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Your Source for News from Point Pleasant Borough Schools

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Point Pleasant Borough High School's Fifth Annual Spring Prom Courtesy of Gerard Marrone

Fighting the Summer Slide with the Summer Reading Program

Parents and educators know that summer reading is the key to enhancing children's skill retention during the summer months. Research has proven that children that don't read or participate in any educational activities during the summer can lose two-to-three months of grade-level equivalency, in a phenomenon called the "summer slide," which can have significant lasting consequences.

"Experts agree that reading during the summer months can be the most effective means of combatting the summer slide," said Director of Curriculum & Instruction Susan Ladd, Ed.D. "Children who read during the summer months don't just retain their literacy skills, they actually gain them, which leads to increased academic performance when school resumes, while the inverse is true for children who do not read during the summer. These children often slide backward, losing literacy skills and reading progress."

For the past nine years, the Point Pleasant School District has sought to mitigate the effects of the summer slide with its annual Summer Reading Program. The district continues the tradition with the 10th Annual Summer Reading Program, which kicks off Jun. 19.

"The Summer Reading Program presents the perfect opportunity for our students to develop a love of reading," said Dr. Ladd, who, along with a committee, oversees the Program. "There are no limitations on summer reading, students are able to select the books they read. And as long as the books they select are appropriate to their reading level and ability, they can read almost anything. And the benefits are recursive – because students choose their own reading material, they are much more likely to enjoy what they're reading, which will lead to increased voluntary reading, and ultimately, to increased proficiency."

"The Summer Reading Program's central theme is Build A Better World," said Dr. Ladd. "The theme provides the program's overall framework, guiding exciting activities occurring at the Point Pleasant Library throughout the summer. These activities help to further engage students in the books they read, further enhancing their enjoyment of reading."

According to Dr. Ladd, the Summer Reading Program runs for approximately nine weeks, from Jun 19 through Aug. 25. Throughout the duration of the program, students in Grades one through eight are to record every book they read on specialized Reading Logs available from the District's school librarians as well as the librarians at the Point Borough Branch of the Ocean County Library. Participating high school students can submit their reading records online at https://docs.google.com/a/pointpleasant.k12.nj.us/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdMdwQFRk74bqrxPI65vaizGEJlFiX-sDPqvriTz0_3m44gVQ/viewform?c=0&w=1 or on hard copy through the library.

"At the conclusion of the program, our committee will tally each students' submissions," she said. "Two winners from each grade and school will be selected via random drawing to win a prize pack including \$25 Barnes & Noble Gift Card and gift certificates for local establishments! Plus, I'm pleased to announce that once again, thanks to the Foundation for Excellence in Education and our school PTO's one random winner from each school will win a grand prize of a \$100 Amazon Gift Card. All participants will have a chance to win one of four Amazon Gift Cards! One participant from each district school will be selected via random drawing to win their school's grand prize."

All winners will be announced in September.

"For the past 10 years, the Summer Reading Program has been cultivating an appreciation for reading among Point Pleasant Borough students," said Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith. "In that time, we've observed the program's participants demonstrate greater retention over the summer and improved academic performance during the school year. And as we prepare to launch the 10th Annual Summer Reading Program, I just want to say, keep up the good work!"

*The Summer Reading Program is open to all Point Pleasant Schools' students who will be enrolled in grades one through 12 this September. Participants should take care to submit the appropriate Reading Logs.

Board of Education approves 2017-2018 Budget

The Point Pleasant Borough School District continues to demonstrate that a steadfast commitment to delivering a first-class educational experience to the children of Point Pleasant Borough while remaining accountable to the town's taxpayers can insulate against the common troubles that challenge many New Jersey school districts during the annual budget process. The sluggish economy, a restrictive State Spending Cap, lagging State Aid figures, and an ever-expanding list of un- or under-funded State-mandated programs, were, once again, no match for the district as demonstrated by the Board of Education's recent adoption of the district's 2017-18 budget, a spending plan that, maintains all academic and co-curricular programming; makes all necessary accommodations for the continued integration of the Common Core State Standards in Math and English Language Arts/Literacy as well as the Next Generation Science Standards in accordance with State mandates; addresses the technological and material requirements to continue to effectively administer the PARCC standardized assessments as prescribed by the State; and provides for all essential maintenance and upkeep to the district's more than half a million square feet of building space and exterior property, at a total amount that falls within the parameters of the state tax cap and that is significantly less than neighboring districts.

On Apr. 24 the Board took the final step in the months-long budgeting process, when they unanimously voted to approve the proposed spending plan, appropriating \$43,188,953 for the 2017-18 school year, of which \$33,716,844 will be supported via local taxes.

"The approved budget is the result of approximately six months-worth of meticulous planning, diligent attention to detail and plain old hard work," said Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith. "I'm pleased to announce that the budget meets the district's stringent educational objectives, yet – with the second lowest tax increase in over 20 years – is fair and equitable to taxpayers."

CURRICULUM INITIATIVES

The budget provides for increased instructional continuity and

collaboration between all grades and schools with continued development and refinement of standards-based instruction and assessment in all academic areas.

"Curriculum and improvement initiatives remain focused on providing our educators with the materials, knowledge and skills necessary to support their continuous growth and achievement and that of their students," said Director of Curriculum & Instruction Susan Ladd, Ed.D. "Targeted professional development coupled with the continued use of supplemental learning tools like Achieve3000 and Google Education's suite of programs and the strategic addition of new materials as well as the continued integration of classroom technology will help foster increased student success at all levels."

At the elementary level, the coming school year will see the implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards [NGSS] in kindergarten through grade five. The new standards, which were introduced this year in grades 6 through 12, present a new approach to science education that is more consistent with the way scientists work and think. Under the new standards, students will continue to engage in hands-on experimentation and use critical thinking skills to design investigations that answer questions about the world around them.

