Summer STEAM Camp returns

Last summer, 70 students from the Montour and Cornell school districts participated in Montour’s first-ever Summer STEAM Camp. Over the course of five half days, campers explored potential career paths through hands-on activities that mixed learning with play. Campers conducted DNA analysis, built robots, learned how to use Photoshop, wrote computer code, and more.

This past June, Montour’s Summer STEAM Camp returned with an even larger lineup of courses and around 170 campers. The camp took place June 20-24, during National Week of Making, and was nominated as a White House Champion of Change of Making. Many courses had a Pittsburgh theme that celebrated Pittsburgh’s bicentennial.

Throughout the week, Montour educators piloted new ideas in an effort to encourage independent learning through hands-on exploration and creativity.

“I was extremely impressed with the students’ creativity throughout the week,” says assistant to the superintendent Jason Burik. “We received so many positive comments about the program and that speaks volumes to the type of programming our teachers put together for each course.”

Given the popularity of this year’s camp, Burik says the district is already planning another camp next year and will be offering a discount for siblings.

Last year, elementary teacher Amanda McDermott, who worked with Burik and Montour superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani to start the Summer STEAM Camp, taught a course that touched on a range of scientific and technology-based concepts. This year, her course focused solely on app design. Students in the course gained an introduction to coding, including Java, by using various software programs. Campers coded games and animation sequences. One even created a currency converter.

For art teacher Marcia Chauvet, the camp allowed her to revive a program she completed a few years ago under a grant that involved creating glass mosaics depicting each of the district’s school buildings. Chauvet says she does not currently teach mosaics in her classroom, though it’s something she wouldn’t mind adding.

“If it’s something that makes them feel successful and they like it, I add it,” says Chauvet. “They don’t have to be artists.”

Chauvet’s campers learned how to safely grind and cut glass, and to grout. One of their projects was a stained glass rendition of the Pittsburgh Pirate mascot.

Also new to the camp this year was a cooking class led by fourth grade teacher Kelly Butera, Courtney Gill of the Nutrition Group and school chef Kim Wodoff. Each day, campers learned how to prepare a different Pittsburgh-centric food. They kicked off the week by making hand-cut fries and homemade coleslaw for Primanti Brothers sandwiches. Throughout the week, they also made Italian wedding soup, Eat’n Park-style smiley cookies, baklava and pierogies, all from scratch.

Yet another new course introduced students in grades K-2 to physics. At a presentation on June 24 in front of parents, campers from the course articulated how boats float by displacing water and roller coasters are impacted by kinetic and potential energy. To study these concepts, campers spent much of the week building rollercoasters out of pipe insulation and marbles, and bridges out of sticks and candy. They then tested their designs.

“They love it,” says Forest Grove kindergarten teacher Erin Hric, who co-taught the course with Lynne Jones. “It’s so much fun as a teacher to let them explore and learn on their own.”

In a Lego architecture course taught by Burik and sixth grade teacher Melissa Palmer, students built structures and completed challenges. They also created a replica of the Roberto Clemente Bridge, which will be donated to the Roberto Clemente Museum in Lawrenceville.

A course taught by Burkett Project Lead the Way instructor Rick Barie also used Legos, along with Lego Education WeDo Construction Sets that allowed students to build models that could be moved and controlled using software. Campers in the course also built a drone using a FlyBrix Lego kits and learned how drones are being used by fire departments from Kennedy VFD member Don Martin, who gave campers a demonstration using the department’s own drone.

In a Minecraft course taught by Beth Hobbs, campers built 3D models of district school buildings. In yet another course taught by Bill Black, campers designed racecar bodies the size of matchbox cars using Autodesk Inventor and then printed their designs on the school’s 3D printer. They tested their designs by racing them. Winners received acrylic plaques etched by graphic design instructor Bradin Jasin, who led his own Summer STEAM camp course. Jasin’s campers gained an introduction to Photoshop, created screen prints to make custom t-shirts and crafted designs using the school’s laser etcher.

For a video of the camp, go to www.montoursteamcamp.com.
Professional development programs make Montour a draw for regional educators

Less than a week later, Montour opened its doors during Remake Learning Days week. In conjunction with LUMA Institute, the school gave visitors an introduction to Human-Centered Design thinking, which administrators used to develop Montour’s own core values: (1) Putting Children First; (2) Promoting a Growth Mindset; and (3) Supporting Learning Culture. Visitors then toured the school’s state-of-the-art facilities to experience how Montour has instituted those values and the Human-Centered Design philosophy.

