



SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Big day showcases Elyria athletes
SEE PAGES 5-6

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WWW.ELYRIASCHOOLS.ORG

Computer tech is bee's knees

Amy Higgins
Communications director

From 9 to 5, Elyria Schools information technology specialist Stan Boozer is busy as a bee, installing SMARTboards, fixing computers and solving complex hardware and software issues with thousands of computers across the district.

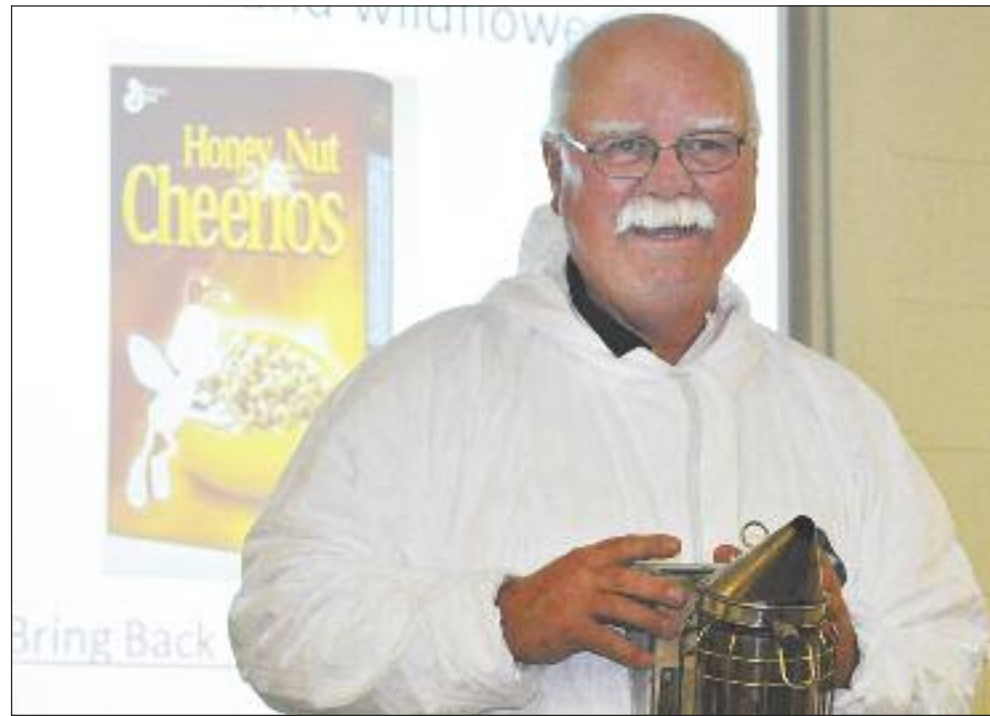
But come quitting time, Boozer makes a bee-line home, where in his backyard he has a hive that serves as a cozy shelter to thousands of honeybees.

Here's the buzz about these remarkable winged insects and their hives: They are relentless workers, producing wax, building comb, collecting pollen, making honey and, most importantly, guarding the Queen as she lays her eggs.

The beekeeper's job is to manage the care of the honeybee colony and harvest the honey when it's ready.

Enter Stan — or "Mr. Bee," as he's known around the district.

"In the past 15 to 20 years, the numbers (of bees) have been declining," Boozer said. "If there's one thing anyone can do to help the



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS

Stan Boozer, Mr. Bee, explains the use of a smoker when moving bees away from the hive so the beekeeper can tend to it.

See **BEES**, 7



GRAPHIC PROVIDED

Can't you see: Marshall Tucker Band comes to PAC

Amy Higgins
Communications director

Southern rock legend The Marshall Tucker Band is coming to the Elyria High School Performing Arts Center on Friday, June 24.

The performance is a fundraiser for a local church looking to add a treatment and transitional housing center to its faith-based services.

Elyria's Beyond the Walls Church and concert promoter Rise Above Media Solutions are organizing the benefit, dubbed, "Recreate: A Concert for Change." It will include many other events that weekend in Elyria, all under the banner "Recreation Weekend."

Also taking the stage for the June 24 show are special guests Jimmie Bratcher and Jason Green and The Tritones, featuring Becky Boyd.

The show includes an auction, too.

