

IC The Creek

Indian Creek Local School District Newsletter

March 2024

ICHS Hosting Aquatic Learning Experience

Indian Creek High School's ongoing hellbender conservation program will be highlighted in a special aquatic learning event next month featuring state leaders.

"Healthy Creek, Healthy Hellbender Aquatic Learning Experiences" will be held April 4 and doors open at 4:30 p.m. with events throughout the building from 5-7 p.m., but opening ceremonies will be held in the auditorium at 6 p.m. Speakers include Chief Kendra Wecker of the Ohio Division of Wildlife along with Jamey Emmert, avian education coordinator for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources; Steve Gray, assistant ODNR director; Scott Hall, executive administrator of fish management and research for ODNR; John Navarro, aquatic wildlife diversity educator for ODNR; Scott Angelo, district III manager for ODNR; and Craig Porter, wildlife officer. Other officials were also invited to attend the event.

Science teacher Crystal Fluharty said the process has involved a multitude of school programs and she was thrilled for everyone to catch a glimpse of the program in April.

"I'm excited," she said. "It will be a great night for Indian Creek High School."

Fluharty and Assistant Principal Keith



Indian Creek High School will host an aquatic learning experience on April 4 from 5-7 p.m. to showcase its new hellbender program in collaboration with the Ohio Division of Wildlife, Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Columbus Zoo. Aquatic activities and a learning fair will be held throughout the evening with state officials speaking in the auditorium at 6 p.m.

Swearingen have been working on the hellbender program since last year when the school partnered with the ODNR, Columbus Zoo and Jefferson County Soil and

Water Conservation District to help bring the salamander back from the brink of extinction. ICHS is the fourth site in the state and the only public high school to participate in the project and began an aquatic education pathway as a result. JCSWCD has been part of the program for the past 15 years and has 500 acres of appropriated county land eyed for natural habitats, with most of it located within the school district. It is also fitting because Jefferson County is considered the epicenter for the species' habitat and eggs used for the project were harvested at Cross Creek. The salamander dates back more than 160 million years and can live up to six decades in creeks, but more recently it has been placed on the endangered list.

ICHS received an Aquatics Wildlife Education Grant from ODNR and made a home for a three-year-old hellbender named Chief, plus officials most recently added a rearing room to raise junior hellbenders that will eventually be released into area waterways.

"The Aquatic Education Grant is an annual grant offered to groups to host angling and aquatic education classes,"

(Continued as AQUATIC)

District Secures \$150K Grant for CTE Programming

Indian Creek High School's career-technical education program has gained a nearly \$150,000 windfall to help prepare students for the ever-changing technological landscape.

A total of 56 schools statewide will receive grants totaling more than \$67.7 million through the Ohio Career Technical Education Equipment Grant Program for various programs including engineering, manufacturing, health sciences, construction and more. State legislators approved \$100 million within H.B. 33, the state's 2024-25 biennial budget, to fund the competitive grant program and award schools to help them establish or expand CTE pro-

grams, with priority for programs that support careers on Ohio's Top Jobs List and establish or expand credentialing programs from the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation Innovative Workforce Incentive Program list. In addition to the grant program, officials provided \$200 million for the Career Technical Construction Program and 35 schools received awards to update or expand their career tech facilities this past fall.

The Indian Creek Local School District was the only recipient in Jefferson County to receive funding through the first round of the equipment grant program, earning \$149,779 to provide credentialing and tech

assistance opportunities.

Superintendent Dr. T.C. Chappellear said officials applied in December and learned of the allocation through the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce this past week. The funding will be used to acquire two FANUC robotic arms to expound learning and earn credentials for students in the engineering design and programming career pathways and to form a Student Repair Academy (SRA) to assist in the district's school buildings and prepare pupils for the future workforce.

(Continued as CTE)

Swearingen explained. "This is the first grant we've gotten from them and manager Kerry Toth at Pet Supplies Plus donated equipment for the rearing room, then she assisted in setting up the aquarium and filtration system. They have been very generous and helpful to us in getting the program going and we planned the ceremony for Chief."

There will be food and a variety of student-helmed, aquatics-related interactive events with the academic team hosting aquatic trivia, Interactive Media students are handling promotions as well as displaying original nature photography and a photo booth with a hellbender backdrop. More activities include green cleaning, macros and creek study, fishing regulations, a casting station, biomagnification and a kids' corner.

Fluharty said the public is also being asked to take part in a Bags to Benches campaign and the school aims to collect 1,000 pounds of plastics, including bread bags, and recycle them to create benches for the campus and community. The campaign will kick off the night of the aquatic

learning event and will conclude next spring.