Also in May, Montour welcomed educators for a workshop on digital citizenship to help districts become Common Sense Certified. Montour was Common Sense Certified last year. Later this year, on Nov. 7 and 8, The Pittsburgh Technology Council will hold its Three Rivers Educational Technology Conference at the high school. The event will build on the National Educational Technology Plan, released in 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education, which focuses on reimagining the role of technology in education. The Coalition of Schools Networked will partner with the PTC to incorporate a chief technology office clinic, which is expected to draw educational technology leaders from across the mid-Atlantic region.

For more information about TRETC 2016 and call for presentations, contact Justin Driscoll at the Pittsburgh Technology Council at jdriscoll@pqtech.org.

Montour transportation: experienced, district-operated service

By Director of Transportation Robert Wagner

Montour is one of the few remaining school districts in Allegheny County that continues to operate its own transportation department. By servicing Montour daily routes, athletics and extra-curricular activities, along with over 40 private, parochial and special needs schools, district vehicles log over 600,000 miles per year.

The Montour School District Board of Directors continues to support the in-house service that has been a trademark of the district. A contract with the Montour Transportation ESP, PSEA/NEA was recently ratified that provides cost certainty and consistent, reliable service for the next four years.

After six years of not purchasing any new vehicles, there has been a commitment to update the fleet of 70 school-certified buses and vans. Eleven units were purchased in 2014, seven in 2015 and five are currently on order for delivery during the 2016-2017 school year.

All vehicles are equipped with two-way radios so that the dispatch office can be in communication at all times. A camera system with audio capability, which is key activated, functions inside each bus and van. A GPS system that records location, time, speed and other functions is installed on most buses.

New, full-sized and minibuses are all delivered with a child minder system that is deactivated when the driver walks to the back of the bus and pushes a button. This ensures that the vehicle has been checked for students after each route. Drivers perform a safety check before and after each route and school vehicles are inspected each summer by the Pennsylvania State Police.

The department presently has a dedicated staff of 75 drivers and chaperones, plus four mechanics/service personnel and a secretary. There is a strong sense of community loyalty among drivers, 85 percent of whom are district residents. Employees are seen around the community and at district functions as parents and grandparents of current and former students.

The staff is very experienced. Five drivers - Charlotte Easley, Marian Macek, Debbie Schramm, Jane Tallon and Anna Teyssier - have driven students for over 30 years. Mechanics Byron Kautzman and Doug Carson have maintained the fleet for over 35 years, along with Jim Connor, who recently retired. By Director of Transportation Robert Wagner

This past April, Joan Obeldobel retired after 43 years of service. She transported multiple generations and was a trusted, familiar face for many residents. For more, see page 6.

The department’s goal is to provide safe transportation in a caring environment.
It takes two: the practical benefits of K-12 public education and higher education partnerships

By Director of Innovation Justin Aglio

The concept of integrating virtual reality and edtech products into classrooms can be daunting for the average educator. How do you integrate effectively when you can’t predict the outcome, or when you don’t know what you’re looking for?

In the Greater Pittsburgh region, a strategic partnership has been created to introduce new and emerging educational technologies into the classroom. The technologies supplement teaching methodology with guided practice for students and detailed progress reports for teachers.

In August 2015, Carnegie Mellon University and Montour School District formalized a partnership called the CMU LearnLab at Montour. This on-campus research center, housed in a classroom at Montour High School, was designed to advance K-12 educational research by providing the latest advances in the science of learning and edtech. The CMU LearnLab at Montour brings together K-12 classroom teachers and university researchers for research collaborations, introducing evidence-based education technologies into the classroom with the goal of taking science and mathematics instruction to the next level.

Let’s take a peek inside at how this partnership is bridging the gap between edtech research and classroom practice - making teachers more effective than ever before.

Bringing virtual reality experiences into science classrooms

Integrating VR and simulations in the classroom isn’t easy. How do you design a lesson around it? Nesra Yannier, a Ph.D. candidate at CMU’s Human Computer Interaction Institute, has a few ideas - and knows how to bring personalized learning into the mix.

NoRILLA - or Novel Research-Based Intelligent Lifelong Learning Apparatus - which founder Yannier developed, is a mixed-reality educational system that bridges physical and virtual education to improve children’s science learning and enjoyment. The system uses an in-depth camera and a specialized algorithm to give interactive personalized feedback to children as they experiment and make discoveries in their physical environment.

Through the support of The Sprout Fund’s Educational Technology Refinery Grant, Montour is conducting a study with Yannier. This study is designed to discover if second-graders learn early physics principles better when interactively predicting and observing experimental comparisons on a physical earthquake simulation - rather than when seeing a video of the same.