Next year will also see the continued integration of Reader's and Writer's Workshop at the elementary level. Reader's Workshop, the district's comprehensive K-5 Reading Language Arts program, infuses lessons with opportunities for guided and independent reading, book clubs, and differentiated skill instruction in both reading and writing, while Writer's Workshop, an interdisciplinary writing technique that was implemented this year, builds students' fluency through immersion in the writing process, thereby fostering lifelong writing skills. Using Reader's & Writer's Workshop - with the support of their teachers - students learn and apply strategies that help them become thoughtful, critical readers and effective communicators, both in spoken and written word.

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Point High School wins big at NJSBA STEAM Tank Challenge

When used constructively, technology enhances standards-based learning across the curriculum. Because technological fluency is essential for living and working in the 21st century and beyond, the Point Pleasant Borough School District has made every effort to integrate technology into virtually every curriculum area.

Technology is more than a supplemental learning tool, however, comprising its own curriculum content area, the goal of which is to teach students to become independent, responsible and effective users of information and technology. Through daily, interdisciplinary technology use, district students learn to conduct research, solve problems, and think critically while gaining essential communication and vocational skills that are necessary for success in today's global economy.

"The Point Pleasant Borough School District offers diverse opportunities for students to become proficient users of computers and mobile technology as well as to learn valuable programming and back end design skills," said Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith. "These opportunities have better prepared our students for the technological demands that await them at college and in their professional lives and have provided them with increased opportunities to achieve success."

The technology-based educational opportunities available in Point Pleasant Borough High School teacher Nick Gattuso's class have gone a step further,

not only providing students with opportunities for personal achievement and to gain professional experience but also allowing them to put their technological savvy to use to affect lasting positive change in their school and the surrounding community with the development of a series of specialized applications and programs.

The understanding that students taking his classes will use their programming skills to affect positive change stems from Mr. Gattuso's idealistic approach to computer programming – both as a teacher and in practice – which has been inspired by a moral imperative to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

"I try to teach my students how to use their programming, engineering and problem-solving skills for good," said Mr. Gattuso.

When each new project is introduced, Mr. Gattuso assembles his students into traditional project management teams, with a resource manager, technical manager and lead programmer, who work together to complete the assigned project.

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STEAM Tank Challenge Winners: PALS HELP & PPBHS APP Teams

Fifth Annual Spring Prom an unforgettable night for all

As one of high school's final major events before graduation, prom represents the culmination of students' high school experience and has become one of pre-college life's significant milestones. For most students, attending the prom is a tradition, a rite of passage that allows for simultaneous reflection and anticipation as budding sentimentality about childhood blends with excitement about the future beyond high school. Prom can serve as the bridge between students' past and future selves that provides a glimpse into the diverging paths they and their peers will soon take.

But for students with special needs, attending the prom can seem unattainable, an activity made exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, because of these students' unique needs. Whether a student's disability requires the assistance of a nurse or aide, who would typically be unable to work an evening event, or for those who require assisted mobility devices that certain venues cannot accommodate, or those for whom loud noises and strobe lights provoke sensory issues, attending the prom can pose insurmountable challenges.

Plus, considering the fact that many special education programs for students with multiple disabilities typically retain their students until they reach age 21, thereby negating traditional grade level assignments, additional questions arise regarding which prom – junior or senior – would be appropriate for students to attend.

This was the question that plagued the teachers of Point Pleasant Borough High School's Life Skills Program for Students with Multiple Disabilities, who, for years, struggled with how they could bring the prom experience to the students in their program.

"The prom is such an important experience in the life of a high school student," said Ms. Anne Gearing, who along with Phyllis Thomson serves as the Life Skills Program's teachers. "Mrs. Thomson and I wanted our students to have that experience, so we began having discussions about which prom event might be best for them to attend. We knew that, although our students have every opportunity to attend either the junior prom or the senior ball, they might not be as comfortable in a larger, and potentially unfamiliar crowd."

But the seed was planted, and while both teachers agreed that although the existing prom events might not be the best fit for their students, there was no reason that they couldn't create a new event. And thus, the concept for the Spring Prom, a prom designed specifically for students with special needs, was born.

Deciding to have the prom was the easy part - where to host it, what to do about volunteers and how to pay for it – proved somewhat more challenging.

For a traditional prom, students from the respective grade level, typically purchase prom bids or tickets at a pre-determined price, to spread the event's cost among a large pool of attendees. With an anticipated guest list consisting of six students, funding the prom through traditional means would have been impossible. Never ones to back down from a challenge, however, Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing, with the full, enthusiastic support of both high school and district administration, got to work, pounding the pavement in search of donations and planning fundraisers, all to make their students' dreams of attending a prom, a reality.

And their combined efforts paid off, raising enough money for the First Annual Spring Prom in 2013.

"All six students from the Life Skills Program along with 23

student volunteers attended the inaugural Spring Prom," said Mrs. Thomson. "Our students had a wonderful time at their first ever prom, and it was awesome to be able to experience it with them. We knew that, going forward, we wanted to make the prom bigger and better."

A feat they achieved with the Second Annual Spring Prom held at the Spring Lake Manor in 2014 and with every Prom since then. Now, the Spring Prom attracts double the number of special needs students and double the amount of student volunteers!

"Based on the success of that first event, we decided to invite some additional students, who, although they are not in the Life Skills class, do have special needs," said Mrs. Thomson, explaining that they expanded the guest list to include special education students from the high school's resource centers.

And as for the student volunteers? Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing had to begin turning volunteers away as their numbers swelled to nearly 50, a mix of students from the high school's student ambassador program and the key club as well as a number of students from Technology Teacher Nick Gattuso's Software Engineering class, the same students who work with the Life Skills students to develop the Panther Assisted Learning Software or PALS applications. Though they typically receive double the applications, student volunteers are capped at 45.

