

# IC The Creek

Indian Creek Local School District Newsletter

April 2024

## ICHS Shares Facilities, Aquatic Learning Experience

More than 1,000 people, including students, families, community members and state officials enjoyed an aquatic learning experience at Indian Creek High School on April 4.

A wide array of educational offerings was on hand during the “Healthy Creek, Healthy Hellbender” event to showcase the school, which is the first high school in the state to partake in a pilot program designed to save the eastern hellbender salamander from extinction. The amphibian, which has its roots in Jefferson County’s creeks, is currently on the endangered species list but ICHS is developing a program to raise and release juvenile hellbenders while also recording data which will be shared with state experts.

Assistant Principal Keith Swearingen and science teacher Crystal Fluharty have worked on the hellbender program since last year when the school partnered with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 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 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 hellbender dates back more than 160 million years and can live up to six decades.

The school even has its own ambassador, Chief, who was proudly on display in an aquarium tank on the main floor while 20 1-year-old juveniles were being added in a bio-secure room on the lower level. Swearingen and Fluharty, with the help of teachers and students, showcased the facility and provided aquatic-themed displays and activities while the ICHS Family, Career and Community Leaders of America



**Indian Creek High School hosted the Healthy Creek, Healthy Hellbender Aquatic Learning Experience on April 4, which featured a visit from state Ohio Department of Natural Resources, state Division of Wildlife and local officials to celebrate the school’s participation in a project to save the eastern hellbender salamander from extinction. A career fair, music and theater previews and more were also on hand. At right: Hills Elementary student Logan Sinsel says hello to the school’s hellbender ambassador, Chief. More photos are inside.**



(FCCLA) led a career fair with college, trade organization and business representatives available to speak with students and adults alike.

“I think it went very well. It was a great event for the school and community,” said Swearingen. “It was a great way to highlight what the kids are doing with the natural resources CTE (career-technical education) courses and they did a wonderful job presenting to the ODNR of Columbus. We got to showcase some of the great things we do to the people from the state.”

Fluharty said a dozen student-led stations were provided and pupils shared their knowledge of the environment. Among the displays were and robotics, plus a kid’s corner offered chances for little ones to color pictures of water-based wildlife. Stations ranged from biomagnification and parasites to green living and robotics.

“I’m so proud of my students,” she said.

“They were engaging and knew their information. The ODNR officials had a great time and it was a wonderful event.”

Among the state officials attending were Kendra Wecker, chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife; John Navarro, aquatic wildlife diversity educator for ODNR; and Greg Lipps, amphibian and reptile conservation coordinator at The Ohio State University, while local representatives included Jefferson County Commissioner Tony Morelli and JCSWCD official Aaron Dodds.

Wecker addressed the audience during a brief session in the auditorium and heralded the school for taking part in the program, which also hones students’ education in the process. She said state officials have worked to release three-year-old salamanders into the wild to increase the popu-

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# Experience

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lation and hopes are that ICHS's program will help raise and release even more around 2026.

"After touring the facilities, I have to say, Indian Creek you rock!" Wecker lauded. "We're so excited that you are the very first high school to raise hellbenders."

She said water changes and environmental effects impacted the number of hellbenders in existence, but the state organizations were working together to restore the balance through the Ohio Hellbender Partnership.

Wecker later said having the ICHS students on board also makes a difference.

"I think it's very refreshing to see their interest in exploring something that's close to nature and in their own backyard," she said. "By learning about an animal, they are improving their reading skills and studying water quality."

"It makes me happy. It's so good to see kids interested in conservation," added Navarro. "We really want to stress the water quality and quality of life because having clean water helps the hellbenders."

Lipps said the school was off to a great start in helping restore the species to its natural habitat.

"I think they are doing great. I think it's

so great to have conservation occur here locally, and it means a lot more when you can have local people involved," he commented.

Meanwhile, FCCLA advisor Julie Robinson said the career fair provided 29 different groups to provide information and resources to benefit students and adults.

"It's people look for a job, it's colleges and it's local businesses. It's all of the above," Robinson noted. "This was bigger than last year."

