

# Traditions

District Publication of

**FORT THOMAS**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Vol. 28 No. 2



SPECIAL FOCUS

**FTIS: United**

**FALL/WINTER 2023**

# FROM THE Superintendent

To Our Fort Thomas Community,

Happy Holidays! I hope the Winter Break provides a well-deserved chance for you to recharge and also celebrate the wonderful happenings that have taken shape in our schools since we reconvened in August for a new academic year. Mailing another edition of *Traditions*, as we do twice a year in Fort Thomas, is for me an exercise in sincere gratitude, as I believe earnestly that there is no better place in the country to teach and learn than in the Fort Thomas Independent Schools. Compiling and communicating the depth and breadth of our vast successes, and sharing the ingredients that factor so prominently in our achievements, is a privilege because we do it **together**. No matter where I travel within our schools and in our city, I sense a palpable feeling of unity, not only between students and teachers, among school families and our District stakeholders, but also more broadly with the impactful bonds we have forged with our community partners. We have a shared resolve, an ambitious and attainable vision, and an expansive network of support to accomplish our goal of molding our graduates into leaders who successfully navigate postsecondary paths of all kinds.

Our District maintains a very productive collaboration with the City of Fort Thomas and our first responders, and we are so grateful to the local businesses that support our students with experiential learning opportunities. Throughout the District, our PTOs, Education Foundation, Board of Education, site-based decision making councils and parent volunteers work tirelessly (often after working all day!) to give back to our schools, and our government representatives champion the student experience as a central tenet of their legislative agendas. The successes we enjoy are truly accomplished as one team because the community support in Fort Thomas takes a backseat to no one else in the Commonwealth.

The theme for this edition of *Traditions* is FTIS: United, a celebration that we are truly at our best when we are rallying behind our students and teachers both in and out of the classroom. Our strategic focus is intentionally preparing our students to create their personal success. We



1st graders (L-R) **Parker Brennan, Macie Lohstroh, Scarlett Ramsey, Piper Conner** and **Ivy VonLuehrte** are all smiles during Superintendent **Brian Robinson's** visit to Woodfill Elementary.



Superintendent **Brian Robinson** passes out candy along the 4th of July parade route.

do this as FTIS United. It was fantastic to see a student-led Highlands Homecoming Parade down Fort Thomas Avenue for a second year in a row, and our school festivals such as Hullabaloo, Big Top and Moyer Santa House represent clear examples of a student body, a faculty, and a surrounding community coming together as one unified school cohort to enrich the overall experience, as the money raised is invested right back in the schools. In this edition, you'll be able to read articles about how each one of our schools is benefitting from a unified infrastructure and support network.

We believe in communicating as broadly as possible, but as stewards of taxpayer money we also have a responsibility to be mindful of postage costs. As such, this will be the **last edition** of *Traditions* that is automatically mailed to everyone on our current mailing list. Starting with the **Spring/Summer 2024** issue, the homes in the 41075 zip code will continue to receive *Traditions* automatically, but **if you live outside of Fort Thomas** you must proactively "opt-in" using this QR code to continue receiving *Traditions* without interruption.

To see members of our school community working in such harmony, not only with one another but with our neighbors, fills me with such optimism that our best days are ahead of us. Thank you for your part in making Fort Thomas a shining example of achievement and boundless possibilities. Have a wonderful holiday season.

Happy Reading,  
Brian Robinson, Superintendent



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# CALENDAR 2023-2024

## JANUARY

- 3 Return from Winter Break
- 5 Q2 Report Cards Available
- 8 Board of Education Meeting
- 15 Martin Luther King Day - No School
- 17 Student Late Arrival Day
- 22-26 COGAT Testing (Grades 1-3)

## FEBRUARY

- 5-9 Iowa Testing (Grades 2 & 3)
- 12 Board of Education Meeting
- 16 No School (Possible Make-Up Day)
- 19 Presidents Day - No School
- 21 Student Late Arrival Day

## MARCH

- 2 FTEF "Parents' Night Out"
- 11 Board of Education Meeting
- 12-14 ACT Test Window 1
- 20 Q3 Report Cards Available
- 22 Student Late Arrival Day
- 29 Professional Development - No School

## APRIL

- 1-5 Spring Break - No School
- 8 Board of Education Meeting
- 11 The Nesties – Best of the Nest

## MAY

- 6-24 State Accountability /AP Exams
- 13 Board of Education Meeting
- 21 Election Day - No School
- 24 Last Day for Students
- 27 Memorial Day
- 28 HHS Graduation Ceremony

## JUNE

- 5 Q4 Report Cards Available
- 10 Board of Education Meeting

LINK TO ONLINE DISTRICT CALENDAR:



