

# Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS  
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

## Students Show Support for Ukraine



***Middle school students Kaitlyn Zigabarra and Bella Collins in front of the items they collected and packed for distribution to people in need in Westchester County and surrounding areas.***

Whether it's assisting local veterans with necessities or helping to prepare supplies to send to Ukraine, Somers Middle School students Kaitlyn Zigabarra and Bella Collins are doing what they can to help. The girls have been volunteering with My Brother Vinny, a local non-profit organization that coordinates and distributes furniture and household items to veterans, outreach groups, shelters, and families in need in Westchester County and neighboring areas.

The girls recently volunteered to shop for and pack sets of pots and pans, lamps, and other household items for local veterans. They also packed blankets to be shipped to Ukraine to help refugees displaced by the current conflict there.

"It makes me feel so honored to help people," said Zigabarra, an eighth-grader who began volunteering in February through a family connection to Paula Miritello, founder of My Brother Vinny. "I absolutely love it so much."

"To have a younger generation truly love volunteering with us is a gift," Miritello said. "Their families should be very proud of how kind they all are."

While Zigabarra became involved in the organization as a way to earn hours for the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS), she realized that helping veterans through My Brother Vinny felt particularly special because her grandfather Joseph Pettit is a veteran of World War II. She was so inspired by the experience that she invited her friend Bella Collins to come aboard.

"I think it is a really good thing to do," said Collins, a sixth-grader who is joining NJHS. "I know I am helping people."

With the current situation in Ukraine at the forefront of many people's minds, the girls said they were especially glad to help Ukrainian families. "The best part was when we loaded the blankets onto a truck, we knew how much they would help," Collins said. "There are kids our age over there who had to leave everything. I feel good about helping them. I think about if I was in a similar situation I would appreciate others helping me."

Both girls plan to continue volunteering with My Brother Vinny and are looking forward to doing another shopping trip for items for homeless veterans. "I am also looking forward to meeting some of the local veterans when we drop off the items," Zigabarra said.

The Human Rights Club at Somers High School held a candlelight vigil for the people of Ukraine at the front entrance of the high school on March 20. It was a night of reflection made especially poignant by words from former SHS students Tatiana Barankewicz and Emily and Adriana Szpynda, who are Ukrainian-American. Somers students, administrators, staff, multi-denominational faith leaders, and Somers community members attended to support the cause. The club raised more than \$1,200 in donations for relief efforts.



## Science Research Students Win Big at WESEF



**Ten juniors and seniors in the Science Research class at Somers High School competed in the 2022 Westchester/Putnam Science & Engineering Fair.**

Nine Somers students won special awards or placed in their categories at the 2022 Westchester Science & Engineering Fair (WESEF). The awards ceremony was held at WESEF's new home - Somers High School - for the very first time on March 24. See the

incredible transformation of the high school gym and [watch the ceremony here](#).

Senior Emily Dodd was named a finalist, advancing her to the International Science and Engineering Fair in Atlanta, Georgia, in May. Junior Zoe Gutherman qualified for the International GENIUS Olympiad in June. [See the awards given to Somers students here](#).

Somers High School Science Research students' multi-year projects traverse many disciplines of science and range from being personal to them or their family, something of relevance when they joined the Science Research Program, or something they wanted to research and found interesting when they began the research process. Students detail their projects in PowerPoint and poster form which, in most cases, involve complex research conducted under the guidance of a professional researcher in their field of interest.