"We've gotten some great donations already for the auction," said Melissa Somers, owner of Rise Above Media, the company that organized the event. "This event is a cause close to my heart. I used to

See **BAND**, 6

A beautiful day for broadcasting

Amy Higgins
Communications director

Ely has pride.

And after the May 11 broadcast of the FOX 8 morning show, everyone in Greater Cleveland knows it.

That's because Ely Elementary hosted the program "Weather at Your School," featuring the popular FOX 8 meteorologist A.J. Colby.

The likeable weatherman and his crew spent the entire morning

shooting multiple segments for that day's forecast and the eight-day look-ahead.

Some of the highlights included interviews with school principal Dr. Jack Dibee, as well as on-camera live shots of a balloon rocket science project in Mike O'Brien's class.

Up and down the old stairs of Ely, Colby trucked from one end of the building to the other, stopping

for a good while in the media center to chat with students in the Young Authors Club.

He even gave six students the spotlight as they delivered the eight-day forecast live on-air, having to adlib their plans to enjoy the weather.

Students who weren't featured in speaking roles were likely part of the backdrop, as Colby delivered live teasers inside the school



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS

and throughout the grounds.

It was a great day for Ely Pride. You can check out the full photo gallery of Weather at Elyria Schools on Flickr.

Elyria's second to none

I simply can't believe I'm nearing the end of my first year as the Elyria City School District superintendent.

The year has been filled with exciting activities and events in our schools and in our community.

I've held more than 50 informational forums, from town hall meetings, private gatherings and local club meetings to community agency assemblies, resident talk sessions and church receptions.

These formal and casual gatherings have given me the opportunity to meet face-to-face with residents, parents and community leaders to chat about the many great things happening each and every day in our classrooms and schools.

And the feedback I'm receiving on these occasions is vital, even precipitating big changes in long-term practices.



TOM JAMA

For example, we've boosted ridership on our buses by decreasing the mileage eligibility from 2 to 1.3 miles, because we heard from parents that transportation is a barrier to education in our town.

We're focused on hiring qualified residents and graduates of Elyria for vacancies in the district, because we have an "all-in" attitude and we believe that it matters when you're rooted in your community.

We're engaging the community in meaningful conversations like these, because it's essential to our ability to truly and fully serve our students and community.

I'm extremely proud to be

"We're engaging the community in meaningful conversations like these, because it's essential to our ability to truly and fully serve our students and community."

superintendent in this wonderful community, and I'm inspired each and every day by this district's incredible staff and student population.

Elyria and its people are second to none.

Tom Jama is superintendent of Elyria Schools.

Delivering news to you

If you like what you're reading in the Pioneer Press, then you should take a look at this paper's social-media sister platform on YouTube: The Elyria Schools Pioneer TV channel.

Nearly every story in this edition is a snippet of a more extensive video online at www.youtube.com/user/TheElyriaSchools.

These and hundreds of stories like them are featured at an all-in-one location, but in a video storytelling format that's produced in-house each week by the Elyria Schools communications and marketing office.

And it's not only short news stories to catch your interest, even though these will entertain you for hours.

Pioneer TV on YouTube is chockfull of good programming, including spring and winter concerts; public service programs and announcements; board of education meetings; and full-length



AMY HIGGINS

documentaries on important matters in education and in the Elyria Schools.

We do our best to bring school news to you in a variety of ways. Social media, with its instant dissemination of information and its far-reaching scope, is just one of them.

You'll also find us at Elyria Schools on Facebook and Elyria City Schools on Twitter, as well as our home base of www.elyriaschools.org

If social media and online surfing aren't for you, dial in to the Elyria Schools Education Station on Time Warner Channel 95.

Ultimately, we want to meet you where you get your news: online, in print, on air or in person.

"We always have great things to share about Elyria Schools, and it's our mission to deliver it all to you — our community — clearly and succinctly."

We always have great things to share about Elyria Schools, and it's our mission to deliver it all to you — our community — clearly and succinctly.

Please don't hesitate to call us and let us know how we're doing. If you have story ideas or there's something you're curious about in Elyria Schools, we'd love to hear from you. Send an email to ask@elyriaschools.org or call (440) 284-8203.

Amy Higgins is communications director at Elyria Schools.