But how does this help teachers? Let’s consider another example. Students in Tina Frank’s College in High School chemistry course participated in a chemistry virtual lab that showed significant learning gains. The research study consisted of online activities designed to help students apply chemistry knowledge in authentic contexts. At the end of the two-week study, a detailed report - analyzed student by student - assessing different skill levels was provided. Thus, the report enabled Frank to modify classroom instruction based on which topics students found challenging - or had already mastered.

As in Frank’s class, data is an extremely useful product of teacher-higher education partnerships, especially when there’s so much frustration with existing data solutions. According to the Teachers Know Best report from the Gates Foundation, “67% of teachers are not satisfied with existing data/tools” out there.

Acquiring new data while piloting new math technologies

Science wasn’t the only space where new forms of data -and subsequent instructional implications - came out of these partnerships. In another study at Montour’s David E. Williams Middle School, students in Dana Rongaus’ fifth grade classroom helped pilot software called the Fraction Tutor. Students had to collaborate with a partner in order to learn fraction skills involving operations (addition and subtraction), as well as comparing fractions, finding the least common denominator, and identifying equivalent fractions.

While students were working with Fraction Tutor, researchers captured streamed webcam data of students’ work and facial expressions, along with audio. Their “conceptual fraction knowledge” scores - being able to identify other students’ errors - increased from 30 percent to a 98 percent.

“It was the collaboration component that I enjoyed the most, as I heard rich conversations taking place with partners, as well as the implementation of problem solving strategies,” said Rongaus.

At the end of the day, this isn’t just about Montour. This collaboration can be a model for other district/university partnerships, as well.

Why all this effort for a partnership?

In the course of normal teaching, a classroom teacher will essentially experiment while testing different strategies. Through this partnership between university researchers and public school educators, we are able to formalize the research, validate the results and make it a more integral part of teacher professional development. After all, Montour teachers have action research projects (what ASCD describes as teachers experimenting in the classroom) linked to Montour’s evaluation process, so as more Montour teachers become interested in incorporating research, the CMU LearnLab will be available to the district for consultations.

“Our experience partnering with Montour School District has been amazing. We have introduced educational technologies that have been validated by cutting edge research to numerous classrooms, ranging from fifth grade math to high school chemistry,” shared Dr. Ran Liu, a post-doctorate fellow at CMU. “The CMU LearnLab at Montour partnership is paving the way to closing the gap between edtech research and classroom use.”

Teachers shouldn’t have to engage in experiments alone. Researchers shouldn’t have to make assumptions about the classroom. Partnerships are one way of closing that gap.

A version of this article originally appeared on www.edsurge.com on April 21, 2016.
Montour's Class of 2016

The Montour High School Class of 2016 commencement exercises were held June 2. Special congratulations to salutatorian Connor Wilson and valedictorian Hunter Smutney. Congratulations and best wishes to the Class of 2016! They are as follows:

