

Bulldog

BULLETIN

January 2025

Message from the Superintendent

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of the Bulldog Bulletin. Our students are achieving amazing things from debate team wins to cereal drives for those in need to performing at Radio City Music Hall.

Thank you to our teachers, staff, and families for making this all possible.

Enjoy!

—Matt Landahl



BHS Debate Team Wins Dutchess County Tournament

Beacon High School's newly revived Debate Team participated in its first competition of the year at Dutchess Community College in mid-December and impressed everyone with a big win.



The team of juniors Samiha Golden, Gabrielle Khalil and Mikaela Sanchez emerged victorious over Dover High School's team in the final round of debating where they

had to argue in favor of homeschooling. Additionally, Atlas Botlz won an individual speaker award for being a top 10 speaker and the team of Alexander Browning, Miguel Herrera and Julian Rivers placed fourth.

Team co-advisers Matthew Steltz and Erin Haddeland were pleased with the 15 students' dedication and hard work that was demonstrated. They plan to participate in a May debate. "Even though it's been close to 17 years since the last time the Bulldogs have had a competitive debate program, the students exceeded all expectations," Steltz said. Initially, Golden did not think her team would do as well because the other schools have debate teams with more experience. She felt better as it proceeded and received helpful advice from the judges.



"We exceeded my expectations because we went farther than I thought," Golden said. "It was cool going there and getting better as the rounds went on." Khalil most enjoyed a debate topic surrounding science versus the supernatural, but hearing that the team would get to the final round was both surreal and exciting for her. Sanchez was recruited for the team later than Golden and Khalil, but was quickly prepped for the debate by her teammates and advisers. While it can be hard to argue for viewpoints Sanchez did not necessarily agree with, she found the experience fulfilling.

"It's challenging for both sides to argue, whether you're pro or con, because someone always has a different viewpoint," Sanchez explained.

"Cereal-sly" GOOD JOB (Seriously!)

Glenham's Student Council were able to collect over 250 boxes of cereal for those less fortunate during a special cereal drive this holiday season.



President Baylyn Carr, a fifth grader; Vice President Leana Soltish, a fourth grader; secretary Emily Calle, and council advisor Jaime Riviuccio helped organize the drive and even a fun game of cereal dominos that was held in the school's hallways.

Cont'd on next page...

Rombout's Chorus is a Broadway Hit (close by anyway...)

Rombout's eighth grade chorus had an opportunity this December few school choirs do – to sing at Radio City Music Hall ahead of the theater's annual Christmas Spectacular Show.

A stipulation for the chorus was that their set list of the Christmas standards "Jingle Bells" and "Winter Wonderland" had to be a capella, something the students do not do often, but music teacher Shaun Cunningham held extra rehearsals to get everything right.

While some students express nervousness before a performance, Cunningham always reassures them.

"I let them know that's their body's way of telling them that this is important to them," Cunningham said. "It's really a good sign that they want to do a good job." Cont'd next page...



Rombout Chorus cont'd...



Cunningham was not as nervous about the performance as he was about ensuring that his students enjoyed the experience.

"That helped take my mind off of the fact that we were in front of 5,000 chairs," Cunningham said. "The fact that we were at Radio City Music Hall was just amazing."



While Lorelei Aakjar felt some pressure on stage, it was well worth it. In addition to performing, the singers got to go backstage to see the cast and crew prepare for the legendary show and later watched the Rockettes perform.

"My family got to show up and it was a whole day in the city," Aakjar recalled. "Whoever does chorus is really into it and it's a good group of kids."

Samantha Johnson did not register the enormity of getting to perform at Radio City at first until her parents heard the news. She was in awe of the experience which was enhanced by seeing the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree.

"It was really exciting," Johnson said. "We just got to stand there and take it all in."

Cont'd from previous page...

"Cereal-sly's"

Carr initially got involved with student council to show support for Glenham and the wider community. The cereal drive was just one way of fulfilling that goal.



"We wanted to support our community so they could have food and have what we have," Carr said.

Soltish enjoyed lending a hand to this cause which included sorting the cereal boxes before they went to the local food bank and setting up the domino game. She shared why these efforts are so important.

"It wouldn't be fair if everyone else had food and no one else did," Soltish explained. "It's always good to help other people in need."

The cause was especially important to Calle who knows people who are in need and was happy to help them. She also had fun setting up the domino game.

"It was so hard to not make it fall off, but it was so much fun," Calle said of the game. "I love helping out everybody."

South Ave. students learn about Hanukkah



Jewish families in South Avenue came to school in late December to teach students about Hanukkah where they showed off items used during the holiday and played fun games.

