



The Creek

Indian Creek Local School District Newsletter

September/October 2023

Unified Sports Eyed for Indian Creek High School

Indian Creek High School is getting on board with inclusive unified sports programs through the Special Olympics.

Intervention Specialist Tom Mort is spearheading the program in conjunction with Unified Champion Schools, which is part of Special Olympics Ohio. Mort said he has been cooperating with Steve Forte of the Jefferson County Special Olympics and county Board of Developmental Disabilities and Kristi Peters, director of youth engagement for Unified Champion Schools, and the program is still within the planning stages.

"Kristi Peters contacted [Indian Creek Superintendent Dr. T.C. Chappellear] and he asked if I would run it. It brings our IEP [individualized education plan] students with our general education kids and I would be the facilitator," Mort said. "Students would be coaches and we hope to have flag football, basketball, track and field events and cheering. It brings our kids together as a unified team."

The idea was first mentioned last year when Mort attended meetings with Forte and Dr. Georgia Pavlik-Roseberry, children's services director for JCBDD. Mort has since met with Peters and said she was ecstatic about Indian Creek's involvement.

"She was impressed with our kids. Students Brayden Stewart and Emma Castillo were tour guides and gave her a tour of the school. This unified sports program would be a great opportunity for all of our students," he added. "We are definitely going to have a football team and will sign up players. I approached our general education students and they were excited about it as well."

He mentioned how enthusiastic Stewart was about the idea that the teen approached ICHS athletes about coaching for the program and brought them to the meeting with Peters. In addition, pupil Melia Lane will assist with the cheerleaders. Stewart himself also intends to play and plans to don a No. 43 football jersey for events. It holds significance because ICHS Football Coach Andrew Connor gifted him

with an equipment bag bearing the number. Stewart said he looks forward to playing games with his friends and meeting new people along the way. Activities would be held during school assemblies so the entire building can view the interaction and cheer on players. Practice would be scheduled during flex time and hopes are to invite other local schools to participate in games.

"If we're competing against another Jefferson County school, it would be a field trip for the other schools and their kids can cheer them on, too," Mort added. "It would be reciprocal with us traveling to other schools."

Meanwhile, Forte said it was his hope to see more unified sports in the county.

"It's going to be beneficial to all of the kids and everybody's going to learn something about it, no doubt about it."

**-Tom Mort,
Intervention Specialist**

"We're creating the same opportunities now for kids with disabilities with unified sports," Forte said. "You can play sports throughout junior high and high school and play in the Special Olympics from ages 8-80. It gives them an entire career just like others have. With all the steps of unified sports, these kids get school engagement and it evens the score."

He added that it opens doors to inclusion in ways that kids with special needs never had before.

For his part, Forte would like to revive the county Special Olympics program and expand sports to include cornhole and bocce ball at the JCBDD campus for younger and older athletes, plus he hopes to extend the unified games program into other county schools.

"Unified sports are thriving and it literal-

ly changes the dynamic," he noted. "Indian Creek is taking the first step."

Additionally, Peters said 169 schools actively took part in Unified Champions Schools across Ohio and encompass components of UCS' mission of whole-school engagement, unified sports and clubs and unified leadership.

"Within the last year, Steve Forte and I have had a collective mission and vision of making Jefferson County Ohio's premier unified county. We are working diligently toward that goal since our first meeting about a year ago. So far, Indian Creek, Steubenville, [JCBDD's] School of Bright Promise and Edison have expressed strong interest in implementing UCS strategies within their respective districts," she said. "Mr. Mort and his team, including students Brayden and Emma, are championing the 'Inclusion Revolution' within their school, which we hope will continue throughout the entirety of the district."

She added that 81 UCS initiatives have been implemented in Northeast Ohio with plans for more. Peters was pleased with the enthusiasm shown by Indian Creek officials and students and cannot wait to see the program get off the ground.