# WELCOME NEW Faculty & Staff

## CERTIFIED

**Michael Caldwell**, HHS Social Studies  
**Isaiah Cook**, HHS Social Studies  
**Kelsey Etherton**, HHS Math  
**Matthew Mickelson**, HHS Science  
**Adam Osterbrock**, HHS Special Education  
**Kelsey Sentney**, HHS FACS  
**Katie Simon**, HHS English  
**Laura Taylor**, HHS English  
**Maggie Walker**, HHS Spanish  
**Sarah Klensch**, HMS Math  
**Jenny Davis**, HMS Library Media Specialist  
**Haley Bathiany**, JES 1st Grade  
**Megan Jones**, JES 5th Grade  
**Brooke Smith**, JES 3rd Grade  
**Sherri Chan**, MES Special Education  
**Beth Davis**, MES Speech Language Pathologist  
**Jenna Gilman**, MES 4th Grade  
**Megan Yarman**, MES Kindergarten  
**Chastity Jacobs**, WES Kindergarten  
**Makayla Fraley**, WES Kindergarten  
**Maddie Roy**, WES 3rd Grade  
**Shalyn Jones**, WES Special Education  
**Michala Saffell**, WES Speech Language Pathologist

## CLASSIFIED

**Ryan Cunningham**, District HVAC Technician  
**Bob Detzel**, HHS Custodian  
**Mary Diamond**, HHS Custodian  
**Angela Dirksen**, HHS Instructional Assistant  
**Chris Middendorf**, HHS Custodian  
**Nona Stevenson**, HHS Cafeteria  
**Jenna Stone**, HHS Instructional Assistant  
**Nancy Hensley**, HMS Cafeteria  
**Maggie Mastropaolo**, HMS Instructional Assistant  
**Sherry Norman**, HMS Cafeteria  
**Edith Parsons**, HMS Cafeteria  
**Amanda Scott**, HMS Principal's Secretary  
**Michele Turner**, HMS Cafeteria  
**Emma Eide**, JES Instructional Assistant  
**Becky Fischer-Lucchetta**, JES Instructional Assistant  
**Jacob Myers**, JES Custodian  
**Matt Schnelle**, JES Custodian  
**Madison Helminiak**, MES Instructional Assistant  
**Tara Henry**, MES Principal's Secretary  
**Claire Freppon**, MES Instructional Assistant  
**Peter Lloyd**, MES Cafeteria  
**Melissa Rossini**, MES Instructional Assistant  
**Jen Black**, WES Instructional Assistant  
**Jessica Eades**, WES Instructional Assistant  
**Rebecca Leonardi-Neufarth**, WES Instructional Assistant  
**Nicholas Kalonda**, WES Custodian  
**Maria McGovney**, WES Cafeteria Manager  
**Cindy Woolum**, WES Cafeteria

# DEVELOPING A Fort Thomas Graduate

For generations, Graduation Day has always been a festive occasion in Fort Thomas. Friends and loved ones, with cameras and programs in hand, fill either the Performing Arts Center at Highlands High School or, if Mother Nature is cooperating, we can celebrate together outside on the field and in the bleachers at David M. Cecil Memorial Stadium. Our newly-minted graduates are cloaked in blue and white gowns and as they pass the stage, one-by-one, the diplomas they receive read "Highlands High School". They officially become alumni in that moment, and we thoroughly enjoy celebrating their vast successes and reveling in the possibilities to come.

Once our students move their tassels from right to left on their caps, they become Fort Thomas graduates: products of a holistic and intentional



Johnson 3rd grade students (L-R) **Sam Grainger**, **Theo Munninghoff** and **Hadley Duesing** identify and research plants during an outdoor group activity.

K-12 experience at the elementary, middle and high school levels that prepares them with the tools to blossom on a host of postsecondary paths. Our District is therefore implementing the moniker "Fort Thomas Graduate" to describe the purposeful work underway in our District that builds upon the merits embedded in our Portrait of a Graduate.

Several years ago, our students, teachers, administrators and community members collaborated and identified Portrait of a Graduate (POG) competencies, the kinds of traits we want our graduates to master before they leave the Nest: Curious and Critical Thinking, Global Communicating, Empathetic Collaboration, Creative Problem Solving and Courageous Leadership. A key difference however, in 2023-2024 and beyond, is that

instead of serving as one of five pillars in a strategic plan as the POG competencies once did, it becomes the pillar and a beacon of our shared ambition.

"Our intention is to develop, identify and foster these competencies which will strengthen the areas of achievement, student experiences and opportunities, and thus create a positive and engaged culture and ultimately promote individual student growth," said Keith Faust, assistant superintendent of teaching and learning.

Our District has created Leadership Implementation Teams (LIT teams) to monitor progress in these key areas and identify sectors where we are succeeding and have room for growth. Dashboards on the District website serve as real-time report cards in a constant evaluation process. Our principals and assistant principals work with administrators, teachers, parents, staff and students from different schools to ensure our strategic planning encompasses a K-12 mindset. It also aims to ensure our students are benefitting from momentum along the journey: that what they are experiencing at the elementary levels at Woodfill, Moyer and Johnson is enhanced at the middle school and strengthened noticeably at the high school, before they depart as Fort Thomas graduates. At various stages, we will ask students to prepare defenses of learning presentations to demonstrate growth and show clarity in their progress.

