



ATTICA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

UPDATE

FALL 2022



HOMECOMING 2022

Another year, another fantastic homecoming at Attica Central Schools! From dress up days to parade floats, and from sports wins to pep rallies, our students had a blast and let their Blue Devils pride shine through the entire Homecoming Week!



Scan the QR code at left using the camera app on your smartphone to watch a video from our high school pep rally in October.

SCAN ME



SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE



There's a line at the end of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" (a little early for Christmas stories, I know, but bear with me) where Ebenezer Scrooge, fresh from his time-traveling odyssey with the yuletide ghosts of past, present and future, promises to honor Christmas in his heart and keep it all the year.

"I will live in the past, the present and the future," a newly enlightened Scrooge promises. "The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach."

Now that's all well and good. Giving thanks and being charitable the whole year 'round is an admirable goal, but let's face it: We're humans, not a literary allegory. It's hard to stay thankful 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In difficult times, it can be hard to see the bigger picture which, oftentimes, is brighter than the one right in front of our eyes.

That's why it's important, from time to time, to take a step back and reflect on what we're thankful for. With Thanksgiving in the rearview mirror and the holiday season upon us, the time seems even more appropriate to take stock of the good things in our lives. I, for one, am thankful to find myself in a school community so invested in its students' success.

Now I know what you're thinking: This guy's only been here a few months. How can he know anything about Attica?"

In some ways, you're right.

But even as a newcomer, it's easy to see Attica Central Schools and the broader Attica community is a special place that boasts rich traditions and deep-rooted pride.



Superintendent Dr. Kiel Illg paints pumpkins with students in Mrs. Carrie Willey's pre-kindergarten class.

You hear it in the cheers of Blue Devils supporters who pack bleachers to support our student athletes at home and away games.

You see it in the respectful way our students interact with teachers and one another in hallways and classrooms.

And you feel it in the care our teachers take instructing their students and responding to their individual needs.

Make no mistake: This buy-in from students and staff and support from the community can't be found just anywhere. They're special. Things to cherish.

That's why, this school year, we're working to nurture these unique assets by bringing our efforts to bear on three central themes: love, serve and care.

I'll admit: It's easy to be cynical about these kinds of things.

It's our job to push through that skepticism

and show why instilling these values in our students and centering them in all we do is so important to the continued success of our district and the health of our school climate.

While we're off to a great start, the work of improving is never done.

In the coming months, we'll be looking to build on the positive instructional habits we've been preaching in our classrooms by extending them into our students' homes.

Our teachers and staff are fantastic and make positive, meaningful differences in our students' lives every day, but parents and families will always be a child's greatest support system.

Ample research exists showing students perform best when these positive instructional habits are mirrored at home and we owe it to our students to ensure we're doing everything possible to enable their success academically, socially and emotionally.

In addition, we must and will continue to forge positive relationships with students, parents and one another. It's up to us to lead with love, serve our students to the best of our ability and show we care as much about their successes as their failures.

In a few short weeks, chances are you'll be sitting down to a holiday meal.

Before digging in, I encourage you to take a moment to look around your table and see the people you're with. When you do, you may find you have more to be thankful for than you'd have thought. I wish all of you a happy holiday season.

Kiel Illg, Ph.D., Superintendent

HYDROPONIC GROW SYSTEM YIELDING NEW KNOWLEDGE, FRESH VEGGIES FOR ATTICA STUDENTS

Students in Mr. John Versage's middle school career and technical education classes are putting the district's new hydroponic grow system to use learning about plants and their growing cycle while helping feed their fellow students at the same time.

The district acquired the growing system and started growing lettuce last year, said Versage, a technology teacher at Attica for the past 18 years.

"We have these little pads - you get them wet and you put seeds in there and put them in a tray," Versage explained. "Then you take the tray, put it on top of a little heater and then I have a couple grow lights over there and we put them under there."

Versage and his students planted Buttercrunch, Iceberg and Romaine lettuce seeds in mid-September and harvested their first crop last week. Once they harvest a crop, Versage's students transport it to the district's cafeterias where it's used by Attica's food service staff in dishes served to students during lunch.

"They think it's pretty cool to know we're eating our own stuff that we've grown," Versage said of his students.

Now that the lettuce plants have reached the point of being ready to harvest, Versage said they should continue to yield for quite some time.

"Once it gets to the point where we harvest it and take it down to the cafeteria, it's probably every two weeks after that that you get a good bucketful of lettuce. The same plant will keep producing," he explained. "It takes a bit but it's a good turnaround once we get going."

Versage's also grown a few varieties of flowers with his special education students



*Photos courtesy of John Versage
Students in Mr. John Versage's middle school career and technical education class harvest their first crop of lettuce, which was used by the district's food service staff in dishes served to students during lunch. Students grew the lettuce using a new hydroponic grow system the district obtained last year.*

using the hydroponic setup, among other things.

"Toward the end of last year, we threw a Coleus plant in there just to see what'd happen. I took it home over the summer and put it in a pot and it grew all summer, so that was exciting to see," Versage said. "I had a tomato plant going too but it was toward the end of the year and I don't know - it just didn't work out as well."

The new hydroponic growing operation dovetails with the district cafeteria committee's ongoing efforts to prioritize the serving of fresh, locally procured fruits and vegetables to students.

In addition to the hydroponic grow system, Versage's students continue to experiment with dehydrating different types of fruits like apples and bananas which are then served in the district's cafeterias.

Agriculture teacher Michalle Barber and members of the high school Future Farmers of America chapter have been working with Paul Fenton of Fenton's Produce in Batavia to improve crop yields in the district's high tunnel greenhouse. Once harvested, the vegetables are likewise served in the district's cafeterias.

Versage said he and his students will continue trying new plant varieties in the hydroponic system to see what works and what doesn't.

"Agriculture's probably the number one industry here and a lot of our students' families are in farming," Versage said, "so having this type of growing system here and being able to offer students some real-world, hands-on experience with it is, I think, really valuable."

NEW SCIENCE ELECTIVE GETTING STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

High School Science Teacher Jenna Linsey's new local outdoor sciences elective covers a lot of ground for its 20-week duration.