ELNA AND 'BIG ERV' GO TO PROM



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

Cleveland Browns No. 74 Cameron Erving poses for a picture in Ely Square with his prom date, EHS senior Elna Wright. Erving and Wright attended prom on May 7 after Erving learned through social media channels that Elna didn't have a date for this special occasion after losing her boyfriend earlier this year to illness. Erving rented a tuxedo and a limousine van equipped for wheelchairs, and picked Elna up at her home in Elyria.



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The mamas and the papas

Amy Higgins

Communications director

The incredible, edible egg transformed into the lovable, huggable baby at McKinley Elementary School during a fifth-grade book study.

"We started a novel called 'Baby,' by Patricia MacLachlan, a book about a baby that gets abandoned," teacher Dawn Neely-Randall said. "We decided since that family was caregiving for a little baby, we needed to care-give for our own little baby.

"Everyone brought in their own little decorated egg baby," Randall said, "and we started an integrated unit of study: reading, writing, listening, speaking. So, our creativity was unleashed, and they became mommies and daddies to an egg."

Each day, the egg babies traveled from class to class, home and back to school again. They were on the developmental fast track.

After one week, they were ready for "kindergarten."

Like any parent who has ever uttered the phrase, "They grow up so fast," the moms and dads weren't quite ready to see their



Egg babies were finely detailed by students, even wearing clothes and accessories and living in carriers.

chicks off on this educational milestone.

"I'm very sad that I'm actually gonna have to let my egg baby go because I like taking care of him and helping him get set up," fifth-grader Jack Merrell said.

Merrell had two "babies," Jessica and John. He described John as a mini version of himself.

"He's crazy," Merrell joked. "He's actually a very smart kid and he loves hanging out with his sister."

Fellow egg dad Dominic McLemore said it's a project he's waited for all year.

"Everybody really liked it," he said. "And I'm pretty sad that



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

Macy McMillan and her fellow McKinley fifth graders lovingly cared for hard-boiled egg babies in week-long book study project.

we're having to close (the project)."

To lift their spirits, teacher Brandi Huffman brought her kindergarten students in to meet

the incoming class.

"Mrs. Huffman's class came in to teach our egg babies about some of the kindergarten rules to help them acclimate very nicely,"

Randall said.

Watch the full egg babies' story on Elyria Schools Pioneer TV on YouTube.

Plan for new schools includes \$80M from state

Pioneer Press

After studying the aging elementary and middle schools across the district, the Ohio School Facilities Commission found significant problems that inhibit learning and would cost too much to repair.

The OSFC is the same entity that shared in the cost and construction of the new Elyria High School in 2007, after Elyria High was deemed the worst facility in the state.

With the OSFC's help, the community built a state-of-the-art high school with first-rate results — it has helped improve test scores, it has been an endless resource, and it is a continuous source of community pride.

The OSFC found significant building deficiencies in our pre K-8 schools, including structural

problems, inadequate heating and cooling, failing plumbing, lack of modern safety and security features, and aging electrical systems that cannot handle today's technology.

Because the cost to repair them is almost as high as replacing them, the state recommends building new schools.

If Elyria voters approve a bond issue for the remaining funds, the state will pay \$80 million, which is 67 percent of the entire project cost.

A bond issue of this size would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$12 per month.

The plan calls for replacing the 11 existing schools with five new schools: one pre K-8 campus; two K-8 campuses; and two K-4 schools.

By reducing the number of

schools from 11 to five, we can save millions in operating costs annually, and improve education.

The campuses will have age-appropriate divisions so that younger students will be separated from older students and they will not share spaces.

Additionally, the current plan involves replacing the deteriorating century-old stadium.

By combining the stadium with the pre K-8 building plan, Elyria Schools can save on design, construction and engineering dollars — and all of our building projects will be completed by 2022.

Go to www.elyriaschools.org for regular updates. Check out Elyria Schools Pioneer TV on YouTube for videos on the schools and stadium.



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS

Ely Elementary School is nearly a century old. It, and all preschool through grade eight buildings, would be replaced with approval of a bond issue in November 2016.

Super special day showcases athletes

Amy Higgins

Communications director

Each year, the city of Elyria hosts a day for superheroes in the town square.