"If our students possess, practice and develop these skills from kindergarten through 12th grades, it is our belief that the Fort Thomas graduate, regardless of interest, field or course of study, will be equipped to take on whatever challenge life presents to them," Faust said.



HHS freshmen (L-R) **Kendall Shields**, **Kaylynn Kremer** and **Kenna Urlage** collected directions and a bowling ball to prepare to conduct their physics experiment.



# COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

## Peggie Hughes

BY MYA SCHWARTZ AND KAYLA LEHN  
HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISTS

In Fort Thomas, the memories made, the stories told, traditions honored and people-centered culture help keep the town and school system united. For the past 27 years, one of the key behind-the-scenes champions of FTIS United, keeping all of the pieces together, is our own **Peggie Hughes**.

Hughes hasn't just worked in FTIS for nearly three decades. She grew up here. Ms. Hughes is a 1979 graduate of Highlands High School and she came back to the District in 1995 to serve as the administrative assistant to the principal at the high school. "Peggie was the absolute best. She is so knowledgeable, professional, dedicated and hard working," said **George Frakes**, the HHS principal from 1988-2002. She worked at Highlands for 5 years, left briefly and then returned to the Nest, working at the central office under five superintendents and directly for the last four.

For the last 15 years, Ms. Hughes has worked directly as the administrative assistant to the superintendent, taking on a variety of responsibilities: working with teachers and staff, developing presentations, crafting policies and procedures and supporting the overall mission of the Board of Education.

"I have really enjoyed the role because there's a lot of variety in what I do. Mr. Robinson is the fourth superintendent that I've worked for directly. Each [superintendent] brings a little something different to the role, which makes my role a little different," Hughes said.

The superintendents treasure their time with Ms. Hughes and recognize her invaluable role within our District.

"Peggie was much more than an administrative assistant. When I was named superintendent, I insisted that she move into her current role because she was not only skilled and talented, but more importantly hard working and caring. She was instrumental in working with me on curriculum, professional development, and a number of projects. She has always completed work well beyond her job description," former superintendent **John Williamson** said. "In my 33 years in education, to this day I have to say Peggie was by far the best educational partner I've worked with."

Having both lived and worked in the Fort Thomas community, Ms. Hughes has a deep appreciation for the "Fort" and has gained a family here.



"In all of our schools and among our faculty and staff, we work together as a team very well. We come together as Fort Thomas Independent Schools, and it is like a family. Everybody brings their best and wants to promote the best in our students and the jobs that we do as well."

Ms. Hughes has decided to retire at the end of December, 2023.

"The people connection is what I'm really going to miss. I'm used to seeing people here in the office on a daily basis and in the schools on a regular basis. I've worked with a lot of the people here for many years."

Superintendent **Brian Robinson** said Ms. Hughes has left an indelible mark on so many facets of our school system, including Traditions magazine, a twice-per-year publication that the District mails to the community. For the last decade and a half, every issue of Traditions has benefited noticeably from Hughes' vast skills and expertise.

"Ms. Hughes has been a tremendous colleague, providing care to all that bind our community together. She works hard to ensure we communicate the many ways our schools serve as the heartbeat of our community. From my very first year in FTIS as a new teacher, it was easy to see that Peggie deeply cared about the tradition of excellence and is the go-to person when the need arises. In countless ways, she has served the Fort Thomas team and students and ensures we are FTIS United. She will most certainly be missed."

# SCHOOL UPDATES

## Johnson Elementary



DRAWING ON EACH OTHER TO INSPIRE SUCCESS

On the trek to the gymnasium for the monthly Jaguar Jamboree, **Brooks Fromm** walks down the stairs knowing that a high-energy vibe awaits in the all-school assembly, and the 3rd grade student wouldn't want it any other way. At Johnson, individual and group achievements are celebrated with the entire school rejoicing as milestones are read aloud, one at a time.

"It's really cool because you get to recognize people's successes," Fromm said.

Perhaps it's a reading goal, mastering math facts, displaying curiosity, or working toward more character-based competencies such as raising one's hand in class or moving quietly through the hallways. Fromm said what he's found, by sitting alongside several hundred of his friends, classmates and teachers at the Jamboree, is something very palpable: inspiration.

"It gives me a push because I want to be the one who's creative, and who accomplishes a lot of my goals, so I can hear my name called and stand up in the gym," Fromm added.

Principal **Ashley Dikeos** and Assistant Principal **Kristina Sheehy** have also assigned each student to a particular "family" for the 2023-2024 school year. Approximately 20-25 students, from kindergarten through 5th grades, collaborate in smaller groups during designated times with two members of the Johnson faculty and staff.



The Johnson school community gathers for a Jaguar Jamboree in the gymnasium.

On one particular Friday, after the Jamboree concluded, the students learned that becoming good leaders begins with gratitude. The eighteen families made a list: "What do I love about Johnson?"

