

Traditions

District Publication of

FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Vol. 27 No. 2



FROM THE Superintendent

Hello and Happy Holidays! Thank you for reading the Fall and Winter edition of Traditions for the 2022-2023 academic year, which provides a golden opportunity for the Fort Thomas Independent Schools to spotlight for the community the wonderful happenings in our District. For a second time, the U.S. Department of Education recognized Woodfill Elementary as a national Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, and it was exciting to travel with an enthusiastic contingent to Washington, D.C. in November to formally accept the honor. Also this fall, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) ranked Fort Thomas Independent School District as the top-performing K-12 public school district in the Commonwealth. To everyone in our school community--way to go! I am so thrilled for our high-achieving students, their families that offer support second to none, our outstanding teachers and staff and the visionary leadership team with whom I am grateful to work each day. It requires a shared commitment to excellence to achieve distinction of this magnitude, and it's a fabulous time to be part of our school system. It has been as true through the generations as it is today and will be tomorrow: providing a world-class education is a privilege and responsibility we collectively embrace in Fort Thomas.

To realize our vision and foster an environment of continuous improvement, the Fort Thomas Independent Schools implemented a five-year strategic plan with a focus on steady growth in five key areas: Achievement, a Positive and Engaged Culture, Student Experiences and Opportunities, our Portrait of a Graduate initiatives and Individual Student Growth. In the pages that follow, we will demonstrate how these priorities are blossoming in our five schools and provide the road maps necessary to

prepare our students for postsecondary paths of all kinds once they leave the Nest.

This edition of Traditions might look a bit different to you, and it's literally by design! Our District wants to prominently showcase the blue and white colors that are unmistakably linked to our schools and spirit wear. In addition, the publication is currently mailed to all homes and businesses in the 41075 zip code, and that practice will continue in the future. However, mindful of costs and as stewards of taxpayer money, starting in the 2023-2024 academic year our District will only mail to an address outside of Fort Thomas if you contact the central office and let us know that you'd like to receive Traditions in your mailbox. Our Information Technology team is hard at work on providing a link to include in the next edition of Traditions which will eventually allow our stakeholders outside of 41075 to voice their preferences through the district website. We will communicate progress with you and, and as always, we welcome your feedback. In the meantime, we encourage you to follow Fort Thomas Schools on Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram.

I want to personally thank you for providing the community support in Fort Thomas that serves as a backbone of our elite standing among public schools, in Kentucky and across the country. Students, families, teachers and administrators share a passion for wanting to teach and learn here. We call the phenomenon Destination: Fort Thomas. I encourage you to keep reading about how our schools are preparing the next generation of problem-solvers, innovators, visionaries, and leaders, right here in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

Sincerely,
Brian Robinson, Superintendent



Superintendent **Brian Robinson** and FTIS Board Member **Lisa Duckworth** talk with 2022 seniors (L-R) **Jackson Higgason**, **KJ Toole** and **Nicholas Robinson** before the graduation ceremony.



CALENDAR 2022-2023

JANUARY

- 2 Return from Winter Break
- 6 QT2 Report Cards
- 9 Monthly Board of Education Meeting
- 16 Martin Luther King Day - No School
- 18 Student Late Arrival Day
- 26-29 HMS Musical

FEBRUARY

- 4 HHS - Winter Ball
- 10 HMS 6th Grade Dance
- 15 Student Late Arrival Day
- 16 QT3 Progress Reports Available
- 17 No School / Make-Up Day
- 20 President's Day - No School

MARCH

- 3 FTEF Parents Night Out
- 10 No School / Make-Up Day
- 15 Student Late Arrival Day
- 17 QT3 Ends
- 24 QT3 Report Cards
HMS 7th Grade Dance
- 24-26 HHS Musical
- 31 Professional Development - No School

APRIL

- 3-7 Spring Break - No School
- 13 FTIS/FTEF Nesties
- 20-22 8th Grade DC Trip
- 22 HHS Prom
- 27 WES 1st Grade Musical
- 28 QT4 Progress Reports Available
HMS 8th Grade Dance

MAY

- 1 AP Testing Window - 5/1-12
- 16 Election Day - No School
- 29 Memorial Day Holiday - No School
- 31 JES 5th Grade Celebration
MES 5th Grade Ceremony/
Awards

JUNE

- 1 QT4 Ends
Last Day of School for Students
- 2 Closing Day for Teachers
- 4 Graduation
- 5 QT4 Report Cards Available
for Pickup