Jeffrey Jon Anderson - PW
Sahbria Marie Anderson
Alexander Kevin Arroyo - H/BMSA
Cody William Ariel - H
Michael Patrick Arnold
Zachary Thomas Azzarelli - H
Walter Joseph Baker - NHS/DH
Brianne Lynn Bangs - PW
Colton Kenneth Barth - NHS/DH
Alexandra Megan Bauer - H/BMSA
Aiden Robert Beck - H
Dylan Martin Beck - H
Elise Caitlin Beidle - H
Melanie Dawn Beilers Beiler - H
Nicole Marie Benigni - NHS/DH/BMSA/TM
Jacob Connor Bombardier
Benjamin Douglas Bowman - H/PW
Talen Matthew Bowman - NHS/HH
Julie Ann Bowser - H
Jacob Marshall Bradrick
Bryan Daniel Brogley
Nathanial Robert Bruce - H
Caleb Thomas Bryan - NS/H/HH/ESA
Alaina Renee Buell - H
Emily Elizabeth Burianek - H
Grady Weston Butler - NHS/HH
Michael Jason Butter
Gianna Morgan Campalong - H
Roberto Lorenzo Carrabba - PW
Tyler Love Carswell - H
William Connor Casey - H
Karlee Jon Cato - H
Adam Paul Celidonia
William August Cook II - H/TM
Dominic Giovanni Corona - H/TM
Daniel Joseph Crawford - H/TM
Arn Demetrius Criswell
Dakota Guy Crivella
Nicholas Brian Cronin - H/ESA
Reese Ashton Crown - H
Jacob Michael Cruny - H
Kirsten Ann Czytzer - H/BMSA
Caley Marie Cubbon
Brian Patrick Dabney - H
Heaten Vincent Davis - H
Seth Richard Davis - H
Jordan Matthew Deller - NHS/H/ESA
Kerry Eileen Dietrich - H
Jonathan Carlo DiSalle
Julia Nina DiSalle - NHS/HH/BMSA
Mason Thomas Edison - PW
Cecilia Louise Esposito - H
Nicole Marie Evanovich - H
Aja Marie Evans - H
Anthony William Fiorentini
Anthony Paul Fiset - NHS/HH
Brianne Lynn Forney - H
Georgia Mae Fowkes - H
Sara Marie Fratangelo - H/BMSA
Jordan Lee Friedman - H
Tresslyn Valeria Froehlich
Alec Joseph Gamble - H
Raami Savannah Gauthier
Adam David Gielas - H/PW
Phillip George Gieske - PW
Zoe Madison Graham - H/TM
Blair Ann Gratzer - H/PW
Jackson Alexander Gray - H/ESA
Kailen Miech Grimm
Frank Ernest Guerrera - H
Patricia Marie Halajecio - H/PW
Christopher Todd Hanlon - H
Anthony Alan Hartwick
David Marlin Hasleau III - NHS/HH
Brandon Charles Hemeny - H
Alyssa Marie Henry - H
Zachary Tyler Herskovitz - H
Daniel Joseph Heyer - H
Jacob Kenneth Hill Jr.
Alex Charles Hoffman - BMSA
Jules Jordan Anthony Hollerich Jr. - PW
Lexi Elizabeth Hollis
Veronica Faith Holzapfel - H/BMSA
Darrien Renee Tereck Hopkins - H
Taylor Michelle Horsley - H
Caleb Gregory Hric - H/ESA
Tyler James Hudson - H
Zachary Michael Jablonski - H
Norbert John Janas
Jack Taylor Johnson - H
Chyna Nicole Jones - H
Leah Christianne Joseph - H
Hannah Ariel Kanuch - NHS/DH
John Raymond Karabinos - H
Hayley Louise Kendall
Julia Volitich Knapp - H
Hayley Marie Kocyan - H
Skyler Paige Kokocinski - NHS/HH/TM
Emily Anna Korkitsky
Kayleigh Susen Koss - H
Sylvia Samantha Kraunacker - PW
DevonnMichael Kraus - PW
Joseph Thomas Kuchnicki - H
Randall Anthony Labrie - H
Madison Jaye Lapre
Kaitlin Bernice Laskowsky - PW
Hannah Nicole Lepore - H
Morgan Marie Lucas
Carly Leigh Maedinger - H/PW
Jay Alfred Mantini - NHS/DH/ESA
Meghan Leigh Marcinko - H
Alex Joseph McKibben

Ian Eugene McLean
Meghan Marie McNally - H
Tyler David McNally
Hope Johnne McNemar - H/PW
Alegga Lopez Meraz - H
Daniel Joseph Meyers - H
Jade Elizabeth Miley - H
Adam Jeffrey Miller - H/PW
Alysia Marie Miller - PW
Bradley John Miller - H/PW
Genevieve Rose Miller - NHS/DH
Saige Elizabeth Mireur - H
Brady Anthony Minetti - H
Gina Elaine Mifitras - H
Alexa Catherine Mitro - H
MacKenzie Paige
Mohr-Bague - PW
Alexandria Elizabeth Myers - H
Devin Richard Nestler
Danielle Kathleen Nuttridge - H
Shelby Anne O'forney
Thomas Pack
Anna Pan - NHS/DH/BMSA
Dana Marie Parker - NHS/DH
Milan Bhargav Patel - D/EESA
Madison Taylor Pendell - H
Molly Elizabeth Pfanner - H/BMSA
Lyndsay Rae Pinto - H/PW
Angelica Marie Plutko - H
Lane Joseph Postava - PW
Keaton Graham Powell - H
Julia Taylor Pravolchak - NHS/HH
Celeena Marie Priddy - H
Sean Arthur Ramirez
Keegan William Adams Ramser - NHS/DH/BMSA
Rachel Ann Reiff - H
Abrielle Noel Rendar - H/PW
Christian Anthony Revetta
Gregory Robert Risinger - H/ESA
Noelle Lynn Rosko - H
Coury James-Robert Rust
Alexis Rayanne Ruta - NHS/H/ESA/TM
Stone Alexander Schaldenbrand
Nathan Thomas Schneider - H/ESA
Haley Lorroso Schosch - H
Ryan John Sharkey - H/ESA
Christine Lynne Shine - NHS/HH/BMSA
Cameron Scott Shinton - H/PW
Sage Renee Sienerth - H
Allega Noelle Silvat
Daniel Terrence Skwarch - H/TM
Katherine Lynne Skwarch
Matthew Tyler Slesinger - NHS/HH/ESA
Kevin Francis Smith - PW