On May 5, the group of students – the special needs students with their non-disabled peers – joined together at Spring Lake Manor to dance the night away at the Cinco de Mayo-themed Fifth Annual Spring Prom.

The guests danced for approximately three hours straight to tunes courtesy of DJ Alex Bromley as the evening's paparazzo, high school math teacher and part-time photographer Gerard Marrone, who volunteered his photography services, snapped their photos.

After reluctantly taking a break from the dance floor, the students, seated side-by-side at fancy clothed tables decorated with festive piñatas and colorful balloons, dined on a catered buffet that included everything from chicken nuggets and French fries to tacos and nachos while the other guests, including the teachers and paraprofessionals who work with the special needs students each day, members of the district's Child Study Team and Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith looked on at an unforgettable evening that would not have been possible if not for the hard work and dedication of Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing.

And work hard they did! Amid the ever-growing interest in the Spring Prom, Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing have had to begin planning the event earlier and earlier in the school year.

"To fund the prom, Phyllis [Thomson] and I hold a massive gift auction each winter that's sponsored by the Point Pleasant Elks," said Ms. Gearing. "Throughout the year, we're going door-to-door and making calls to solicit donations of products and services from local businesses."

Though the Spring Prom may be smaller than traditional high school proms, it's not lacking in any authentic prom detail. The funds raised during the gift auction fundraiser cover the cost of the venue rental, catering, and favors. Local professionals donate DJ, photography and other services. The Life Skills students also lend a hand to help coordinate elements of the prom putting the vocational skills they've learned to use to create decorative elements and other special touches for the prom, like custom napkins

emblazoned with the event name and date that they made with their classroom embossing machine.

A photo booth, complete with Cinco de Mayo-themed props including giant sombreros and Dia de Muertos masks, was donated by the owner of Point Pleasant's Compass Chiropractic on Bridge Avenue, Dr. Brian O'Mullan and his wife Claudia.

After donating a gift basket to the 2016 Spring Prom Gift Auction, Dr. and Mrs. O'Mullan, who attended this year's prom, wanted to provide something special for the students, opting to donate the photo booth rental.

"We had recently attended a number of weddings that had photo booths set up at the reception," said Mrs. O'Mullan, an Occupational Therapist for the Matawan-Aberdeen Regional School District. "They're such a fun addition to any party and help make the night more memorable. We thought it would be a great way to contribute to the prom and the kids."

"It's just a small token but it really feels great to see the kids using and enjoying it," said Dr. O'Mullan. "We're so happy to support this event and thrilled to have been invited to share this night with the students. It's truly a special event."

From the local businesses and organizations that donate in-kind goods and services to the general education student volunteers, adult volunteers and school and district administration and staff, the support the Spring Prom receives is an extraordinary example of the community-based educational approach that is the foundation of the Life Skills program.

"From the ball gowns to the music, to the excellent food and good times with friends, this, by all accounts, looked like the typical prom," said Mrs. Thomson. "But nothing could have been further from the truth, while I'm sure those proms are great, this event was just extraordinary and demonstrated the spirit of inclusion and acceptance that permeates our district. I'm so grateful to everyone who helped make this evening possible and for giving our students an unforgettable experience."

For the general education student volunteers, the experience was as, if not more, meaningful. Year-after-year the volunteers state that they enjoyed the Spring Prom more than their own proms, citing the opportunity to help their fellow students, coupled with the general fun and stress-free atmosphere as the primary reasons.

Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services Rita Miller said the credit for the students' universal enjoyment of the Spring Prom is reserved largely for Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing, explaining, "This event has truly been a labor of love for Phyllis Thomson and Anne Gearing. They were determined to give their students the opportunity to experience a prom, in a safe and caring environment, and they did everything in their power to accomplish that and I applaud their efforts."

"Although, I know I speak for both Mrs. Thomson and Ms. Gearing as well as for anyone who attended the Spring Prom, that the best, and most rewarding thanks was the smiles and laughter of the special needs students," added Ms. Miller. "To watch our special needs students, some of whom have physical disabilities, dance in the middle of a circle, bordered by their non-disabled peers, who were cheering them on every step of the way and who were there for them, lending a hand or two whenever the need arose, made this experience one of the most profoundly gratifying moments of my professional life."

District hosts Reality of Recruiting Forum for student-athletes and their parents

Diversity, character, and academic achievement. These are the top qualities college coaches seek in the young athletes they recruit – that's according to Rutgers University's Head Wrestling Coach Scott Goodale and Associate Head Track & Field Coach Robert Farrell and Fred Hill, Assistant Basketball Coach at Seton Hall University, who shared these and other insights into what it's like to recruit, play and coach Division 1 level college sports at the Point Pleasant Borough School District's recent forum, The Reality of Recruiting.

On May 4, the three Division 1 coaches joined Supervisor of Athletics Chris Ferrone at the high school's Loren Donley Auditorium to take part in a panel discussion where they provided student athletes and their parents with a realistic look at the college athletic recruitment process. Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith served as moderator.

"There seems to be a lot of myths and misconceptions surrounding college recruitment and collegiate athletics in general," said Superintendent Smith. "Coach Ferrone and I felt it was important to host this forum and bring together a panel of experts who could clarify some of those false impressions and shed some light on the process to ensure that the expectations of our parents and their children match the practical and financial realities of college athletics."

The prospect of continuing their athletic careers at the college level is something that most student-athletes dream about but - depending on the sport - only between two and four percent will ever experience. And college coaches must consider a great many factors when deciding to recruit an athlete - the least of which is playing ability.

