

Traditions

District Publication of

FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Vol. 28 No. 1



FROM THE Superintendent

Greetings! I hope you are enjoying these first days and weeks of summer, a much-deserved respite after all of the hard work we invested and the successes we enjoyed during the 2022-2023 school year. Our community of learning is truly thriving, in academics and extracurricular pursuits, and our accomplishments have generated a momentum that we will take into the next school year and beyond. Our students only get one K-12 experience, and it is our job to make the journey as enriching and exciting as possible—one filled with memorable and one-of-a-kind learning opportunities. It is such an exciting time to be a part of Fort Thomas schools and I thank you for providing the invaluable support that makes our community backing second to none in Kentucky.

Our community gathered on May 3rd to celebrate a milestone birthday. Woodfill Elementary School turned 100 years old. I have to say: the teachers, staff, leadership and everyone that supports Woodfill know how to host a special evening! The school's namesake, Major **Samuel Woodfill**, was a decorated military veteran and Medal of Honor recipient, and notes he used to deliver the Medal of Honor acceptance speech were buried as part of a Woodfill time capsule in the 1920s. Students from all grade levels took part in a showcase that revealed old photographs and mementos, and allowed Woodfill to shine as a school that for generations has developed the skills in students that they've used to thrive during their remaining years in education and in their postsecondary pursuits.

The theme for this edition of Traditions, "FTIS: In Focus," spotlights the people and programs that are instrumental in our success and demonstrates how our tradition is to remain focused on the future. I invite you to continue reading to understand how our schools are flourishing and equipping our community of learners for the exciting opportunities that await. To capitalize on the vast possibilities in information technology, our District is partnering with regional colleges and universities, as well as local companies, to offer advanced courses and internships for our students. At Johnson, all 5th graders apply for and are assigned to various leadership councils that have a hand



Superintendent **Brian Robinson** with Moyer Elementary students, who presented at the January Board of Education meeting.

in all types of initiatives at their school. In fact, one such group is planning Johnson's 100th birthday celebration. Our Moyer 2nd graders are talented artists and dozens of Fort Thomas businesses display their creations through the "Art Around Town" program. Yes, students create and deliver beautiful paintings, and learn valuable life skills in the process. Did you know that snakes are able to detect earthquakes and evacuate a potential danger zone several days beforehand? These kinds of real-life dynamics are studied, challenged, analyzed and shared during individual and group presentations in the AP Seminar class at Highlands High School. At Woodfill, Wednesdays are often time to break out colorful wigs on the morning announcements to celebrate goals and, more importantly, the very careful strategizing that goes into students, teachers and leadership accomplishing what they set out to do. At Highlands Middle, students with and without disabilities are meeting up after school to take part in Unified Bocce. They're learning that the fun and spirited competition is bringing them closer together as classmates and enhancing the school culture. The articles appear in the ensuing pages, so I encourage you to keep reading!

Additionally, the mailing protocol for Traditions will change with the Spring/Summer 2024 edition. If you live outside of 41075 and wish to receive Traditions in the mail, please see the important information on page 5.

Happy Reading,
Brian Robinson, Superintendent



2022-2023 Recognitions

2022-23 State Champions

Individual Champions

- ▶ Ian Kirschenbaum – TSA – *Promotional Graphics*
- ▶ Caden Schroeder, Dash Macke, Connor Wehby – TSA – *Engineering Design*
- ▶ Emma Barton, Emerson Fraley, Emma Doerr, Travis Votel – STLP – *Documentary Film*
- ▶ Lydia Poteet – STLP – *Book Trailer*

Team Champions

- ▶ Odyssey of the Mind
 - ▶ HHS Freshman Team
- ▶ We the People

Perfect ACT

- ▶ Bradley Groneck
- ▶ Connor Wehby
- ▶ Jackson Wilson

2023 Governor's Programs

Governor's Scholar Program

- ▶ Owen Borden
- ▶ Henry Campbell
- ▶ Isabelle Fischer
- ▶ Ryan Groneck
- ▶ Bradley Groneck
- ▶ Samantha Heilman
- ▶ Sophia Scherrer
- ▶ Campbell Smith
- ▶ Connor Wehby
- ▶ Jackson Wilson

Governor's School for the Arts

- ▶ Paul McDonald – *Instrumental Music – Woodwinds*
- ▶ Evan Stuart – *Musical Theatre*
- ▶ Noah Huber – *Instrumental Music – Strings*
- ▶ Eva Sarakatsannis – *Vocal Music*
- ▶ Ashton Willis – *Film + Photography*

Governor's School for Entrepreneurs

- ▶ Nate Arentsen
- ▶ Eli Back
- ▶ Lily Cleveland
- ▶ John Exterkamp
- ▶ Ryan Toole
- ▶ Isaiah White

National Merit Finalists

- ▶ Bianca Hemsath
- ▶ Caden Schroeder

FCCLA STAR Event

- ▶ Kathleen Price – *Event Management*
- ▶ Annie Bauer – *Nutrition and Wellness*
- ▶ Michael Wagner – *Career Investigations*

Al Neuharth Free Spirit & Journalism Conference

- ▶ Treiston Collins – *KY Representative*

KMEA All-State

Jazz Band

- ▶ Logan Holbrook – *Piano*

Orchestra

- ▶ Caden Schroeder – *Violin*

Women's Chorus

- ▶ Kathryn Buschle
- ▶ Addie Littner
- ▶ Sylvie Martin
- ▶ Norah Shadwell
- ▶ Grace Schuley