Nicholas Phillip Smith
Hunter Austin Smutney - NHS/DH
Jordan Anthony Spaniel
Rees Zane Stehle
Bradley David Stoyer - H/ESA
Christopher Dennis Stuchell - H/TM
Alexis Marie Sullivan - H
Jennifer Yuan Sun - NHS/DH/BMSA
Savanna Nicolett Svihula
Christina Swantek - H/PW
Amanda Leightanne Sweeney - H/TM
Benjamin John Sweeney
Kelsey Marie Swimkosky
Thomas Vincent Sylvester - H
DuJuan Lee Taylor
Jarrett Eamon Taylor - NHS/DH
Sheyane Lynn Taylor
Arizona Lee Teel
Paule James Termi
Gabrielle Lauren Totino - NHS/DH
Michael Anthony Tracy - H
Ollivia Don Trevenen - H/TM
Meghan Elizabeth Trasky - H
Kasymia Marrie Turcoy - HH
Dante Michael Vezio - PW
Abigail Grace Vietmeier - NHS/DH
Andrew Scott Vietmeier - H
Noah Edward Vietmeier - H
Sydney Lauren Vlasach - NHS/HH/BMSA/TM
Thomas Michael Wall - PW
Jordan Alexandra Waltz - NHS/DH/BMSA
Matthew Alan Warner - PW
Isabella Marie Waslowsky - H
Joseph Willam Waslowsky III - H/ESA
Nicolete Alexa Webb - NHS/DH/BMSA
Anthony Zachary Webster - PW
Clara Page Weibel - NHS/DH/BMSA
Jenna Grace Wellsbacher - H/BMSA
Alexandra Marie White
Breanna Marie Wiegand - H
Brandon Lamont Wilkerson - H/TM
Connor Jay Wilson - NHS/DH
Lauren Marie Windisch - H
Robert Nathaniel Wisner - PW
Russell James Wood - PW
Nicholas Charles Woodcock - H
Alexander George Yanosick
Nicholas Paul Yanosick - H
Carolyn Marie Young - NHS/DH/TM
Cody Robert Zakowski - H

NHS – National Honor Society
DH – Distinguished Honors
HH – High Honors
PW – Parkway West Career and Technology Center
ESA – Engineering STEM Academy
BMSA – Biomedical Sciences STEM Academy
TM – Tri-M Music Honor Society
Montour produces "Anything Goes"

Montour’s Cure Finders club helped raise over $30,000 for the American Cancer Society in May by hosting the American Cancer Society’s Relay For Life Pittsburgh West event. Lyndsie McPadden, community manager for the Relay For Life, says that the organization had previously approached Montour about hosting a smaller event for students at the suggestion of Diana Siebert, a Montour resident and administrative volunteer with the American Cancer Society. That was before the venue for this year’s Relay For Life Pittsburgh West event fell through. When it did, McPadden approached Montour about hosting the Relay For Life Pittsburgh West event. She says the school did not disappoint. “They were really on board with it,” says McPadden. “They were super excited to take on the event.”

Over the next five months, McPadden worked with Cure Finders sponsor and 11th grade AP European history teacher Nichole Gutt to coordinate and plan the event. This year marked Gutt’s first as the Cure Finders sponsor.

Despite their best attempts at planning, though, the day hit a snag when the weather failed to cooperate. With rain pouring down on the track where the event was supposed to take place, the custodial staff and event organizers moved the entire event into the athletic center. From noon until 11 p.m., as rain poured down outside, teams of walkers enjoyed a carnival-like atmosphere inside as they circled the athletic center’s track. McPadden says that while money is raised leading up to the event, additional dollars are generated the day of, meaning those dollars could have been lost were it not for Montour’s organizers acting so quickly. Because they did, the American Cancer Society was able to get that much closer to their fundraising goal of $39,000 this year and participants were encouraged to return next year. The American Cancer Society and Montour have already agreed to hold the event at the school again next May.

Teams at this year’s event included ones sponsored by FedEx Ground, Bayer Heritage Federal Credit Union and Olivia’s Banquet Room. Montour’s Interact Club, Cure Finders and National Honor Society also sponsored teams. To raise money, the Cure Finders made t-shirts to sell throughout the week and the day of the event.

“Your facilities and custodian team [were] incredible,” wrote McPadden in an email to Montour administrators afterwards.

“This to me shows a genuine school that comes together as a community and serves others. I have been in this position for four Relay seasons and can honestly say that this type of generosity, care and integrity is rare to come by…Our Relay teams, including several from FedEx Ground commented throughout the day of what a nice facility it was and how grateful they were to be out of the weather.”