"When I was in school, relationships were so important to me with my classmates and teachers, and it's a core pillar of my philosophy as principal," Dikeos said. "Sometimes a conversation, or a comment, or an idea generated in these families can be a transformational moment for a student. What I also really like are the mentoring opportunities between students that will unfold as the year progresses."



Teacher **Chasity Ogle** oversees a small group discussion on gratitude.

As a 5th grade student, **Mackenzie Schell** sees leadership as part of her calling each day she comes to school, and the families will provide opportunities for older students to guide younger ones as they pursue different academic and behavior-based goals.

"I think we can inspire the younger students because, as 5th graders, we have gone through every grade at the school and we can pass along things that have worked for us to help them accomplish what they want to do," Schell said.

Achievement, camaraderie and inspiration: it's part of a recipe for success that's working beautifully at Johnson, and the accomplishments continue to mount.



# SCHOOL UPDATES

## Moyer Elementary

### THE FLUFFIEST MOYER MAMMAL GALVANIZES THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY



Moyer 1st graders (L-R) **Huxley Lemons** and **Braden Fite** work on an assignment while **Humphrey** watches attentively.

With a leash in hand and a full heart, it's almost as if **Ben Reynolds** is walking alongside the fifth member of the Beatles when they visit Moyer Elementary School together: John, Paul, George, Ringo, and....Humphrey.

"It is almost impossible to put into words exactly what happens when he's here," said Reynolds, a Moyer parent of two daughters. "It's a huge win-win for everyone. I'm more than happy to be a wingman for this rockstar named Humphrey."

**"He's like  
a human,  
only fluffier."**

A hypoallergenic and fully-trained therapy dog, Humphrey began visiting the school during the 2022-2023 school year, and the labradoodle became an almost instant member of the community due to his calming presence, and how he willingly listens to presentations and jumps in to be a part of classroom activities.

"It's like magic," 5th grade teacher **Claudia Hils** said. "Humphrey immediately lifts our spirits and engages in our writing centers. The students often write about him and it really brings our classroom together as one."

Humphrey also provides social-emotional support, eases test and public speaking anxiety, attentively absorbs book reports, and, on Friday afternoons, visits the population of Moyer students who are studying English as a second language. Remarkably, students who were once hesitant to speak find Humphrey to be a reassuring audience, and they are reaching previously uncharted territory in their spoken and written mastery of English.

Ben and his wife, **Laura Reynolds**, care for Humphrey and take turns bringing him to school, an example of community connectivity that Principal **Dawn Laber** sees as a gift to everyone at Moyer.

"What I have found as principal at Moyer is that our schools and community work hand in hand, and it's amazing. We couldn't be who we are without the community support and vice versa," Dr. Laber said. "Together, we truly are better."

Humphrey will turn two years old in January 2024, and his optimal visits at Moyer last from 90-120 minutes. Ever adaptable, he can give "Humphrey hugs" to students who need an emotional boost and, minutes later, turn around and lay on the floor to be a part of a math group in a 1st grade class.

"It is just really cool to have him do math with us," 1st grader **Serafina Deinlein** said. "He's like a human, only fluffier."

He's a fluffy friend fostering student growth and making the school and community connection that much stronger.



2nd grader **Griffin Futscher** enjoys a little one-to-one interaction with **Humphrey** (with handler **Ben Reynolds**) during their visit to Moyer.

# SCHOOL UPDATES

## Woodfill Elementary



THE 5 C'S ARE PROVIDING A+ OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO BLOSSOM



Woodfill 3rd grader **Cambrie Crawford** begins the process of painting the Buddy Bench.

**T**he Sharpie markers waited patiently on the colorful new addition to the playground and what a fitting time it was to complete the project. Unity Day allows our elementary school students to dress in orange, re-affirm a commitment to kindness and celebrate their differences. Classes took turns heading outside. The Woodfill Wildcats had a contract to sign: not on paper, or with a company, but with one another.

When **Cambrie Crawford** learned about an all-school contest to design a "Buddy Bench", the 3rd grade student eagerly submitted her vision because it blends two of her passions: painting, and making sure every one of her classmates feels included at Woodfill. "It means a lot to me," Crawford said. "This is such a special school and I wanted to do my part to have something on our playground to remind us to always be nice to each other."

Positioned right next to the playground, the "Buddy Bench" serves as a place where students can sit if they're feeling lonely or left out, a signal to classmates that they need a friend at recess. In a pledge of unity, every member of the student body signed the bench. "I can't tell you how excited I was when I found out we were getting the bench," said **Lucas Tremper**, a 3rd grade student. "Recess is only fun when everyone's having a good time. We don't want anyone off to the side." As the designer, Crawford learned valuable skills in the student-driven process of painting the bench: sharing her ideas, making a proposal, communicating with teachers and classmates, displaying artistic creativity and completing a project on deadline.

In a host of initiatives this school year, Woodfill students are honing their academic skills with an

eye on strengthening community, both in and out of school. First graders are making periodic visits to Carmel Manor, a Fort Thomas retirement home, to read alongside residents and even sing to them. In improving their literacy and bringing the performing arts beyond Woodfill, teacher **Carrie Skirvin** describes the experience for all involved as "pure awesomeness".