So far this semester, Linsey's 18 students have studied hydrology and soil sciences on the district's campus and taken a field trip to the Attica Wastewater Treatment Facility where Attica alumni Doug Bietz and Evan Krawczyk gave an engaging tour and explained how they treat and purify wastewater before releasing it back into Tonawanda Creek.

"We also did a Zoom chat with Reid Polmanteer, a Finger Lakes native and fellow SUNY Geneseo graduate who's now a hydrogeologist in Denver, and discussed some of the water troubles they're having out west," said Linsey, who's now in her fifth year teaching at Attica. "Coming up, we have a trip to a rock quarry to look at mining and engineering practices."

The elective is new this year and is open to students in grades nine through 12. Linsey said she created the elective because, while the practical content of an earth sciences course lends itself to career options that involve working outdoors, being out "in the field" tends to be more interesting and engaging to students than desk work.

"In a rural school district, it's important to provide students these options as well as utilize the stream and nature trail on campus to explore the physical sciences," she said.

In addition to hydrogeology, soil

sciences and mining, Linsey's course also covers subjects in engineering practices, manmade and environmental hazards and meteorology.

"On the hazards front, we're starting with flooding as the Tonawanda Creek has high-risk flooding," she said. "Attica is also on a fault that produced a 5.2 magnitude earthquake in 1929, so we'll be looking into that as the semester progresses."

Linsey's course will culminate in a final research project that will see students share their findings with the public.

"I really want the students to pick from the topics we've discussed in class," she said.

Topics Linsey's students have expressed interest

in are testing salinity in the soil after road salt has been applied compared to early fall soil samples, additional water quality testing from storm drain pipes that enter the stream from school property and determining the angle of soil on a slope before a landslide.

It's possible that the latter topic could even center on the collapse of some houses along Exchange Street near Attica Correctional Facility that occurred a couple of decades ago, said Linsey.

"How the projects are shared with the community will depend on the subject matter of the project," said Linsey. "I'm really pleased with how the course is going so far and think students are getting a lot out of it. Hopefully we can



HEART BEAT OF ATTICA

Students in Mrs. Tressa Smith's middle school art classes took advantage of some sunny fall weather to make chalk paintings on the pavement that paid homage to our district's themes for the 2022-23 school year: love, serve and care. Students' creations came out great and helped remind everyone who saw them of the importance of exemplifying love, service and care to others not just in school, but everywhere, every day. Great job, artists!



TAKE A STROLL THROUGH OUR NIGHT GARDEN

To help welcome parents and guardians to open house in September, our elementary school students put their green thumbs (and other fingers) to work creating flowers that transformed the first floor of our elementary school into a night garden. Art teacher Mrs. Sara Lewinski demonstrated the proper flower-making techniques and then set students to make their own using construction paper, markers, glue and buttons. Students' finished flowers came out beautifully - scan the QR code below using the camera app on your smartphone to see for yourself!



SCAN ME



PREDICTION PRECISION

Students in Mr. Will Paddock's AP Statistics class got out of the classroom earlier this school year for some hands-on learning about analyzing and comparing types of data. First, students picked different pull-back cars. Then, they pulled the cars back certain distances and measured how far they went. Students then used computers to analyze and work with the data to predict exactly how far their cars needed to be pulled back to go precisely 80 inches.



DONATION TO BENEFIT ATTICA'S 'BEST BUDDIES' CHAPTER

In October, members of the Wyoming Correctional Facility's Make a Difference committee stopped by the high school to present Attica Central Schools' Best Buddies chapter with a \$350 donation.

Best Buddies is an international, non-profit organization that creates opportunities for elementary and middle school students with disabilities to build relationships with high school-age mentors. Through planned social events, the "Buddies" gain self-advocacy and social communication skills and build inclusivity and connections with others in order to feel more secure and valued.

Best Buddies Advisor Debbie Stanton, a teacher at Attica High School, said the donation would be used to defray the cost of national dues and to help the organization pay for materials for future events.

"We're so grateful to Attica's Make a Difference committee for this generous donation," said Stanton. "It's going to go a long way toward helping our members build meaningful relationships with their buddies."

According to Mary Anne Acker, who sits on the Make a Difference committee, Attica Village Mayor Nate Montford, who's also a committee member, learned about Best Buddies during a trip to speak with Stanton's government class about his elected position.

"Some of the students in the class were members of Best Buddies and they discussed the program with him. He brought that information back to us at a committee meeting suggesting that it might be a good program to support," Acker explained. "We decided to help Best Buddies because of the positive nature of the program. Many of the members on the Make a Difference Committee are teachers and most are parents. Best Buddies is something that we would like to see be successful to help make a difference in the lives of those kids in need."



Attica's Best Buddies chapter has more than 30 members who regularly volunteer to help make a positive difference in the lives of younger students.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

STUDENTS TEST CULINARY METTLE IN PANCAKE CHALLENGE

In late September, students in Mrs. Becky Sphar's "Foods on Your Own" class went head-to-head in a pancake showdown for the ages. Sphar's elective course is designed to assist students in principles related to food preparation. Students learn how to prepare truly tasty, mostly healthy, and totally realistic meals all on their own.

In the pancake challenge, Sphar gave teams a basic pancake recipe that teams then modified with add-ins or toppings. A panel of expert(ish) judges then graded each offering.

"Excellent taste - the fruit to pancake ratio was great," remarked a judge about one team's submission.

"Perfect! Looks like it was created by a professional," remarked another.

When all the batter had been fried and the last forkful of pancake had been eaten, it was the team of Jordan Anderson, Clayton Bezon, Skylar Hiam and James Stockweather that stood victorious and were presented with the Golden Whisk. The team added chocolate chips to their pancakes then topped them with a medley of strawberries, raspberries and blueberries.

"The students did a fantastic job with this challenge and the results were delicious," said Sphar.

A special thank you to our judges - Mrs. Alison Zybczynski, Mr. Tony Miller, Miss Amanda Crowley and Dr. Kiel Illg - for selflessly agreeing to serve as taste-testers. Make no mistake - this was tough work, but someone had to do it!