The gang's all there: Iron Man, Captain America, Wonder Woman, Spiderman and Superman, of course.

Also each year, the Elyria Schools hosts a day for superheroes.

It's called the Special Olympics, and its champions are the athletes who arrive from districts near and far.

The 36th annual Special Olympics track and field games at Ely Stadium this month drew 17 school districts and scores of athletes, staffers, volunteers, and supporters.

Bright blue skies and balmy temperatures made it a perfect day for play and competition.

Thank you to the following school districts for participating: Elyria; Lorain (first year); Avon; Avon Lake; Midview; Sheffield; Sheffield Lake; Keystone; Columbia; North Ridgeville; Olmsted Falls; Oberlin; Wellington; Murray Ridge; Lorain County Joint Vocational School; Amherst; and Firelands.

A highlight video is posted on Pioneer TV YouTube and a photo gallery is on Flickr.



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

ABOVE: Windsor fifth grader Gabriel Booth runs in a relay event at the 36th annual Special Olympics.

LEFT: The Elyria High School sign choir performs in the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics.



Artists bring State of the Schools to life

Amy Higgins

Communications director

The superintendent's State of the Schools address is akin to the president's State of the Union.

In school terms, it's a big deal.

On April 20, Tom Jama delivered his first address as the new superintendent of Elyria Schools, during the Elyria Board of Education meeting.

Rather than inundate guests with text-heavy power point slides featuring raw data and an endless stream of numbers, the presentation was illustrated in real-time by a supremely talented team of Elyria Schools art teachers: John Filipiak, Nicole Vanche, Mike Brand and Ryan Meikle.

The goal of the display was two-fold: Show off the talents of the Elyria Schools staff, and illustrate the district's forward-thinking practices in all aspects of education and business.

It's no small task to translate a formal message into a casual, fun work of art in front of a room full of people.

Filipek, Vanche, Brand and Meikle had their initial doubts, in fact — they're humble artists, to be sure — but they agreed to go for it anyway, with some gentle prodding from the communications department.

It went off beautifully. Jama's presentation highlighted the many incredible things that are happening in Elyria Schools these days, giving these creative illustrators plenty of material to work with.

Here's what the artists had to say about this extraordinary project:

"I was apprehensive at first mention of this project, but changed my mind quickly after collaborating with Ryan, Mel Rainey and John on a strategy. The experience itself was very enjoyable. Working on an art piece as a team was new to me and got me out of my comfort zone a little. I felt fortunate and at ease working with Ryan, John and Nicole because of their professionalism and encouraging nature. We really worked as one, and the final result surpassed my expectations. The feedback and critique from the audience was very positive and



Brand

validated the whole project. The best comment of the night came from EHS principal Jodie Johnson's son. He was standing up front looking at the drawing and said, 'I could look at this all night.' His comment made the whole night worth it for me."

— Mike Brand, EHS art teacher
"I really had a great time working on it.

We were all a little apprehensive to tackle something like this, but the process was a blast — and the finished product was amazing."

— Ryan Meikle, Westwood Middle School art teacher

"It was a pleasure to work with my fellow artists on this project. The real excitement was allowing the audience to witness a wonderful piece of art being created. I greatly enjoyed



Filipek

being part of this and hope similar opportunities arise in the future."

— John Filipiak, Elyria Schools elementary art
"The experience for me was new. I had never done something like that before and in front of so many people! I was nervous going in

but at the end of the meeting I had a blast. It was so exciting to hear what is going on for the future of Elyria city Schools and being able to illustrate it and be a part of it. It was great to really feel like AMPS (art, music, physical education), and especially ART, is a big priority for the future of Elyria. It's what our kids need and love! Loved being a part of it."

— Nicole Vanche, Elyria Schools elementary art



Meikle



Vanche

'Board Business' with Greg Elek

Amy Higgins
Communications director

In each issue of Pioneer Press, readers can connect with a school board member in a casual Q&A format.

Here we catch up with board vice president Greg Elek.

Q: First, a little bit about you: How are you connected to Elyria and Elyria Schools? Who makes up your family? Provide a brief description of your profession.

A: I come from a long line of proud Pioneers. I grew up in Elyria and attended Elyria Schools my entire school career. My parents also attended Elyria Schools. My wife Sharon went to Elyria Schools, as did her father. Sharon and I have five children they've all attended Elyria Schools. My youngest child Abigail will graduate from Elyria High School this year and my son Gregory graduated last year.