Men's Chorus

- ▶ Connor Defevers
- ▶ Rafe Pinkston
- ▶ Evan Stuart

Junior High Chorus

- ▶ Lela Bach
- ▶ Lucy Schill
- ▶ Kit Valentine

Children's Chorus

- ▶ Hannah Bere
- ▶ Amelia Crozier
- ▶ Alice Hair
- ▶ Maggie Hair
- ▶ Avni Jani
- ▶ Beatrice Landon
- ▶ Grace Manning
- ▶ Parker Shipman
- ▶ Brielle Stanford
- ▶ Edie Twehues
- ▶ William Twehues

2022-2023 Cappies

- ▶ Lighting – Robert Chalk, Penelope Kolb, Gabe McDermott and Crew
- ▶ Ensemble in the Musical – The Lunatics
- ▶ Featured Actor in a Female Role in a Musical – Phia Veshapidze
- ▶ Comic Actor in a Female Role in a Musical – Grace Shule
- ▶ Lead Actor in a Male Role in a Musical – Evan Stuart
- ▶ Best Song – *The Ballad of Sweeney Todd (opening)*
- ▶ Best Musical – *Sweeney Todd*

DISTRICT STORY

Early IT Program



HMS 8th-graders (L-R) **Chanith Abeysinghe** and **Sam Forrester** team up to work through their coding assignment.

It wasn't too long ago that any learning about a python was limited strictly to snakes, most likely in a science class or on a trip to the zoo. Leave it to advances in technology to expand the meaning entirely, an evolution that is seemingly changing by the minute.

In the exciting and continuously expanding field of Information Technology (IT), computer code is written in the Python program, and both student and industry practitioners are flourishing in web design, data collection, networking and cybersecurity. In Fort Thomas, we have crafted a curriculum to equip our students with the necessary knowledge to be fully prepared for postsecondary study in the discipline and successfully embark on careers in the field. "Our students are actually writing computer code as early as elementary school and telling us, very clearly, that they love the experience," said **Keith Faust**, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning. "What we want to do is personalize education in Fort Thomas by creating an invigorating curriculum tailored specifically to student interests." Teaching and learning information technology is very much a K-12 effort.

By fully embracing the Early IT Program, Highlands High School is partnering with Northern Kentucky University and the University of Cincinnati to offer a sequence of classes, not only in computer science but in key content areas, and the journey provides students with golden opportunities to complete their first years of college, for free, while still in high school. Having access to this content and getting early college credit is giving our students a leg up regionally and exposing them to a highly desirable career path, making them very



HMS 8th-grader **Ryan Nickelman** enjoys the challenges of programming in his AP Computer Science Principles class.

marketable and opening doors to opportunities.

"We have held extensive meetings with Fort Thomas school leadership and provided learning materials and syllabi to make sure the learning objectives at the high school level are in sync with what is taught in a college classroom," said **Marius Truta**, the interim school director of NKU's School of Computing and Analytics. Because of such sound collaboration, Truta foresees a smooth transition as Highlands graduates resume their IT studies at the collegiate level.

In the Early IT program, Highlands High School teacher **Sam Volpenhein** leads an eager and very capable group of 8th graders in AP Computer Science Principles, and AP Computer Science Applications is offered to high school students. Two courses will be offered in the fall that are centered around web development and networking.

"I think I am more fortunate than most, because my own child is taking part in the Early IT Program and the feedback has just been excellent," said **John Darnell**, Highlands High School principal. Darnell's son, Aiden, is one of the 8th graders in AP Computer Science Principles who can earn college credit by successfully completing the AP exam in the spring. The younger Darnell says it's a perfect fit for him because he wants to pursue a computer-related career field.

"Where this is very valuable, for our families, is giving the students exposure to Information Technology concepts and applications in high school before investing tens of thousands of dollars to study IT in college," Darnell said. "They have a good sense for what IT entails."



DISTRICT UPDATES

Changes to Traditions Delivery

One of our top leadership priorities in Fort Thomas is to communicate broadly, but also in an efficient manner. In doing so, our District will make a permanent change to the mailing protocol for Traditions starting with the Spring/Summer 2024 edition.

Each household in the 41075 zip code, all faculty and staff, and families of tuition students will continue to receive Traditions as usual. However, **if you live outside of 41075**, you will need to "opt-in" to continue receiving Traditions in the mail. We will provide options to opt-in via QR code, email or by calling our office - please see below for instructions.

An enhanced digital version of Traditions will soon be available on our website. We also encourage you to stay connected to all the great happenings in our schools through our social media accounts.



Brothers (L-R) **Rowan** and **Leo Travis** take time to play a game or two of "Rock, Paper, Scissors" before school.



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Opt-In By Scanning this QR Code:



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TRADITIONS@FORTTHOMAS.KYSCHOOLS.US

SCHOOL UPDATES

Johnson Elementary

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT GROWTH



As a 5th grader at Johnson, **Mollie Smith** embraces the privilege of serving as a leader in school, so much so that she hones her skills at home. Mollie frequently reads to her sister Nora, a Johnson 3rd grader, so Mollie is ready for her responsibilities on the "Readers for a Reason" student leadership council. With students taking ownership and leading the way, the reading council conducts book reviews, generates book trailers and ventures into classrooms to read aloud to younger students.