Anyone interested in getting involved in the 2017 Relay For Life Pittsburgh West event should contact Lyndsie McPadden at (412) 919-1049 or Lyndsie.McPadden@Cancer.Org.

Montour hosts production of “Anything Goes”

For its annual musical this year, Montour produced “Anything Goes,” a romantic comedy of errors set on board an ocean liner. Playing the leads were Alex Archev as Billy Crocker, Haley Casperson as Reno Sweeney, Miranda Lynn as Hope Harcourt, Daniel Crawford as Sir Evelyn Oakleigh, Abby Schick as Mrs. Wadsworth T. Harcourt, Colton Barth as Elisha J. Whitney, Coleton Edwards as Moonface Martin, Madison Pendel as Bonnie and Billy Cook as Bishop Henry T. Dobson.

The production was directed by Ryan Collins and Nick Stamatis, with Cara Flodine as choreographer. It ran on dates in April.
Blake O’Malley qualifies for statewide 24 competition

By Sixth Grade teacher Jamie Chiarelli

On May 11, David E. Williams Middle School held its annual in-house tournament for 24, a card game in which both sides of a deck of cards each have a different set of four numbers. Cards are worth one, two or three points, depending on the difficulty of the card. The object of the game is to add, subtract, multiply and/or divide, using all the numbers just once, to total 24. Mathematics is the “science and language of patterns,” and thus, students need to look for patterns that will make 24. Students who recognize these common patterns are the ones who excel at the game.

During our recent tournament, fifth and sixth grade students competed against one another to crown a school champion. Coming out on top was sixth-grader Blake O’Malley. Winning the school championship enabled Blake to qualify for a countywide 24 tournament, which was held May 26 at the Galleria of Mt. Lebanon. In that tournament, Blake finished in third place. He won two medals: silver for qualifying for the semi-finals and gold for qualifying for the finals. Blake’s third-place finish qualified him to compete in the state championship 24 tournament at the Keystone Atrium Building in Harrisburg on June 15. There, he competed against 180 finalists in grades 4 through 8.

DEW Day at the Museum

By Student Writers Ambika Rajasekaran and Liana Santiago

On April 28, the sixth grade social studies classes of Dena Baron, Melissa Palmer and Michele Vrana hosted DEW Day at the Museum. It was a creative and unique way to introduce students to the family backgrounds of their peers. Each student was asked to bring in an item - or artifact - that was important to them. These artifacts were presented in a touring fashion, by which students could view the artifact itself or a picture of it. The artifact was presented alongside a paragraph about the artifact, including its historical significance to the family and the overall sentimental value to the student. The entire grade viewed the artifacts and had the opportunity ask questions about the history of the item. Artifacts varied from war relics to common, everyday items.

At our DEW Day at the Museum, we were introduced to many of our other student’s ancestral history. We were asked to walk around the LGI room and observe displayed items. We were enticed by the array of antiques presented to us. Also, by being able to experience this day, we were able to enrich our lives with the history of our friends and students alike. The entire day was a stepping stone to indulge ourselves in an open fashion while learning more about our fellow classmates and coming closer as a grade.

DEW hosts final Sumdog contest of year

Submitted by Sixth Grade Math Teacher Jamie Chiarelli

Fifth- and sixth-graders at David E. Williams Middle School participated in their final Allegheny County Sumdog contest of the year. Sumdog is a free educational game that motivates students to practice math, reading and writing. The games engage students because they are participating in multi-player games against other students from all over the world. Questions on Sumdog are aligned with Common Core skills. The program tailors questions to students’ individual needs and builds an understanding of each student. Sumdog’s math questions are free to use with no time constraints. It offers county and national contests in which students can compete against other classes both in their school and other school districts.

The final Allegheny County Sumdog contest took place May 13 through 19. Sixty classes qualified for the tournament and 1,314 students played. There were 407,408 questions answered and 347,212 were answered correctly. Daily winners were crowned and each class could be a daily winner only once. Dana Rongaus’ block 3 class was the daily winner on May 15, Jamie Chiarelli’s block 3 class was the daily winner on May 17 and Chiarelli’s block 2 class was the daily winner on May 18.

Chiarelli’s block 3 class finished first and her block 2 class placed second. Students from DEW who finished in the top 10 were: (first) Nicholas Zezza, Chiarelli block 2; (second) Sydney Fusco Rongaus, block 3; (third) Natalie Allen, Chiarelli block 3; (fourth) Marcus Cetrone, Chiarelli block 3; (fifth) Dylan Sparkenbaugh, Chiarelli block 2; (sixth) Om Arora-Jain, Chiarelli block 2; and (10th) Alex Fleck, Chiarelli block 2.

