilizer effect on plants, how white light is made, cleaning pennies, air pressure, density of water and other liquids, how what kids drink affects smiles, invisible magnetic fields, slime, germs, objects floating or sinking, food spoilage, volcano eruptions, solar panel, freezing, color changing milk, effect of Ph on bacteria, tricky eyes, drying a phone, gummy bear science, electricity with lemons and potatoes, “oobleck,” recycled robots, elephant toothpaste, soap, paper airplanes, air pollution, bouncing balls, electromagnets and more.

The evening also included ten exciting hands-on “solar science” adventure stations, presented by the Carnegie Science Center, and stationed by 20 student volunteers from David E. Williams Middle School and Montour High School. A special science table was sponsored by eighth grade student Jacinda Safko, who is working toward earning her Girl Scout Silver Award.

The science fair challenges students to be scientists and not only observe, but also explore and think deeply about the world. Students used the scientific method to conduct an experiment, observe, measure results and draw a conclusion. It also encouraged them to have fun, make a mess and maybe stink up the house.

The science fair and associated science assembly, both held during the same week, are part of an ongoing, in-school joint effort by Montour schools and the PTA to spark interest in STEAM - an acronym for science, technology, engineering, arts and math - as well as a life-long enjoyment of learning.
On April 29, Montour welcomed former NFL running back and ESPN commentator Merril Hoge to the athletic center to talk with student athletes about the risks and benefits of playing contact sports. The visit was made possible by Allegheny Health Network, which provides Montour with athletic trainers.

Hoge played six seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers and one with the Chicago Bears before his career was cut short by a series of concussions. The final one he sustained required him to be resuscitated.

Hoge, though, told students that if he had the chance to do it all over again he would. Hoge said that the life lessons gained from playing football far outweighed the risks.

Addressing an increase in awareness about concussions in recent years, Hoge urged parents and student athletes to do the research on their own and to be aware of the symptoms and dangers, but not to avoid sports altogether.

Hoge visited with Craig Castor, an outpatient rehabilitation services supervisor with AHN. Castor said AHN is utilizing a new concussion assessment program called C3 Logix. Using an iPad, a trainer can evaluate a patient for a concussion by measuring balance, reaction time, motor function and visual acuity.

**Spartan Athletics News**

**Two more seniors sign letters of intent**

Two more Montour student athletes have accepted college scholarships to compete at the post-secondary level.

Alexa Smarra has signed to play volleyball for Davis and Elkins College. Smarra was first team all-conference, first team all WPIAL, and first team all-state her senior year.

Adam Check has signed a college letter of intent to play football for Robert Morris University. Check was a first team all-conference punter and kicker for the Spartans. Check is also a member of the varsity baseball team.

**Montour students recognized with MAC award**

Seniors Adam Check and Amanda Bruscemi were both selected to receive the MAC conference student spotlight award, and were honored at a banquet April 3 at The Fez in Hopewell. The award recognizes student-athletes who show great promise on the field and in the classroom. Bruscemi earned a MAC tennis championship and was the top singles player at Montour these past four years. Check was named to the first team all-conference as both a punter and kicker in football. Both are honor roll students.

**Merril Hoge visits Montour**

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