

T. J. CONNOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SAYS “THANK YOU” TO ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, essential workers have continued to serve on the front lines, caring for people and doing the critical work that keeps our community functioning. In a year that has seen so many challenges, the Student Council at T. J. Connor Elementary School decided to bring some holiday cheer to essential workers in the Wheatland-Chili community.

Students throughout the school dedicated class time to make “Thank you” cards for the men and women working these essential jobs. These students came to understand that expressions of gratitude are always welcome and always appreciated.

Representatives from Student Council even accompanied advisor Mrs. Hughes to local businesses to drop off the “thank you” cards. They started at Buster’s Market, and visited locations like Dollar General, Mark’s Pizzeria, and the United States Post Office in Scottsville.

“We spread Christmas and holiday cheer, it felt amazing!” said Sierra Musson and Anna Reid, Student Council Representatives. No gesture of gratitude is too small. This holiday season, these students demonstrated that principle wholeheartedly.



MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



The 2020-2021 school year has been incredibly challenging. Although we began extensive preparations last summer, we have still encountered twists and turns that have required flexibility and support from students, teachers, staff, and parents. We recognize that so much of this school year has been imperfect, as our community ponders the loss of what could have been.

Despite these challenges, our commitment to academic achievement and student excellence has never wavered, and we’re proud of the way our community has responded to the ongoing pandemic. We have one of the lowest COVID-19 positivity rates in the region, we continue to exhibit high compliance with mask wearing and hand-washing, and we haven’t seen a single documented case of virus transmission in our schools. It is because of our teachers, support staff, transportation staff, facilities staff, and so many others that we have remained open and facilitated our transition to four-day in-person instruction at the Middle/High School. These

individuals deserve our gratitude for their dedication and service to our students. Without them, none of this would have been possible.

Finally, there seems to be a light at the end of the tunnel. While the news on vaccine distribution changes almost daily, it’s encouraging to know that significant portions of our community will be vaccinated this year. School personnel are classified in Group 1B by New York State, and so many others should follow soon afterward. We hope that by the time the 2021-2022 school year comes around, we will have reclaimed some level of normalcy.

Until then, we are incredibly grateful for your flexibility and support as we navigate these challenges. We will continue to communicate with you as best we can and we look forward to brighter days ahead.

Lynda Quick, Superintendent

Wheatland-Chili staff SPOTLIGHT

STAFF SPOTLIGHT ON MISS PAGLIEI



Samantha Pagliei, Miss P to her students, began teaching Physical Education for grades 6-12 and seventh-grade Health at Wheatland-Chili MS/HS in September. This appointment fulfilled her long-term career goal. "I have

always wanted to be a PE and Health teacher," said Pagliei. "I like that I get to be physically active while teaching. I am constantly moving!"

Pagliei grew up in Lockport and earned her Master's Degree in Health Education from SUNY Brockport. She was a competitive dancer and cheerleader. Prior to coming to Wheatland-Chili, she served as a long-term substitute for several districts.

The altered schedules and safety guidelines have been a challenge for her first year at Wheatland-Chili, but Pagliei has leveraged technology to deliver curriculum remotely as well as in-person. Her classroom page on the Wheatland-Chili website features a creative graphic with links to contact her directly, as well as links to Schoology lessons and CDC information.

Outside of work, Pagliei is very active. "I like to work out and go for walks with my dog, Harley," She lives in Brockport with her boyfriend; cat, Queso; and 7-month-old puppy. She is also a big fan of "The Office."

"My favorite thing about my job is that I see different students every day," said Pagliei.



STUDENT ARTWORK



WIN WEDNESDAY

The MS/HS moved to four-day in-person learning in February, but Wednesdays remain remote. Leaving Wednesdays remote allows for deep cleaning of the building and for MS/HS Principal Eric Windover to continue a program first implemented during the hybrid schedule. WIN (What I Need) Wednesdays began in January and provides students a chance to access, what they need.

“WIN Wednesday is an opportunity for students to get support in whatever way that may look,” said Windover. “It could be an opportunity for academic support, for a student to connect with a counselor, or make up a missed music lesson. Maybe what they need is just a quiet place to work.”

WIN Wednesday is the formalization of the initiative teachers had already taken. Many teachers had students coming on Wednesdays for extra academic or social-emotional support. By creating a school-wide initiative, students now have access to transportation and designated work spaces for up to two hours during morning or afternoon sessions.

“I started coming to WIN Wednesday to try to be more proactive about getting my work done,” said Aaron Lund, now in his junior year.

Windover has also designated a “Seniors Only” lab where the Class of 2021 can catch up on work or enjoy a complementary snack with their classmates.