WELCOME NEW Faculty & Staff

CERTIFIED

Susan Cooper, District Gifted/Talented
Brianne McDowell, District Gifted/Talented
Jisoo Bae, HHS Vocal Music
Stephanie Beiting, HHS Visual Art
Ellen Buchanan, HHS Spanish
Andrea Higgins, HHS Science
Monica Luebbers, HHS Spanish
Steven McClamrock, HHS Special Education
Abbey McCoy, HHS Mathematics
Rachel Stephenson, HHS Counselor
Jill Taylor, HHS Health/PE
Savannah Brady, HMS Language Arts
Samantha Corman, HMS Language Arts
Rachel Jackson, HMS Counselor
Meredith Reber, HMS Strings
Amanda Wagner, HMS Special Education
Amanda Zornada, HMS Language Arts
Alyssa Brown, JES 5th Grade
Brooke Shea, JES Kindergarten
Barbara Carrasquel, MES Spanish
Abby Jones, MES Preschool
McKenzie Leigh, MES 5th Grade
Allison Roch, WES 4th Grade
Summer Sands-Arthur, WES 2nd Grade
Kassidy Schreiber, WES Kindergarten
Julie Stewart, WES Special Education

CLASSIFIED

Heather Clark, HHS Cafeteria
Robin Lunsford, HHS Instructional Assistant
Andrew Moré, HHS Custodian
Brandon Ponchak, HHS Instructional Assistant
Melissa Rosenhagen, HHS Cafeteria
Michael Sears, HHS Custodian
Peggy Steele, HHS Cafeteria
Mary Ballard, HMS Cafeteria
Tim Barth, HMS Custodian
Dalton Schroder, HMS Custodian
Rhonda Thompson, HMS Cafeteria
Ami Barth, JES Instructional Assistant
Jennifer Underhill, JES Instructional Assistant
Megan Darnell, MES Instructional Assistant
Luciey Garland, MES Instructional Assistant
Jessica Hiser, MES Instructional Assistant
Chastity Jacobs, WES Instructional Assistant
Amanda Krebs, MES Instructional Assistant
Evangeline Ainsworth, WES Instructional Assistant
Jason Sullivan, WES Custodian
Tara Wells, WES Instructional Assistant

LEADERSHIP Implementation Teams



Leadership Implementation Teams (pictured here and below) collaborate to carry forward the FTIS strategic focus.

As a Highlands Middle School parent, **Caroline Wells** sees vast similarities between the Leadership Implementation Teams in the Fort Thomas Independent Schools and her work as an international business executive. Wells knows firsthand that the global landscape is changing rapidly and, in Fort Thomas, our District is determined to keep pace with the ever-evolving role of education in the 21st century.

"These Leadership Implementation Teams (LITs), in a lot of ways, conduct meetings like I see all the time at my company," Wells said. "These teams allow us, as a district, to assess where we are, where we want to be, and what measurable steps we need to take to get there. It's really inspiring to see this cross-section of school and community leaders take this on as long-range vision."

Put in place before the 2022-2023 academic year, the Leadership Implementation Teams are important elements of the Strategic Plan that outlines the five key priorities on which our District will focus from 2022-2027: Achievement, Individual Student Growth, a Positive and Engaged Culture, our Portrait of a Graduate work and Student Experiences and Opportunities. There is one LIT for each of the above-mentioned priority areas, led by a school principal who is matched with an assistant principal from a different school.



"It has been really key for us to have that overlap so we can have people with different voices and perspectives assessing how we are performing district-wide," Assistant Superintendent **Keith Faust** said. "Also, our principals set out to intentionally build each one of these five LIT teams with the most diverse array of people they could find to provide the most comprehensive analysis possible."

Mrs. Wells is a parent invited to serve on the Highlands Middle School team that is evaluating the Achievement pillar. Every Leadership Implementation Team in the District has representation from students, parents, teachers, staff members and school counselors at their meetings, that occur at least quarterly, to take a snapshot of where things stand in each focus area and what can be improved. It might eventually lead to introducing a new class, better aligning the curriculum in a course offering with postsecondary requirements, or building upon the fabulous internship opportunities in place for our high school students to get real-world opportunities. Possibilities abound and are discussed in detail, which owes to how the District has embraced change as an organic construct.