"I've always enjoyed reading and it's so much fun to make it exciting for the younger students as well," Smith said.

"Readers for a Reason" represents one of 15 student leadership councils at Johnson reserved exclusively for all 5th grade students. Each 5th grader has the opportunity to apply for a council that resonates with their interests and ambitions. For example, 5th grader **Maggie Meyers** knew that the "Surprise Pack" would be her first choice, because, true to its name, the students on the council take the lead in surprising students, teachers and staff with flowers, well-wishes, parties and pick-me-ups to celebrate their accomplishments. These students get an opportunity to grow their unique skills through the real-world applications of their respective councils.

"It's a great experience to be a part of something so positive," Meyers said. "We have such a great school and it's important to recognize all of the people that make it that way." The individual growth throughout the 5th grade year is unmistakable, as students learn the art of compromising, communicating with classmates and ultimately balancing different ideas to settle on a vision for a project, event or ceremony. Their personal views are broadened by addressing the needs of the school as a whole. Students also demonstrate initiative by carrying out the critical tasks necessary to host successful events. For example, **Jennifer Flynn's** art room serves as a hub for all of the design work needed for the informative and interactive exhibits on display at Johnson's S.T.E.A.M. Family Night.

History buffs can apply for a coveted spot on "Time Travelers," a leadership council that is planning Johnson's 100th birthday celebration. The "World Changers" council led a school-wide assembly to teach students about the upcoming Pulsera Project, which enhances students' global understanding. "Seeing a council of

students blossom in their confidence by standing in front of the entire student body, teaching students about other parts of the globe, was a shining example of the extraordinary growth our students are experiencing," said Assistant Principal **Kristina Sheehy**. A select group of 5th graders also represent classmates on an "Executive Team" that provides feedback, analyzes school data, shares progress and proposes solutions for Johnson goals to Sheehy and Principal **Ashley Dikeos**.

"At Johnson, academics are so very important to us and we thrive in that area, but we want to make sure we are developing the whole student with these leadership councils," said Sheehy. "It has been so rewarding to see all Johnson students with all kinds of personalities and interests grow into leaders in their own way. They've been the driving force behind the immense personal growth through the authentic experiences they have authored on their councils."

If you venture up the steps to the second floor library, you might find Smith browsing the shelves to find just the right book for her next out-loud reading assignment, either to a younger class or with sister Nora at home. She picked up "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie."

"I think I found it," Smith said, pointing to the book. "It's right here."



Johnson 5th-graders (L-R) **Parker Beiting** and **Mollie Smith** read to Mrs. **Erin Staff's** kindergarten class.



The concept for "Art Around Town" was born during a rural Kentucky rest stop.

While on a car trip to a lake house in Pendleton County, **Nikki Everett** saw student artwork on the walls of a McDonald's and, quite impressed with the school and business connectivity, she immediately knew: "It's time to bring a program like this to Fort Thomas."

That was in 2016.

Everett, the art teacher at Moyer, started out by going door-to-door to Fort Thomas businesses, asking if they would be interested in featuring 2nd grade student art projects. One responded favorably. Then two. And, in a span of seven years, two dozen community businesses and organizations have said "yes" to Moyer art students. Paintings and drawings now adorn the walls of businesses and organizations throughout Fort Thomas.

"It is just such a special program that our students really look forward to. Maybe an older brother or sister has done it and the word has gotten out in such a positive way. It's such a great takeaway from their Moyer experience and a memorable project, for sure," Everett said.

Students work together in groups and consult with their customers to determine, most importantly, the kind of art that the client would like to exhibit in the business. Along the way, the young artists learn the important life skills of conceptualizing, refining, compromising with group members and ultimately developing a shared project that Everett endorses before it is hand-delivered to the business.

Second grader **Benny Collier** partnered with three classmates to craft a customized project, made of paint sticks and oil pastels, that the group presented to Fort Thomas Living, a communications business that his father, Mark, co-owns. The art features a golden camera displayed prominently over Paycor Stadium, home of the Cincinnati Bengals.

"It was very fun because I got to go and see my dad when I delivered it," Collier said. "The painting looks like the camera is taking pictures of the Bengals, and I know my Dad takes a lot of pictures for his work."

"That's always an amazing day, when we walk around Fort Thomas with our projects and deliver them to the businesses," Everett



Moyer 2nd-graders (L-R) **Graham Nickerson, Ellis Mile and Owen Bach**, accompanied by art teacher **Nikki Everett** present their artwork to Superintendent Robinson.

said. "Art Around Town" is tied into a 2nd grade school unit that focuses on "What kinds of jobs can I do?" For example, a student interested in the banking industry can craft an art project and learn more about banking while on-site delivering the art project to the financial institution.

"This is something the kids get really excited about, because it's truly their project and it's on display for everyone to see," Assistant Principal Peter Winkler said. "I am really proud of how much the program has grown and the very tangible impact we can see on student development."

Christine Smalley owns "Fort Thomas Coffee" and, in the children's play area, Smalley has prominently placed a Moyer student drawing of "The Smoothie Panda" for all of her patrons and employees to enjoy. For Smalley, it was a no-brainer to support the program because "Art Around Town" represents what Fort Thomas, and her business, truly embody.