"The first thing I do when looking at an athlete, after checking their grades, is follow them on Instagram and Twitter," said Robert Farrell, who's currently in his fifth season as coach of the Scarlett Knights Men's Track & Field Team and first as the program's associate head coach. "Talent is easy. Talent I can see by watching an athlete compete but I want to know who they are off the track."

Thirty-year coaching veteran Fred Hill said he looks for the player that's going to contribute to the winning culture he's helped establish with Seton Hall's Pirates Basketball Team, he said, "When we won the Big East Championship in 2016, it wasn't because we had the best team but because we had the best attitude. Character is number one after academics."

Coach Goodale, currently in his tenth year of coaching Rutgers Wrestling Team, also ranks character as a critical factor in his decision-making process, taking it a step further than his colleagues, saying "I go on home visits. I want to see how a prospective recruit talks to his parents and siblings and I want to see the players room, to check if it reflects his character and attitude."

All three coaches stressed the importance of academics, stating that was their first and foremost concern due to college admissions becoming more and more selective.

"I look at it as though we're making an investment in the players we recruit," said Coach Hill, who said every player he recruits receives a full scholarship. "I can't make that

investment on a student who's going to be deemed academically ineligible to compete."

According to Coaches Farrell, Rutgers requires a minimum SAT score of 1250 and a GPA of 3.5 and above for admission.

"Though Rutgers is definitely selective, I've found that academic and athletic achievement often go hand-in-hand and athletes at this elite level tend to have a strong work ethic in everything they do," he said.

Once an athlete is determined to possess the talent, grades and character to warrant further attention, then the focus turns to fit whether the player is the right fit for the team and the college or university is the right fit for the student and whether the roster can accommodate each athlete's unique skillset.

"Fit is incredibly important," said Coach Hill. "I see a lot of athletes trying to go to the biggest, most well-known school and that's a mistake. They need to consider whether they're going to get the best education because there are no guarantees. Last year, 800 kids transferred out of Division 1 colleges; I look at that as 800 mistakes. You need to consider what's the best fit and where you're going to have the best experience. And that's not always going to be Division 1."

"Personally, I went Division 3 because I wanted to play in college and because it was the best fit," he said citing his experience attending Montclair State.

Coaches Farrell and Goodale both emphasized the value of diversity in athletes, encouraging students to play multiple sports.

"I want athletes I can develop," said Coach Farrell. "An athlete that plays on multiple teams for multiple coaches shows flexibility and a willingness to be taught."

The coaches also discussed the reality of athletic scholarships, clarifying some common misconceptions.

"With college costs spiraling out of control and parents looking for relief from the exorbitant tuition prices, more and more families are looking to athletic scholarships to partially or completely offset tuition costs, which is, unfortunately, statistically unlikely," said Coach Ferrone. "Full scholarships are only offered in the sports football, basketball and volleyball and even then, they're not guaranteed. Coaches are allocated a certain number of scholarships, which they then split up and distribute among players at their discretion."

As a basketball coach, Coach Hill is able to offer full scholarships to every player he signs to his program; however, Coach Goodale divvies up the equivalent of 10 total scholarships among his 30-person roster while Coach Farrell gets 12.6 to split among 50 total team members.

"Every kid gets a different number with each earning the amount they get," said Coach Goodale.

"Part of the reason it's so important to diversify – especially in Track & Field – is that an athlete that can compete in multiple events can contribute more to the team and can therefore earn a more generous scholarship," added Coach Farrell.

According to recent NCAA statistics, the average athletic scholarship for the 2016-17 school year is about \$10,400, which against the average cost of college tuition and fees for the current school year - \$33,480 for private and \$24,930 for state – falls far short.

"To put it in perspective, consider that there roughly 1 million high school football players in this country who are competing for about 19,500 scholarships," Mr. Ferrone said. "Just over two percent of those students will commit to Division 1 schools and the amount of any scholarship they receive could be negligible. There are no guarantees and even if a student does receive an athletic scholarship, there is always the possibility it may not be renewed after the first year."

The coaches concluded the presentation with some advice for current and prospective student athletes, encouraging them to be proactive and to market themselves to coaches with personalized letters of introduction. They stressed the importance of making as many unofficial college visits as possible to determine if the relationships with the coaches, teammates and school are the right fit and cautioned against using fee-based recruiting services and camps or academies that make exaggerated claims and promises in exchange for high retainers.

"I receive between 50-75 emails from recruiting services a day," said Coach Hill. "I delete every single one without opening."

"I never look at them," Coach Goodale said of recruiting emails. "Work on making connections with coaches on your own. You don't need to pay a service or go to an expensive academy, in fact, I think it's more impressive to succeed in your home school than one of those specialized academies, it shows more initiative and drive."

Coach Farrell urged students to keep a constant dialogue with their coaches and the guidance department, he said. "Your coaches and guidance counselors are key. Your counselors can make sure you're where you need to be academically and that you've taken the right classes to be on target; and your coaches are one of the most valuable resources. They can communicate things I can't learn from a profile."

"The district's Athletic Program has historically been very successful in garnering the attention of leading college athletic programs," said Superintendent Smith. "Among this year's group of students to sign National Letters of Intent are an impressive eight members of the high school's Class of 2017! This is an incredible achievement that demonstrates the integral role sports can play in a student's life; however, these achievements have only been possible due to the combination of our students' passion, dedication and hard work along with the support of their coaches, teachers and parents."

Though we encourage our students to pursue every post-secondary opportunity, including college sports, we as a district must ensure they have the most relevant and accurate information," he said. "We hope this forum helped shed some light on the process and, going forward, it will help our families make the most informed decisions for themselves and their children."

Point Pleasant Borough Schools' Teachers of the Year

Educators have a profound and lasting impact on the lives of their students. As the architects of their students' educational experience, teachers help lay the foundation for a lifetime of learning, setting the tone for what, where, when, how and why their students learn while also inspiring a sense of intellectual curiosity and a love of learning. Through their influence, teachers have the power to make their students' lives - and by extension the world - better.