"Since this is a five year plan and our starting point is at such a high level in FTIS, I am looking forward to seeing the impact this will have on our students," said **Kristina Sheehy**, the assistant principal at Johnson Elementary School. "It has been so encouraging to see how our initiatives start at the elementary level and build momentum through middle and high school all the way to post-graduation."

Sheehy sees it through a parent lens as well.

"I'm so thankful for the experiences my daughters have at Johnson and feel excited for what awaits them at HMS and HHS."



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Brad Fennell

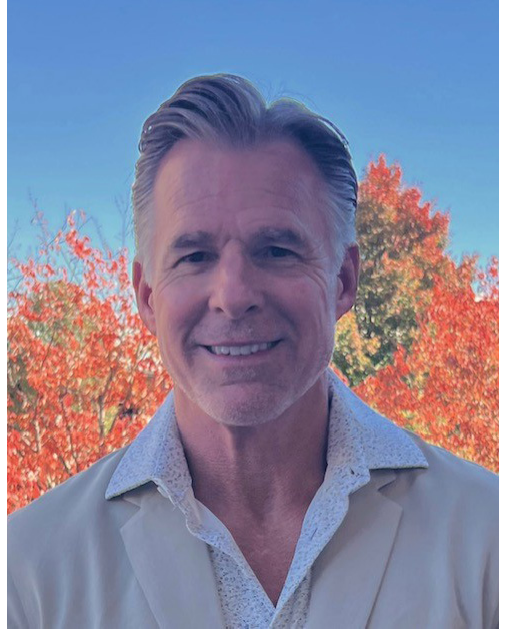
BY TREISTON COLLINS, SARA PRICE, KIARA RAAKER, ASTER BREDWELL
HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM STUDENTS

To Brad Fennell, “destination Fort Thomas” carries significant meaning. At the end of December 2022, Fennell will complete 24 years dedicated to serving Fort Thomas Independent Schools as a member of the Board of Education, making him the longest-serving member in Board history.

Deeply rooted in Fort Thomas, a 1982 Highlands graduate, then as a parent and now as a business owner, Fennell is completely vested in this community and school district. He recognizes that both must work together to provide students with the best educational experiences and opportunities. This passion for serving the community through the schools led him to run for the Board of Education for the first time in 1998.

“Our goal has always been to maintain and elevate our position as a destination district.” A “Destination District” is a place, he said, “where people yearn to be. A place that provides an exceptional and somewhat unique educational opportunity that is not obtainable everywhere.” To accomplish this goal, over the last 24 years on the Board of Education, Fennell has supported many different projects, “When I arrived on the board each of the buildings was in desperate need of renovation or rebuild... as a result of the tremendous support and commitment of the entire community we have built or renovated every building in the district.”

In addition, knowing the impact schools, teachers, and coaches make “we [the Board] have worked diligently to maintain low student-teacher ratios and provide necessary and appropriate salary increases to attract and retain the best of the best, even during difficult financial times,” said Fennell. “We have also



“Our goal has always been to maintain and elevate our position as a destination district.”

worked on curriculum development to ensure positive improvements were made to keep our educational offerings state-of-the-art. We focused on a more global perspective than a local one as we know our students will be taking their many talents all over the country and even the world.”

Excellence drives Mr. Fennell and providing the best for Fort Thomas has been the reason for his long tenure on the Board of Education. The success of the schools and community are closely connected. The future of both matters greatly because he considers Fort Thomas not only a unique community, but family. “This town is a family. Family is a belief structure, we support each other, we care about each other, and we help each other out when we’re in need.”

BRAD FENNELL Fast Facts

- Longest Tenured Board Member in FTIS History
- Served with 15 Other Board Members
- Worked with 5 Superintendents
- Attended over 500 Monthly Board Meetings
- Board Member for 24 Graduations of 5,029 Graduates
- Board Member through Construction and/or Renovation of all 5 Schools

SCHOOL UPDATES

Johnson Elementary

POSITIVE AND ENGAGED SCHOOL CULTURE



Ashley Dikeos vividly remembers feeling a healthy surge of adrenaline as she walked into the gymnasium on the first day of school. To be sure, the classrooms and hallways brimmed with the excitement of a new school year. In a matter of minutes, the principal at Johnson Elementary School would be explaining to the students and staff at the all-school assembly the “Pillars and Pathways” that the Jaguars would focus on intently in the coming year.

“Our goal is for everyone to want to be here at Johnson and to look forward to coming to school every day.” Mrs. Dikeos added, “It’s in that kind of environment that we can thrive in a healthy culture and truly become the best versions of ourselves.”