Other students who finished in the top 50 included: Morgan Hayes (12th), Jessica Molitoris (14th), Brooke Carver (15th), Owen Jordan (16th), Aaron DeLuca (18th), Jocelyn Paulin (19th), Matthew Luchovich (21st), Giavanna Booz (22nd), Riley Ellis (24th), Francesca Diaz (25th), Jac Caputo (29th), Mackenzie Frederick (32nd), Je’Nari Kelley (35th), Taryn Shukita (39th), Ryan Black (40th), Brian Schultz (42nd), Mason Syke (44th) and Luke Smarra (47th).

Congratulations to all of the students who participated in the Sumdog contest.
Burkett students celebrate Read Across America Day

Third and fourth grade students at Burkett Elementary School celebrated the life of the much-beloved children’s author and illustrator Dr. Seuss on March 3. The day coincided with a nationwide program known as Read Across America, which celebrates the importance of reading.

Over 100 students at Burkett dressed in costume as favorite Seuss characters, such as the Cat in the Hat, Things 1 and 2, Cindy Lou Who and Sam I Am. Students recited a “Reader’s Oath,” promising to read whenever they have the opportunity. A book swap, organized by school librarian Marianna Greenaway, took place wherein a student had the opportunity to bring in a gently used book from home and “swap” it out for another book that they might like to read. Over 150 students went home with a new “used” book to enjoy.

Congratulations go out to third-graders Lydia Witner, Matthew Freyermuth and Ilanna Boris, as well as to fourth-graders Alex Fleck, Jonathyn Hirth and Raegan Czerniewski, all of whom were the lucky raffle winners of this year’s Newbery Award-winning novel “Flora and Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures” by Kate DiCamillo.

Much fun was had by all on this very important day in which reading is a celebration!

Burkett names students of the month for April and May

Burkett students Caitlyn Sill, Parker Brennan, Divye Arora-Jain and Eliana Knause were named students of the month for April. Alivia Fisher, Dante Baron, Erica Keely and Gabriel Martin were named Burkett’s students of the month for May.

Burkett students of the month are chosen for: exhibiting appropriate behavior, performing random acts of kindness, demonstrating improvement in academic areas and exhibiting self control. It can also recognize a deserving student with a quiet disposition.

DonorsChoose proposal nets classroom furniture donation

Earlier this year, Forest Grove first grade teacher Holly Rippole was looking for a way to promote collaboration among her students. Rippole has a spacious classroom and didn’t want to crowd it with a lot of furniture. At the same time, though, when she had students work on collaborative projects, she’d found the best way to have them do so was to sit on the floor. That was when she got a district-wide email from Montour’s director of innovation, Justin Aglio. In his email, Aglio suggested teachers consider submitting proposals to the website DonorsChoose.org, which works not unlike the website GoFundMe. DonorsChoose.org also solicits donations from the general public, but on behalf of teachers.

Once the fundraising goal for a project is met, DonorsChoose.org purchases equipment using funds raised and ships it to the school. After a search on the Internet, Rippole found some furniture that she thought would work for her classroom. In her request, Rippole described how her students loved working together. She explained that the addition of tables and chairs would allow students to develop stronger communication skills and receive social support. Her proposal was funded and, earlier this year, the furniture arrived in her classroom.

“One of my goals for this school year was to allow for collaboration and to promote social development as my students learn,” says Rippole. “When the tables arrived, the looks on the students’ faces were priceless! They could not wait to work at them.”

Rippole says that during the rest of the school year, students collaborated on strategic reading projects and various writing pieces. They also helped each other with math concepts.
Burkett participates in district-wide rain barrel project

Burkett teachers Marianna Greenaway and Marcia Chauvet headed up a project at Burkett called Barrels by the Bay Allegheny County Three Rivers Project this past spring. Barrels by the Bay started in the Chesapeake Bay area and has since spread across the nation to draw attention to the importance of water conservation. In Allegheny County, close to 100 schools - including David E. Williams and the high school - participated.

One of the components of the project involved designing and painting a rain barrel to collect storm water runoff on school property. The rainwater was then reused to irrigate a small garden. Fourth-graders primed and painted the barrels with iconic Pittsburgh and Montour images during recess periods.

Amy West, along with her gardening committee and Girl Scouts, graciously accepted the task of making a planter garden and to maintain the garden throughout the summer. Fourth-graders maintained the garden during their recess periods until the end of the school year. In the fall, those students will be invited back to enjoy a feast of the food they helped grow the previous year. A new class of fourth-graders will take over the maintenance next year.