Additionally, the ICHS Learning Fair will get underway with vendors and information on local employment opportunities, higher education, Armed Forces, trades and wellness services. Among those attending are the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Ohio University, Manpower, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Timet, Softite Community Federal Credit Union, Wal-Mart Distribution Center, Trinity Health System and Change, Inc.

Fluharty said technology, engineering and natural resources students were working together and a bio-secure room was formed to house much of the equipment. The grant helped procure food, tanks, educational supplies and marketing materials while Pet Supplies Plus also donated tanks and equipment for the rearing room, then students helped install five 40-gallon tanks for the small hellbenders that were being provided by the Columbus Zoo this spring.

"In the fall, we initially discussed getting 40 hellbenders, but that could change," she said. "The kids are working on an emergency plan if the power goes out and we

want to create a tank to simulate a natural creek."

Swearingen said the juvenile hellbenders could arrive by April in the first batch from the zoo. For now, students have been feeding Chief crawfish and hellgrammites (fishflies) and the hellbender has grown 11 inches long and weighs nearly 5 ½ ounces.

Fluharty noted that the students in the natural resource career-tech pathway are working with the tech students and cameras will be used for surveillance to watch Chief and the other creatures grow, plus the video could eventually be viewed by the public.

Meanwhile, the engineering students were creating designs for the caves and Indian Creek Middle School students were raising crawfish to feed the hellbenders. Fluharty said if all goes according to plan, the high school's aquatic endangered species pathway could raise other species in the future.

"The natural resource students are taking care of the tanks in their study labs and they are working together brainstorming and collaborating."

"We're extremely happy. It's going to allow us to do things in STEM that we may not otherwise have the chance to do," said Dr. Chappellear. "FANUC Robotics in Japan has 70 percent of the market share of industrial robots in the United States. We'll have an opportunity to put our students through the FANUC Robotics curriculum and it will be a FANUC industrial credential that the students will have an opportunity to earn."

He said the robotic arms should arrive around August and the engineering program will begin over the next school year with Barbara Turner as instructor. The second facet was the formation of the SRA, known as the "Creek Squad," which will allow students to work in the four school buildings and aid with computer repairs.

"The grant will also support the student tech repair team and we'll have a team of students assigned to each building to do Chromebook repairs and other projects. This will also be part of the IT Support and Service pathway. We're excited and feel it fits in with our expanded career-tech education opportunities and ensures our kids are enrolled, employed or enlisted after high school."

Dr. Chappellear added that there were 60 seat licenses for the FANUC curriculum with room for 25 students in the tech repair pathway.

District CTE Coordinator Dan Hartman,

who assisted with the grant along with ICHS CTE Department Head David Moffat, said the grant was a tremendous benefit to furthering students' education as they ready for the working world.

"I'm very pleased with the process and the result and it's amazing for Indian Creek's career-tech programs," Hartman continued. "It's going to boost several programs and we're looking forward to utilizing the funding to make that happen."

He said the engineering and programming students will learn to program and operate the robotic arms while the SRA students gain work-based knowledge.

"The two CTE programs will work together [with the FANUC equipment] and with the SRA we're hoping to provide students with real-life opportunities to work in the buildings and repair district equipment for work-based learning opportunities."

Additionally, Moffat noted that students have an advantage with the modern tools.

"It is specifically designed to empower students with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue career opportunities in the high-paying job fields of the future, including AI, Broadband, Virtual Reality and Robotics," said Moffat. "Our programs are driven by a blended-learning approach that combines online curriculum with real-world experiences. Students will have the opportunity to obtain industry-standard credentials such as CompTIA A+, CompTIA Net-

working and Fanuc -Certified Robot Operator, ensuring that they are equipped with the most relevant and sought-after skills in the next level of the tech industry."

He said one key compound will be the SRA, where students are challenged to develop essential career-based skills while solving real-world problems within the school district. Students will be repairing Chromebooks, password reset and tech help -desk issues.

"These hands-on experiences enable them to create practical solutions and prepare them for the modern workforce," Moffat added.

Indian Creek currently provides six career-tech pathways for students including engineering design, technology support, interactive media, natural resources, performing arts and business.

According to a press release from Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. John Husted, the grant program will expand career-technical education access to an additional 10,345 students across the state and help schools purchase up-to-date equipment so they can better prepare students to be career-ready upon graduation.

The second round of the equipment grant will open later this spring and information and applications are available online by visiting Workforce.Ohio.gov/CTEEquipment.