Unfortunately, teachers rarely receive the recognition and praise they deserve for the vital role they serve in the development of an advanced, well-educated society.

"Most teachers, when asked, commonly cite the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others as the reason they pursued the teaching profession," said Superintendent of Schools Vincent S. Smith. "Though I'd bet that few are in it for the adulation and praise, the transformative and enriching impact teachers have on their students' lives makes them worthy of both, which is why the Point Pleasant School District so strongly believes that teachers' efforts should be regularly recognized and applauded."

Fortunately, at the Point Pleasant Borough School District, where teaching excellence is the norm, recognition happens frequently.

"Our district's teachers regularly capture the attention of various local recognition programs and have also been honored - with increasing frequency - by numerous regional and national programs," said Superintendent Smith.

According to the Superintendent, the list of district educators that have been recognized for exemplary teaching practice continues to grow and has added another four teachers following the announcement of the recipients of the 2017 Ocean County Teacher of Special Recognition Award.

On Feb. 21, Superintendent Smith, Director of Curriculum & Instruction Susan Ladd, Ed.D., Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services Rita Miller and School Business Administrator Steve Corse visited each of the district's four schools to inform the Teachers of the Year of their selection for the prestigious award.

For their outstanding efforts on behalf of the students of Point Pleasant Borough, Emily Bergmann from Point Pleasant Borough High School, Jen Nordyk from Memorial Middle School, Beth Kobesky from Nellie F. Bennett Elementary School and April Grasso from Ocean Road Elementary School were named the district's 2017 Educators of the Year.

Initially nominated by parents and fellow staff members, the Teachers of the Year are selected by a panel of district administrators, teachers, parents and community members. The committee reviews the nominations to determine the four educators whose use of creativity, innovation and efficiency in the classroom improves student achievement by fostering



Point Pleasant Borough High School Teacher of the Year Emily Bergmann

a learning-focused environment.

Emily Bergmann, Point Pleasant Borough High School
Point Pleasant Borough High School math teacher Emily Bergmann always knew she wanted a career in education.

"In addition to the most amazing parents anyone could ask for, teachers have been some of my most influential role models," Ms. Bergmann said.

She pursued her career goals at the College of New Jersey, where she was also a member of the college's cheerleading team. After graduating with a degree in Mathematics

Education, the Point Pleasant native returned to the town of her birth for her one (and only) job interview at Memorial Middle School, bringing her knowledge of math and her cheerleading experience with her. She was offered a position as a sixth-grade math teacher and not long thereafter she became head coach of the Varsity Cheerleading Team.

After eight years teaching sixth grade, Ms. Bergmann transferred to eighth grade to teach Algebra 1 and later when a position became available at the high school in 2013, she left the middle school to teach Algebra II, Pre-Calculus and Calculus at Point Pleasant Borough High School.

In addition to her teaching and coaching duties, Ms. Bergmann has also assumed an active role in improving the school climate with the Be On Point character education initiative.

"Aimed at promoting Respect, Responsibility and Pride, this program helps our students and staff to be their best selves," she said. "Giving back through Be On Point is tremendously rewarding as I have become my best self here in Point."

Jennifer Nordyk, Memorial Middle School

"A child with special needs will inspire you to be a special kind of person." - That quote has guided Memorial Middle School Teacher Jennifer Nordyk's professional life since she began her career as a self-contained special education teacher in 2008.

"I have had some of the most memorable and amazing students throughout the years and I credit them for making me the teacher I am today," she said. "They have taught me so much and inspired me to further my own education in order to better meet their needs."

After earning her Bachelor's degree from Rowan University, Ms. Nordyk pursued her Master's in Special Education from Georgian Court University. She later completed post-grad coursework in Applied Behavior Analysis from Ball State, and became a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst in 2014.

Ms. Nordyk's commitment to special needs children extends beyond the classroom to the bowling alley where she works as a volunteer bowling coach for the Special Olympics. She also works to improve the Memorial Middle School climate, helping make it more inclusive and accepting for all MMS students as a member of the Positive Behavior Supports in Schools team.

"It is rewarding to be able to make contributions to such a positive environment," she said. "My students and fellow colleagues at Memorial Middle School make me smile every day and I consider myself so fortunate to be a Special Education Teacher in the Point Pleasant Borough School District."

Bethany Kobesky, Nellie F. Bennett Elementary School

When Nellie F. Bennett Elementary School Fifth Grade Teacher was named Teacher of the Year, it's likely she was the only person for whom it came as a surprise.

"When several administrators walked into my classroom to present me with the Teacher of the Year Award, I was overcome by many emotions," she said. "I was humbled that in a school district such as mine, I was chosen for this award."

For someone who never planned to become a teacher, Beth Kobesky has excelled in the classroom and it was only a matter of time before she was honored as Teacher of the Year. It's no surprise that this was the year she was selected. In addition to being named 2017 Teacher of the Year, Mrs. Kobesky was also the recipient of this year's New Jersey's Exemplary Elementary Educator Award, an award that honors educators who are valued by their school and community and who have exhibited an inspiring presence, and a clear vision for quality teaching and learning. For her efforts to help prepare her colleagues for the implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards, she was also named this year's New Jersey Science Teachers Association Simmons Scholar.