Linsey Gatto, who has two children in the school, brought an electric menorah, dreidels and gelt, or chocolate coins, to teach the basics of the holiday in an age appropriate way that she noted was not a religious lesson, but a way to showcase cultural traditions that are unfamiliar to some students.

"A great way to foster inclusivity is to invite others to share in our celebration, teach them, and let them ask questions freely," Gatto said.

The dreidels were then given to the students to take home with instructions on how to play the game with their families. Gatto has heard from some families whose students remember the lesson years later.

"My favorite thing is when parents tell me that their family plays dreidel together at home now, or when the kids can chime in about Hanukkah traditions because I've visited their classrooms," Gatto said. "That really touches my heart."

Another favorite activity among the students was a Hanukkah-themed Mad Libs, which produced funny lines that Gatto's son Logan, a second grader, hoped everyone liked. He assisted his mom with the lesson and most enjoyed teaching everyone how to play dreidel.



Field Trips Inspire and Enlighten

DCC Aviation Experience



Beacon High School students in Teresa Lucarini's calculus class took a trip in December that was just 'plane' fun. They visited Dutchess Community College's (DCC) Aviation Building to learn about the college's program, but also how what they are learning in class relates to aviation.

Senior Anastasia Santisi noted that the visit has made her consider aviation as a field to pursue in college and found the experience enjoyable and informative. This trip helped cement the feeling for Santisi that math can be applied in different careers.

"That was a really different experience than what I've seen," Santisi said.

"I love physics, so it was a really fun trip for me to go on."

Senior Anabelle Arginsky most enjoyed seeing how the math she is learning in Lucarini's class is beneficial to the students in the DCC aviation program. She also appreciated being able to apply to DCC on the spot.

"A lot of people have a hard time engaging with the material that they're learning in school, so to be able to actually see that applied made it that much more valuable," Arginsky explained. "I liked getting to see of all the students on campus learning; you could see people enjoying what they're doing."



Cont'd on next page...

Marist College interactive show



South Ave. students took in a different kind of show at Marist College earlier this fall that incorporated numerous fairy tales into one called "Beauty and the Beast Bed and Breakfast."

The show even included audience participation where a student from each class was invited on stage to tell a joke during intermission. Second grader Eli Wolff was one of those students whose joke went a little like this, "Why do sheep like to go to the movies? Because they like to eat all the snaahcks." Wolff was not nervous about getting on stage and enjoyed how the show shook things up. "I was really excited," Wolff recalled. "I thought it was really fun."



Second grader Emma Wenderoth enjoyed the play, especially a unique scene involving Little Red Riding Hood. "She turned into the wolf at the end when it was the full moon because she had a wolf disease," Wenderoth recalled. "The play was cool." Wenderoth also enjoyed walking around the college campus where she witnessed how college students get their homework done. "There's the couches there they can work on," Wenderoth said.

New BHS Classes Educate and Enlighten

New Media

Media teacher James Corbett wanted to offer this class for students to explore new forms of media such as creating short Instagram and TikTok videos, as well as exploring YouTube algorithms and how it is marketed to viewers. Some of these aspects are familiar to Corbett's students.



"They love the opportunity to not be just stuck in the mold of television, but in a mold that they very clearly relate to and one they're surrounded with at all times," Corbett said of his students. "For people who want to go the influencer route, the idea of wanting to make yourself the product as well, it's all covered in this class."

The class' main goal is to increase the subscribers on the school's YouTube channel and have a constant online presence that includes livestreaming and podcasting. Corbett believes this class is the first of its kind in New York.

"I see it as a beautiful thing, the idea of putting out more content and having more succinct content," Corbett said. "Because of that we can produce almost double what we could before."

Senior Kekoa Boyso loves the class as it enhances what he has learned in the school's TV production classes, leaving him with skills he'll use once he graduates.

"It goes into more specific details on how we produce media in a modern age," Boyso said. "It's an excellent addition."

Sports Marketing

Business teacher Melanie Hammitt remembers taking a sports marketing class when she was in high school and the popularity it had. She decided to bring one to BHS and is seeking out opportunities for students to be able to work with Heritage Financial Park, where the Renegades play, and Beacon's own athletic department.

"I'm trying to make some community connections," Hammitt said. "We're going to start local and see where we go from there."

Hammitt loves seeing the enthusiasm her students bring to every class, including them working on a project where they researched the corporate sponsors of sports stadiums nationwide.

"I just like to see them be able to contribute, there's a lot of real world application," Hammitt said. "They're coming in and saying, 'Did you see that on the news?'"

Junior Noah Spiak recommends the class to anyone because Hammitt has opened his mind to career prospects in sports that he would not have thought of before.

"This is a great opportunity to learn something new," Spiak said. "You're going to walk out glad that you took this class."