While WIN Wednesday is available to all students in grades 6-12, prior appointments are required. Teachers may reach out to parents or guardians to request student participation in the program, or students and their parents or guardians can contact the main office.



PreK & Kindergarten Registration

If your child will turn 4 or 5 on or before December 1, 2021,
contact us for registration information for Kindergarten & PreK!

Contact: Stephanie Willard

Phone: (585) 889-6236

Email: Stephanie_Willard@wheatland.k12.ny.us



WHEATLAND-CHILI GIRLS' SOCCER

COACH GARY WARD TO RETIRE

After 550 wins, three State Championships, nine Section V Titles, and hundreds of lives impacted, Coach Gary Ward is hanging up the clipboard for good. For the last 39 years, Ward has coached the Girls soccer team at Wheatland-Chili, guiding the Wildcats to incredible heights and sustained success. Now, as he prepares to retire, he has an opportunity to reflect on his career and how far the game has come.

A CHANGED LANDSCAPE

When he first started coaching the varsity team in 1982, he was only the 2nd Girls Soccer coach at Wheatland-Chili. Six years had passed since Title IX ensured equal access to opportunities for female athletes, but legal access didn't always translate immediately to tangible access. "The early kids were real pioneers and they took some risks," Ward says. "We had to fight for field time, we had to fight for equal facilities and participation... They knew how lucky they were to be playing."

Over the years, the Girls Soccer program improved dramatically. With increased access to fields and facilities, improved training methods, and consistent offseason playing time, the game became much more competitive. Through his coaching career, Ward was continuously impressed by the increased strength, speed, and skills of the female athletes.

The Women's Game is also much more popular now, due in large part to the success of the Women's National Team and the strength of college programs across the country. Former player and current Assistant Coach Jen Quinn, who is also Ward's daughter, credited this visibility with the popularity of the sport. "There are a lot more role models for young girls to look up to – aspire to – and work towards. In the 80s, we could barely even watch the Men's National Team, let alone the Women's Team or college teams."

But with that visibility comes added pressure. "It's so hard to take the pressure off the kids now, because information is so accessible," Quinn added. "They put so much pressure on themselves."

The 2020 team is as resilient as any Ward has seen in his 39 years, due to the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Like every other facet of society, the pandemic has kept people from gathering in groups, so the team has had few opportunities to train, practice, and even bond together as a team. Injuries took a toll this season, and despite requirements that players must wear masks during practices and games, Ward says proudly that "our kids have been great. They haven't complained. We made it clear what the mask rule is and they didn't bat an eye. I couldn't say more about them."

LOOKING BACK

When asked to pick just one moment out of his celebrated career that stands out, Ward struggled. "There were so many highlights, and so many great kids," he said. "I guess one of the most exciting moments would have to be the 2017 State Championship," which the Wildcats won on a Golden Goal after double-overtime. He also pointed to the other two State Championships in 1991 and 2016 as well.

Despite his record of success, Ward makes very clear that winning isn't everything. His coaching philosophy is actually quite simple: "I never set out to worry about winning. We try to teach them how to play and approach the game properly. What we say is 'Go out and give it your best, play the way you've been taught, and at the end of the day we'll look at the scoreboard to see who won.' We try to take the pressure off the kids... We want to teach them to compete in a healthy way."





He emphasized that he never saw himself as solely a soccer coach, either. “To me, coaching is teaching... We’re trying to use [soccer] as a vehicle to help our kids grow and be good people.”

His players saw that principle firsthand. Abby Jones played for Ward from 1988-1991 and led the team to a New York State Championship Title in 1991. “He was always so positive, guiding everyone, and brought out the best in us,” Jones said. “The lessons he taught on the field were so relevant in life... He improved your game, certainly, but he also improved your life.”

“He was very compassionate and caring for his players, above and beyond coaching on the field,” recalled Jill Farrell, former player in the 1980s and a current kindergarten teacher at T.J. Connor Elementary School. “A lot of us had him as a teacher too and he wanted to make sure we were doing well in our studies. He was always really supportive.”

This season, Ward coached Farrell’s daughter – not the first time he has coached a second generation player. “It was cool to see it come full circle,” Farrell said. “I’m glad that they had that opportunity to play together.” She humorously recalled how earlier this year, her daughter came home after the practice in which Coach Ward finally referred to her by her mother’s name. “He finally did it! He called me Jill!” her daughter had laughed.

The impact he has had on players, parents, and the community is unmatched. He has stayed close with countless individuals over the years. For Jones, when she lost family members, Coach Ward was right there, attending the funeral, still serving as a shoulder to lean on. “I hope he knows how many people love him and cherish him.”