Though her original ambition was to be a marine biologist, Mrs. Kobesky has worked to share her passion for science, especially the ocean and aquatic life with her students. Her commitment to science education has inspired Mrs. Kobesky to pursue multiple grant opportunities to fund science-themed educational initiatives. Since 2008, she has been directly responsible for or involved in the receipt of over \$22,000 in grant funds to support scientific educational programs and endeavors. Over the past nine years, Mrs. Kobesky has been



Teachers of the Year: Jennifer Nordyk, Bethany Kobesky & April Grasso

the recipient of Target's Field Trip Grant an astounding eight times, helping to offset the costs for the fifth grade's annual Sandy Hook field trip. In 2009, she received \$4,800 from the Lowe's Toolbox for Education Grant Program, to fund an outdoor classroom at one of Nellie's underutilized courtyards. The following year, she was part of a committee that applied for and received a \$3,382 Barnegat Bay National Estuary Grant, to fund a program that teaches the importance of preserving the Barnegat Bay watershed. Also in 2010, Mrs. Kobesky worked with her fellow members of the school Green Team, applying for and receiving \$2,500 from the OceanFirst Foundation's Go Green School Grant Program. The funds were used to implement the Growing Responsible Environmentally Educated Nellie Students, or GREENS, initiative, teaching students the value of composting. And earlier this year, she received two grants totaling \$5,750 to fund a water quality testing study project entitled "What's in the Water."

"It has been 15 years since I stepped foot in front of my first class of students and I have not regretted a single day," said Mrs. Kobesky. "It is my passion, not just my career. I am continually looking for new ways to develop professionally because I love teaching, I love learning, and I love a challenge. It is my hope that I can continue inspiring students for many years to come!"

April Grasso, Ocean Road Elementary School

Since 2001, April Grasso has been making a difference in the lives of her students at Ocean Road Elementary School, instilling in them a thirst for knowledge and challenging them to be the best they can be both academically and personally. Ms. Grasso's students benefit from her diverse educational background that includes a Bachelor's degree from Villanova University and a Masters in Counseling from Monmouth University, which allows her to support her students both educationally and emotionally.

"It is my hope that students leave my class feeling more confident, motivated, and inspired to be the best versions of themselves," she said.

The Henry Adams quote, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops," inspires Ms. Grasso's teaching philosophy, and makes her appreciate her profound role in her students' lives.

"As a teacher, I have the privilege to not only educate but foster a desire to learn," she said. "When I see a student's face light up and realize I am reaching them and they are learning, it ignites my excitement for teaching."

The Teacher of the Year Program was developed with the goal of highlighting the rewards of teaching, as well as the important services outside the classroom environment that lead to student success. The criteria for selection includes the use of innovative instructional techniques & methods; the ability to inspire students of all backgrounds and abilities to learn; skill and dedication as an educator; and the ability to foster excellence in education by ongoing contributions to the improvement of student learning and the learning environment.

"Educators of the Year are dedicated and inspiring, and they are committed to making a difference - in short, they are like these four exemplary educators," said Superintendent Smith. "I offer my wholehearted congratulations to each of them for this outstanding achievement."

Budget (continued from page 1)

The 2017-18 school year will bring increased educational opportunities and options thanks to new courses that will be introduced at the middle and high school. Memorial School's course selection guide will increase by two with the addition of new STEM and Personal Finance electives, while the high school will gain new college credit-earning opportunities with the addition of Advanced Placement Human Geography - bringing the total number of AP courses offered at the high school to 18 - and new dual enrollment programs Syracuse University Project Advance and Tomorrow's Teachers.

Like the high school's dual enrollment agreement with Ocean County College, Syracuse University Project Advance [SUPA] provides district students the opportunity to take Syracuse University courses embedded in the regular school day, earning college credit, which they may transfer to their post-secondary school. The first SUPA course - Principles and Contemporary Issues in Sports Management - will be offered at the high school starting next year.

Tomorrow's Teachers is open to juniors and seniors who aspire to become teachers. The one-year course allows prospective teachers to gain specialized training and hands-on experience in teaching. Fairleigh Dickinson, Rider and Stockton Universities grant college credit to students who successfully complete the program.

In addition to the embedded OCC courses, the district offers Jump Start, another college-credit earning opportunity with the college. Jump Start allows students to take college classes at OCC's main campus or at any number of satellite schools, including our own high school.

The district also has a Computer Science cooperative agreement established with Monmouth University. The program combines classroom-based learning with practical experience, providing a pathway to acceptance at Monmouth as well as specific scholarship-earning opportunities.

"Concurrent enrollment programs, educational partnerships and other specialized learning opportunities allow our students to get a head start on college while helping better prepare them for the rigors of college life," said Dr. Ladd.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology enhances standards-based learning across the curriculum, and because technological fluency is essential for living and working in the 21st century and beyond, every effort has been made to infuse technology into virtually every curriculum area.

Infrastructure upgrades, coupled with the strategic addition of hardware and components have provided the devices, consistent wireless access and sufficient bandwidth necessary to support a fully integrated instructional model. The ongoing transition to this model will be further facilitated with the purchase of additional quantities of Chromebooks for each school, provided for in the budget.

Over the past few years, Chromebooks have become an invaluable classroom tool, facilitating real time collaboration between teacher and students, with limitless possibilities thanks to the comprehensive suite of Google Apps for Education.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nothing is more important to our students' education than having well-prepared and highly qualified teachers and our district's educators are distinguished for their commitment to continuous professional growth and progress toward mastery of the teaching craft.

District workshops, content area and Grade-level meetings and participation in professional learning communities, allow our faculty to work collaboratively to exchange knowledge and skills and share best practices.

Professional development for the coming year will include, a focus on ensuring the seamless transition to the Next Generation Science Standards; the continued alignment of Reader's and Writer's Workshop; and strategic professional development programs grounded in Google for Education, helping staff harness the transformative powers of Google in their classrooms. Additional technology workshops will be offered in specific technological tools and programs to enhance instruction and improve teacher efficiency.

FACILITIES UPGRADES

"District facilities are regarded as a treasured investment," said

Superintendent Smith. "Our Board of Education and district administration believes it's our duty to keep our schools safe, comfortable and appropriate to our students' needs."