Photos courtesy of Becky Sphar
Students in Mrs. Becky Sphar's "Foods on Your Own" class prepared pancakes as part of a challenge to see who could come up with the most delicious version. The finished pancakes were then graded by a panel of judges.



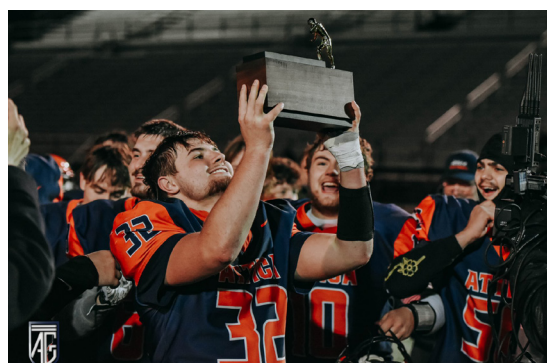
FALL SPORTS

FOOTBALL

The Blue Devils finished their regular season with a record of 6-2 en route to earning the program's first ever sectional title with a 16-8 win over East Rochester/Gananda in Class C. Offensively, the Blue Devils were led during the regular season by senior running back Wyatt Kauffman (446 yards, four TDs), junior running back Landyn Thomas (619 yards, seven TDs) and junior running back Sam Strzelec (269 yards, six TDs). On defense, junior linebacker Case Hill was a three-time Section V Player of the Week and recorded 71 total tackles and two interceptions. Junior linebacker Clayton Bezon had 61 tackles and three interceptions through the eight-game regular season while Jordan Anderson, a junior defensive back, also had three takeaways through the air. As of this writing, Attica was slated to play Section VI's Lackawanna Nov. 21 in the Far West Regionals for a spot in the Class C state semifinals.



Scan the QR code above using the camera app on your smartphone to relive our boys' Section V Class C Championship win.



GIRLS SOCCER

Our girls varsity soccer team got off to a rough start this year, going 0-6 to open its season before bouncing back to win 5 of its next 10 to end the regular season 5-11. The Blue Devils fell to Haverling 0-8 in the second round of the Section V Class B2 tournament. Leading scorers for Attica this season were Skylar Savage (21 goals, 7 assists), MacKenzie McLeod (7 goals, 6 assists) and Emma Spink (3 goals, 6 assists).



Attica's girls soccer team is pictured after its first win of the season, a 4-2 victory over Kendall in September.

BOYS SOCCER

It's been a year to remember for Attica's boys varsity soccer team. For the first time in school history, the team ended its regular season with an undefeated, 16-0 record. Senior attacker Simon Lamparelli broke Attica's old record of 73 career goals set in 1996 by striker Tim Smith during a Sept. 26 game against Byron-Bergen/Elba and Head Coach John Dickhut was named Genesee Region Athletic Association Coach of the Year. Attica's season came to an end in an 0-2 loss to Livonia in the Section V Class B1 semifinals Oct. 26.



Passing of the torch. Attica graduate and former career goals record-holder Tim Smith poses for a photo with senior Simon Lamparelli, who broke Smith's career goals record this season.



Simon Lamparelli broke Attica's single season goal record during the Blue Devils' game against Byron-Bergen/Elba in September. Scan the QR code above to watch Lamparelli's record-breaking goal.

CHEERLEADING

Attica's competitive cheerleading team enjoyed a fantastic season, said Head Coach Teri Wildey. The team cheered at home games, a few away games and competed in three competitions taking first at the NYS Cheer Spectacular in Canandaigua, third at the Hilton Spirit & Pride competition in Hilton and fifth at the Braves Battle competition in Avon. The Blue Devils traveled to Gates-Chili at the end of October to compete in sectionals and took 4th place in Class C.

"Most of the girls that cheer in the fall cheer will cheer in winter as well," said Wildey. "I have an awesome bunch of girls on the team."



Attica cheerleaders perform during halftime of the Blue Devils football team's 30-0 win over Haverling in October.

CROSS COUNTRY

Attica's boys team finished its regular season 8-11 while the girls' team finished 13-6. Top runners for the Blue Devils this season were John Alfiero (20:07.00 at Brae Burn Golf Course) and Ethan Houghton (20:07.09 at Brae Burn Golf Course) on the boys side and Bailey Nixon (20:30 at Geneseo) and Morgan Toland (23:05 at Geneseo) on the girls side. At sectionals at Letchworth State Park Nov. 5. The boys team took 12th and the girls team took 5th - both in Class C. On the girls side, Bailey Nixon took 4th individually at sectionals with a time of 20:38, which qualified her for the state championships where she ran a 22:01.1, placing 54th out of 129 of the best Class C runners in the state.



VOLLEYBALL

Attica wrapped up its regular season with a 15-3 record and was named Genesee Region co-champion. This year's squad was led by senior middle blocker Olivia Mercardo (more than 100 kills, 40 aces and 30 blocks), junior outside hitter Ellie Cusmano (more than 150 kills, 50 aces and 60 digs), senior setter Maddy Durfee (more than 200 assists and 30 aces) and junior outside hitter Maddie Robinson (more than 80 kills, 40 aces and 40 digs). Cusmano was also named Player of the Year for the Genesee Region. Attica fell to the #1 seed Aquinas in the Section V Class C1 girls volleyball semifinals in November, finishing the season 16-4.



Attica's varsity volleyball team is pictured during its straight sets win over Kendall in October. The game also served as a fundraiser to benefit breast cancer awareness, research and care. Our junior varsity and varsity players raised more than \$2,000 with the help of the Attica community.

STAYING SAFE

STUDENTS LEARN VALUABLE LESSONS AT FIRE PREVENTION DAY



Stephan Bove still remembers Fire Prevention Day back in 2002, when he was five years old and a kindergartener at Attica Elementary School.

"From '02, I remember, it was mainly the Attica trucks and it was definitely a cool day because at that time when I was in kindergarten, they had a car parked out here and they burned it," recalled Bove, now 25 and an assistant chief with the Attica Fire Department. "We no longer do it this way because we don't want people smelling the smoke, but it was definitely a cool thing."