"At Woodfill, our primary focus is academics and we thrive in that area and want to continue to reach for more," Principal **John Gesenhues** said. "It's also part of our mission to prepare students for whatever they do in life, and seeing them act the right way on the playground, or make a resident's day at a retirement home, it's all very much a centerpiece of who we are and how we want to conduct ourselves." Known as "Blue Lobster" projects for how unique and memorable they are, the Buddy Bench and Carmel Manor initiatives also drive home Woodfill's commitment to the 5 C's: content, creativity, communication, collaboration and community.

In the spirit of teamwork that pervades our district, engineering students at Highlands High School built the Buddy Bench and treated the wood to a high-quality finish before handing it off to Crawford, whose rainbow-colored design, with a bold "W" in the middle, prevailed in a contest that drew ten entries from students across the school.

"Even after I leave Woodfill, I think I'm going to come up to school from time to time and just look at the Buddy Bench. It's so neat," Crawford added.

It'll be there, waiting for her or anyone else, a reminder of the powerful blend of artistic excellence, character and unity.



Woodfill 2nd graders (L-R) **Adi Daniels, Jensen Stumpff, Theo Ochsner and Rooney Dye** take their turns signing the bench.



The walk from her home to the dance studio in Fort Thomas is exactly one mile, and it's a journey **Maya Wells** makes enthusiastically. By sheer coincidence, the 8th grade student strides past Highlands Middle School and a not-so-subtle question on the announcement screen outside on the front lawn:

"What have you done for others today?"

Wells, a three-year member of the HMS dance team, dedicates time to teach preschool age children dance steps, fundamental moves and choreography in a private Fort Thomas dance studio.

"I just enjoy giving back because I had really good teachers when I was much younger, and seeing three and four-year old girls having a great time doing something I like makes me feel good about being there," Wells said.

Highlands Middle School Principal **Erika Volpenhein** fully endorses a "Lead, Learn and Serve" mantra at school and, starting with the 2023-2024 school year, HMS requires students to complete volunteer hours that correlate directly to their grade level. (6th graders = six hours of community service, 7th graders=seven hours and 8th graders = eight hours). It's an intentionally-designed program to allow our students to eventually blossom into Fort Thomas graduates by using experiences and opportunities to grow.

Volpenhein said, historically, HMS has done a fabulous job with leading and learning, but the third-year principal wanted to see growth in the service pillar.

"We needed something to connect our students in meaningful ways to their community to foster a culture of service over self," Volpenhein said. "It's particularly important in middle school,



(L-R) HMS Library Media Specialist **Jenny Davis** and daughter, 8th grader **Anna Davis**, manage one of the drop off stations for the food drive.



**Marshall Anusbigian**, HMS 6th grader, cleans the windows at Fort Thomas Coffee during the HMS day of service.

when students begin to develop their authentic selves, and we want to foster that."

**"If our schools are the heartbeat of our community, which they are, we want to give back."**

HMS 8th grader **Bella Thomas** is striving to exceed the school-required community service goals and achieve thirty (30) hours as part of her religious confirmation journey. Alongside her brother, Thomas volunteered at a church festival and found joy in overseeing games for younger children.

"I love when they get so excited. It just makes me feel like I did something really nice to make a child laugh and make them smile," Thomas said. During the first quarter, she worked in the office, helping faculty and staff with projects as a Bluebird Assistant. While she didn't receive volunteer hours, Thomas's mother noticed how it clearly enhanced a service mindset.

"I think through that experience Bella really learned that helping others fills her bucket, to live outside of herself and anticipate others' needs," said **Erika Thomas**, who is also a school counselor at Highlands High School.

On November 18th, the Highlands Middle School community came together for a "Day of Service", venturing out to complete projects at businesses in Fort Thomas and collect non-perishable food items for the annual canned food drive leading into Thanksgiving. The student council and faculty advisor **Ryan Augustin** lead the effort to help the hungry in our region, and our ever-supportive community responded with remarkable generosity. Our students loaded more than 31,000 donated items into a collection truck to help our neighbors coping with food insecurity.

"If our schools are the heartbeat of our community, which they are, we want to give back," Volpenhein said.

# SCHOOL UPDATES Highlands High



## STORIES AND MEMENTOS LINK GENERATIONS OF BLUEBIRDS

**B**rayden Moeves believes strongly in using experiences and opportunities at Highlands High School to grow personally, as a multi-sport athlete, Business Launch student, lawnmowing entrepreneur and, most recently, the Highlands High School senior has served as a museum curator in his internship with the Fort Thomas Education Foundation.

"It's been a very rewarding experience," Moeves said. Moeves has worked as a project manager for the "Highlands Stories" initiative, obtaining artifacts from alumni and coordinating interviews to glean more information about their significance.



HHS freshman **Ivy Roberts** and sophomore **Natalie Hinegardner** sort through some of the items received for the display.