Elyria Schools was the basis of my education experience and I can directly credit Elyria Schools for instilling in me the foundation for success.

I am a CPA and own a CPA firm and payroll company. Our firm provides tax, accounting, assurance and consulting services to small- and middle-market businesses and nonprofits.

Q: You've completed your first year of board membership. What motivated you to



Elek

join the Board of Education, and now that you're here, what do you think?

A: I joined the board during last year's superintendent search because I was compelled to make a difference. I am a big believer in home-grown talent and we had in our district some of the brightest, driven, dedicated educational minds and leaders that could step up and lead our district. I am very proud we hired one of our own to be superintendent.

I think we have great leadership in our district and I am amazed at the quality of education available in Elyria Schools at all levels. Whether your student is gifted, regular level or special needs, the education at Elyria Schools is unparalleled. We have the resources, cutting-edge administrators and spectacular teachers that have no limits, and we truly are blessed. We have educators all across our nation inquiring and exploring our best practices. The result our urban district has achieved truly is amazing.

Q: What do you see as the most compelling issues facing public education in general, and specifically, the Elyria City School District?

A: Unfunded mandates. Public

schools are getting directives from Washington DC and Columbus but unfortunately they are not funding these obligations. Also the few mandates that are funded are mostly all underfunded. The list is long and puts public education on an unequal playing field. Just to name a few, you have the Charter schools mandate where we have to pay out more than we receive for children attending Charter schools. On top of that you have the new Ohio Teacher Evaluation System, the Ohio New Learning Standards, Student Learning Objectives, Third Grade Reading Guarantee, Resident Educator, and the list goes on and on. Legislators continue to increase mandates, but they seldom properly fund them and they really put the squeeze on school districts.

Q: You are the board representative on the Master Plan Committee for facilities. The district is pursuing a bond issue in November for new schools. Why is this matter of great importance to the board?

A: First and foremost we must provide for our students in the K-8 grades with the same opportunities afforded to our high school students. Our high school students are achieving great outcomes with the modern state-of-the-art high school and ameni-

ties.

Our younger students are in facilities as old as a hundred years, that are unfit for education and, frankly, borderline unsafe.

The Ohio School Facilities Commission deemed all our elementary and middle schools as "needs replaced," and the state is willing to provide \$80 million to assist us in that process. This is an opportunity that doesn't come along often and we are excited about this opportunity.

By passing the bond issue and replacing the schools and stadium, we will afford our children and many future generations' quality education and new opportunities to truly make a difference. Also, our new high school has drawn families to our district and increased enrollment and made a positive impact on our community.

Now is the time for the other schools to be replaced and given this opportunity.

Q: As an insider now to school business, what do you want the community to know about the Elyria Schools?

A: I want the community to remember all the tough choices the Elyria Schools leadership has made through the years. We continue to cut buildings and staff to mirror our population and remain fiscally responsible.

We are in very good shape

financially and continue to make the difficult decisions as stewards of their tax money. Not all the decisions have been easy, but they have been in the best interest of our children and watching the community's tax dollars.

Not only has the district received the cleanest possible audit opinion every year, but we continue to be honored with the Ohio Auditor's "Auditor of State Award with Distinction" for the district's excellent recordkeeping and transparency. We share with the community how we are spending their tax dollars, and community members know we will not waste those dollars.

Q: In your view, what does the future hold for Elyria Schools?

A: The future of Elyria Schools is very exciting. When you combine our best practices with our talented educators, driven leadership team and all new schools, we have the ability to impact each child's life and offer an education second to none.

Elyria is a special place. With the passage of the bond issue in November to replace the K-8 schools and stadium, we will be able to reward the citizens of Elyria with a school system they can be proud of and a foundation for future success.

The opportunities in Elyria Schools will be endless!

BAND

From 1

teach high school history, and I've lost 16 of my students to drugs.

"To change our occupancy at the church, it takes a lot of money," she said. "That's what this fundraiser is for — to bring the building up to code for an occupancy permit."

The treatment and transitional housing center will be located in the former Roosevelt Elementary building on the south side of Elyria. Beyond the Walls Church purchased the building from Elyria Schools.