While burning cars is a thing of the past, Fire Prevention Day remains an Attica Elementary School tradition and one that returned Oct. 6 with members of the Attica, Cowlesville and Harris Corners fire departments on hand to teach students about how to stay safe in the event of a fire.

Representatives from the fire departments set up their vehicles in the school parking lot and students

Members of the Attica, Cowlesville and Harris Corners fire departments showed Attica Elementary School students some of the equipment they use when responding to a fire or other emergency during Fire Prevention Day on Oct. 6.



SCAN ME



SCAN ME

Scan the QR codes above using the camera app on your smartphone to see some of what our students learned at Fire Prevention Day.

rotated through them, learning the ins and outs of a pumper truck, an ambulance and a rapid intervention truck.

An Attica firefighter gave a demonstration of the jaws of life,

the hydraulic cutting tool emergency responders sometimes use to extricate crash victims from their motor vehicles, while a member of the Harris Corners Fire Department helped students use a hand-held fire hose.

To cap things off, members of the Harris Corners Fire Department even "rescued" Teacher Assistant Chris Kelter and Elementary School Principal Kelly Beitz from the second floor of the elementary school.

"Fire Prevention is an important part of our curriculum and our students always look forward to Fire Prevention Day," said Beitz. "They are excited to learn about fire safety from all of our local fire departments as they view the fire equipment, participate in hands-on activities, and watch a rescue from the balcony at the end of the day. We appreciate the efforts of all the firemen and firewomen who took the time to come and speak with our students about such an important topic."

In addition to bringing students through the ins and outs of the equipment and vehicles firefighters

Fire prevention continued on page 14

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

'14 GRAD NEARING PH.D IN COUPLE, FAMILY THERAPY

Gabrielle Gebel has spent every year since the age of 3 in school. Now 26 and a doctoral candidate in couple and family therapy at Adler University in Chicago, Ill., Gebel is looking forward to the day she can leave the classroom beyond, though it probably won't be for long.

"My ultimate goal would be to be in a tenured job track as a university professor and work clinically in private practice on the side," said Gebel, a 2014 graduate of Attica Central Schools. "I want to be working at a university that is affiliated with a hospital system so that I can best serve populations that are important to me."

After graduating from Attica, Gebel headed to the University of Rochester where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and biology in 2018 and a master's in marriage and family therapy in 2020. She's now in the last year of her doctoral program at Adler and hopes to submit her dissertation in 2024.

While her post-high school career may appear smoothly intentional to an outsider, Gebel said that's not true.

Her initial plan, as her senior yearbook entry can attest, was "to become a world-renowned surgeon." It was during her junior year of college while studying for the MCATs that Gebel realized a career in medicine wasn't in her future.

"I wasn't interested in the content, and was not looking forward to another four years of intensive study before I got to do what I really wanted: helping people," she said. "I felt lost and was scrambling to figure out another plan."

While she passed her MCATs - "I performed about average," - Gebel's career trajectory started to shift during a psychology class on relationships and emotions.

"The professor advertised an open house across the street at the medical school for a master's in marriage and family therapy by saying 'If you like this class, you'll love this program,'" Gebel recalled. "I attended the open house that November of 2017, applied, and was accepted for the fall 2018 cohort. Feeling like I found the perfect fit for a career, I decided to continue my education in the field and applied for a Ph.D. in December 2019. I was accepted into the fall 2020 cohort and now here I am two years later."

Gebel credits the teachers at Attica with not only inspiring her to pursue her chosen field but with giving her the skills



she's used to thrive in the academic world.

Laura O'Donnell, Gebel's advanced honors biology teacher in tenth grade, first convinced Gebel to pursue her bachelor's in biology at the University of Rochester.

"She's always been positive, and I look back on my time

with her fondly," Gebel said.

As a junior, Michelle Pitkin's advanced placement chemistry class proved a challenge for Gebel, but one that paid dividends once she graduated high school.

"She was tough and the rigor of her class well prepared me for college," Gebel said.

So did the teaching style of Judson Heck, Gebel's AP psychology teacher.

"He taught like a college professor and I appreciated his teaching style when I got to college and already knew how to be successful in that environment," said Gebel.

Both Heck and Pitkin described Gebel as an unusually driven student.

"You just remember students who were hard workers and she had a direction," Heck said. "She was doing her thing and she knew exactly where she was going."

Added Pitkin: "Tenacity, grit and perseverance are three words that come to mind when I think of Gabby. It's a pleasure to see Attica alumni go out into this big world and make something of themselves. I couldn't be more proud of her."

In the years since Gebel graduated, Heck would occasionally hear updates about how she was progressing in her studies - either through Gebel's mother, Diane, a middle school social studies teacher at Attica, or from Gebel herself when she'd return to Attica to substitute teach.

Upon learning of each new achievement, Heck would usually think the same thing to himself: "That sounds about right."

"I'm really proud of her. That's an achievement. It takes a

Gebel continued on page 14

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lot,” Heck said of Gebel nearing her doctorate. “I’d like to say ‘Good luck’ to her but there’s nothing about luck. It’s hard work and putting your nose to the grindstone. She doesn’t need it anyway. She could come back and teach me things now.”

'I TRULY LOVE MY JOB'

In addition to continuing work on her dissertation, Gebel is also an active researcher.

Much of her scholarship to this point has centered on access to reproductive healthcare. She even traveled to Puerto Rico this past April to present at a conference of the International Family Therapy Association.

Gebel also teaches and supervises graduate students at Adler University and works as a relationship therapist at Relationship Therapy 312, a private provider in the Chicago area.

“My clients seek me out for a variety of reasons but most commonly it’s for relational issues,” said Gebel, who typically sees between six and eight clients per day.

While her daily job responsibilities center on helping clients confront and work through, in some cases, the most traumatic experiences of their lives, Gebel said she truly loves her job.

“I get to make genuine connections with people by holding space for some of the worst moments of their lives while

also celebrating some of the happiest moments. I get to laugh and cry with clients, often happening within the same hour,” she said. “I myself am the greatest tool that I have as a therapist, which is incredibly rewarding. However, because I use my person as an instrument, the work is also very exhausting which is why taking care of myself is important to me.”