"We are very much looking to implement unified sports within the district, as well as whole school engagement activities and leadership roles. We are currently in discussion about flag football and soccer with more excitement to come, I'm sure," she said. "So many of the pillars of UCS are already being so seamlessly woven into the fabric of everything that is happening there, and it overwhelmed me with joy. To have the ability to have students with and without disabilities supporting one another so organically, speaks volumes for the community and the culture of the school and its leadership. The joy and camaraderie that comes from these simple interactions means so much to these students, and it just effortless – my heart was incredibly full that day."

(Continued on Page 2 as UNIFIED)

ICHS to Present Radio, Stage Plays Starting Oct. 27

Indian Creek High School drama students are getting ready for another year of productions, beginning with online radio plays this month.

Theater teacher Robert Zinsmeister said a second year of broadcasts is planned with three performances set on the ICHS Theater YouTube page over the next few months. The radio show creates another avenue for students to hone their talents not only as cast members but also behind the scenes.

"All of the radio plays will be student-directed," said Zinsmeister.

Just in time for the Halloween season, students will present "The Haunting: The Thought" on Friday, Oct. 27 at 7 p.m. The production will be directed by student Ava Christian is a psychological thriller told through the narrative of a murder investigation.

Next is the mystery "Sherlock Holmes: The Problem of Thor Bridge," which will be directed by Abigail Zinsmeister on Friday, Nov. 17 at 7 p.m. The story follows the famous sleuth as he investigates the murder of a former U.S. Senator's wife and tries

to clear the family's governess of the crime.

The classic holiday tale, "A Christmas Carol," will be broadcast online Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. and is directed by V. Diaz. Charles Dickens' timeless story of Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim and the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future will be on display to delight listeners and brighten yuletide spirits.

A second year of broadcasts is planned with three performances set on the ICHS Theater YouTube page over the next few months. The radio show creates another avenue for students to hone their talents not only as cast members but also behind the scenes.

Additionally, the ICHS Fall Festival of Theater will showcase four short plays plus monologues and songs featuring both drama students and drama club members. Plays include "The Ketchup Bottle," a sharp comedy about the relationship between two sisters; "A Perfect Partnership," a roman-

tic comedy about finding love in unexpected places; "The Waiting Room," a story of three people who find themselves in a waiting room and unsure of where they are, but they all have one thing in common; and "Haunted," about an aspiring actress haunted by four ghosts that like to highlight her bloopers and mistakes.

Those productions will be held in the auditorium on Dec. 1 and 2 at 7 p.m. and Dec. 3 at 3 p.m. for a \$5 admission cost.



Hail to the "Chief"

Indian Creek's new amphibious ambassador has a name following a weeklong contest held at Indian Creek High School, Indian Creek Middle School and Cross Creek and Hills Elementary Schools. The three-year-old hellbender salamander is now known as Chief and is aptly named for the school Redskins team. Chief is housed at ICHS as part of a pilot program to repopulate the endangered species that is, interestingly enough, native to Jefferson County. High school students will study the salamander and provide data for professional research, as well as raise juvenile hellbenders to release back into the wild. ICHS is the only public high school involved in the program and has partnered with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Columbus Zoo while the Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District is also involved.

Unified (Continued from Front)

"I would say that if Brayden and Emma have anything to say about it, there will be a year-round, comprehensive sports calendar at Indian Creek in no time. Throughout my visit to the school recently, there was palpable excitement from the student body whenever conversations were had about bringing unified sports to the area. Several classrooms expressed interest, as well as every football player Brayden could find to bring to the meeting."

She said UCS's purpose is to promote social inclusion to people of all abilities through intentionally planned activities that encompass the program's three components.

"This model is focused on affecting the whole student and meeting them at a point where they are comfortable to grow socially, emotionally, athletically, artistically – the sky is the limit! Unified Champion Schools create climates where students with disabilities feel a sense of belonging and welcome, as they are intentionally and meaningfully included in all activities with peers that do not identify as having a disability."

And Mort agreed.

"It's going to be beneficial to all of the kids and everybody's going to learn something about it, no doubt about it," he concluded.

A memorandum of agreement must be approved, but he hoped to have events starting this school year.