According to the Superintendent, the coming year will see continued maintenance and proactive assessment of building systems to further ensure building safety and durability.

"The budget looks to maintain the momentum established in previous budget cycles with work on a number of key capital improvements, including, the continued replacement of classroom lighting and replacement and installation of drop ceilings at Nellie Bennett and the high school, the renovation of Ocean Road's kindergarten classrooms and the middle school's eighth grade science labs and the installation of a new kitchen in the high school's multiple disabilities classroom," he said.

TAX IMPACT

"The district's responsibility to Point Pleasant taxpayers is second only to the responsibility we have to our students," said Superintendent Smith.

In accordance with the State's current school funding formula, local property taxes account for 77 percent of the district's total budget. Under the 2017-18 budget the general fund property tax increase equals 1.45 cents per \$100 of assessed home value, which for the average Borough home assessed at \$383,000, is an additional \$55 per year, which represents the second lowest increase in more than 20 years!

"Despite incremental increases to the district's State Aid over the last couple year, our State Aid numbers are still, more than six years later, about \$1 million under 2010 levels," he said. "The fact that we were able to craft such a comprehensive budget that is within the State's allowable Spending Cap is remarkable, and truly a testament to School Business Administrator Steve Corso's business acumen and the austerity demonstrated by the Board of Education. The 2017-18 budget provides the essential tools to uphold the district's rank as not only one of the top achieving school districts in the State, but also one of the lowest-spending."

Superintendent's Perspective

Though the weather has been keeping us guessing as to which season we're in, the other signs - warmer weather, more daylight hours, and the not-so-welcome return of itchy allergy eyes - are unmistakable, spring has arrived bringing with it one of my favorite times of the school year. With the many live performances, art and film festivals, and student award and recognition programs that honor student achievement throughout the year, spring is one of the most exciting here in Point Pleasant Borough Schools. These events and activities provide unique insight into the academic, artistic and athletic growth our students have experienced during the school year.

However, spring's arrival is also somewhat bittersweet because it signals the end of another school year. It's hard to believe that the end of the 2016-17 school year is just weeks away. Soon, our schools' will confer to our students their highest honors at their promotion and graduation ceremonies. It's never easy to say goodbye but we send these young men and women off to realize their dreams and ambitions secure in the knowledge that we have prepared them well.

But before we turn our collective attention toward the future, I'd like to reflect back on what has been an unforgettable year. Although the close of each school year lends itself to contemplation and review, with its many achievements, the 2016-17 school year will stand as a touchstone to achievement for our district with our students far exceeding all standards of excellence. This year, like in previous years, our students have received commendations for their academic pursuits, seen critical acclaim for their work in the performing arts and have secured a number of state sectional championships and sportsmanship awards. What sets this year apart, however, is not only the volume of honors, but also the level of prestige of the awards that have been bestowed upon our students and staff. This year, students were distinguished as AP Scholars, Algonquin Rising Stars, and participants in the WorldStrides High School Honors Performance Series at Carnegie Hall among others. Our students have taken top honors in, various art competitions, like the Scholastic Art & Writing Competition; digital video contests including the Ocean County Library Film Festival; and numerous essay contests like the NCTE Promising Young Writers' Contest and multiple Asbury Park Press Student Voices Essay Contests. A number of our student-athletes have also earned spots among our area's top athletes on All County, All Division and All State teams while some of our special education students have medaled in the Special Olympics! Earlier this year, Senior Jake Ippolito took top honors in Computer Programming at the Future Business Leaders of America State Competition. Jake will advance to the Nationals in California this summer. And recently, our high school's Advanced Software Engineering Topics Class achieved finalist standing for two distinct projects at the Regional STEAM Tank Challenge. They'll advance to the State Level Competition, which takes place at the New Jersey School Boards Association 2017 Workshop next October, where they'll face off against 16 other innovative projects in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics fields.

District staff members have also earned recognition this year, including, 12 district teachers whose commitment to 21st Century teaching and learning inspired their pursuit of certification through the Google Certified Educator program; two Exemplary Elementary Educators; four Teachers of the Year; an NJSTA Simmons Scholar; an Educational Support Professional of the Year; a Greater Media Teacher Who Rocks; a Rutgers School of Engineering Dean's Award for Service recipient; and two Coaches of the Year! Our teachers have also demonstrated an outstanding commitment to providing students with the best possible educational experience while remaining fiscally responsible and accountable to taxpayers with the receipt of over \$70,000 in grant monies, this year alone!

Thanks to the Board of Education's recent adoption of the 2017-2018 budget, even greater success is promised in the coming years. In alignment with the district's commitment to delivering a first-class educational experience to our students while remaining accountable to Point Pleasant taxpayers, the approved budget maintains our schools' high quality educational and co-curricular programs and progressively addresses students' evolving needs with new programs and initiatives yet imposes the second lowest tax increase in over 20 years!

The 2017-18 budget represents a hard-won achievement for district administration and the Board of Education, who share the challenge of crafting a school spending plan that facilitates learning yet is sensitive to the needs of taxpayers. I believe the approved budget meets with both those goals and provides for the best possible educational experience for the children of Point Pleasant Borough.

On behalf of the Board of Education, Central Administration, and the entire Point Pleasant Borough School District, I thank you for your continued support.



Vincent S. Smith
Superintendent of Schools

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The Panther Press

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Mission Statement

To assure that all students are equipped with the essential skills necessary to acquire knowledge and understanding; to instill the desire to question and look for truth so that students may become critical thinkers and life-long learners; and, to assure that all students practice self-discipline, perseverance, fairness, and judicious decision making.

It is the expectation of this school district that all pupils achieve the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards at all grade levels.