While a lot’s changed for Gebel since she last roamed the halls of Attica High School as a student, her advice to the district’s current crop of high schoolers is the same she gave to her fellow graduating seniors during her commencement address back in 2014.

“The message that I gave in my graduate speech in 2014 was to ‘Dream big,’” Gebel recalled. “I stand by this advice. I would encourage incoming students to dream as big as the world. Aim for the moon, and you may land among the stars. Use your time in high school to prepare you for the next chapter of your life, whatever that is. There are many life lessons that can be learned while in high school, don’t miss out on them.”

Author’s note: *The preceding piece was the first in a planned series spotlighting Attica alumni who are achieving success in their chosen field. If you know an Attica grad we should consider featuring, let us know! Contact Public Relations Specialist Matt Leader at mleader@gvboces.org.*

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typically use, Joe Lawton, a firefighter with Harris Corners in Sheldon, said they also strive to impress on students how important it is to have a plan at home in the event of an emergency.

“The biggest thing for kids is to have a plan and know what to do at home,” said Lawton. “Smoke alarm goes off, where do you go? What do you do? With my kids, it’s get out of the house and go to the swingset. It’s far away from the house and that’s where you need to go.”

Bove said it’s also important for younger children to see firefighters decked out in their full set of gear so they’re not scared at the sight of a fully-equipped firefighter if a fire were to occur.

“We know it can be scary,” he said. “To be able to see us, see everything



- they can kind of get some sense of what it would be like in a real emergency.”

“We’re not scary, we’re just wearing something to protect ourselves,” added Troy Hubbard, a Harris

Corners firefighter. “To me, one of the reasons I think this is so important is because if we can prevent one fire, we’ve done our job.”

HIDDEN TALENTS

CUSTODIAN BRIGHTENS HALLWAYS WITH ARTISTIC FLAIR

After her junior high art teacher told her she wasn't talented enough to be an artist, Brooke Schery put down her paintbrush and didn't pick one up again for more than a decade.

"I was in seventh or eighth grade and I'm like 'Well, that really stinks,'" said Schery, who's worked as a cleaner and custodian at Attica for the past nine years. "So I kind of stopped caring."

But after attending a paint and sip class with some friends in 2018, Schery decided it was time to give it another shot.

"I was like 'Oh no, this is going to be my next hobby,'" said Schery, a keen crafter. "I like sewing and doing different crafty things like that. Before I got into painting, it was all sewing. I've made tons of quilts, things like that."

Determined to sharpen her painting skills, Schery turned where any red-blooded millennial would: YouTube.

One creator in particular, Cinnamon Cooney, proved particularly instructive, said Schery. Cooney's channel, The Art Sherpa, features dozens of how-to tutorials for amateur painters.

"She's incredible and that's where I learned how to do all of my painting, by following all of her tutorials," she said. "And now that I have that basic knowledge, I've been able to really blossom and create bigger and better things."

Schery started out with a single bulletin board at the elementary school. A night shift cleaner at that time, Schery would find ways to work pictures of herself and her fellow night shifters into the display.

"I wanted to be visible to the kids because as a cleaner at nighttime,



Custodian Brooke Schery poses for a photo next to her chalk drawing "whalecoming" elementary school students back for the 2022-23 school year.

they had no idea who we were," she said. "One time I had all of us as superheroes and it was 'Our Marvelous Cleaning Staff.' You know, like Marvel characters.

Since that first bulletin board, she's expanded her artistic reach. Now, taking a stroll through the hallways of Attica Elementary, it's hard not to pass by a Brooke Schery original.

They may be on another bulletin board, like the one outside kindergarten teacher Chaunda Hertel's second floor classroom that shows a giant tree during each of the four seasons.

Each part of the tree, from the leaves and branches to the trunk and roots and even the small seedling in the bottom right corner, features a short blurb that draws parallels between the growth of a tree and the education of students.

"School counselors, therapists and

psychologists help us keep a clear mind to keep growing," reads one of the blurbs.

"The IT department helps us to branch out to learn new things," reads another.

"I wanted something that would fully encompass the entire school, make sure every position was shown as equal because we all work together to maintain the district and I even included students and parents in it because they're the reason our district goes around too," said Schery of the metaphor. "Without them, we wouldn't have a job so I wanted to make sure everybody was viewed as important in this one symbolic thing - we all work together to make the district go."

Others of Schery's artworks are scattered throughout the school's four floors, painted onto the mailboxes outside teachers' classrooms.

Artistic Flair continued on page 16



Custodian Brooke Schery poses for a photo next to a bulletin board she created on the second floor at Attica Elementary School. In coming up with the design, Schery strived for something that would fully encompass the entire school community and make clear that everyone is working together to better educational opportunities for Attica students.

"I'll ask the teacher, 'What do you like?' and then kind of go from there," said Schery of her mailbox designs.

"One of my favorites is the one I painted for Noelle Dean that shows a shark swimming in front of a tropical sunset. I really love this neon color palette - the mixture of the warm and cool tones are so relaxing to me."

To date, Schery's completed 19 mailboxes and has five more in the works.

"Someday I'll get them done," she said with a laugh.

Still others may be on a chalkboard, like the one students pass on their way to the cafeteria that currently shows a frolicking, flowery whale that's "whalecoming" students back to school.

A self-professed pun-lover, such quips are typical elements of Schery's works. Sometimes, she'll turn to Google to look up a pun on which to base a painting or bulletin board. But oftentimes, they'll just come to her in a lightbulb moment

"I'll be cleaning the cafeteria and I'll be like 'Oh, that's a good one,'" she said.

Good ideas for puns, bulletin boards and paintings go on a sticky note in Schery's office between her computer and keyboard - "I call it my hoarder's nest," Schery joked.

While Schery enjoys the act of creating her different pieces, it's the reactions she gets from students that keep her coming up with new ideas and committing the time during breaks, after school and on the weekends to bring them to fruition.

"They love them," she said. "Sometimes they don't understand the puns, but that's OK."

Hertel, the kindergarten teachers whose classroom is right next to Schery's tree bulletin board, said the positive energy Schery brings to Attica Elementary is unmistakable.