HIGHLIGHT OF A LIFETIME

After nearly four decades, Ward is stepping away from the sport that has come to define his career. He’s looking forward to spending time with his wife, JoAnn, and hopefully getting back to showing his horses. He plans to continue attending Wheatland-Chili soccer games as a spectator. “I hope I get a free pass,” he joked to Todd Grimes, the Wheatland-Chili Athletic Director. “We’ve got some great young kids on the team that I think are going to be great players.”

Why retire now? Ward says that after 39 years of coaching and 50 years of teaching, it’s time. He’s had a great career, and as much as he’ll miss it, he has to move on. But when he reflects on his coaching career, he doesn’t hesitate. “This has been one of the highlights of my life. Man, it was a ride.”

RECOGNIZING OUR UNSUNG HEROES

This school year has been difficult on so many levels. Despite unprecedented challenges, our school community continues to work together to pursue student achievement. Our teachers have demonstrated remarkable innovation; our parents have displayed incredible patience; and our students are far more resilient than we could have hoped. These three factors have contributed to our success this year.

There are others, however, that carry out the essential day-to-day activities that allow us to keep our school buildings open and welcoming for teachers and students: our support staff. Our Facilities Team, which features eight custodians, two maintenance mechanics, and two part-time cleaners, receives little attention and even fewer accolades. Yet they are integral to our success. Even in the best of times, their work is challenging. Sweeping and mopping classrooms, emptying trash cans, disinfecting high-touch surfaces like door handles... these are just a few of the tasks they do each and every day. In a pandemic? That workload has doubled.



Our Transportation team features 24 bus drivers, substitutes, and mechanics. Without their dedication and patience, so many of our students would be unable to get to school.

The list is exhaustive: cafeteria staff, teacher aides, administrative staff, club advisors and coaches etc.

This school year has proven that it truly takes a village to educate our children. Despite all these difficulties, our team takes pride in their work. “They feel that, with everything going on, it’s their responsibility to keep the building clean so that everyone can stay safe and healthy,” said Steve Farrell, Facilities Supervisor. “It’s such a good crew, they’re all self-starters. They work hard each and every day.”

Teachers and students rightfully deserve accolades for their efforts during this strange and difficult school year. At the same time, we should also recognize the work of so many others, a group of unsung heroes who keeps the lights on, the buildings clean, and our entire school community healthy and safe.



UPDATED FOOD SERVICE INFORMATION

Due to COVID-19 funding allocated by the federal government, breakfast and lunch will be free for both in-person and remote students until the end of June!

Daily meal pick-up occurs from 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. for remote students.

Parents can call 889-6251 or email

samantha_clements@wheatland.k12.ny.us to place an order.





❧ WINTER SPORTS ROUNDUP ❧

The Winter Sports season kicked off in the pool. Coach Greg Dunn once again led the Wildcats swim team with senior captains Elizabeth Hogan and Luke Otto. “Our goal has always been to be better than we were yesterday, and everyone’s personal records improved throughout the season,” said Coach Dunn. “I’m extremely proud of them.”

No spectators were allowed at the swim meets, so the team relied on each other to keep up their energy. “It was different because my parents couldn’t be here,” said Hogan, a four-year veteran of the team. “But we cheered for everyone. We had a lot of fun.”

Just as the swim team wrapped up their season, the basketball teams received NYSPHSAA clearance to begin whole team practices. Coach Mark LaMere, in his first year with the Varsity Girls Team, leads a young team with the leadership of senior captains Morgan Parker and Hanna Beldue. “COVID has changed my perspective,” said LaMere. “I’m thankful for the opportunity to coach and spend time with the players. Practicing and playing games is where the players get to have fun together in a competitive environment.”

The basketball teams had been practicing in limited numbers with strict social distancing guidelines, waiting to hear if the competition season would take place. “I’m excited, I really didn’t think it would happen,” said Parker. “I really hope everyone steps up.”

“It’s especially up to us to make sure the chemistry is there,” adds Beldue.

The Varsity Boys are back on the court, too, with Coach Scott Lund. “I’m really excited for the boys to have this opportunity,” said Lund. “Some of them have literally been waiting all winter long to get into the gym. For them to be able to get in here and play some basketball with their teammates is exciting.”

The Boys Varsity Team is headed by junior captains Aaron Lund and Brendan Moore. “We definitely want to give the seniors a good last season,” said Moore. “They almost didn’t have one, so we need to make this count.”

Congratulations to the Wildcat swimmers, and good luck to both basketball teams!

Wheatland-Chili Central School District
13 Beckwith Avenue
Scottsville, NY 14546
585.889.6247

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