Photo Credit: Treiston Collins '24

The experience for Moeves, and a host of other students at Highlands, began to take shape when **Gene Taylor's** cell phone rang. On the other end of the call was a friend and classmate he had known for nearly eighty years, dating back to their shared time at Johnson Elementary School in the 1940s. Traveling through the Philadelphia Airport, **Bill Waddell** passed by a

well-preserved display case containing relics that told stories about prominent people and places in the City of Brotherly Love.

The "Highlands Stories" concept was born at that moment. Waddell, Taylor and their classmates from the HHS Class of 1958 wanted to see something similar in Fort Thomas, and they partnered with the Fort Thomas Education Foundation to launch an almost identical project in the media center at Highlands.

"A lot of young students don't always know the history of the school system. It is vitally important for them to have a connection with the past," Taylor said. "Students begin to correlate the similarities between what they are experiencing and what we experienced a couple of generations ago."

Highlands alumni across different decades have eagerly presented approximately 100 items to be showcased in the "Highlands Stories" exhibit, and a selection committee reviews each submission to determine if it meets the selection criteria. Students are represented on the committee, and Principal **John Darnell** said the true beauty of the project has been how it fosters student involvement at every turn.

"In the early going, my conference room was booked solid for an entire week, as students were meeting with alumni. Our graduates brought in their items, set them on the table, and told stories. Having students involved has just taken an already amazing concept to another level," Darnell said.

Unveiled over Homecoming weekend, the beautifully-lit "Highlands Stories" display case sits prominently near the front of the library and contains three-dimensional mementos and, most importantly, relays the compelling stories that are inextricably tied to the artifacts: a game ball from the first-ever meeting on the football field between Highlands and Covington Catholic in 1968, drumsticks and a harmonica from a 1950s-era dance band and a signed ball from the first-ever boys soccer team. The Highlands journalism students, under the guidance of teacher **Beth Brubaker**, have embraced a prominent role in reaching out to alumni and diligently writing the stories that anyone can access by scanning a QR code next to the item in the display case.



"I think it's an unbelievable opportunity to literally hold pieces of history in my hands and be able to write about it. I'm just so honored," said **Jade Farley**, a freshman journalism student. All told, journalism students have contributed 13 write-ups that appear on a corresponding website. The experience points to a Rich in Tradition, Focused on the Future mindset in Fort Thomas, whereby our students can understand the past as a starting point for creating memories and charting their own paths forward.

**Sydney Bastin** graduated in 2007 and played goalkeeper on the girls soccer teams that won back-to-back state championships in 2005 and 2006. Ms. Bastin donated her ring to "Highlands Stories". What isn't captured in jewelry, or any record book or scoresheet, was the incredible camaraderie the young women shared, a bond that lasts to this day.

"One year, I believe we all went to Homecoming in our soccer uniforms. We didn't have dates," Bastin said. "To be able to pursue something as meaningful as a state championship with twenty of your best friends was incredibly rewarding."



HHS students (L-R) **Katrina Carrier**, **Sophia Taylor** and **Mia ShROUT** review the artifacts donated to the Highlands' Stories project.



HHS alumna **Sydney Bastin** donated memorabilia to the Highlands' Stories project.

Mr. Taylor, a Class of 1958 alum, donated scout merit badges to the exhibit, and shared the story of how his scoutmaster, a fellow Highlands alum named **Bill Rose**, heroically stepped in to assist the City of Newport when floodwaters ravaged the region in the 1930s. Taylor said he is thrilled Highlands students are researching and writing about the people and events that preceded them in Fort Thomas.

"Oh, I think it's great. It couldn't be a better learning experience for a journalism student, plus I think you learn about what's relevant and what's not through the editing process."

Freshman **Skyler Frey** learned all about the 1962 fire that severely damaged Highlands High School through a brick from the original building that an alumnus donated to the exhibit.

"I absolutely love writing and this project was even more fun than I expected," Frey said. "It's important to understand the significance of the fire, how it led to a renovation, and I'm proud to share what I've learned and not just keep it to myself."

Sharing our past and shaping our future. "Highlands Stories" is linking Bluebirds of different generations together and serving as a bedrock for FTIS: United.



HHS freshman **Jade Farley**, along with HHS alumna **Sydney Bastin** and **Gene Taylor**, discuss the items located in the display case.

# 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.





# FACILITY UPDATES & UPGRADES

## In Fort Thomas

With the opening of the beautiful new Johnson Elementary School in the summer of 2021, the Fort Thomas Independent Schools successfully executed our vision to renovate or rebuild all five schools in our District. It is our commitment to have our staff and students working together in the most comfortable surroundings possible, with modern amenities in place that open doors and foster cutting-edge learning.

This summer, the District invested in a new roof at Highlands Middle School and upgraded the HVAC systems at both Highlands High and Highlands Middle schools. Additionally, we completed an initiative to install environmentally-friendly LED lighting throughout our buildings.