"When you are around her, you can't help but to feel happy," said Hertel. "The students feel safe around her and love to ask her questions."

Hertel said her students are especially fond of the chalk drawings Schery does on the chalkboard students pass on the way to the cafeteria that currently bears her "whalecome" back message.

"They stop to admire the drawings and I read them the cute caption she has posted with it," Hertel said. "I tell the students that Miss Brooke does the drawings. They are surprised because they think it is (elementary school art teacher) Mrs. Lewinski because her room is down the hall. I told them that everyone can have many talents or things they are good at! It is important for the students to see first hand that everyone can have many talents and you can express yourself in many ways."

Schery said she'll probably swap out her "whalecoming" whale with some new chalk creation in a couple of weeks.

"I try to do that every two to three weeks," she said, "just to keep it fun and fresh down there."

Next year marks the 100th anniversary of Prospect Elementary, which was constructed in 1923 after a fire razed the school that had stood on the same site, so Schery's considering creating something centered on the idea of "100 years of history," but isn't yet sure on specifics.

"First of all, I need to speak with the historical society to make sure my facts are straight," she said with a laugh

Whatever she decides on, Schery hopes her painting, chalk drawings and bulletin boards help students come to understand that anyone can be creative.

"I want to show the kids that I can create these really lovely pieces for you to enjoy and it didn't take any special training apart from the academy of YouTube," said Schery. "When the kids stop and talk to me, I tell them that. I'm like, 'It didn't take any special training, all it takes is practice and you can absolutely be able to do this too.'"



Students in Mrs. Nicole Parkhurst's first grade class play an adding and subtracting game during a recent WIN lesson in math.

EXTRA MATH INSTRUCTION A 'WIN'NER FOR ATTICA ELEMENTARY SCHOOLERS

Unfinished learning as a result of the coronavirus pandemic has been an unfortunate reality across all New York school districts for much of the past 2-1/2 years.

In 2019, the last non-pandemic year the state administered its grades 3 through 8 math assessments, 46.7 percent of students tested as "proficient." In 2022, that figure had fallen to 38.6 percent, recently released data from the New York State Education Department show.

Attica hasn't been immune to such challenges so this past summer, administrators and teachers at Attica Elementary School got together to do something about it.

"We were looking to provide a more intense intervention for all students and what we came up with is the WIN Math Program, which is short for 'What I Need' in math," explained Elementary School Principal Kelly Beitz. "What it comes down to is 30 extra minutes of math instruction for every one of our students, every single day. We're really trying to provide differentiated instruction for kids and trying to give them math instruction based on their specific needs."

For the WIN Math Program, Beitz has scheduled the extra instructional time during the same period for every teacher within specific grade levels, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction so they're better able to meet students where they are.

For instance, instead of a single teacher having to instruct students who have grasped a concept and are ready to move on and those who may be struggling with that same concept within a single classroom, teachers are now able to group students by competency level which, in turn, enables them to more effectively respond to students' individual learning needs.

Every eight to 10 weeks, teachers will meet to go over students' progress and, if needed adjust student groupings based on need.

"It's flexible," said first grade teacher Nicole Parkhurst of the WIN program. "For one unit, your student might be advanced and for another unit on geometry, they might need a little extra help and this makes it so we're able to meet everybody's needs."

Parkhurst said so far, the new approach seems to be working.

"We just did a mid-module math assessment halfway through the first math unit and I think my kids did better than they would have done in the past," she said. "For every four lessons, we also do a really quick five-minute assessment. That's really telling for us. If everybody is doing better than they have in the past, obviously that will indicate this approach is working."

Parkhurst said the goal is to get the majority of students ahead of the curve in math and to a point where they'd benefit from more challenging instruction.

"Hopefully we can get from being heavy on remediation to being heavier on enrichment," she said. "That would be ideal."

"That would be a long-term goal and it's definitely attainable," added Beitz, who's planning to continue with the WIN program next year. "I think we've had a really positive response so far and it's really what's best for kids."

NEW FACES

Read the short bios below to get to know the new members of our faculty and staff. Each is an outstanding addition to our Blue Devils family and brings a unique set of strengths to serving our students. Welcome to Attica!

Samantha Kio

Position: School psychologist



Education:

Bachelor's degree in psychology from SUNY Oneonta. Master's in school psychology from SUNY Oswego.

Before Attica:

I was a substitute teacher for a few years and

recently completed my full-time, full year internship in the Cazenovia Central School District.

Hometown: Verona, NY

My favorite:

- Book: "The Teacher Who Couldn't Read" by John Corcoran
- Musical: "The Phantom of the Opera"
- Music: The Lumineers and Stephen Sanchez
- Movie: "Dr. Strange"
- Sport: Go Bills!

Educational philosophy: All students have the right to a safe, inclusive, and fun learning environment which challenges them and supports their academic, social/emotional, and behavioral needs.

I admire: My sister, Katherine, who overcame the challenge of coming out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. She has faced significant challenges and has overcome this adversity while inspiring other members of her community to be true to themselves.

Hobbies: I love working out and reading. I am new to the area and look forward to becoming more involved in the community!

Katie Kennedy

Position: 4th grade teacher

Education: Bachelor's degree in childhood and special education from SUNY Geneseo. Master's in curriculum and instruction (literacy) from Arizona State University.

Hometown: Attica

Before Attica: This is my 12th year

in education as a teacher. I have taught second, third and fourth grade in both Arizona and New York.

My favorite:

- Children's book: "Cowboy Camp" by Tammi Sauer
- Sports Team: Buffalo Bills

Educational philosophy: I believe in creating a positive learning environment where students are willing to take chances, feel loved, valued and confident in their abilities. I strive to



create a positive and strong relationship with each of my students and their families as we work together and become a team to ensure success for every child.

I admire: I have always admired my parents. They have supported my dreams and been my number one fan over the years. Thank you for everything, mom and dad!

Hobbies: I love to travel. I lived in Arizona for 11 years and was fortunate enough to see a lot of the West Coast. Now that my family and I have returned to Attica, I look forward to exploring the East Coast as an adult.