Fourth-graders who participated were: Ashley Wallace, Julian Kletz, Josh Peremba, Louis Mariano, Gabby Pendrak, Cassidy Broad, Nicolette Lysick, Marin Torrens and Arianna Strimmel.

Forest Grove hosts fourth annual elementary student art show

On April 5, Forest Grove hosted the fourth annual Montour Elementary Student Art Show in the school gymnasium. When Forest Grove first began hosting the art show four years ago, it featured only the work of K-2 students at Forest Grove. It has since grown to also include the work of third and fourth grade Burkett students. As it has, the show itself has grown in popularity.

Holding an art show for primary students was the idea of Forest Grove Elementary art teacher Natalie Rush. With the collaboration and assistance of Montour Elementary PTA, a great show was organized and became a tradition. When the art show expanded to display the work of the third and fourth grade students, Burkett art teacher Marcia Chauvet became involved.

The 2015-2016 art show was held under the direction of Jordan Paddick, Forest Grove Elementary art teacher, who was a long-term substitute teacher. She was assisted by PTA chair Rikki Benton and parent volunteers.

Once again, the art show was a huge success and well-received by students’ families and community members. Students were very proud and beamed as they showed their work. Many families purchased framed artwork for display at home and to add to their collection from previous years. It was a fun and successful event, one that has become a wonderful tradition for Montour’s elementary art program.
Lou Cerro named to 2017 Big 33 coaching roster

Montour head football coach Lou Cerro has been named the offensive line coach for the 2017 Big 33 Football Classic. The game will take place May 29 in Hershey.

Cerro, who is also Montour’s athletic director, will be among those coaching 33 of Pennsylvania’s top football players in the all-star game against 33 of the top football players from the state of Maryland. In the past, the Big 33 game has pitted Pennsylvania players against those from Ohio and Texas. Some of the game’s past players have gone on to become some of the top talent in the NFL. Among those players are Joe Namath, Ben Roethlisberger, Dan Marino, Kerry Collins, Tony Dorsett, Joe Montana, Ty Law, LaVar Arrington, Curtis Martin and Marvin Harrison.

This past season marked Cerro’s 11th as head coach at Montour. Under him, the Spartans won a WPIAL AAA title in 2011 and two other times reached the WPIAL championship. Some of his standout offensive lineman over the years have included George Beerhalter, Dom Martinelli and Vic Martinelli. Before coming to Montour, Cerro won two WPIAL titles in three years at Seton La-Salle Catholic High School, where he coached Geno Gradkowski, who is now in his fifth year in the NFL and playing for the Carolina Panthers.

“It is a great honor to coach the Pennsylvania team for the Big 33 next season,” says Cerro. “It will be great to represent the Montour School District and community in such a prestigious game and capacity.”

Track team wraps up successful season

The track and field team wrapped up a successful season in the spring, thanks in part to a record-breaking girls relay team and a high jumper who walked on mid-season.

Before Dejuan Taylor started high jumping for the team, he had no experience at the sport, but cleared 6’2”. He has since decided to walk onto the track and field team at Division I Youngstown State University, where he is now considered a preferred walk-on.

The girls 4x400 relay team, meanwhile, broke a 12-year school record this past season with a time of 4:06.12. The team is comprised of one senior, Genevieve Miller, and three underclassmen: Rayna Stevenson, grade 10; Jayda Moyer, grade 11; and Rosina Esposito, grade 9.

Overall, the team’s participants this year numbered over 80 high school and 60 middle school athletes.

“My staff and I are very excited about the growth of our program,” says head coach Bob Naylor. At the beginning of the summer, track and field coaches also held the team’s second SPARTAN Speed and Agility clinic for middle school and elementary student athletes. Participation numbers doubled from last year. During the clinic, participants were exposed to a number of updated speed and agility drills. Sessions started with warm up through speed agility ladders, group stretches. Coaches introduced new drills and reviewed and practiced past drills from previous days. Each session ended with relay races, flag tag, an Indian run challenge and more. Participants also competed for Under Armour gift certificates in the hurdle challenge, quick feet through rings, agility ladder accuracy and speed, obstacle course one-on-one challenge, and 40-yard carry dash.

Three more student athletes sign letters of intent

Three additional graduating student athletes have signed letters of intent to continue their athletic careers at the college level. Alec Hoffman and Alec Gamble have both signed letters of intent to play for Thiel College. Hoffman will play football while Gamble will continue his baseball career. Chris Hanlon will also continue his baseball career in college at La Roche College. Congratulations and good luck to all three athletes in their future endeavors.