Kara Bryan Receives CORAS Award for Teaching

Indian Creek High School educator Kara Bryan has been recognized for her work in the classroom and received an Outstanding High School Teacher Award through the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS).

She was among roughly 60 teachers who were lauded by their home districts during the event at Ohio University in Zanesville on Feb. 21. Bryan, who instructs freshman and sophomore English Language Arts and heads the English Department at ICHS, was humbled by the distinction.

"I am very surprised and very honored to receive the award," she said.

Bryan, a graduate of Steubenville Catholic Central High School, earned her bachelor's degree in English with a secondary education certification from Xavier University. She has taught in the Indian Creek Local School District for the past seven years and said the vocation runs in the family.

"My mom was a high school English teacher and I swore I would never be one," she recalled. "Once I got to college, I realized how much I love working with kids and how much I love English. Now I couldn't imagine doing anything else."

She also feels very fortunate to work with the students and people in the district.

"I'm blessed to work with the best people at ICHS. I have great support from administrators, great teamwork with other teachers and great students willing to work hard for me."

Principal Louie Retton congratulated Bryan and said she was an important asset to the school.

"Kara Bryan is an outstanding teacher. Mrs. Bryan is a leader among her colleagues as she leads multiple PLC's (professional learning communities) with her department and grade level intervention team," Retton added. "Mrs. Bryan is a student-centered teacher, she always puts the needs of her students first. Not only is Mrs. Bryan a great teacher, she is an even better person. She is a great faculty member and approaches every day in the most positive way."

Indian Creek Superintendent Dr. T.C. Chappellear said Bryan exemplified the spirit of an educator and the award was well deserved.



Kara Bryan, a teacher at Indian Creek High School, was among 60 educators who received an Outstanding High School Teacher Award through the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS) on Feb. 21 in Zanesville. The teachers were honored by their home districts during the event and Bryan is pictured with, from left, Ohio State Board of Education President Paul Larue, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction Paul Craft, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Director Steve Dackin and CORAS Executive Director Dr. Richard Murray.

"Kara has been a great teacher for Indian Creek. I believe the district is fortunate to have Kara and dedicated teachers like her in Indian Creek classrooms."

CORAS, which is in partnership with the Ohio University Gladys W. and David H. Patton College of Education, is an organization of 110 school districts and other educational institutions in the 32-county region of Ohio designated as Appalachia. Its mission is to advocate for and support the public schools of Appalachia Ohio in the continuous improvement of educational opportunities available to all the region's children.

Alum Nicole Marshall Joins ICLSD as Food Service Director

Nicole Marshall once roamed the halls of Indian Creek Local Schools as a student, but today she is back as the district's new food service director.

Marshall, a native of Mingo Junction and 2006 Indian Creek High School graduate, began her new role in February and helps feed students, staff and faculty in the district's four buildings. For her, it was like coming home and she has been adjusting well.

"I love it. I'm starting to adjust and I came from the restaurant world, but I'm really excited and everyone's been so supportive," she said.

Marshall saw a job posting online with Nutrition, Inc., and was hired following several interviews.

"I thought this would be perfect for being with my kids. When you are not looking for something, it happens," she said. "It's too good to be true and I'm excited to be

back in the district where I went to school."

She has very close ties to the district. In addition to being an alumna, her fiancé Ross Sanders helped construct Indian Creek's new schools and their two children, Brayden and Madison, currently attend Cross Creek Elementary. The Wintersville resident has experience in the food service industry with previous stints as a service manager at Texas Roadhouse and Applebee's but said working in the school system is vastly different.

"I'm used to the high volume and fast



Marshall

pace and now it's slower paced and we're feeding kids," she explained. "I can't wait to learn more as I go."

She also noted that she had worked with more than 100 employees at the eateries in the past, but now she oversees 27 workers and substitutes and is building a relationship with them. Marshall has gained plenty of support from the staff and district and hopes to provide the students the nourishment they need as they feed their minds at school.

"My goal is to get different foods for students to try and give them opportunities they may not have at home. I want them to try new things and incorporate them into the menus," she explained.

She has already added pierogis and pepperoni pizza grilled cheese sandwiches and also plans to carry on conversations with kids and survey teachers to obtain their input for menu ideas.

Hills Elementary Planning Chemo Care Bags Program

Second-graders at Hills Elementary School are showing their kindness to cancer patients as they prepare for the annual chemo care bag distribution for the Tony Teramana Cancer Center.