Amanda Crowley

Position: Elementary school counselor

Education: Bachelor's degree in dance from SUNY Brockport. Master's in education in school counseling.

Hometown: Attica

Before Attica: I worked for Genesee Valley BOCES as a teacher aide while going to school for my master's degree. After finishing my master's and for the past six years, I've worked for Genesee Valley BOCES as a



school counselor four days per week at Attica and one day per week at another district.

My favorite:

- Movie: I love all the Jurassic Park/Jurassic World movies
- Sports team: Buffalo Bills
- Author: Nicholas Sparks

Educational philosophy: Every individual child has the right to learn in an environment that encourages growth and expansion. All students can acquire the skills to be successful across their lifespan.

I admire: Someone I truly admire is my mother. She is a kind and selfless person who has taught me a lot in life and is constantly supportive in everything I do. My mom is someone who I aspire to be.

Hobbies: I enjoy trying new walking trails to get exercise and be outside in nature and enjoy my surroundings while being in the moment.

Crystal Nutty

Position: High school main office secretary

Education: I studied biochemistry and was on the pre-med track at Niagara University, but did not graduate due to an illness.

Hometown:

East Rochester

Before Attica:

I worked as an office and administrative assistant in the medical records department at Wyoming Correctional Facility, the education department at Industrial Residential Center and the environmental science and ecology department at SUNY Brockport.

My favorite:

- Book: Anything that draws you in.
- Music: I love all kinds of music but my favorite is country.
- Movie: Comedies and action movies.

Hobbies: I hunt with my husband and I dance.



Erin Marr

Position: School psychologist

Education: Bachelor's degree in psychology from St. John Fisher University. Master's in educational



psychology from the University at Albany. I'm also pursuing a doctorate in school psychology from the University at Albany.

Hometown: Batavia

Before Attica: I spent the last two years as a school psychologist at Newark Middle School in Newark, NY. Prior to that, I had several internship and field experiences in school districts in the Albany area as well as an internship at a community agency serving youth and families affected by abuse and trauma in Albany.

My favorite:

- Book: I have recently gotten into Colleen Hoover books but typically I enjoy reading books on psychology-related topics. One of my favorites is "The Body Keeps the Score" by Bessel van der Kolk.

- Sports team: The Buffalo Bills!

Educational philosophy: I am all about building relationships and meeting kids where they are at while finding creative ways to help them feel safe, connected and confident in their learning environment. A quote I love is: "They won't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

I admire: My dad. Throughout my life he has always modeled integrity, empathy, patience and showing up for his loved ones. He has been one of my greatest teachers in every chapter of my life, always encouraging me to be brave and try new things while also reminding me of the safe places and people I have to fall back on.

Hobbies: I was involved in after-school programs as well as helping with food distribution for families in my previous district. I am looking forward to finding

some new opportunities to get involved in the Attica community!

Anthony Miller

Position: High school social studies teacher

Education: Bachelor's degree in history and master's in childhood education (grades 1-6) from SUNY Potsdam.

Hometown: Middletown, NY

Before Attica: I taught third, fifth and sixth grade in the Utica City School District from 2019 to 2022.

My favorite:

- Book: "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" by J.K. Rowling.

- Movies: "Toy Story 2" and "Hercules."

- Sports teams: New Jersey Devils and the New York Mets.



Educational philosophy: Students and teachers should do everything in their power to facilitate learning and growth.

I admire: My dad because he has taught me that making a mistake is not the end of the world as long as you learn from them. I also admire him because he went back to school in his 50s to get his doctorate degree, which has been a lifelong dream of his.

Hobbies: Reading, watching movies and working out.

Tracie Cooley

Position: Middle school nurse

Education: Associate's degree in nursing from Genesee Community College.

Hometown: Attica

Before Attica: I worked as a nurse at Strong Memorial Hospital, Buffalo Amherst Allergy Associates, Pembroke Family Medicine, Rochester Regional Health's United Memorial Medical Center and Oak Orchard Health.

My favorite:

- Sports team:

- Buffalo Bills

- Band: The Eagles

- Movie: Love Affair (1994)

Educational philosophy:

Everyone should have the right to an equal

opportunity to learn no matter how it needs to be presented. Just because everyone processes things differently, doesn't mean they can not be taught. Think outside the box!

I admire: My husband for owning his own successful business for more than 30 years and always putting his family first.

Hobbies: I love plants and am learning how to propagate as many as I can.



Sabrina Keiper

Position: 7th/8th grade math AIS teacher

Education: Bachelor's degree in

mathematics from SUNY Brockport.

Hometown:

Belfast, NY

Before Attica: I've had one year of teaching at Attica and before that, I was a substitute teacher.

My favorite:

- Book: My favorite series is Harry Potter.

- Musician: Taylor Swift.

- Movie: "Taken" and "Lilo & Stitch."

- Sports team: Buffalo Bills, Buffalo Sabres and the Milwaukee Brewers.

Educational philosophy: I believe students deserve a classroom where they feel safe and comfortable. I want students to always feel like they can come to me when they need help.

I admire: I think the person I admire most is my mom. She is a teacher as well and influenced my decision to pursue teaching. She has always shown me how



to persevere through tough situations.
Hobbies: I enjoy reading, playing video games and playing Dungeons & Dragons. Last year, I was a tutor in the WIN program and I plan to continue that this year.

Alyssa Allein

Position: 3rd grade teacher

Education: Associate's degree in childhood education from Genesee Community College. Bachelor's in childhood education from SUNY Brockport.

Hometown: Attica

Before Attica: I've been a substitute in Attica since the fall of 2017. In the last year, I did long term substitute teacher jobs for both first grade and fourth grade special education positions.

My favorite:

- Book: Throughout this summer, I have been hooked on all the Colleen Hoover books!

- Music: I love country music and going to concerts. I am also a huge Taylor Swift fan.



- Movie: My favorite movies are definitely comedies.

- Sports team: Buffalo Bills

Educational philosophy: I

believe that school should be a place where students want to be, not where they have to be. In my classroom, having positive relationships with my students is essential. I want my students to feel supported, safe, valued, and respected in my classroom. I believe my role as a teacher is to guide students to develop a love of learning by developing strong relationships, knowing my students, understanding their goals and meeting their individual needs.