"Having the 'Smoothie Panda' on display reaffirms what we want Fort Thomas Coffee to be, a gathering place for the community that's built by the community," Smalley said.

Art and community. It's what Everett saw while on vacation at a Pendleton County McDonald's all those years ago, and the vision has become a hugely successful reality.

SCHOOL UPDATES

Woodfill Elementary



ACHIEVEMENT

Liz Waymeyer knows it's going to be a great Wednesday at Woodfill Elementary School when she picks out the perfect wig to wear with **Rachel Caswell**, the school counselor, on the morning announcements. In her first year as the assistant principal at Woodfill, Waymeyer tends to choose the vibrant purple and pink selection for the all-school presentation.

Broadcast to every classroom in the school, wigs on the morning news serve as a clear sign that it's time to celebrate: individual students, groups and entire classes are achieving their goals in a ceremony known as "WIG Wednesdays". At Woodfill, WIGs stands for "Wildly Important Goals," and the morning announcements provide the perfect platform to motivate students to aim for future successes and celebrate their existing accomplishments.

"What we want to do at Woodfill is teach the importance not only of setting goals, but creating a roadmap with actionable and measurable steps to achieve what we want to accomplish," Waymeyer said. Students, teachers and administrators create color-coded charts to see how they are progressing, and if any changes need to be made to more ideally align goals and behaviors.



Woodfill 2nd-grader **Emmi Witterstaetter** is excited to ring the bell to celebrate accomplishing her goal.



WES Assistant Principal **Liz Waymeyer**, and **Rachel Caswell**, school counselor, showcase achievements, and some colorful wigs, during morning announcements.

Kindergarten student **Danny Engels** crafted an individual WIG to improve his reading proficiency, and to do so, the Woodfill student practiced sight words five days per week. Reading achievement is a particular focus kindergarten-wide, as Engels' class created a group WIG—for 80 percent of the students to know 50 sight words by the end of the 2022-2023 school year. Kindergarten teacher **Alicia Wiltmer** found that the goal-setting and dedicated practice led to noticeable growth in the STAR reading assessment administered in December of 2022.

WIGs can be developed for both classroom and extracurricular pursuits. Student **Clara Sackenheim** saw an opportunity to help move around the house with making dinners, doing dishes and laundry, and packing lunches for school. The color-coded chart kept her on track toward her goals. One of Woodfill's core beliefs centers around the mantra that every member of the school community can be a leader—administrator, teacher, staff member and student alike.

"WIGs have become just a huge part of who we are at Woodfill, because we truly live out the Leader in Me program in everything we do," Waymeyer said. In making the transition from teacher to assistant principal, Waymeyer established a WIG to know every student's name. Waymeyer practiced five nights per week by diligently studying classroom lists. Practice made perfect as she now greets every student personally first thing in the morning by the school cafeteria.

One of the most memorable WIGs for Waymeyer was helping a student create a plan to arrive at school on time and not accumulate tardies. From going to bed earlier, to laying out clothes the night before, the student followed a clearly-established plan and has arrived on-time to school much more frequently.

"Sure, we have consequences if we fall short in our behavior. But it's also important to constructively assess why things are falling short and proactively address how we can make changes to get where we want to go," Waymeyer said.

Students can ring a bell under the staircase in the front foyer at Woodfill to celebrate their accomplishments. Then comes the fun part as they listen for their names as Waymeyer and Caswell wear their favorite wigs on the school announcements.



On a Thursday afternoon in March, the final bell rang at Highlands Middle School to signal the end of the school day. The fun, however, was just beginning for the students participating in Unified Bocce in the gymnasium after the last class period. A program built on positive competition through Special Olympics of Kentucky, students with and without intellectual disabilities are paired up in teams to have fun, foster camaraderie and, in so doing, create a more cohesive student body.

"It really shows that we are all in this together. We are all one school. It has been really nice to see," said **Andrea Smith**, a special education teacher at the middle school. Smith introduced Unified Sports at Highlands Middle School during the 2022-2023 school year, and a nearly \$5,000 grant from the Fort Thomas Education Foundation provided the resources to purchase all of the bocce equipment. The bocce competitions unfold on the gym floor on Thursdays in March.

Smith saw how Woodfill Elementary fully embraced Unified Bocce when the sand courts were built on the front lawn in 2019. It galvanized the school community and **Lorenzo Sarge**, a former Woodfill student and bocce alum, now plays on one of six teams at the middle school.

"It makes him feel very special and very important. But it also makes him feel like a part of something, and for Lorenzo that's everything," said **Lauren Sarge**, Lorenzo's mother and a loyal Bluebird bocce fan.

"It is our goal to create the kind of environment in which all of our students wake up excited



HMS students (L-R) **Olivia Raaker, Henry Hamblen, Jagger Tolle** and **Jack Barlow** build friendships while participating in the bocce program.

to come here and possess an enthusiasm for school," said **Jeff Schneider**, the assistant principal at Highlands Middle School. "A positive and engaged culture is one of our top priorities and we are very pleased with the programs in place to support those critically important goals."