Collections have begun for the service-learning project started by Sarah Hibbits, who currently serves as the Orton Gillingham specialist at the school, and items will be accepted until the end of March. Hibbits helmed the project with her own second-grade classes for the past eight years and distributed thousands of bags, but is now she is working with other classes and more than 60 students are involved.

“This year, I am no longer teaching second grade. However, the second-grade teachers decided that they would like to continue this project. Watching the community come together as well as the response that we receive from patients, caregivers and Teramana nursing staff made a big impact on those teachers. They wanted to keep the project going but it is overwhelming, so I am going to continue to help the second grade while in my new role.”

Items include individually packaged snacks, saltines, bottled water, Gatorade, gum, mints, hard candy, Tootsie Pop and Dum-Dum lollipops, tuna or chicken lunch packs with crackers, Chapstick, lotion, Biotene or other dry mouth products, wet wipes, tissues, Sea Band wristbands, reusable plastic cups or water bottles, hat or scarves, blankets, slipper socks, puzzle books and adult coloring books, notebooks, journals, pocket calendars, playing cards, pens and pencils and fun items such as puzzles, card games, Bibles, ear buds or stress reliever balls. Hibbits said the items are greatly used by chemotherapy patients and the intent is to make their treatment more comfortable.

“Each item that we are including was chosen after careful research on what products are most beneficial while going through chemotherapy treatment, through conversations with others going through treatment, and helping my mother go through treatment. She often had very rare side effects and all of these items were very helpful to her,” she said.

She added that the collection process has generally been extended from four weeks to roughly six or eight weeks to ensure all of the items are received, then they are gathered in colorful totes and students add handmade cards with messages of positivity and support. Hibbits hopes to present the finished bags to Trinity Health System officials during an event at the school in April.

For now, she is seeking bag sponsors to help defray costs for the project.

“It takes approximately \$20 to cover the expenses of each bag and students are gathering sponsors to help fill bags. The sponsors will have their names included in the bags that they sponsor (if they wish) and can in-



Hills Elementary second-graders Addison Cohick, Casen Shepard and Aubree Beveridge pack items for the annual chemo care bag distribution to the Tony Teramana Cancer Center. Educator Sarah Hibbits has organized the service-learning project for the past nine years and distributed thousands of bags to help patients undergoing treatment at the Steubenville facility. Items are currently being collected until the end of March and plans are to formally present the filled bags to Trinity Health System officials in April.

clude a personal card or note that we will include in the bag as well,” Hibbits added. “We have over 60 second-graders at Hills who are collecting but are also inviting the community to help out as well since this is a big project.”

She said someone people know has been touched by the disease and the care packages were a reminder that they were not alone.

“The more we can give, the more lives we can impact. Most likely, we know someone who has been diagnosed with, or even passed away from, cancer and we are looking for a way to give back and honor his/her memory. We are accepting donations of the items or cash or check donations for this project,” she continued. “This is a project that is very near and dear to my heart. It was inspired by my mom during her battle with breast cancer. She passed away in 2016, but her memory lives on through this project. She mentioned to me during one of her treatments that a lot of patients came to Teramana in buses or cabs and she wondered who was taking care of them and making sure they were comforted.”

Hibbits said the service-learning project also impacts the children because they are doing something for others.

“The purpose of this project is to encourage the kids to give back to the community. As adults, we want to teach our kids the importance of selflessness, empathy, kindness and compassion. These children are our future leaders, and it is important to instill these traits at an early age. The kids learn

that small acts of kindness can have a huge and lasting impact and that they can make a difference,” she said. “Students who complete this project remember it fondly as well as how much the bags are appreciated by their recipients. Often, when you do not actually see the face of the person who is receiving the gift, it is difficult to have a connection and understand the impact that each student is making. The students love receiving cards and hearing about what their project meant to others.”

Hibbits was grateful to donors for their continued generosity and said the project would not be successful without their support.

“This project is a huge undertaking and we would never be able to complete it without the outpouring of love, kindness, and generosity from the public. This project has become a challenge over the recent years. The increase of product prices has slowed down donations,” she concluded. “In order to keep this project going, we must ask the community to help us gather the items needed to complete the bags. If anyone is able to help, we would greatly appreciate donations of any listed item, as well as monetary donations that would allow us to purchase the needed items.”

Donations may be dropped off weekdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. or sent to Hills Elementary School, c/o Second Grade, 2281 Wilson Ave, Mingo Junction, Ohio, 43938. Any checks may be made payable to Sarah Hibbits.

ICMS Targets Attendance, Behaviors with Incentives

Indian Creek Middle School is targeting attendance, skills and behaviors with incentive programs that also allow students to earn fun rewards.