I admire: My little brother, Braden. He's a junior this year at Attica and is a three-sport athlete. He is also this year's starting quarterback on the football team. We have a seven-year age difference, but he is my best friend. I am so proud of him for how hard he works.

Hobbies: Shopping, reading, traveling and spending time with friends and family. I also enjoy volunteering to help Gateway Home in Attica.

Courtney Post

Position: Special education teacher (6th grade integrated co-teacher)

Education: Associate's degree in teacher education transfer from Genesee Community College, bachelor's in childhood inclusive education from SUNY Fredonia, master's in teaching and learning from SUNY Empire State College.

Hometown: Attica

Before Attica: I taught at a childcare center in Buffalo for one year and



kindergarten in Las Vegas, Nev., also for one year. I also taught for Genesee Valley BOCES for six years in a self-contained, 6-1-1 classroom.

My favorite:

- Sport: Football (especially the Buffalo Bills)

- Animal: Dogs and elephants.

Educational philosophy: My philosophy of education is student-centered. Every day, in each classroom I'm in, my goal is to always focus on the specific needs of each individual student. It is important that academics are differentiated so each student's unique skills are emphasized. Students learn best when they're in an environment they feel comfortable in. I do my best to get to know my students so I can best meet their needs. I focus not only on their cognitive development, but also their emotional and social well-being which is equally necessary for learning to occur. Education is the foundation for each student's future and as an educator, it is an honor that we can help our future generation learn to their fullest potential.

Hobbies: Baking, crafting, kayaking and spending time with friends and family.

Becky Spahr

Position: Family and consumer sciences teacher

Education: Bachelor's degree in business from Roberts Wesleyan College, currently pursuing a master's in education at SUNY Oswego.

Hometown: Sheldon

Before Attica: Prior to my current teaching position, I served as the district clerk for the Board of Education and secretary to the superintendent. For the last five years, I've been an adjunct instructor for Genesee Community



College in the hospitality and tourism department. I have more than 20 years of experience in the management of full-service hotels, restaurants and event planning.

Educational philosophy: I strongly believe that the purpose of education is to prepare students for their futures with both knowledge as well as fundamental life skills. It's my privilege and responsibility to provide students with the opportunity to develop these skills, using our FACS classroom as a model for this environment. I believe we must instill in our students the value of having an admirable work ethic, the belief that they can solve challenging problems, and the importance of conducting themselves with integrity so that regardless of their specific post-graduation plans, they will be responsible individuals who contribute positively to society.

I admire: My parents for all the sacrifices they make for others.

Growing up on a dairy farm was an invaluable experience for me. Among many other things, they taught us that hard work can still be enjoyable with the right attitude.

Hobbies: Anything with my children! Besides cooking and sewing, I love roller coasters, road trips, catching fish, learning new things and just enjoying life.

SKILLED TRADES FOCUS OF CAREER EXPO

In September, Attica students joined hundreds of others from across the region at the Genesee County Fairgrounds in Batavia for GLOW with Your Hands, an annual career exploration event designed to give students in Genesee, Livingston, Orleans and Wyoming counties opportunities to learn more about career opportunities in local high-growth, high-demand industries.

More than 65 business and career exhibitors in agriculture, manufacturing and other skilled trades attended this year's event to present to students.

This was an incredible opportunity for the about two dozen Attica students who attended and they learned a lot!



Scan the QR code above using the camera app on your smartphone to watch one of our students try their hand at laying a brick.



FFA MEMBERS TACKLE NEW CHALLENGES DURING ANNUAL TRIP

Thirteen members of Attica's Future Farmers of America chapter went on their annual leadership retreat to the Oswegatchie Educational Center in Croghan, NY in September.

Oswegatchie follows a "Challenge By Choice" philosophy, explained agriculture teacher and FFA advisor Michelle Barber, where students are encouraged to push the limits of their comfort zones, knowing that it is entirely their choice how far they want to go – on the giant rope swing, the climbing wall or the challenging vertical playground. They're also responsible for cooking all of the meals, cleaning up afterwards and organizing their free time activities as a team, said Barber.

The recent trip was junior Larissa Hyman's third to Oswegatchie. When she and her fellow FFA members weren't playing cards or board games, they were outside hiking or kayaking, said Hyman.

"The most memorable part of the trip was kayaking on Saturday night. Some of us had gone down a stream we had never been down before. We went out after dinner so it was already getting dark, and there was a storm rolling in," recalled Hyman, who serves as vice president of Attica's FFA chapter. "Getting back was harder than we had thought because we had to go against the current so most of us just ended up wading back upstream. It was a little stressful in the moment but it was definitely the most fun part of the trip!"



BLUE DEVILS GO TO WASHINGTON

Eighth graders enjoyed their trip to our nation's capital in October. The trip included a guided, nighttime tour of some of Washington D.C.'s famous monuments, visits to Arlington Cemetery, the Smithsonian museums and the World War II Museum in Gettysburg and even a dinner cruise on the Potomac.



ATTICA ALUM RECEIVES NAVY PROMOTION



2019 Attica grad Edward Strzelec, a U.S. Navy sailor who was recently meritoriously promoted to the rank of petty officer third class, credits the values he learned in his hometown with helping him succeed in the military.

Strzelec is pictured receiving his promotion aboard the U.S.S. Makin Island in September.

Thank you for your service and congratulations on your promotion, Petty Officer Strzelec. You'll always be MR. Iceman, to us!

WELLNESS WEDNESDAYS A WELCOME REPRIEVE

High school students made stress balls using balloons, cornstarch and water during our high school counseling office's first Wellness Wednesday event at the end of October.

"Our goal with Wellness Wednesdays is to get kids to put their phones down and have some fun with friends," said High School Counselor Elise Meyer. "There are just so many things going on in kids' lives. I wanted them to have a little time to just hang out with friends with no commitments, no stress and no phones."

Wellness Wednesdays is a new offering this year. The district is using a grant to pay for supplies.



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