In addition to spearheading Unified Bocce, Smith sponsors the Inclusion Club, an organization that opens the door for every Bluebird to feel a part of what happens both in and out of the classroom. The club has led initiatives such as "Rock the Sock", in which students, teachers and staff can wear brightly colored, mismatched socks on World Down Syndrome Awareness Day. Students have sparked conversations by making videos in which their classmates answer the question, "What does inclusion mean to me?" Smith also notices, year after year, that a large number of 8th grade students apply to be peer tutors to assist students who might need additional help in mastering a subject.

"It has really been a joy to work with my classmates who might need a little more help or practice in a certain area. And it's challenged me to really think about how I can clearly explain a concept," said **Sarah Steiden**, an 8th grader and peer tutor.

Both Steiden and Smith have noticed that as students with and without disabilities have gotten to know each other better, they are spending time outside of the classroom by going out for coffee, having lunch together, playing Minecraft and even attending each other's birthday parties.

"It feels like we are truly all a part of one school," Steiden said.



HMS 6th-graders **Elijah Richard** (front) and **Mason Lehn** team up on the bocce court.

SCHOOL UPDATES Highlands High

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE



Highlands High School sophomore **Allette Broomall** vividly remembers the rising adrenaline before the AP Seminar presentation inside the school's Black Box Theatre in January. Her group had rehearsed it, going over each detail time and again on FaceTime. Now it was time for the real thing in front of classmates and teachers. They would face questions from the audience afterward. Broomall's group explored what measures can be taken inside correctional facilities to reduce rates of recidivism once inmates are released back into society.

"I feel like I have grown so much looking into important issues through this experience and it went really well," Broomall said.

For the approximately ninety sophomores enrolled in AP Seminar, it's a valuable and hard-to-replicate journey: a course that challenges students to dramatically improve their writing, research and public speaking skills while tackling questions that leaders face in all kinds of disciplines across the world.

"I felt like such a proud mom inside the

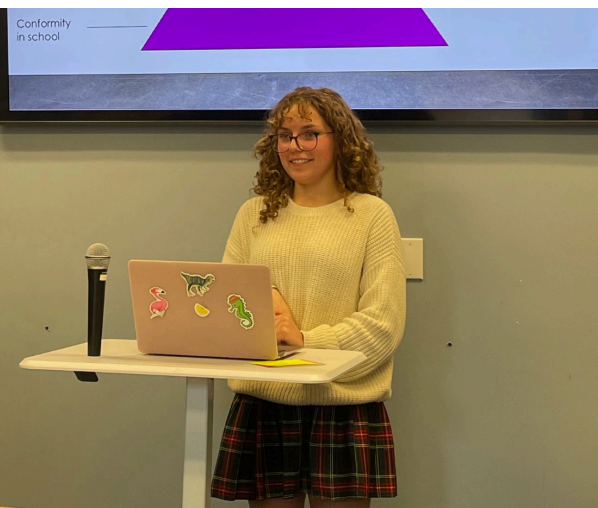
"I have really become a better writer and researcher throughout the year as well. It's been a completely different experience to look into real-world issues and challenged me along the way."

theatre watching the presentations," said **Beth Brubaker**, one of four Highlands High School teachers that oversees an AP Seminar course. Brubaker works throughout the year to collect the research papers and record the video presentations, which are components of a multi-faceted AP exam that also includes a traditional end-of-course exam. Brubaker, along with colleagues **Carrie Murray**, **Angie Gintonio** and **Katie Stewart**, preside over all sections of AP Seminar and, to date, students have achieved a 98 percent pass rate on the AP Exam.

In her office on a beautiful spring afternoon, Assistant Principal **Jennifer Forg**y smiles and beams with enthusiasm while discussing the benefits students receive from the course.

"When I review our Portrait of a Graduate competencies that we want to achieve, AP Seminar truly checks every box in an impactful way," Forg said. "Courageous

leadership, empathetic collaboration, global communication, curious and critical thinking and creative problem solving are all on full display in a course that readies our students for all kinds of postsecondary challenges. I can't



HHS sophomore **Evelyn Smith** delivers her presentation to Mrs. **Katie Stewart's** AP Seminar/English II class.



Audrey Heindl, HHS sophomore, puts in the work researching information for her AP Seminar/English II project.





HHS sophomores (L-R) **AJ Street**, **Alexandria Lancaster**, **Maxwell Hamilton**, **Samual Gillen** and **Marshall Anstaett** respond to questions following their AP Seminar presentation in the Black Box Theatre.

speaking more highly of the class."

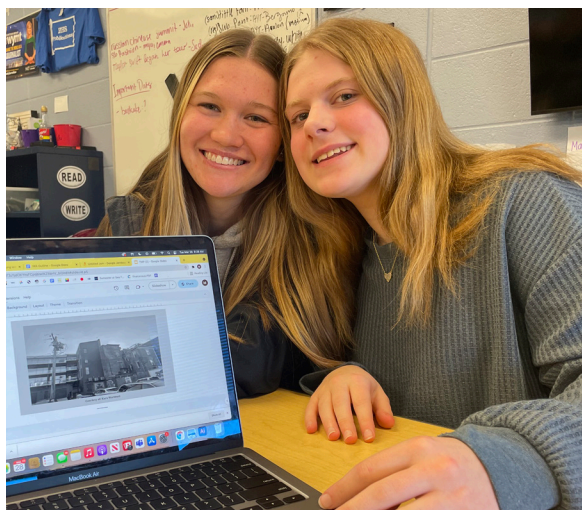
The course dynamic shifts from group work in the fall semester to an individual path of study in the spring, culminating again in a public presentation to lay out findings from months of research. Broomall has moved from prison reform to exploring how snakes can sense and predict earthquakes, sometimes evacuating the area of an earthquake days before it strikes. Students have looked into questions of gentrification in Cincinnati's Over-The-Rhine neighborhood, how social media can foster "groupthink" among consumers and how parental divorce can trigger depression in adolescents.