The event's auction will feature sports paraphernalia and

"That's what this fundraiser is for — to bring the building up to code for an occupancy permit."

Melissa Somers,
owner of Rise Above Media, organizers of the event

music paraphernalia, including a \$400 guitar the Marshall Tucker Band will autograph that night, with band members posing for a picture with the person who buys the guitar.

There's also an "Ultimate Fan" auction item, where the winner can sit in a comfy spot by the stage during the show, as well as being treated to a meet and greet with the band, Somers said.

Other auction items include certificates and promotional



GRAPHIC PROVIDED

items to area businesses and restaurants. A full listing of auction items is online at www.recreationweekend.com/auction-listings.

SHOW INFO

Tickets

■ Premium at fundraiser level: \$175 each for orchestra seating; \$125 each for mezzanine seating. These also include a pre-concert gourmet meal and prime seating during the show.

■ Standard concert tickets for show only: \$125 apiece for orchestra seating; \$75 apiece for mezzanine seating.

■ To buy tickets, go to elyriaschools.org and hover over the Performing Arts Center menu, then click on "Events calendar" and find June 24 on the interactive calendar. From there, follow the links to purchase tickets. Keep in mind that online ticket sales carry an extra \$10 processing fee.

Schedule

■ 5:30 p.m. — Pre-show dinner and auctions for fundraiser-level sponsors

■ 6:30 p.m. — Concert doors open

■ 7 p.m. — Show kicks off with Jason Green & The Tritones, featuring Becky Boyd.

■ 7:45 p.m. — Jimmie Bratcher

■ 9 p.m. — The Marshall Tucker Band

For more information or to purchase tickets without a convenience fee, call Melissa Somers (440) 986-0847 or go to www.recreationweekend.com.



BEES

From 1

bees, it's plant flowers, particularly pollinator mixes that are specifically made to feed bees and butterflies. Everyone can afford to plant one little spot to try and help the bees."

Boozer hoped to imprint this message on some of the curious young minds of preschool and kindergarten students at the Elyria Early Childhood Village. He visited the village with his tools of the trade—even donning his protective beekeeping suit — and described to his young audience how honeybees live and work in hives and why they are important to the

ecosystem.

He then gave each student a parting gift: sunflower seeds.

"I'm trying to raise awareness with the preschool (and kindergarten) students of the importance of the honeybee in pollination of our food crops," he said. "I'm also trying to get them involved by planting flowers and doing whatever they can to help the bees and not to be too afraid of the bees, although I don't want them to get too friendly, either."

Check out the Elyria Schools Pioneer TV channel on YouTube to watch Mr. Bee's visit at the Elyria Early Childhood Village.



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

ABOVE: Mr. Bee explains the importance of honeybees to preschool students.

ABOVE LEFT: Preschool students at the Early Childhood Village taste-test fresh honey from the hive located in Mr. Bee's backyard.

LEFT: Mr. Bee demonstrates the toughness of the wax comb in a hive.



Got game? EHS-EWHS alumni game seek ballers

Amy Higgins

Communications director

The Elyria Schools and Friends Alumni Association is hosting an Elyria High-Elyria West alumni basketball game on Saturday, June 4, in the Elyria High School main gym.

Admission to the game requires a donation — big or small — to the alumni scholarship fund that

benefits Elyria High School students bound for college.

EHS distinguished alumni Mark L. Johnson Sr., Class of 1990, is heading the organizing efforts for the Alumni Association.

Johnson played professional basketball in Europe, graduated from the seminary of Princeton University and is now a coach, pastor and youth motivational

speaker in Cleveland.

The basketball game — Johnson playfully calls it the "I still got it (I think) alumni game" — features players old and new on a simple mission: family fun, and fundraising for student scholarships.

His scheme includes a vendor fair in the EHS dining hall, a free youth basketball camp and an

alumni game to close the day.

Vendors and boosters are invited to sign up for the vendor fair. Tables can be purchased for \$25 by contacting Tania Keyges, (440) 537-8407. Proceeds benefit the scholarship fund. Table setup begins at 9 a.m.

The free basketball camp is open to children ages 12 and younger. It runs 10:30 a.m. to

noon. Register online at www.elyriaalumni.org.