Embedded in Pillars and Pathways are twelve (12) key habits, skills and mindsets that foster excellence, both individually and collectively, and the Jaguars placed a special emphasis on compassion during the first quarter of the academic year. When students and teachers see this important trait on display, they are encouraged to complete a “Jaguar Shout-Out”, a short written description that is dropped off at the main office and shared school-wide on an upcoming morning news broadcast. It also extends to the community. Classroom Dojo allows parents to keep tabs on when their children are demonstrating Pillars and Pathways at school.

The concept is blossoming and reflecting a positive and engaged school culture at Johnson.

Louie White shared an important interaction with his classmate, **Isaiah**. “He helped me feel better when I was sad.” Fourth grade teacher **Olivia Bryant** observed that student **Lauren Henderson** “helps others even when no one is watching.” Teachers and staff are also acknowledging one another for going above and beyond expectations. “Staff spotlights” are posted in the front hallway, alongside photos of the students who exhibited the most compassion during a particular time period.

Assistant Principal **Kristina Sheehy** said that parents are noticing that children are more mindful of treating their family members with compassion once they get home.

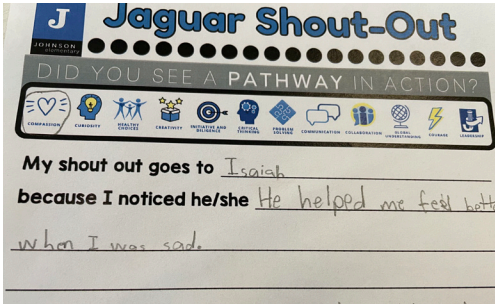
“To have such an important part of our Johnson culture go home with the kids is such a reflection of how successful this initiative has been and continues to be for us,” Sheehy said.



Johnson 2nd-graders (L-R) **Brooks Fromm**, **Sawyer Woods**, **Zayed Nejib** and **Quinn Blanton** learn about properties of matter as they build and test the strength of their index card tower.



Johnson Principal **Ashley Dikeos** greets students **Natalie** and **Ryder Jacobs** as they arrive for school.





The Moyer Round-Up Gang celebrates another successful monthly schoolwide assembly.

This past spring, **Harper Luebbers** knew exactly what she wanted to do as a fifth grader in 2022-2023 to close out her time at Moyer Elementary School. She had big plans for a last hurrah on Highland Avenue.

"I wanted to be an emcee of the Mustang Round-Up, and I worked so hard on my application to show that I have the energy to do it," Luebbers said. In addition to emcee, students applied to serve with the recycling crew, the birthday brigade, as a hallway leader or on the grounds crew or Habits at Home team.

Decked out in cowboy boots, a hat and a bandana, Harper joins a group of fifth graders to both plan and produce a monthly all-school assembly at Moyer that celebrates successes, distributes awards, communicates Moyer news, imparts growth lessons for students to ponder, creates learning videos and features a "Minute to Win It" challenge. Student-led from beginning to end, teachers are on-hand to assist but the fifth grade leadership team quiets the audience and technically executes the production with microphones, audio adjustments and slides.

"I believe once children find their inner genius, what gives them that 'spark'—that's when they will truly take off," said **Dr. Dawn Laber**, the principal at Moyer. Students from grades K-5

are doing just that. They're thriving.

At the Round-Up, students wear blue, yellow, red and green attire and are separated into groups, or "houses", along with fellow classmates from grades K-5. As an ode to dog lovers, children in the yellow house voted that they should be called "The Golden Retrievers". They are challenged to take on school citizenship responsibilities during the month, for example, by competing to see who can consistently have the cleanest classrooms at the end of the school day.

"We have awesome teachers and staff at Moyer who create such memorable curriculum for our students all year long," said **Peter Winkler**, the assistant principal. "When the children

teach one another at the Round-Up, the students are in awe of what they are experiencing."

The individual student growth across the school is unmistakable. Each student maintains a binder to help reflect and "find their genius", and students referred to these binders at student-led conferences in November. **Sim Willis**, one of the fifth grade Round-Up student leaders, said, "I was a bit shy at first about getting up there in the gym and presenting in front of everybody. But now I'm doing it and it's so much fun to be a part of something special for our school."