Pep Club Donates \$1,500 to T.E.A.R. Fund

The Indian Creek Middle School Pep Club is lifting up cancer patients by contributing proceeds from a recent money-maker to Trinity Health System's T.E.A.R. Fund.

The student organization raised nearly \$1,500 during an end-of-year carnival in May to benefit the Trinity Emergency Assistance Relief (T.E.A.R.) Fund to help purchase gas cards and food and pay utility bills while patients undergo treatment at the Tony Teramana Cancer Center.

"We do a spring fundraiser each year and it was our end-of-year carnival," said club advisor Stacy Zink. "DJ Anthony Bailey [of Movin and Groovin Productions] had inflatables and we had activities. Kids purchased wristbands to go on the rides."

The club also sold water at the event while Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) peddled treats and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes provided face painting.

"It was nice to have different clubs help out," Zink added. "We had a football toss, a basketball free throw and a baseball homerun derby. Anthony Bailey also has Ha Ha Concessions and had popcorn and cotton candy, so it made it a real carnival atmosphere."

She added that the kids learned a valuable lesson while Trinity officials were also very appreciative.

"The kids really enjoy helping and I try to make sure the eighth-graders are involved," she commented. "They are also very happy and gracious with donations at the Teramana Cancer Center."

Pep Club members Kendall Canestraro and Kaylin Lee said they like to help others.

"It makes me feel proud that we are able



Eighth-graders Jessah Hirschfeld, Kendall Canestraro and Kaylin Lee, who are all members in the Indian Creek Middle School Pep Club, present an estimated \$1,500 check with proceeds from a spring carnival fundraiser for the Trinity Health System T.E.A.R. Fund. The fund assists patients undergoing treatment at the Tony Teramana Cancer Center by defraying costs for gasoline, food and other expenses.

to help people," said Canestraro.

"We're happy that the school has the club," added Lee. "We can have fun and help people."

The club is also busy planning activities such as making signs and holding popsicle sales to benefit the T.E.A.R. Fund. Zink said 15-20 members are involved and the organization is open to students in grades 5

-8. Members typically work on signs and other projects each week after school.

"We have a lot of creative kids who like to show what they can do. We showcase athletes each season by putting their names on the wall and have decorated lockers for Christmas and Valentine's Day," she said. "We support the athletes and school as a whole."

ICMS Using Game to Bolster Attendance

Indian Creek Middle School is looking to bolster attendance and is making a real game of it in the process.

For the second year in a row, guidance counselor David Kemp has led activities as a fun way to keep kids in school. Last year's incentive followed the FIFA World Cup soccer competition and

matched up homeroom classes in a battle to hold the title of best attendance for the week. Top classes were listed in brackets in posts outside the office and whittled down until an ultimate winner was named. Kemp is now capitalizing on a life-sized trend in the childhood game "Hungry Hungry Hippo" for the school's estimated 530 students in grades 5-8 to enjoy.

"Hungry Hungry Homeroom" pits homeroom classes against each other and top teams are listed in a post in the building, while the winner will play a large-scale version of the game using laun-

dry baskets to catch balls, much like the current trend.

"Homerooms are paired up into teams throughout the building and one team plays each other each week [to have the most attendance]," he explained. "Whoever has the best percentage for the week gets Tomahawk tickets. The winner at the end of nine

weeks who gets first place has a party and a life-sized 'Hungry Hungry Hippo' game, plus they get a trophy for that nine weeks."

Kemp added that the latest incarnation has bolstered interest since the World Cup activity was

held last year, while the initiative has been in place following the upheaval of the COVID pandemic.

"The attendance percentage has been in the 90's and up and we'll see as the year goes on. Last year's event was effective. The goal was to get a 10-percent increase and we were at 8 percent. The hope this year is to increase it bit by bit."

"The goal [last year] was to get a 10-percent increase and we were at 8 percent. The hope this year is to increase it bit by bit."