## TOWER PARK ATHLETIC COMPLEX Renovation

Our District is excited about the vision for a completely renovated Tower Park Athletic Complex. The project calls for a complete renovation of the facility which includes a new 8-lane track and artificial turf field. The blueprints also provide for the addition of a fieldhouse, locker rooms and expanded seating and parking. This should make the complex not only safer, but also more comfortable and accessible for participants and patrons alike. The renderings illustrate how the project aligns with our philosophy of promoting health and wellness for users of all

We will use the energy savings from noticeably lower electricity bills to pay for the upgrades.

"We are fortunate to have beautiful, state-of-the-art facilities in Fort Thomas and it's our job as stewards of these buildings to ensure they are well-maintained for future generations," said Director of Operations **Jerry Wissman**. "These updates and upgrades certainly accomplish this goal."

KEY DISTRICT UPGRADES

- LED Lighting
- Boilers
- Circulation Pumps
- Hot Water Heaters
- Central Controls
- Chiller
- Cooling Tower

ages and abilities throughout our community.

"The vision for Tower Park offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to add a community jewel to the heart of Fort Thomas," said Superintendent **Brian Robinson**. "As is the case now, it would be open to the community when it's not being used for athletics. This complex, once completed, will have all of the amenities in place to host regular season and postseason athletic events."

Stay tuned for future updates!



Architectural Rendering of the Athletic Complex Renovation.

# FORT THOMAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION Grants In Action

Each year, the Fort Thomas Education Foundation (FTEF) strives to support our wonderful teachers through our Teacher Grant Program. We ask them to dream about how they can continue to impact the educational experience of their students and then, with your help, we fund their dreams. We are UNITED in our efforts to provide our students with a world-class education.

For twenty-two years we have supported our teachers' dreams and have positively impacted the educational experience of every student in all five of our schools. We are hard at work raising funds for our 2023-2024 grant cycle. Help us give them everything they have asked for with a generous donation to the FTEF Annual Appeal. **GIVE TODAY!** [ftef.org](http://ftef.org)

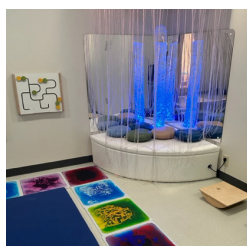
Over the last two decades we have awarded over \$1 MILLION in Teacher Grants; more than \$116,000 just last year alone!

Some examples of Teacher Grants awarded last year include:

- Intelligent Lighting for the PAC that uses GPS technology during theatre performances, giving our HMS & HHS students access to state-of-the-art technology not common in other high school theatre programs.
- Spike Robots for the district Robotics Program directly impacting over 200 students, giving them the opportunity to work with the latest in robotics that demonstrate more consistent productivity and have more advanced and accurate sensors.
- Decodable Readers giving primary students in all our elementary schools access to materials that research indicates promotes fluency.



Woodfill Elementary students using their Decodable Readers.



Left: New sensory room items at Moyer Elementary.



Right: Johnson Elementary students with their compost items.



Left: Johnson Principal Ashley Dikeos, showing off their new Book Vending Machine. Right: Kindergarten students learning on their new interactive rug.



Left: Author Jarrett Lerner visiting students at Johnson Elementary.



Right: Woodfill Elementary students hatching their chickens.



Middle school students using their heart rate monitors.

## It's Annual Appeal Time!

Consider a gift to the FTEF and support our mission of enhancing educational excellence.

We can't do what we do without YOU!

FTEF.ORG  
859-815-2004



# HIGHLANDS HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

## 2023 Alumnus of the Year Reception

Each year the Alumni Association selects an alumnus who has achieved greatness in their professional career or has given back to HHS and the community to ensure that future students can maximize their own greatness. The 2023 Highlands High School Alumnus of the Year is William (Bill) Waddell, Class of 1958 who was honored during a special reception at the Birdhouse before the Homecoming game on October 6. Family, friends and members from the Class of 1958 were on hand to honor Bill with a special video, which was also shown during halftime of the game. To learn more about Mr. Waddell, go to <https://ftef.org/hhs-alumni-of-the-year/>



2023 HHS Alumnus of the Year, Bill Waddell ('58)



John Darnell, Bill Waddell, and Brian Robinson



Frank Twehues, Dustin Buecker, Brian Robinson, and Bill Waddell



HHS Class of 1958



The Waddell Family



Left: Amy Shaffer, FTEF Executive Director, honoring Bill Waddell  
Right: Attendees watching Bill Waddell's video



1958 Classmates Catherine Onyemelukwe, Gene Taylor, Tom Crain, and Terry Roberts



Left: Bill Waddell and HHS Filmmaking and Broadcasting student, Ashton Willis

[View video here:](#)