**"I believe once
children find their
inner genius,
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truly take off."**

SCHOOL UPDATES

Woodfill Elementary



PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE

Caroline Comstock frequently participates in drawing and art projects at home with her two siblings. When her father, Oliver, walked by and saw her diligently writing down sentences, one after the other, he naturally asked what she was working on.

"I am writing out what I say on the broadcast," the third grader said, beaming at home after a successful second day with the Woodfill news crew. Caroline's parents have seen how broadcasting has boosted her confidence and energized Caroline to wake up early and go to school before the first bell to fulfill her responsibilities.

"With other activities, we have to remind her about them. With the news crew, she reminds us," Oliver said. Tricia added, "When we reviewed the list of extracurricular options at school, Caroline immediately identified news crew as something she wanted to do."

A corner of the Woodfill library doubles as the broadcast studio. A wall, painted bright green, provides chromakey capability. Every



Members of the Woodfill News Crew all play an important role in producing and delivering the daily news broadcast.

school day at 8:15am, students on the news team partner with Principal **John Gesenhues** and media specialist **Karrie Chajkowski** to communicate important happenings to all classrooms and to community stakeholders via a live YouTube link. Students research facts, write scripts, and help technically execute the broadcast. Mrs. Chajkowski works with students on enunciating and reading at a desirable speed, and she wants to introduce podcasts in the coming weeks and months, all in an effort to strengthen the school community at Woodfill by introducing as many people as possible to one another.

"We place a high priority on leadership at Woodfill, with the philosophy that everybody in our school community can be a leader," Gesenhues said. "Since so much of leading involves communicating effectively, students on our news crew are cultivating these skills both with their writing and oral presentation skills." In Fort Thomas, students begin to develop the public speaking competencies built into "Portrait of a Graduate" as early as elementary school.

"This is a great intro to real life," **Tricia Comstock** said. For Caroline, it involved applying for a job, finding a passion, presenting to a large audience as part of a team, and script writing at home. All at eight years old.



Live from the Woodfill Media Center, 4th-grader **Avery Katt** and 5th-grader **Sawyer Arend** deliver the daily news.



Christian Bedinghaus remembers exactly why he signed up for AP Computer Science, a newly-unveiled course at Highlands Middle School designed only for 8th grade students during the 2022-2023 school year. The opportunities on the horizon resonated with him, as did the subject matter. "I thought coding sounded fun. I really like making games. It's a great chance to earn college credits now," Bedinghaus said.

Principal **Erika Volpenhein** views achievement as an end result of educators exposing students to a host of core subjects and elective offerings—from graphic design to personal finance, to broadcasting and

"It's an out-of-the-box opportunity that's really cool."

computer science—and showcasing for children where pursuing those interests can lead. Perhaps the journey involves taking more classes, becoming involved in apprenticeships and further developing skills in high school and beyond.

Mrs. Volpenhein embraces the challenge of introducing 8th graders to coding and programming, while preparing for the AP exam in the spring, so long as expectation and empathy are delivered in equal measure.

"It is our job to really balance the rigor of the course and the complexities of the subject with an understanding that we are fully committed to each student's individual success within it.



HMS 8th-graders **Cole Noah** and **Aiden Darnell** collaborate to problem-solve coding issues.

We'll be on that path with them the whole way," Volpenhein said.

HHS teacher **Sam Volpenhein** teaches the 8th-grade course for twenty-six students and has embraced that mantra as an almost-daily reminder for his students. "We can do it." Mr. Volpenhein's students work in pairs with creative freedom to explore the curriculum in hands-on learning projects. **Aiden Darnell** saw the benefit of a team-based approach with his partner, **Cole Noah**.

"I had a bug in my code, and Cole saw the problem in two or three minutes and we fixed it right away," Darnell said. Darnell first coded in elementary school and said he wants to work with computers as a career. Other students, such as **Hannah Arey**, arrive with no previous programming experience but an interest in math and science and a motivation to learn more about computer concepts.

Sam Forrester, a student in the class, was away at hockey camp this past summer when his parents first learned of the option to take AP Computer Science. Sam decided to go for it and is working on a computer game that allows the user to select different costumes for a character to wear in assorted settings, or "stages".

"I think this is why the schools in Fort Thomas are so highly ranked, to have initiatives like this," said **Maddie Forrester**, Sam's mother. "It's an out-of-the-box opportunity that's really cool - and it's going very well."



HMS 8th-graders **Christian Bedinghaus** and **Paschal Nwachukwu** work together with support from Mr. **Sam Volpenhein** in their computer science principles class.