Beacon High School seniors Ernesto Jenkins and Elijah Mitchelo are not students who dip their toes in a multitude of activities, but their proposal to bring a beneficial class to their class received rave reviews from the Board of Education.



The students, as part of the school's Seal of Civic Readiness initiative, proposed bringing a home and careers course to the high school during a fall board meeting. Jenkins noted that Superintendent Dr. Matt Landahl liked the idea and wanted to see it implemented.

"I would love to see that happen... a majority of the people supported it," Jenkins said. "Everybody should have a home and careers class, it offers benefits."

Mitchelo noted that it is not easy to speak up on important matters and was happy to advocate for his fellow students, which involved plenty of research beforehand.

"It gave us that extra boost, now it's not just teachers and kids in the high school, it's people with more power listening to us," Mitchelo explained.

Cont'd on next page...

ANNUAL BOOKMARK CONTEST TURNS 20

When Rombout school librarian Jeanne Dottavio started a bookmark contest back in 2004 to generate interest in the fall book fair, she never imagined it would blossom into an institution everyone looks forward to every year.

Dottavio finds that students are always excited to participate and encourage their classmates to vote for their design.

Every participant is given a list of suggestions about what they can include in their design if they choose to do so.

“It can have something to do with books, readings, libraries, RMS or Beacon in general, but we don’t really follow that,” Dottavio said. “Most of them do try to do that and we get some really amazing entries.”

The winners received book fair gift certificates, while Dottavio displayed their bookmarks in the library. “They were very excited to find out they won,” Dottavio said of the students. “They like it, I like it, it’s fun.”

Sixth grader Frances Coulon, won first place with a design celebrating the Beacon Bulldogs with some books included. She initially entered the contest so her artwork could be displayed. “Sports are a really big part of Beacon, so I did sports,” Coulon explained. “I really love doing art.”

Sixth grader Nahlia Kellen, who placed third, submitted a floral design with the words “Love to Read” imprinted on it. She entered the contest because her uncle, a former Rombout student, won first place in the contest and she wanted to keep up a family tradition. While she did not place first, Kellen’s uncle was proud regardless.

“My grandmother told me my uncle won first place for me and I’m like ‘Now I have to win it for him,’” Kellen recalled. “He entered a lot of times and my librarian teacher showed me all of his bookmarks, they were really cool.”



Cont'd from previous page...



“I feel like that what we did was helping someone else who doesn’t have the voice to do what we did.”

Jenkins and Mitchelo spoke highly of their advisers Erin Haddeland and Jennifer Ferraguzzi who helped keep them on track with the proposal. They have this advice for students interested in getting involved.

“Think about the community around you and your peers,” Jenkins said.

“Always speak up,” Mitchelo said. “Even if you’re scared, you could never say something wrong or have a bad idea.”

Haddeland is immensely proud of Jenkins’ and Mitchelo’s efforts and noted that they went forward with an idea they believed could benefit the school based on their personal experiences.

“They are a fantastic example of how students from all educational backgrounds can make a difference in their community,” Haddeland said.

AI Allows Kids To Chat with Historical Figures

Forrestal’s library media specialist Sarah Coleman always looks ahead when it comes to emerging technology and her students were able to directly communicate with historical figures they were learning about by using an artificial intelligence program.

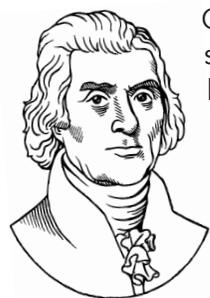


This was achieved by utilizing the Magic School program’s character chat box. Coleman noted that artificial intelligence will be a part of her students’ lives growing up and they should know how to use it responsibly, which also includes fact checking information that the program provides.

“There’s a huge human component that is necessary and hopefully they’ll grasp that too when they see inaccuracies,” Coleman said. “Emergent technology is a big part of what we do in library skills.”

The program at times seemed very human, especially when questions students asked were rejected with Coleman noting this too served as a learning experience.

“It teaches them to write better questions and learning to use AI is a big skill as well, having to be really clear with your directions,” Coleman explained. “Like anything else, we need to learn to work with the technology and make it work for us.”



Coleman is testing the waters with the program’s chat box where students could converse with literary characters, opening up further learning opportunities.

“In the library world, there’s a ton we can use it for,” Coleman said.

Fifth grader Abeni Buffin enjoyed using the program where she asked Thomas Jefferson about challenges he faced as president. She appreciated that the technology had Jefferson speak as he would have back in his time.

“I like how the AI spoke in character,” Buffin said. “Whenever they answered one of your questions, it would just keep your mind going and you kept thinking of more questions.”

Fifth grader Henri Green felt he learned more about author Mary Shelley by using the program than if he read it in a book. He shared this tip for any student trying out the program for the first time.

“If you’re going to ask a question, try to think outside the box,” Green said.