Vendors included the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, Ohio University, Manpower, Ohio State Highway Patrol, Timet, Sofite Community Federal Credit Union, OhioRISE, Trinity Health System, Change, Inc., Wal-Mart Distribution Center, Kent State University Regional Campuses, Muskingum University, West Liberty University, Belmont College, Sienna Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 495, Franciscan University, The Pavilion at Star Lake, Cedar One Realty, Apollo Professional Cleaning and Restoration, Steel Valley Contracting.

Additionally, the crowd enjoyed free food and interactive photo displays, plus they got a chance to view the musical stylings of the elementary and high school

choirs as well as a sneak preview of the upcoming performance of the spring musical, "Grease."

ICHS Principal Louie Retton praised Swearingen, Fluharty, Robinson and school CTE Department Head Dave Moffat for their involvement in the aquatic event, saying it highlighted what the school has to offer.

"We had a lot of activities with different organizations at the career fair. I heard one or two adults left here with jobs," Retton said. "We're the only public school in the state that has taken this program on. It sends the right message to our students about the environment and gives them knowledge and they have resources to bring back the species to the area."

"We're really happy with the turnout. I appreciate the hard work of everybody who put this together," added Indian Creek Superintendent Dr. T.C. Chappelle. "We had a lot of businesses and colleges and it was also a chance for our students to show off their abilities."

He said none of it would be possible without the community's support in creating new school buildings, which in turn offered new facilities and opportunities for the students to learn.



# ICHS Receives Momentum Award for Report Card

Indian Creek High School is gaining accolades after achieving a Momentum Award through the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

The school received a certificate and a banner will soon arrive for display, while the award was given for its results on the 2022-23 state report card. The Momentum Award is presented to a local education agency, or LEA, who has improved their performance index by three or more points from the 2021-22 report card and received a value-added rating of four or more stars.

"This remarkable accomplishment reflects your unwavering commitment to excellence and the outstanding services you provide to you students and the community," stated a letter from ODEW Director Stephen Dackin. "It recognizes the devoted teachers and staff who consistently go above and beyond, ensuring that all students receive exceptional learning and instruction."

Dackin stated that officials' tireless efforts in nurturing young minds, fostering a positive learning environment and promoting holistic development has not gone unnoticed and their impact extends beyond the classroom to shape tomorrow's leaders.

"I commend your entire team—teachers, administrators, support staff and students—for their collective contributions. Your commitment to providing top-notch education and fostering a supportive community is truly commendable," he stated. "May the Momentum Award serve as a source of pride and motivation that continues to inspire, innovate and make a difference in the lives of your students."

ICHS Principal Louie Retton said the award was a testament to the efforts of teachers and students to attain positive results. Retton said six tests are generally given during the freshmen and sophomore years of school, including Algebra I, U.S. History, English 10, biology, geometry and government.

"Getting the value-added rating and improved performance index means our students are performing at a higher level on state tests than in the past," Retton explained. "We are projecting our performance index to go back to the pre-COVID year results or higher, which would be the highest we have had."

He attributed the strong showing to two things: being a professional learning community (PLC) school with regular meetings to review educational data and improve upon areas in need and offering structured flex time to help students work on improving their test scores.

"Every day our teachers start with 30-minute meetings to move students forward. We have department meetings for curriculum and assessment and our intervention team meets regarding inter-

ventions needed for any student at any grade level. We ensure nobody falls through the cracks at Indian Creek and our PLC has been huge in improving the performance index," he continued. "We also have structured flex time to help students when they need to improve their scores on state tests."

Retton said the value-added portion refers to how teachers are measured based upon student performance on their state test scores.

"It's based on how our students perform along with students across the state who are taking the same test and shows how you stack up," he added, saying he was very optimistic about this year's assessments. "I think we're going to take an even more significant jump this year because the results from our fall tests were extraordinary."

Indian Creek School Superintendent Dr. T.C. Chappellear applauded everyone for their dedication to ensuring that the school's more than 550 students in grades 9-12 thrive.

"I appreciate all the hard work our teachers at Indian Creek High School do to provide the time and support students need to be successful," Dr. Chappellear concluded.

***"We are projecting our performance index to go back to the pre-COVID year results or higher, which would be the highest we have had."***

**-ICHS Principal Louie Retton**

## ***Band Members Honored during Banquet***

Indian Creek High School Marching Band students were honored during the 2024 Band Banquet on March 24. Among the recipients are, pictured from left, Colton Boyd, the Mary Kay Means Award; Alexis Smith, the Dr. and Mrs. Lewis Indian Creek High School Band Boosters Scholarship; Emma Sensibaugh, the Louis Armstrong Award; Aziah Ade, the Latonya Martin Concession Stand Award; Reese Scott, Band Director's Award; and Kaitlyn Donohue, the Arion Award and the John Phillips Souza National Award.