SCHOOL UPDATES Highlands High

EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES



As a member of the Dance team at Highlands High School, senior **Kathleen Price** knows full well what Bluebird spirit means both within the school and throughout Fort Thomas. It's something one can feel: a fan base covered in blue and white and proudly sporting the letter H, cheering on our teams in competitions throughout the region.

But a tradition that once harnessed that Bluebird passion was put on hold several decades ago and hasn't returned since—a Homecoming

Parade that leads into a full weekend of festivities to welcome Highlands graduates home to the Nest. When, if ever, would it come back?

Over the summer, Price and classmate **Katie Deshler** thought to themselves, "We can be the ones to do it." Re-introducing the parade in Fort Thomas started as a passing idea at a summer club meeting and once Price learned of the community support behind the concept, "It just spiraled from there." Price added, "I think a large part of the ability to make this process happen has been the community and their involvement."



The HHS Band always kicks up the hometown pride as they play our traditional songs.



HHS Mock Trial is represented by (L-R) **Peyton Wissman, Owen Borden, Graham Borden, Chanuthmi Abeyasinghe** and **Chloe Zeit**.



JES teacher (and HHS alum) **Katie Mills** and her son **Mac**, a JES kindergartener, enjoyed participating in the community event.



Alongside family and consumer sciences teacher **Ahren Wagner** and fellow students and staff, Price and Deshler dedicated three months to planning the Homecoming Parade. It involved obtaining permits, working with the Fort Thomas Police Department to staff additional officers to safely divert traffic during the event, deciding on a route and having businesses along Fort Thomas Avenue give their permission for the celebration, not to mention advertising and coordinating logistics to get the right people and vehicles in the right places at the right time.

"Kathleen and Katie approached us with this fantastic idea and we just turned them loose to make it happen," said Principal **John Darnell**. "Of course, teachers and administrators are always available to provide guidance and answer questions. But this has been student-led on a very impressive level from beginning to end."

Price said it's been a unique and unforgettable experience.

"Being at the forefront of hands-on planning has been different than anything I've ever conducted before, but I cannot imagine anything more rewarding," Price said. She and her classmates plan to donate any parade profits to "Florida Strong", a non-profit created to assist families coping with the destruction from Hurricane Ian.

The parade galvanized the school community and proved to be a resounding success. Athletic teams, clubs, the Homecoming Court and groups involved in extracurricular activities canvassed the parade route down Fort Thomas Avenue and onto Memorial Parkway from Guardian Bank to Highlands High School, where a Pep Rally followed at David M. Cecil Memorial Stadium.

For Darnell, the student-driven parade project reflects an educational philosophy shared throughout the district. Classroom instruction provides key knowledge, and experiencing successes and setbacks in hands-on settings only accentuates the learning.

"Our students in Fort Thomas have only one K-12 educational experience, and maximizing it with unforgettable experiences and opportunities is a calling that inspires us," Darnell said.

In this case, students revived a long lost community tradition that started with a question: "Why not us?"



The HHS Football team gears up for a big win on Friday night.



(L-R) **Katie Bucher, Kaylee Mills, Macy Hargis, Ariana Harms, Natalie Hinegardner** and **Bailee Class** roll through town on the HHS Girls Soccer team trailer.



HHS freshman **Saryn Stepner** and HMS 8th-graders **Rose Ewald, Sarah Steiden** and **Adalynne Shaw** bring some of their Dance team moves.



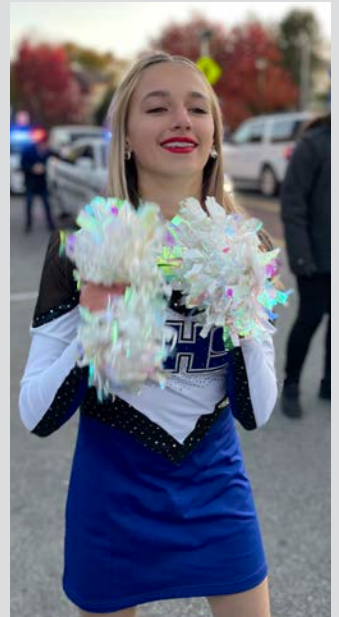
HHS seniors, parade organizer **Kathleen Price** and Homecoming King **TreVaughn Woods**, represent the Homecoming Court in the parade.

Rich in Tradition Focused on the Future



All around the district, FTIS students are engaged and excited to be a part of our tradition of excellence.





WOODFILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

100th Birthday Celebration

Woodfill Elementary School sure knows how to celebrate a 100th birthday in style.

A YouTube video gave the traveling delegation in Washington, D.C. a much-needed assist to properly begin commemorating the occasion.

Assistant Superintendent **Keith Faust**, Woodfill Principal **John Gesenhues**, 5th-grade teacher **Dawn Hils** and Superintendent **Brian Robinson** landed at Reagan National Airport to formally accept Woodfill's second National Blue Ribbon award in the days that followed. But the group wanted to make an important first stop and time was ticking.

Arlington National Cemetery closed at 5pm. They had to move fast to pay tribute to a Fort Thomas icon.

The school's namesake, Medal of Honor recipient and former **Army Major Samuel Woodfill**, is buried there and cemetery officials provided only the section in which his gravesite rests. The group walked around for about 45 minutes trying to find the exact burial plot. No luck.

At that point, Mr. Gesenhues searched YouTube in hopes of locating a video of someone who had successfully located and visited Major Woodfill's grave. By quickly comparing what they saw on the iPhone screen with their own surroundings, the Fort Thomas contingent found Major Woodfill's headstone and poignantly reflected on their roles at Woodfill Elementary School and in Fort Thomas.

"I just felt so lucky to be there and to be the principal of a wonderful elementary school. It was so serene, as not a lot of people were around us," Mr. Gesenhues said. "I definitely represented the thousands of students, teachers and administrators that have come before me that built Woodfill into what it is today."

100 years. A second Blue Ribbon. A trip to pay homage to the man for whom the school is named. Everything lined up just perfectly.

The journey began in the summer of 1922, when Woodfill Elementary opened its doors as a tiny schoolhouse with four classrooms connected to the library. Named after Major Woodfill, a distinguished soldier in World War



Principal **John Gesenhues**, with WES and district representatives, is presented the National Blue Ribbon of Excellence award by the U.S. Department of Education.

I who lived and was stationed in Fort Thomas, Major Woodfill's wife gave an oil painting of the former Army officer to the school that carried her husband's name. The artwork hangs prominently in the front foyer of the school to this day. In the decades that followed, the Fort Thomas Independent Schools added wings to the existing schoolhouse and built an entirely new building that opened in time for the 2010-2011 school year.

It wouldn't be a milestone birthday without students recognizing the century mark with impactful learning projects. One group of Woodfill students coordinated with the City of Fort Thomas to obtain blueprints of the old schoolhouse and create a Minecraft simulation to show users what it looked like in Woodfill's first school building. Another group plans to make a video documentary of Major Woodfill. When Woodfill Elementary School opened a time capsule that was found buried in the foundation of the old school building the original papers containing Major Woodfill's Medal of Honor speech were unearthed. A documentary team from Highlands High School is working to share the story publicly with Northern Kentucky University, as scholars at NKU are preserving the papers from the speech as historical artifacts.

On the flight home from the festivities in Washington, D.C., Mr. Gesenhues wasn't going to risk putting the Blue Ribbon plaque in his checked luggage or even in a carry-on bag. He held onto it the entire plane ride home.

PLANNED GIVING Leaving a Legacy

Join the FTEF's 1891 Society to leave a legacy of your values and vision to the Fort Thomas Education Foundation (FTEF) through naming the FTEF as a beneficiary of your will, retirement plan, life insurance policy, or other planned giving vehicle. This is a great way to create a meaningful, long-term impact to the Foundation, your school, and your community. It is a powerful way to support the Highlands Tradition of Excellence. Even a modest-sized gift can make an enormous difference for future FTIS students.

- Name the FTEF as a beneficiary on your retirement account or life insurance policy. This is a simple and powerful way to support the FTEF without changing your will or living trust.

Since 2001, the FTEF has helped to provide funds beyond the operating budget for educational programs and activities for students and staff. Please consider a gift to the 1891 Society. Speak to your attorney or financial planner. Call Amy Shaffer at 859.815.2004 with any questions.

Ways you can join the 1891 Society:

- Leave the FTEF a stated dollar amount in your will or trust.
- Leave a percentage of your residual estate (what remains after gifts to loved ones and expenses have been paid) in your will or trust to the FTEF.
- Name a specific asset, such as securities or other marketable property, in your will or trust.



PLANNED GIVING
LEAVE A LEGACY

**save
the
date**

Parents Night Out (formerly the annual dance)

03.04.23

.....