- **Michael Aquilino**, junior, researched the effect of exercise on post-concussion symptoms in adults and adolescents.
- **John Ginty**, senior, researched the prevalence of sleep aid usage in adolescents.
- Jaewon Yeo, senior, investigated and compared the quality of urban green spaces in neighborhoods of different poverty levels.
- **Zoe Gutherman**, junior, researched land surface temperature (LST) and its relationship with land cover across New York State using satellite data.
- **Kiera Goff**, junior, focused on determining the ideal level of arousal and balance between sensitivity and specificity for the most efficient working dog.
- **Julie Rios**, senior, researched the effects of shift work and length of employment on sleep disturbances among tri-state area firefighters.
- **Grace Wu**, senior, researched the efficiency of university COVID-19 protocols.
- **Matthew Kahn**, senior, researched integrating technical indicators into machine learning systems to increase profitability in simulated Stock Market trading.
- **Charlotte Potter**, senior, researched and compared emotional experiences between human-to-human relationships and human-to-AI (artificial intelligence) relationships in a mental health counseling setting.
- **Emily Dodd**, senior, focused on identifying alterations to homeostatic plasticity in Parkinson's Disease patients and how this change in homeostatic synaptic downscaling can lead to learning and memory impairments.

"The students who presented at WESEF truly impressed me with their drive, perseverance, and commitment to their research," said Science Research teacher William Maelia. "All of these students have had their research impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in one way or another, whether it be due to laboratories shutting down or their original project ideas becoming unachievable due to circumstances outside of their control. The fact that all of them are presenting such outstanding work this year despite those challenges speaks to their level of passion and grit and they should be celebrated for their contribution to their fields of study."

The three-year Science Research program at Somers High School begins sophomore year and culminates senior year. Students engage in an independent piece of research that they design and conduct under the supervision of a mentor and attend several competitions at the local and national levels in order to present their research.

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## **First Junior Officer for the Day a Success**



***Annaliese Varughese inspects the police cruiser during her day as a Junior Officer at Primrose Elementary School.***

Officer Annaliese Varughese reporting for duty! Students at Primrose Elementary School couldn't miss her – a blazing yellow police vest, shiny silver shield, official Westchester County Police Department hat, and Primrose School Resource Officer Brian Pavletich by her side. Varughese was the first Primrose Junior Officer for the Day, and the lucky first-grader spent time with “Officer Brian” checking doors, monitoring school cameras, checking out the patrol car lights, and having an all-around great time.

With so many responsibilities, Varughese said it was hard to pick her favorite part, but playing with the patrol car lights and checking on doors topped the list. “I liked it a lot,” she said and added that a special treat was learning how a pair of real handcuffs work.

Varughese was the first of 12 Primrose students who will spend the day with Pavletich. The opportunity was part of the PES PTA Holiday Happiness Fundraiser in December, where families could bid for the chance to shadow Pavletich. The Junior Officer for a Day raised \$600 for the PTA.

“It was really an awesome day, and she loved it,” Pavletich said. “The other kids who saw her were all very excited, and it drummed up a lot of interest. We are always trying to build relationships with the kids at every level.”

Pavletich showed his young officer the cameras that monitor school grounds, how to check the doors for safety, some of the equipment and lights he uses in the patrol car, and finally, they ate a special lunch together.

As the first Junior Officer, Varughese ended the day with a big smile, a great experience, and some cool swag – a stuffed police dog, an official hat, a flashlight, a pen, a cup, a bookmark, and an eraser, all of which she said she couldn't wait to share with her brother.

Pavletich said he is looking forward to the next 11 weeks when he will spend time with 11 more Junior Officers.

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## March Maple Madness at SIS



***Students in fifth grade stand by the jug that is collecting sap from the hole they drilled in the maple tree.***

Winter is in its final throes during March. With temperatures creeping above freezing that means it's maple syrup time at Somers Intermediate School.

Students in Jacob Ringer, Randi Pepe and Kelly Gronert's fifth-grade classes are taking on the multi-step process of making their own maple syrup. In early winter they drilled holes and tapped three big maple trees on the campus and have spent several weeks watching the weather and waiting patiently to collect their prize - the almost 50 gallons of clear, fresh sap to boil and turn into golden maple syrup. Students will celebrate next week by drizzling their homemade syrup onto some pancakes.

Thursday was "sugaring off" day and students gathered outside their classrooms around large steel pots of boiling sap as the very faint scent of sweetness and steam wafted about. Students explored how sap turns into syrup through the processes of boiling and evaporation.