# Indian Creek Middle School Establishes STEM Club

Students at Indian Creek Middle School are gaining some true hands-on knowledge through the formation of its new STEM Club.

About 30 fifth-through eighth-graders are involved in the afternoon program, which meets each Thursday from 2:45-4:30 p.m. and is led by science teachers Michael Minor and Greg Lewis. They spent their first session in separate groups preparing the ground for a new, 200-square-foot greenhouse and also viewing the trail onsite which they will cleaned up for use.

The club was made possible through a \$21,000 grant from the Martha J. Earp Charitable Trust in an effort to foster a more immersive learning experience. According to a release from the foundation, the grant will promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) by acquiring various resources essential in creating an engaging and innovative learning environment. The funds will provide stipends for the advisors, help purchase a classroom set of VEX robots for robotics, coding and engineering and acquire four high-quality drones equipped with high-definition (HD) cameras and automatic landing capabilities for students to learn about aerial technology and capture stunning imagery while honing their piloting skills.

The grant was also used to establish the greenhouse on the school campus and will help students explore environmental science, biology and sustainability practices firsthand. The greenhouse will allow students to understand the significance of environmental conservation and apply STEM concepts in real-life scenarios.

ICMS Assistant Principal Scott Abercrombie said officials applied for the grant last summer and was thrilled to receive the funding.

"It will provide hands-on opportunities to extend the learning standards into the real world," said Abercrombie. "It will also provide leadership opportunities for students. It was to start a STEM club but we'll be able to utilize it in the school as well."

Minor said it was also a chance for the students to do something important and sustainable. Plans are to use the lettuce in a farm-to-table initiative with the school's food service.

"This is your stuff for the future," Minor told the group. "When the greenhouse is up, it is yours to take care of and you can bring your family here and think of doing this one day [as an adult]."

He said the 20-foot-by-12-foot structure



**Students at Indian Creek Middle School prepare the ground for a new greenhouse as part of the recently formed STEM Club. About 30 fifth-through eighth-graders joined the first session but more were anticipated to join. Among their tasks were to help create the 200-square-foot greenhouse and cultivate lettuce while learning about conservation, plus they were clearing the unfinished trail on the campus. The STEM Club was made possible through a \$21,000 grant from the Martha J. Earp Charitable Trust, which will also provide for VEX robots and high-quality drones for further hands-on learning.**

would be used to plant lettuce, for now, but more is eyed for the future. The youth were also informed that the trail was unfinished and plans were to continue the program that was started by previous teacher Greg Cable. One group shoveled gravel to level the ground in preparation for the greenhouse while the second would begin working on the trail, then they would switch sites.

"There is interest among students," Minor added. "Once the greenhouse is put together, my goal is to have them run this. [Lewis and I] are here for supervisory reasons. I want them to run this as their own. We're making this stand the test of time, and maybe in five, 10, 15 or 20 years they can come back with their families to show them what they did."

As for the trail, Lewis said plans are to maintain and beautify it.

"Mr. Cable had the trail program and we want to get it back to that level and give the kids something to be proud of."

Officials said the students may also tend

to the outdoor learning pavilion and add to the area.

Meanwhile, some of the students on hand said they enjoyed the opportunity to learn in a new way.

"I like being a part of STEM because it gets me outside and engaged," said fifth-grader Cadence Jameson. "It also helps the environment."

"I learn new things and I love working with STEM," added fifth-grader Ja'Ondrea Young.

"I like STEM because I am outside making new friends and helping the school," commented sixth-grader Jionni Gombar.

"I like doing stuff for science and I know it will matter," noted sixth-grader Audriana Hosfelt.

"We like being able to help," added sixth-grader Ava West.

"It's good for everyone to get outside and learn hands-on stuff," said eighth-grader Aiden Still. "It's for the future of the school."

# ICMS Students Learn about Inclusion and Acceptance

Indian Creek Middle School students learned the importance of inclusion during a special presentation on March 27.

The Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities capped off its speaker series for National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month with a discussion on kindness and understanding when it comes to disabilities under the theme "Building A Community: Listen and Learn." Mindy Aleksiejczyk and Alycia Clark, both mothers of special needs children, addressed fifth- and sixth-graders in the cafetorium about their sons and also highlighted differences in a book entitled, "The ABC's of Inclusion."

Cookie West, community navigator for JCBDD, explained that she assists students with disabilities as they navigate their way into adulthood. West added that ICMS was among the schools that participated in past activities and were winners in the "Through Our Eyes" art contest that promotes awareness in March for National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

"We're here sharing with students about their role in making a more inclusive community and being more understanding of others' needs and abilities. It's important to connect with students face to face and share and also here from the students. We are to listen and learn from them as well," she commented.

Aleksiejczyk and Clark, whose sons both attend the School of Bright Promise, are also founding members of Special Connections, an organization that hosts informational events as well as activities for children and adults with disabilities as well as their families. The women donned orange shirts signifying unity and inclusion, plus they distributed orange wristbands inscribed with "Unified" and "Side by Side" with the audience and shared their stories as well as some of those within the book. "The ABC's of Inclusion," which was penned by Beth Leipholtz, includes characters with autism, Down syndrome and more. Both Aleksiejczyk and Clark also shared details how their children also have interests in sports, music and other commonality with the rest of us.

Aleksiejczyk, who serves as board vice president of JCBDD and created the Special Needs Parents Support in the Ohio Valley Facebook page, said her eight-year-old son, T.J., was developmentally delayed and in a wheelchair. She said while he is non-verbal and has seizures, he enjoys listening to Taylor Swift and other music and loves to be among people.

"He makes friends and they help push him in his wheelchair, and he really enjoys it," she added.

She read from the book, which included a prologue on how people with differences could also have similarities.

"We live in a big world and not every person is the same," she read. "Sometimes when you meet a new friend, you might notice they are different from you. When we take the time to learn about our differences, we might find some special ways that we are the same."

Aleksiejczyk said the purpose of the visit was for students to learn about other differences and being kind.

Clark, whose son Oliver is a third-grader, has autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

"My son carries iPads and one is a speaking device. Since he can't verbalize, he can tell his name [with the device]. We're really excited that he's starting to pick up a little bit more," Clark added.

Students were asked to select a letter of the alphabet which represented the name of a book character and explained their different abilities. Several included Emma, a girl with cerebral palsy who loved to read; Jacob, who was diagnosed with sensory processing disorder; and Arthur, who was born prematurely and was



**Mindy Aleksiejczyk, left, and Alycia Clark, mothers of children with special needs, capped off National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month for March by addressing fifth- and sixth-graders at Indian Creek Middle School. The women discussed their sons' conditions and read excerpts of the book, "The ABC's of Inclusion," which describes characters with different abilities from autism to Down syndrome and the common interests they share with others in a bid to foster community, understanding and kindness.**

blind but learned how to navigate through the world.

"A lot of times when someone is visually impaired, they hear a lot better and other senses improve. Maybe they can help us and we can help them too," Aleksiejczyk said. "If a child who can't speak can use a device, it doesn't mean they are not smart and can't hear you. These kids work hard to improve on their challenges and are very smart."

During the discussion, students agreed that the best way to help is to teach the world to be kind. ICMS Principal Dr. Holly Minch-Hick also shared with the crowd that people shouldn't be another challenge to those with special needs; rather, they should be helpers.

"Things we take for granted every single day [are what] kids have to work for. We should be buddies, not bullies. We want to help people," she noted. "Part of this is developing awareness that everybody is different, everybody is special and everybody needs help in some way shape or form."

Following a brief question-and-answer session, West reminded students that before speaking to others with special needs, they should THINK about the words they use, alluding to an acronym for being truthful, helpful, inspiring, necessary and kind.

"We wanted to plant seeds so you would have information about being accepting and responsible young people in your school and your community," she concluded.

Several pupils on hand said they learned a lot from the assembly.

"Disability doesn't mean you can't do things anybody else can," said sixth-grader Samantha Gaffney. "I learned a lot about disabilities and being kind."

"I've learned it's really helpful to include people with disabilities and make them a part of a group of friends," added sixth-grader Annabelle Petrella.

"Because someone has disabilities it doesn't mean you should treat them any differently," said sixth-grader Marin Barcalow.