NESTIES: Best of the Nest

04.13.23

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

We are looking for volunteers to help us with a variety of projects. To find a list of volunteer opportunities or to sign up, follow the QR code:



FTEF HELPS MAKE HHS AN ENGINEERING Student's Destination School

BY NATHAN MUELLER, HHS CLASS OF '23



HHS freshman **Elizabeth Clarke** uses the 3-D printer to create an object.



A bandsaw used by engineering students to cut wood and plastic.

It's Annual Appeal Time!

Consider a gift to the FTEF in support of our mission of enhancing educational excellence. We can't do what we do without YOU!

FTEF.ORG
859.815.2004

The bounds of a classroom are often limiting, but due to the impressive desire to exceed expectations here a Highlands, programs like engineering give students experience that could not be obtained in a traditional classroom setting, making HHS a destination school for many.

For many students who excel in a hands-on environment, a course like the engineering pathway provides an environment for them to learn. The course offers three classes, as well as a dual credit, and architecture program.

Each course offers different experiences and knowledge that lead up to the next program. Many students start these courses in 8th grade.

This environment was not provided entirely by the school. The HHS engineering program has been the beneficiary of many grants from various organizations.

"The engineering program has been the recipient of grants from the Fort Thomas Education Foundation (FTEF) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE)," said **Ron Rosel**, engineering teacher.

These grants have allowed the expansion and enhancement of said programs, Rosel talked about the equipment he was able to add to the engineering room.

"CNC mill, CNC lathe, Laser cutter, 3-D printers, machinery, and robotics equipment. The KDE and FTEF grants provided funding for advanced training and travel."

The Engineering program focuses on the physical design and production process but also introduces students to CAD (computer-aided design).

"We design many products in Computer-Aided Design and students get the opportunity to make a prototype of their projects," said Rosel.

Another advantage of the Engineering program is access to advanced machines that students wouldn't otherwise have access to experiment with.

"This gives the student a real-world application.

Hands-on learning gives the student the opportunity to problem solve, use critical thinking skills and enjoy their learning experiences,” said Rosel.

It goes without saying that an enhanced learning experience, especially in such a desirable career path, is crucial.

“Hands-on learning gives you the ability to create solutions to problems and better understand the project by physically building it and seeing your work in progress versus on a computer screen!” said **Landen Baumer**, a junior at HHS.

Baumer has completed Engineering 1 & 2 and earned a certification in Autodesk Inventor, a CAD program.

Allowing students to earn things like certifications is a great way to let the students feel as if they are progressing and give them something they can use in the future.

At the end of the day programs like engineering are intended to provide students with practical skills and experiences that they can bring into their adult lives and create a destination on their career path.



HHS senior **Rylee Swope** uses the laser engraver to engrave words onto her project.



HHS senior **Dash Macke** uses the CNC Mill Machine to transform materials such as metal castings into finished, usable parts.

FORT THOMAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Grants in Action

Thanks to your generosity, the FTEF has awarded over \$1 million in teacher grants since 2001. Over those years, teachers have asked for an outdoor classroom, musical instruments, books, software, a soundboard, cameras and so much more! We are hard at work raising funds for our 2022-2023 grant cycle. Help us give them everything they have asked for with a generous donation to the FTEF Annual Appeal. GIVE TODAY! fitef.org



Author Aaron Reynolds visits with elementary students.



Author Aaron Reynolds signing books.



Echoing Voices: Unpacking History. HHS students unpacking the story of a Holocaust survivor.



Johnson Elementary Outdoor Classroom



Johnson employees Jessica Birkholtz and Jill Booth try out the new rock wall.

HOMECOMING Weekend



We welcomed back alumni and friends to the Nest on October 21 at the Homecoming Tailgate before the football game. The classes of 1972 and 1997 celebrated reunions during homecoming weekend. Many more attendees stopped by the Tailgate to visit other alumni before heading in to see Highlands play Cooper. The Bluebirds beat the Jaguars 34-5 to win the District.



HHS Class of '72 with the band



The HHS marching band played the alma mater and HHS fight song.



The Hudepohl Family cheering on their Bluebirds.



HHS Class of '72



Sandy (Kleier) and Jack Kuhnhein and Jeff Walters



The HHS Class of '72 celebrated at their 50th reunion.



McKenzie, Amy, Steve and Ryan Leigh



The HHS Alumni table all set up and ready to go.

FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

H

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HIGH

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elementary

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