

# BLAZER BULLETIN



A Publication of the Millbrook Central School District

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## Hello Millbrook families!

It's hard to believe that Thanksgiving has come and gone and the holidays are rapidly approaching. Our winter recess begins Dec. 24 and runs through Dec. 31 with classes resuming Jan. 3. Whatever you celebrate, I hope you are able to take some time to do so with friends and family.

**Seasons Greetings and Happy New Year!**

**Laura, Your Proud Superintendent of Schools**

## Pre-K program launches successfully



Students in Alessandra Surriano's class learned to name and recognize the parts of a pumpkin in October while Samantha Hale's class learned the days of the week.

Both teachers and the students are new to the Millbrook Central School District and Elm Drive Elementary School - the

first pre-K classes hosted and funded by the district.

"We purposely hired teachers with experience to help form the program with us," Setaro said. Enrollment for the program opened this summer for students who were four by Dec. 1, 2021. The goal was to have two classes of 15 students, each with a teacher and an aide.

Principal Michael Setaro said the team has learned a lot in the first two months of the program. "We learned these students need additional support to develop school and group-ready behavior. For many, this is their first structured experience outside of their homes," he said. So, the team adapted, shifting some time to teach them the appropriate social skills.

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## Students help blood drive exceed goal



Millbrook High School's Interact Club held a successful blood drive Nov. 4, surpassing its goal of 42 donors by four.

The youth service club is part of Rotary International with members ranging in age from 12 to 18 and is sponsored by the Millbrook Rotary Club. Among other service projects, the club hosts two blood drives per year, but recently due to COVID such drives weren't possible.

"We are happy to be hosting again," Jeanene Kascak, the club's adviser said.

To drive participation, the club sent communications to all district employees and parents and put signs up in town.

Most of the donors were high school students and most of them were first time donors, Kascak said, adding that 18 adults from the school community gave blood as well.

"The Interact Club is very appreciative of the student and community support for our blood drive. Thank you for helping us help others."



**Millbrook High School's Interact Club held its first blood drive since the pandemic began on Nov. 4 and exceeded its donor goal of 42, with donations coming from 46 people including 18 adults from the school community. Thank you for helping us help others.**



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Athletic Director Al Hammell had a vision to do more to recognize Millbrook's athletes.

"I wanted to create a physical Hall of Fame for our athletes which is what started it," Hammell said. The district has had a list of names online for years.

That vision started to take shape this year thanks to a \$5,000 grant from the Millbrook Education Foundation.

Phase 1 of the project involved installation of displays in the Millbrook High School lobby to recognize Hall of Famers as well as creating the displays now lining the entrance to the gym recognizing boys and girls sectional championships.

Once those displays were completed, Hammell turned his attention to the gym.

He purchased new banners and signs to hang, which were recently installed.

Hammell hopes the displays and banners will help create more school spirit and recognition for student athletes. "It's important to have this recognition for past teams and for those to come in the future," he said.

The goal is to recognize all the school's teams with banners. But, Hammell had to pick a place to start so he chose the teams that have been most successful in recent years: volleyball, boys basketball and girls basketball.

Those teams also play in the gym, so that is where the banners have been hung, along with letters spelling out "Millbrook" on one side and "Blazers" on the other.

The girls volleyball team made the state Final Four this year (it has done so seven times since 2005) and was the Section 9 champ (a title it has secured 16 times in the last 20 years), Hammell said.

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# Pre-K program launches successfully

Next year, Setaro said, the team is considering focusing on such skills during the first week of school.

Learning to sit together and welcome each other is something Hale’s students worked on during circle time. Table by table she called them over to the corner where they all sat in a circle. Then, Hale led them in a short song: “Good morning (child’s name) how are you. Wave hi to (child’s name) who’s sitting next to you.”

After they went around the circle, Hale asked who had been practicing snapping their fingers (which reinforces motor skills). Then, it was on to the days of the week, sung to the tune of The Adam’s Family theme.



Next door, Surriano’s students were working on letter sounds and associated words. Surriano would hold up a page with a letter, animal photo and name on it.

“D is for Dog, Da, dig,” she said, while making digging motions with her hands and encouraging the children to do the same.

Students attend school from 9am-3pm five days a week and receive instruction based on the New York State’s Next Generation Standards. The experience of having the district’s youngest students on campus has had an impact on everyone.

“It’s like the building gained a younger sibling,” Setaro said, explaining that while the pre-K program is in two self-contained classrooms, the specials teachers interact with them on a regular basis and the hallways are shared, so everyone sees each other. Setaro said enrollment for next year’s classes will likely open after winter break.

“Our teachers came with an open mind for year one. It’s experimental. We try strategies, evaluate them with data and try new strategies,” he said, adding that Victoria Curry, the district’s new supervisor of data analytics and professional development, spent a lot of time with the teachers adjusting the curriculum and integrating technology.



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In the same time frame, there were seven boys basketball sectional titles and six girls basketball sectional titles, he said.



These banners are just the start. “There’s more to come pending funding,” he said, adding that he is considering hanging banners for the outdoor sports on the fencing by their fields so that they are visible to fans and supporters.

## STUDENTS' PLANT GARDEN WITH EYE TO FUTURE

Millbrook High School’s Environmental Club wants to beautify the landscape, create a place for native plants and attract butterflies, hummingbirds and more to the campus. After more than a year of planning, approvals and fundraising. The club planted the first plants in its butterfly garden last month.

“We learned a lot more about our native ecosystem and how our local ecosystem is being overrun by invasive plants,” Olivia Lucal, a junior said.

Club President Delaney Foss, a senior, said she enjoys learning about environmental and sustainability issues and “how it benefits our local ecosystem.”

Foss said when the project began more than a year ago, there were different officers in the club who have all since graduated.

On a sunny, mid-October morning, Foss, Lucal and members Lorraine Affigne, Eleena Francia and Nell Stevens marched through the cafeteria with adviser Colete Alonge-Watz carrying a shovel. They headed outside, behind the cafeteria to a plot of land. There, John Mullins and his maintenance team had built a 6-by-12 foot garden bed, lined with mesh and covered with dirt and soil. It took about a day, he said.



Cone flowers (Echinacea) and Joe Pye Weed plants sat beside the bed, awaiting planting. “We’ll plant a couple of plants today and then next spring will add to it and expand so that we have more room,” Lucal said.

Alonge-Watz teaches chemistry and forensics, but has a passion for the environment. “This allows the students to get active in things. Every year they choose one project and they have seen this project through to fruition,” she said as the girls dug the first hole. While Alonge-Watz helps guide the students, they learn from each other as well.

As Foss finished digging, Stevens cut the mesh and began preparing one of the plants, lifting it from the container it came in and breaking up the bottom.

“You have to loosen the roots so they can get into the soil,” she said.

Within an hour, all four plants were in their new homes.

“You can see it through the cafeteria windows and so can cars that drive by,” Foss said.

The 20 club members sold mums this year and raised about \$300, but the total cost will likely be double that by the time the project is finished, Alonge-Watz said. Anyone who wishes to donate to the butterfly garden can write a check to Millbrook Central School District and put ‘Butterfly Garden’ in the memo line.