# FORT THOMAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

## Highlands Stories

### A HISTORY IN LITTLE PIECES

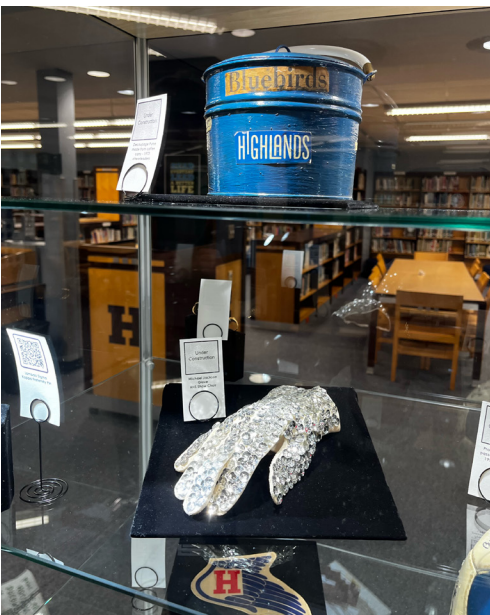
After many months spent curating Highlands items, Highlands Stories: A History in Little Pieces was unveiled on October 7, 2023, in the HHS media center. Highlands Stories was spearheaded by 2023 Alumnus of the Year **William Waddell** (HHS '58) who noticed a similar display in the Philadelphia airport while traveling. Visitors to the Highlands Stories micro-museum will find unique items such as swim patches and medals from the 50's, class rings, dance cards, sub deb sorority items and so much more. Visitors can then scan the QR code where they can read the story behind the artifact and learn

about Highlands history. Members from the Class of 1958 and students from the Highlands journalism department helped to create the accompanying articles. "We have been very pleased with the response from everyone connected with Highlands – administrators, teachers, students, alumni, the FTEF – in contributing items and otherwise," says Waddell.

If you have any unique items that you would like to donate, contact the Highlands Stories Curator, **Amy Leigh**, at [Amy.Leigh@FTEF.org](mailto:Amy.Leigh@FTEF.org) or (859) 474-2255.



Glass cases containing Highlands artifacts.



Glass cases containing Highlands artifacts.



Left: Sub deb sorority items; Right: 1950's swim patches



Highlands class ring

Visit the Highlands  
Stories Website:



# FORT THOMAS EDUCATION FOUNDATION

## Blue Feather Society



Blue Feather founding members.

**T**his membership program helps sustain the legacy of excellence we have come to expect in our schools for current and future generations. Your annual membership helps the FTEF give back in big ways to our schools and students. We have two membership levels to choose from, including our new Ambassador Membership.

### Blue Feather Annual Ambassador Membership:

An annual payment of \$2,000 or can be broken into monthly payments of \$170

#### Membership includes:

- Elegant blue feather gift signifying your annual support
- Invitation to the annual holiday party hosted by FTEF
- Recognition as a Blue Feather Society Member in the FTEF Annual Report

#### Ambassador members also receive:

- VIP invitations to special events
- An additional exclusive gift
- Recognition as Blue Feather Ambassador Member in the FTEF Annual Report



### Blue Feather Annual Membership:

An annual payment of \$1,000 or can be broken into monthly payments of \$85

FTEF

★ PARENTS' ★

★ *Night Out* ★

Save the Date

March 2, 2024

# FTEF SUPPORT STAFF OF THE YEAR Nominations



## THE NESTIES *The Best of the Nest*

### Who is eligible for nomination:

Cafeteria workers, central office staff, custodial and maintenance staff, digital learning coaches, instructional assistants, health assistants, school nurses, school secretaries, instructional assistants, technology staff and transportation staff.

### Who can nominate:

Administrators, teachers, other support professionals, students and community members can nominate (members of the NESTIES: Best of the Nest committee are unable to nominate).

### NOMINATION DEADLINE:

**WEDNESDAY  
JANUARY 10, 2024**

The FTIS Supporting Staff Award winner(s) will be selected by the NESTIES: The Best of the Nest committee based on the above criteria. Winner(s) will be honored at the annual NESTIES: The Best of the Nest event.



## THE NESTIES *The Best of the Nest*

**SAVE THE DATE  
April 11, 2024**

3rd Annual event celebrating our incredible staff who make this district exceptional!

PRESENTED BY FTIS AND FTEF

### NOMINATION CRITERIA:

- This award honors a supporting services employee who has made an outstanding contribution to FTIS schools, students, and community.
- Nominees should extend themselves beyond basic required duties and contribute to students and the school community by enhancing student learning, creating positive relationships, and making school or the office a better place by demonstrating one or more of the B I R D S traits:

## BIRDS

**B - Build Trust**

**I - Inspire Passion**

**R - Relationship Development**

**D - Determine Authentic Self**

**S - Solution-based**

## 2023 OUTSTANDING SUPPORT STAFF OF THE YEAR



**Whitney  
McKay**



**Joe  
Weyer**



**Mike  
Redmond**

**USE THE  
QR CODE FOR  
NOMINATION  
FORM:**



# FORT THOMAS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

H

HIGHLANDS  
HIGH

H

HIGHLANDS  
MIDDLE

J

JOHNSON  
elementary

M

MOYER  
elementary

W

WOODFILL  
elementary



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  
Sarah Foster  
Clem Fennell

### 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 Forgy  
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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**Traditions**

**FORT THOMAS**  
**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

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