Sophomore **Tabitha Tobergte** has noticed a marked improvement in her public speaking skills, as she can compare her current presentations to one that was recorded as a benchmark at the beginning of the year.

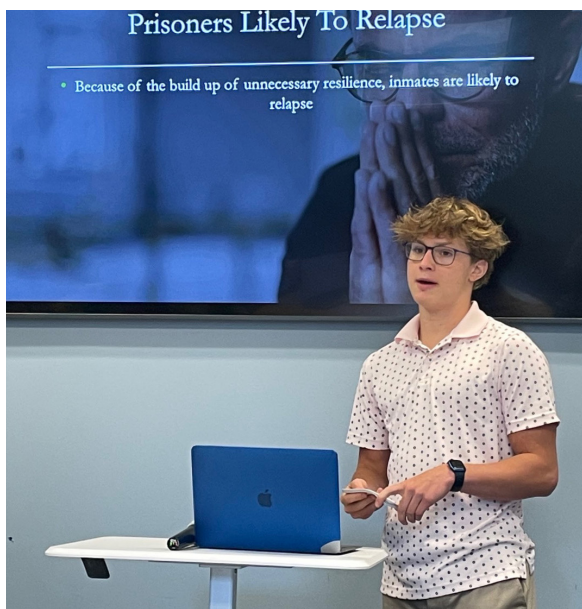
"I have really become a better writer and researcher throughout the year as well. It's been a completely different experience to look into real-world issues and challenged me along the way."

The word is getting out, as well, as AP Seminar continues to surge in popularity. Current projections indicate that approximately 125 students are expected to enroll in AP Seminar during the 2023-2024 school year across different sections of the course. Brubaker uses a term, both powerful and candid, to describe the students in her class, and the work they've done.

"They are rockstars," Brubaker said.



Sophomores (L-R) **Julie Luhn** and **Mayson Gindele** collaborate to plan and complete their AP Seminar/English II assignment in Mrs. **Beth Brubaker's** class.



HHS sophomore **Griffin Barlow** shares the information he researched and prepared for his AP Seminar presentation.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Bill Waddell

FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE BY HONORING OUR TRADITIONS

BY ELLA PEABODY, GRAYSON THOMAS AND KAITLYN RYAN,
HHS JOURNALISM STUDENTS

In Fort Thomas, we try to have an ever-constant eye on how to improve, while always listening to the wise words of those who came before. We are a town where the new and old cross paths, ever evolving with new bustling businesses, outdoor escapes, new residences—yet still keeping the older traditions that serve as a foundation from which to build.

William 'Bill' Waddell, Highlands Class of 1958, has always wanted to give back to his hometown and alma mater, even after eventually moving away and seeking out dreams that spanned farther than his neighborhood. He is beckoned back even still, he says, because of the vast experiences and memories that will always be kept close to his heart. "Highlands is a very special place and I think only those of us who have fully experienced and gone through high school here can feel that."

Waddell grew up in Fort Thomas with a passion for this town sparking deep within him at an early age. "My history in Fort Thomas really starts with my father, **Ewell E. "Judge" Waddell**. He was a head football coach at HHS, later the superintendent, and always a role model for me, playing such a big role in our town...I wanted to be like that."

One of Waddell's favorite memories from his senior year was on the front steps of the old Highlands High School building. "We would gather on the front steps...we'd all sit there together, just casually trading war stories, it almost didn't feel like we were at school," said Waddell.

Waddell and his family started a well-known, honorable legacy. This family has been ingrained in Highlands for generations sharing their history, knowledge and traditions with faculty and students, continuing to teach lessons. In 2016, he was inducted into the Highlands High School Athletic Hall of Fame. The plaque he was awarded hangs in the halls of HHS.

"We [the Waddell family] are so proud of how Highlands has grown with this community and the whole dedication behind this school from people who give themselves completely to the cause."

Waddell works to make Fort Thomas a continuous part of his life, dedicating his time to Fort Thomas values and ideals. To remember his incredible experiences and to honor his father, in 2004 he established the Judge Waddell Scholarship,



encouraging others to pursue a career in education. "We have awarded 12 scholarships of almost \$100,000 to those pursuing a teaching career." Two of these scholars returned to teach at Moyer Elementary.

Mr. Waddell still makes visits to Fort Thomas a priority, and is in the process of creating what he calls a "micro museum" that encompasses small items and stores from the old Highlands High School. Almost like a time capsule, as he calls it, keeping as many old memories preserved as possible, for this, he says, is how we thrive as a community.

"The micro museum would have a ton of artifacts from the class of 1958 or just Highlands in general. Like a piece of the old building wall or floor tile, showing the importance of how things used to be and the memories shared that some often forget as time passes us by."

"Highlands Stories is seeking artifacts and mementos from every era of Highlands history, this is a place where all age groups can share," said Waddell. To participate in "Highlands Stories," please visit FTEF.org/highlands-stories.