Tip off for the main event — the Elyria High-Elyria West Alumni Basketball Game — is 1 p.m. (Warmups start at 12:15 p.m.)

Players past and present are welcome. Sign up today at www.elyriaalumni.org or call (216) 245-3592.



The Herald

A supplement
to the
Pioneer Press

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

ELYRIA HIGH SCHOOL, ELYRIA, OHIO

SPRING 2016

'Super senior' final editorial: Surviving high school

In my final week at Westwood Middle School way back in 2012, I confessed to the school librarian, Mrs. Lawrence, that I was deeply afraid of entering high school in the fall. She offered this advice, "High school is what you make it."

I have often considered this simple statement in my four years of high school asking myself, "Am I making my high school experience what I want it to be?" When I walked into this building on Aug. 27, 2012, as a scared little freshman, I wasn't off to a great start. (The very first statement I uttered was, "I think I'm going to throw up.")

I had grown to *love* Westwood and had forged special friendships there and taken advantage of many opportunities. I was afraid to leave that all behind and terrified of what the future would bring. My freshman year was definitely a bit of a struggle, so I made a goal to better myself and resolved that I wasn't going to sit around mopey and depressed the following year.

"I'm going to make things better," I decided. And I did. Or at

least, I tried.

I began getting involved by joining many of the clubs Elyria High School has to offer. I became quite busy, which at times was a bit stressful, but it was worth it because it opened up so many new doors for me and allowed me to get to know so many more people. I wasn't just a passing face in the hallway anymore; no longer a small fish in a large pond of 2,000 others. I was becoming someone that others could put a name and a face to. I was starting to leave a legacy and make a positive impact on people's lives, which is a lifelong goal of mine.

As the years flew by, I became even more involved and was presented with new opportunities which helped me to grow as a person and also were quite fun. I think that's the key to surviving high school: finding the right people to fit in with. The ones who will boost you up and make you want to work harder, aim higher and become a better person. The ones who support you through the many tears, frustrations and confusion as you make



AUDREY BAUER

your way. The ones who will laugh with you, cheer with you and share good times with you. The ones who will support your dreams and help you reach your goals. Family, friends and even teachers can be the ones to do this. When you are at your absolute lowest and feel the most alone, you can find comfort in the most unexpected people or places. You just have to be willing to grow up and use the resources you have to better yourself.

That's the other key to surviving high school: growing up. You may find yourself losing friends you never in a million years believed you would even fight with. Just understand, everything happens for a reason, and sometimes people are taken out of your life because they will just wind up doing you more harm than good. Negative people will drag you down and for that rea-

son; they need to be released so you can make room for positive people who will point you on the right path. Don't look back on your teenage years and discover you wasted them on the wrong people or activities. One solitary decision can change your life in an instant, whether it is for good or bad. Of course we'll make mistakes along the way; we're teenagers and our brains haven't even fully developed yet! But the true sign of maturity is being able to take these mistakes and learn from them, rather than turning them into regrets. Being able to tackle tough situations with a clear head and a logical approach rather than making rash decisions is yet another sign. Set a goal, form a plan, do some research, evaluate your resources, and figure out how you are going to turn a dream into a reality. If you're striving for the right path, there will always be a way, and it's *never* too late to better yourself.

So to answer my original question, No, my high school experience was not what I had intended for myself, because

despite all of my successes, I let the small things get me down and allowed myself to wallow in self-pity rather than appreciating the small things, and setting a goal for my future and figuring out how to get there. On the upside, I have grown immensely from that scared little freshie trembling at the sight of that big scary building and that huge crowd of 300 upperclassmen bombarding the cafeteria entrance. I have my family, my classmates, and my teachers to thank for that. I'm currently formulating a plan to make my future brighter than my past.

The moral of the story is, don't let obstacles in your life drag you down. Find something you love and are passionate about and focus on it, because that's what will give you purpose in life. If you're not sure exactly what that "something" is, school is a magnificent place to figure it out. You just have to be willing to get out there and do it.

Best of luck, fellow graduates! I am so proud of each and every one of you and wish you all the best in the future.

CONGRATULATIONS

TO ALL OUR GRADUATES
IN THE CLASS OF 2016!

WE'RE PROUD OF YOU!