STEAM Tank (continued from page 1)

Panther Assisted Learning Software, or PALS, is one such project. PALS is a suite of assistive learning applications that have been in development by Mr. Gattuso's students over the last five years. The applications are designed for students enrolled in the high school's Life Skills program for students with multiple disabilities.

During the development phase, the programming students work alongside the special needs students to design applications based on each special education students' unique needs. Apps created so far under the PALS initiative, include, a navigational tool to help students new to the program navigate through the high school; a program to simplify units of liquid measure; a money-changing app; and a shopping simulator designed to help the students navigate the supermarket.

"The development of the PALS applications for the students in the Life Skills class aligns perfectly with the program's goal of teaching vocational sufficiency while promoting community integration among students with multiple disabilities," said Supervisor of Pupil Personnel Services Rita Miller. "PALS provides our students with multiple disabilities with new ways to achieve their potential, ultimately helping them to become independent members of the community."

"The development of these apps has also facilitated increased interaction between our students with multiple disabilities and their non-disabled peers," she said. "This interaction is central to the inclusive school climate that we have been working to foster in the district."

This close collaboration has inspired the concept for a new suite of tools called PALS Hospital Education Learning Program, or PALS HELP, currently in the beginning stages of development. PALS HELP will assist the Life Skills students with volunteer work they perform at a local hospital, providing them with a targeted educational foundation in specific vocational responsibilities related to their work.

Mr. Gattuso's students recently unveiled the first application in the PALS HELP suite - the PALS HELP Emergency Room Cabinet Locator, which visually identifies the materials that belong in the hospital's Emergency and Respiratory Care Room supply cabinets that the Life Skills students restock - at the Central Region Semi-Finals of the 2017 STEAM Tank Challenge, where it was one of six high school programs selected from the region to advance to the State-level of the competition.

Modeled after the popular "Shark Tank" television series, the STEAM Tank Challenge helps promote innovative STEAM

(Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) education initiatives taking place in New Jersey schools. Now in its second year, the Challenge, which was created and is co-sponsored by the New Jersey School Boards Association's [NJSBA] and the U.S. Army, invites school district teams to compete in creative problem-solving.

Teams of students are encouraged to invent something new, modify an existing product, or identify a situation or problem that needs resolution. The teams of students present the design or solution, which is then judged by a panel of entrepreneurs, business leaders and inventors.

One-hundred-ninety-three applications were submitted by teams from across the state for consideration for 30 (fifteen K-8 and fifteen 9-12) spots in three regional semi-final competitions. Six winning teams from each grade bracket were selected from each regional competition - 36 teams in total - to advance to and compete at the STEAM Tank Finals on Oct. 24-25 during the 2017 NJSBA Workshop conference in Atlantic City. Among the teams that will compete in this year's Workshop Challenge at the high school level are not one but two teams of Mr. Gattuso's students.

In addition to PALS HELP, Mr. Gattuso's students also presented the Point Pleasant Borough High School App to the judges at the STEAM Tank Challenge. The app, which is available for download on all Android and Apple devices, provides district high school students with key school information like daily announcements, lunch menus, schedules and calendars as well as local lunch spots and other helpful links. An update made to the app earlier this year added a new security feature that allows the district to send emergency alerts to notify students in the event of a school lockdown situation.

"Our high school has an open lunch policy, allowing students to leave campus during lunch," said Superintendent Smith. "We struggled with a method by which we could notify students during emergency situations. Where the district's Instant Alert System fell short, Mr. Gattuso's students came to the rescue, making modifications to the high school information app based on my and the Point Pleasant Police Department's specifications. The resulting app meets all the necessary requirements and enables us to send alerts from a secure, web-based control panel. In the event of a lockdown or other emergency, the app will send a text notification advising students not to return to school."

The PALS HELP Team was: Jane DeRensis; Frank Hulse; Maggie McKeon; Samantha Inneo; and Kimmy Sleys.

The PPBHS Smartphone App Team was: Kristen Stanfield; Devin Moeller; Jake Ippolito; Matthew Moran; and Jack Diehl.

On May 12, both software development teams, along with their classmates from Mr. Gattuso's Software Engineering Topics class, Superintendent Smith, Director of Curriculum & Instruction Susan Ladd, Ed.D., high school Principal Kurt Karcich, Supervisor of Technology Kevin McDermitt, select students from the Life Skills class and high school drama teacher Becky Muraglia, who wrote and directed the app presentations, traveled to the MG William S. Stryker United States Army Reserve Center in Trenton for the Central Region STEAM Tank Challenge, where the two teams presented their projects in two three-minute presentations.

"It was stressful," said Mr. Gattuso. "We only had three minutes during which this giant clock was ticking down our time. Plus, we were the very first school to present."

But Mr. Gattuso needn't have worried as he received notice as the bus was returning to school that both projects were named Challenge finalists.

"It was a total team effort," he said. "Mrs. Muraglia coached us and directed the skits, Art Teacher Kelly Mitreuter designed the logos for the brochures and collateral materials, Digital Video Teacher Pete Casalino lent us camera equipment and Industrial Arts Teacher Jim Badecker built our props. Plus, we had the full enthusiastic support of district and school administration and the Board of Education. We couldn't have done it without everyone's assistance, support and guidance."

"This project exemplifies collaborative learning at its best," said Superintendent Smith. "Working together on projects such as this not only helps our students learn better, making them individually better students, but it also makes our school better, and promotes a culture of acceptance and inclusion throughout the district."

"Education and world leaders agree that a strong foundation in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics, or STEAM, is essential for students to be prepared to live and work in the 21st century," he said. "Integrated, interdisciplinary STEAM education cohesively blends the five disciplines to teach students to apply principles of math and science and the use of technology to engineer or design solutions to real life problems. Through STEAM, students learn to think critically and to become effective problem solvers - essential skills in today's global society."