One student who tried a small sample of the sap said it wasn't exactly syrupy or sweet just yet. "It tasted a lot like water with a little bit of sweetness," said Nicholas Whipple.

Ringer and Pepe said that the whole procedure, while superficially just a fun late-winter activity, teaches the students many different concepts – economics, ratios, evaporation, boiling points, weather, research skills, using earth’s resources, teamwork, and more.

“We can take the whole process and extract bits out for concepts in science, math, ratios,” Ringer said. Their 50 gallons of sap could generate about one gallon of syrup. “This whole process lends itself to so many different areas of learning.”

## Meeting a Favorite Author



***Students hold copies of "Dress Coded", the book they read as a group before getting advice from the author over Zoom.***

Few people get to meet the authors of the books that inspire them. But seventh graders in the Somers Middle School WIN Book Club did just that.

Carrie Firestone, author of the New York Times bestselling middle years novel “Dress Coded,” popped into their Book Club session via Zoom this week for a quick talk, Q and A session, and some advice for future writers.

“This book started with me being mad,” Firestone said. “Dress Coded,” she explained, began with issues she saw in her own daughters’ school in Connecticut – girls being unjustly targeted and shamed by teachers and/or administrators for what they wore and how this behavior of “dress-coding” developing girls is harmful to their self-esteem.

“Every story comes from somebody’s personal experience,” Firestone said. “I always tell young people that if you have feelings about something, write them down. It could be a powerful book that resonates with a lot of people.”

Firestone uses small chunks of text centered on the main character’s use of a podcast to tell the story. One student, Erin O’Brien asked Firestone why she decided to base the story on a podcast rather than traditional chapters.

“I thought about if I was in middle school right now, how I would get the word out to the most people,” Firestone said. She added that the podcast format comes back in the

sequel, a novel about members of a climate change club at the school.

Firestone asked the Book Club members to think about some issues that are important to them now and offered advice. "I encourage you to write these kinds of books yourselves," she said in response to the subject of toxic internet friendships. "It would be powerful to have that raw story of someone who lived it. A lot of people can relate to it and it can be healing to write that story."

"She writes about topics that are very relatable and present," said student Emma Steinberg.

Teacher Christina Sweeney, who facilitates the Book Club during WIN, said she was excited for the students to utilize Firestone's writing, especially next year when they will participate in the National Novel Writing Month as eighth-graders.

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## **New Therapy Dog Spreads Comfort**



It's a "ruff" life, but this pup is up for the job! Vader and his pet human, SHS Student Life Coordinator Brenda O'Shea, were recently certified as a therapy dog duo. Vader comes to the high school once a week to provide snuggles and receive love.

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## **Posters Encourage See Something, Say Something**

**BE TUSKER STRONG!**



***SEE SOMETHING?***

***SAY SOMETHING!***

***SCAN NOW TO  
SUPPORT A TUSKER!***

**BE AN UPSTANDER.  
BE PART OF THE HERD.  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.**

**SAFETY CONCERNS? WORRIED ABOUT A FRIEND? FOUND A HATE SYMBOL?  
DO YOUR PART. STAND UP TO BULLYING, BIAS, AND HATE.**

<https://anonymusalerts.com/somerscsd/default.aspx>



**IF IT CAN'T WAIT, TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT TODAY!  
WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!**

These posters will soon be seen on walls in every school in the district and on buses to encourage students to be upstanders, and give them an easy way to anonymously let adults know when they feel that something harmful is taking place. Students at each school will have these posters explained to them in an age-appropriate manner.

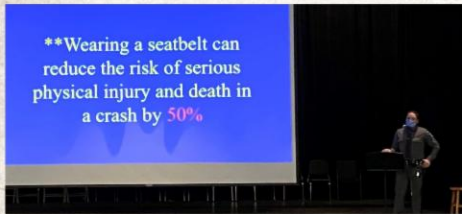
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**PTA Presents Driver Safety Program**





# SHS PTSA Driver Safety Program



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