With minds continually set on the future; however, always being able to take time to acknowledge and learn from past experiences—this is what our town of Fort Thomas seeks to accomplish—with the most generous help from people who can understand what both the past and future can offer, people who bring the most genuine love and passion for all generations. This is how Fort Thomas continues to grow and flourish, and this is because of alumni like Bill Waddell.



THE NESTIES The Best of the Nest

On April 13, 2023, Fort Thomas Independent Schools (FTIS) and the Fort Thomas Education Foundation (FTEF) cohosted the 2nd Annual NESTIES: the Best of the Nest event. Faculty, staff, parents and the community joined together at the Fort Thomas Mess Hall to honor our 2023 Teachers of the Year along with several others being recognized for significant contributions. Veteran educator **Gerry Brooks** was the guest speaker.

In addition to celebrating the amazing accomplishments of our three Teachers of the Year (one each for elementary, middle, and high school), we honored three staff members with the Outstanding Support Staff of the Year Award. This award honors a supporting services employee who has made an exceptional



THE NESTIES
The Best of the Nest

contribution to FTEF schools, students and community.

It was a wonderful night, recognizing the contributions of several faculty and staff that help make Fort Thomas Independent Schools so great. We look forward to seeing everyone for the third annual NESTIES: the Best of the Nest on April 11, 2024.

Save
the
Date



THE NESTIES
The Best of the Nest

04.11.24

OUR NESTIES
Winners



Chrissy Barlow, Carrie Skirvin and John Gesenhues



Sommer Rosa, Michelle Fair and Abby Jones



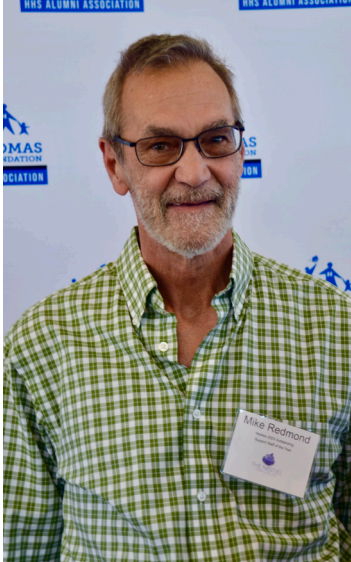
Andy Eckerle



Ann Listerman, Rachel Stephenson, Jamee Flaherty, Jennifer Forgy, and John Darnell



Kym Grillot, Kelly Pratt-Booth, John Darnell and Jennifer Forgy



Mike Redmond



Susan Twehues, Robin Kemp, Jennifer Forgy and John Darnell



Guest Speaker Gerry Brooks



Aaron Lense



Peter Winkler, Jenny Miller-Horn and Lindsey Van Orsdel



Whitney McKay



Elizabeth Waymeyer, Kerrie Anderson, Joe Weyer, Donna Hicks and John Gesenhues



Click on the QR code to view our Teacher of the Year videos made by HHS students in the Filmmaking and Broadcasting class.



Click on the QR code to view our Nesties Photo Gallery

Award Winners

Andrew Eckerle

NESTIES 2023 High School Teacher of the Year

Aaron Lense

NESTIES 2023 Middle School Teacher of the Year

Carrie Skirvin

NESTIES 2023 Elementary Teacher of the Year

Whitney McKay

NESTIES 2023 Outstanding Support Staff of the Year

Mike Redmond

NESTIES 2023 Outstanding Support Staff of the Year

Joe Weyer

NESTIES 2023 Outstanding Support Staff of the Year

Ron Rosel

Kentucky Applied Technology Education Association (KATEA) 2022 High School Teacher of the Year

Kelly Booth

Inaugural Holocaust & Humanity Center Kurtz Educator Award

Jenny Miller-Horn

2022 Mary May Wyman Outstanding KY Council for Exceptional Children (KYCEC) Member of the Year Award

Michelle Fair

Golden Apple

Rachel Stephenson

Northern Kentucky University (NKU) Graduate Student of the Year

Robin Kemp

Kentucky Teacher of the Year Semifinalist

2023 Nesties Committee

Kerrie Anderson

Kristen Banocy

Chrissy Barlow

Kelly Booth

Keith Faust

Bridget Go

Jennifer Flynn

Karen Kampschmidt

Abbe Kuhn

Sally Race

Krissy Richard

Pam Schultz

Lindsey Van Orsdel

Peter Winkler



THE NESTIES
The Best of the Nest

A Special “Thank You” to Our Sponsors

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Friends of FTEF Sponsor:

Highlands Middle School PTO

Johnson Elementary School PTO

Moyer Elementary School PTO

The Muzumdar Family

Prestige Auto & Golf Carts

Woodfill Elementary School PTO



Award Recipients: Joe Weyer, Mike Redmond, Michelle Fair, Jenny Miller-Horn, Kelly Pratt-Booth, Aaron Lense, Whitney McKay, Robin Kemp, Carrie Skirvin, Andy Eckerle and Rachel Stephenson

FTEF TEACHER GRANT PROGRAM

Over \$116,000 Awarded

This spring the 2023 Grant Patrol continued our annual tradition of going into classrooms and surprising teachers with their “big checks.” Thanks to your generous donations and support of the FTEF during the year, we were able to award over \$116,000 in teacher grants. Twenty teachers were surprised over the course of a two week period by the FTEF Grant Patrol. We are excited to see these #FTEFGrantsinAction next school year.