-David Kemp, Guidance Counselor



Hills and Cross Creek Elementary Schools raised more than \$2,500 in separate fundraisers during Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September, holding a “Caps Off for Cancer” moneymaker where students gave funds to wear hats all week while Hills also had chances to cut school aide Jennifer Duke’s hair for the Hair We Share charity. Events were held Sept. 18-22 and proceeds were split between the Children’s Hospital Pediatric Cancer Research Center and Steubenville boy Landyn Strosnider, who is in the midst of his own battle. Pictured are, from left, Hills third-graders Isabella Largent and Aria Moore with the donation for Children’s Hospital in the name of former student Brayden Tipton and, at right, classmates Levi Scaffidi and Ava LaSalle with a check for Strosnider.

Schools Raise More Than \$2,500 for Childhood Cancer Causes

Two Indian Creek elementary schools raised more than \$2,500 for some special causes to close Childhood Cancer Awareness Month in September.

Hills and Cross Creek Elementary Schools each held “Caps Off for Cancer” moneymakers during Sept. 18-22 and students paid to don a different hat each day, plus Hills students ended the week by paying for chances to cut classroom aide Jennifer Duke’s hair, while her tresses were donated to the Hair We Share charity.

Virginia Pawelczyk, a third-grade teacher at Hills and school event organizer, said proceeds were split to benefit the Children’s Hospital Pediatric Cancer Research Center in Pittsburgh in honor of former Hills student Brayden Tipton, who passed away last year of acute myeloid leukemia (AML), and Landyn Strosnider, a Steubenville boy who is currently battling cancer.

“We raised \$1,854 and about \$927 each went to Children’s Hospital and Landyn Strosnider, who was diagnosed with ALL [Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia] in May,” Pawelczyk explained. “It’s unfortunate that we have to help a local child, but we are blessed to be able to do so. He is the second non-Indian Creek student we have helped and it takes a community to support them and get them through their hardships.”

On Sept. 22, students gathered in the school gym and fourth-grader Luke Logsdon was chosen to clip Duke’s coiffure in the second

fundraiser. Pawelczyk said the proceeds for Children’s Hospital were matched by a private Pittsburgh donor to benefit the research facility even more.

Alecia Cockrill, dean of students at CCE, said her building raised more than \$700 during their activity through the hat-wearing moneymaker and they were pleased to support the causes.

“We raised \$733 through our Childhood Cancer Awareness Month fundraiser and half went to Children’s Hospital and half went to Landyn Strosnider,” she said.

Pawelczyk’s fundraising ventures have raised more than \$10,000

“...It takes a community to support them and get them through their hardships.”

**-Virginia Pawelczyk,
Hills Elementary Teacher/Organizer**

for the Children’s Hospital research center and local kids battling cancer, and it has been a personal mission to eradicate the disease. She created the event after her son, David, was diagnosed at seven months old with an anaplastic ependymoma brain tumor. He underwent three rounds of chemotherapy and 31 radiation treatments which left him

with short- and long-term deficits. David is a cancer survivor and currently attends Indian Creek Middle School.

Meanwhile, Pawelczyk’s goal now is to help other children thrive through new research and treatments which remain grossly underfunded. She indicated that the government only gives 4 percent toward pediatric cancer while hundreds of different cancers exist, plus a majority of treatment options that children receive are actually developed for adults.

Safety Forces Being Recognized with Breakfast at Hills

Hills Elementary is recognizing safety forces by inviting them to breakfast on Oct. 13.

Officials from the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office and Mingo Junction Police, Fire and EMS departments can dine in classrooms with the school’s 374 students in grades PreK-4 from 7:30-8:30 a.m.

“We did this last year and had 20 officers from the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, Mingo Fire and Police and our school resource officer,” said Principal Makenzie Householder. “They

eat breakfast with preschoolers and other kids in the classroom.”

She said the school food service will provide the meal and the day was more than just a time to break bread; it also allowed officials and students to build camaraderie.

“It’s just for community involvement and for kids to see the officers are here to support them and do good for the community,” Householder added. “It also shows appreciation for them and the work that they do.”