Since the beginning of the school year, students have been participating in a game of “Hungry, Hungry Homeroom” which mimics the “Hungry, Hungry Hippos” board game. Over the past two quarters, homerooms in grades 5-8 have been paired up to attain the best attendance numbers. At the end, the winning teams have gotten to play a large-scale version of the game using scooters, balls and laundry baskets and earn treats for their good work.

Guidance Counselor David Kemp said it has made an impact and so far, fifth-, seventh- and eighth-graders have won chances to play.

“We did it through the second quarter and plan on picking it up for the fourth quarter. We’re taking a bit of a hiatus for the third quarter for the [IXL program],” he said. “Compared to last year at this time, there are fewer truancies.”

Kemp said the students were excited to learn who topped the list and frequently made sure he posted the percentages each day.

“The teams change every quarter to keep it as even as possible with the attendance rate,” he added.

This is the second year for the attendance initiative, with last year’s inspired by the FIFA World Cup competition. The classes with the best attendance at the end of each week were listed in brackets posted outside the office and whittled down until the ultimate winner was named. Both programs were designed to bolster interest following the COVID pandemic.

Principal Dr. Holly Minch-Hick explained that IXL was a digitalized learning space that covers the K-12 curriculum and is used by more than 14 million students. It is tailored to the students’ age group by specific subject and topic from language arts and math to science and social studies. Each class is represented in a particular color as a climber scaling a mountain, and the first to reach the top could earn activity time.

“It is a building leadership team (BLT) project to promote skills and personal betterment,” she said. “IXL is a supplemental learning tool with language arts, math, science and social studies and kids can work on targeted skills in different areas. They have to take a benchmark test that indicates their strengths and weaknesses and it adapts the needs for the kids.”



Students at Indian Creek Middle School are improving attendance, skills and behaviors with a series of fun rewards, such as this human version of “Hungry, Hungry Hippos.” They can also earn golden tickets for clothing and treats or field trips as part of the school’s incentive programs.

es and it adapts the needs for the kids.”

Dr. Minch-Hick noted that the program is remote and students can also work at home if they choose.

Administrators also track good behaviors and attendance and students earn a golden ticket each week that they could cash in the school store to purchase food and clothing or save up for fun field trips. Eight golden tickets are needed for the trips, which has included a trek to the Plaza Theater in Weirton to watch a movie in December, and the next is a Wheeling Nailers’ game later this month with the final jaunt to go roller skating.

Hills Observing Neurodiversity Week on March 18-22

Hills Elementary School will celebrate what makes their students who they are by observing Neurodiversity Week.

Intervention specialist Alyssa Lollini said neurodiversity, which encapsulates autism, ADHD, mental health, dyslexia and other issues, will be recognized with a series of inclusive activities on March 18-22. Each day will have a different theme while some special guests have been invited to commune with the kids.

“Neurodiversity [includes] a majority of the things our kids experience and we’re celebrating their minds,” said Lollini. “We’ll have an Olympic theme and will decorate parts of the building where they can take pictures. There will also be themed days and a PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) celebration. We will have a pajama day dance party with gold, silver and bronze medals given to each grade for the best dancers.”

It all kicks off on Monday with a Heroes’ Luncheon featuring local safety forces, and Lollini said representatives from the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, Mingo Junction Police Department, Mingo Junction Fire and EMS and Ohio State Highway Patrol have been invited to break bread and interact with the estimated 380 students in grades PreK-4. About 15-20 officials are expected to attend during the lunch periods, which take place between 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

“We did a breakfast for [safety forces] during Fire Prevention Week, but this is an additional way to show that kids can have different things but can do what they like, and they can’t let labels dictate that,” she added, noting that some officials may also be neurodivergent but still have accomplishments. “This will be fun and they can sit and interact with the kids.”

More activities follow with dress-up days featuring America (red, white and blue) on

Monday; workout wear on Tuesday; favorite college, professional or Creek sportswear on Wednesday; class colors within the neurodiversity infinity symbol with blue for preschool, yellow for kindergarten, red for first grade, purple for second, orange for third and green for fourth while faculty and staff will also be encouraged to don similar hues; and pajamas with the dance party on Friday.

Information will also be shared during daily announcements and videos are being supplied to teachers to for their classrooms so kids gain a better understanding of what neurodiversity means.

This is the third year for the event and ties into observances for neurodiversity and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month for March.

“It’s going to be a fun week for the kids and I hope they learn a lot. The kids here are kindhearted and don’t see labels,” Lollini concluded. “This is a way to educate them.”