Fort Thomas Independent Schools:

Spike Robots for Robotics Program

Highlands High School:

Intelligent Lighting for the PAC
Heart Rate Monitors
Musical Instruments
Meta VR Goggles

Highlands Middle School:

Heart Rate Monitors
Butterfly Garden and Tracking Station

Johnson Elementary School:

Book Vending Machine
Author Visit
Illustrator Visit
Decodable Readers
Fort Thomas Interactive Rugs
Composting Materials

Moyer Elementary School:

Sensory Room Materials
Author Visit
Decodable Readers
Fort Thomas Interactive Rugs

Woodfill Elementary:

Author Visit
Fort Thomas Interactive Rugs
Chicken Hatching Materials



Alicia Wittmer accepting her grant for decodable readers.



Lori Duncan accepting her grant for musical instruments.



Heidi Neltner accepting her grant for Spike Robots for FTIS Robotics program.



Jason Burgess accepting his grant for Intelligent Lighting.



FORT THOMAS EDUCATION Foundation Club

BLUEBIRD NATION!

JOIN THE FOUNDATION CLUB AND GET A FRONT ROW SEAT!



Join us under the lights and help our schools while cheering from the best seat in the house. Foundation Club Membership includes reserved parking, private entry with no lines, a catered pregame dinner and more.

If you renew your Foundation Club Membership or join the Foundation Club by July 1, 2023, you will be entered to win a Bluebird Family Pass.

2023 SCHEDULE HIGHLANDS VARSITY FOOTBALL

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------|
| 8/5 | LOUISVILLE MALE (SCRIMMAGE) |
| 8/12 | BLUE/WHITE (SCRIMMAGE) |
| 8/18 | LEXINGTON CATHOLIC |
| 8/25 | COVINGTON CATHOLIC |
| 9/1 | CAMPBELL CO |
| 9/8 | RYLE |
| 9/15 | RACELAND |
| 9/22 | COOPER |
| 9/29 | DIXIE HEIGHTS |
| 10/6 | BOONE CO. (HOMECOMING) |
| 10/13 | CONNER |
| 10/20 | SCOTT |



PLANNING A REUNION? LET US HELP!

- Reunion Resource Kit
- Tour Coordination
- Alumni Contact Information

859.815.2004
FTEF@FTEF.ORG

Save the Date!

2023
HOMECOMING
WEEKEND

OCTOBER 6-8

We hope to see
you back at the Nest!

FORT THOMAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Focused on the Future



The FTEF has given over \$1M in teacher grants since 2001.



The FTEF gifted FTIS the property located at 2504 Memorial Parkway in 2022.

Since 2001, the Fort Thomas Education Foundation has been focused on our mission of enhancing educational excellence in our schools. We have accomplished some important milestones since our inception including giving over \$1M in teacher grants, raising over \$10M for Highlands High School renovations, raising over \$600,000 for the new Johnson Elementary School and raising over \$1M for the FTEF Foundation Endowment Fund. But we aren't stopping there! The FTEF is constantly focused on the future of our schools, and our desire to continue to enhance educational excellence for generations to come.

One of the ways we are focusing on the future, is to fully fund the FTEF Endowment Fund. Once we reach our \$2.5M goal, 100% of every donation made to the FTEF will go back to our schools and students giving us the opportunity to give

back in BIG ways. Ideas include expanding world language offerings, creating additional career and college center resources, creating a curriculum incubator and offering teacher sabbaticals to allow for advanced industry training. The possibilities are endless!

We know we can't do this without your help! Here are three reasons to consider investing in the FTEF Endowment Fund:

1. Helps ensure that the FTEF can survive well into the future.
2. Allows for expansion of programs and resources at all five schools.
3. You become a lasting part of the FTEF and the future of our schools.

To learn more about the opportunities associated with a gift to the FTEF Endowment Fund, visit FTEF.org or call 859.815.2004.



The FTEF is focused on our students' future.

FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

H

HIGHLANDS
HIGH

H

HIGHLANDS
MIDDLE

J

JOHNSON
elementary

M

MOYER
elementary

W

WOODFILL
elementary



HHS seniors proudly display their choice of college on "College T-shirt Day."



Follow us on Facebook: *Fort Thomas Independent Schools* | Follow us on Instagram: @FTSchools

Follow us on Twitter: @FTSchools, @FTMoyerES, @FTJohnsonES, @FTWoodfillES, @FTHighlandsMS, @FTHighlandsHS

FORT THOMAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS Directory

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Ann Meyer - Chairperson
Julie Kuhnhein - Vice-Chairperson
Jeff Beach
Clem Fennell
Sarah Foster

CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS

Brian Robinson - Superintendent
Jamee Flaherty - Assistant Superintendent
for Student Services
Keith Faust - Assistant Superintendent
for Teaching and Learning

HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL

Principal - John Darnell
Assistant Principal - Jennifer Forgý
Athletic Director - Wes Caldwell

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Principal - Erika Volpenhein
Assistant Principal - Jeff Schneider

JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal - Ashley Dikeos
Assistant Principal - Kristina Sheehy

MOYER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal - Dawn Laber
Assistant Principal - Peter Winkler

WOODFILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal - John Gesenhues
Assistant Principal - Elizabeth Waymeyer

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