



Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

The Latest News from Somers Schools

Rolling Fury Down the Court



Michael Abrams competing in Atlanta with his basketball team, the New York Rolling Fury

Just like many of his classmates, Michael Abrams spends hours on the basketball court. He goes to New York City at least once a week for practice, and travels around the country regularly for basketball tournaments. Unlike his classmates, Michael plays basketball in a wheelchair.

"My favorite part of the game," says Michael, "Is going down the court and making a basket."

As one of the top scorers on his team, the New York Rolling Fury, Michael is a key player on both offense and defense.

"He is a competitor," says his coach, Chris Bacon. "He is usually amped up, ready to play, and he plays with his heart on his sleeve."

The New York Rolling Fury is in the Prep division of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association and is ranked fourth in the country. Players range in age from eight to 13 and all the Fury players except for Michael come from New York City boroughs.

"I've seen a change in Michael in the three years he's been playing for us," says Bacon. "He was quiet and shy and didn't really talk. Now he has a lot of confidence and he's out of his shell."

In March, Michael and his team will go to the national tournament in Kansas where they will compete against the 15 other top teams for the championship. For more information on the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, go to www.nwba.org or www.nyrollingfury.org.

Valedictorian Janecka Regeneron Scholar



Maeve Janecka stands with the device she created to test for toxic heavy metal content in JUUL e-cigarette vapor.

It is not often that students can pinpoint the exact high school class that determines their path forward. But that is what the Science Research Class has done for Somers High School senior and class of 2020 valedictorian Maeve Janecka.

"If it weren't for this class, I never would have gotten the experiences in a lab that taught me that chemistry is something I want to do with my life," says Janecka.

This class was also Janecka's path to a prestigious award in the Regeneron Science Talent Search competition. Janecka was named a semi-finalist in the contest, received a \$2,000 scholarship, and an additional \$2,000 for the SHS Science Research program.

Janecka's research is on JUUL brand e-cigarettes, and the toxic heavy metal content in the JUUL vapor. She built a device in a lab at Mount Saint Mary College which created suction on JUUL e-cigarettes. That suction created vapor, which Janecka either drew through filters or condensed to collect a precipitate. Her analysis of those samples detected elevated levels of iron, copper and chromium.

"Everyone knows someone who vapes," says Janecka. "I have friends who vape and half the time I think it is because they don't have the resources to make informed decisions about e-cigarettes. I'm really hoping my research can help them make these choices in the future."

Science Research teacher Bill Maelia says that the personal connection Janecka has with her research is one of the reasons she has been so successful with her project.

"I always tell students when they come into the program, if you can find something that is personal to you, something you are passionate about, you can really take it somewhere," says Maelia. "She hit the ground running and never really looked back."

Kindness Challenge at Somers Intermediate



Fourth-grader Henry Sposito points to his act of kindness on the Kindness Challenge bulletin board.

Students are being challenged to spread kindness around the halls and classrooms of Somers Intermediate School. They are in the middle of a two-month project to commit acts of kindness such as playing with a new friend, helping a classmate organize their materials, or teaching someone a new skill.

"I asked someone his name and then asked him if he wanted to play basketball," says fourth-grader Henry Sposito. "He said he didn't know how to play so I taught him how to dribble and shoot. He's actually pretty good now!"

All students in the school are encouraged to complete acts of kindness and then write their names and acts on Post-It notes on a bulletin board outside of the main office.

"It's the simple, every day act that sometimes we don't think about," says Liz Turner, principal of SIS. "But they are important things to do to support each other and help our school community."

"The kindness challenge might help people who don't feel comfortable in school feel like they want to come to school," says Henry, "And want to play with new friends, and feel safe."

Their hope is that the bulletin board will soon be overflowing with such acts of kindness.

Big Dreams Start Here



Artist Chris Rios, SHS Class of 2011, stands in front of his completed mural at Somers High School.

Big dreams are behind the new mural on the walls near the main office at the high school. Artist and Somers High School alum, Christopher Rios (SHS 2011), came up with the “Dream Big” concept because it is a phrase he thinks of often, and one he wants others to follow.

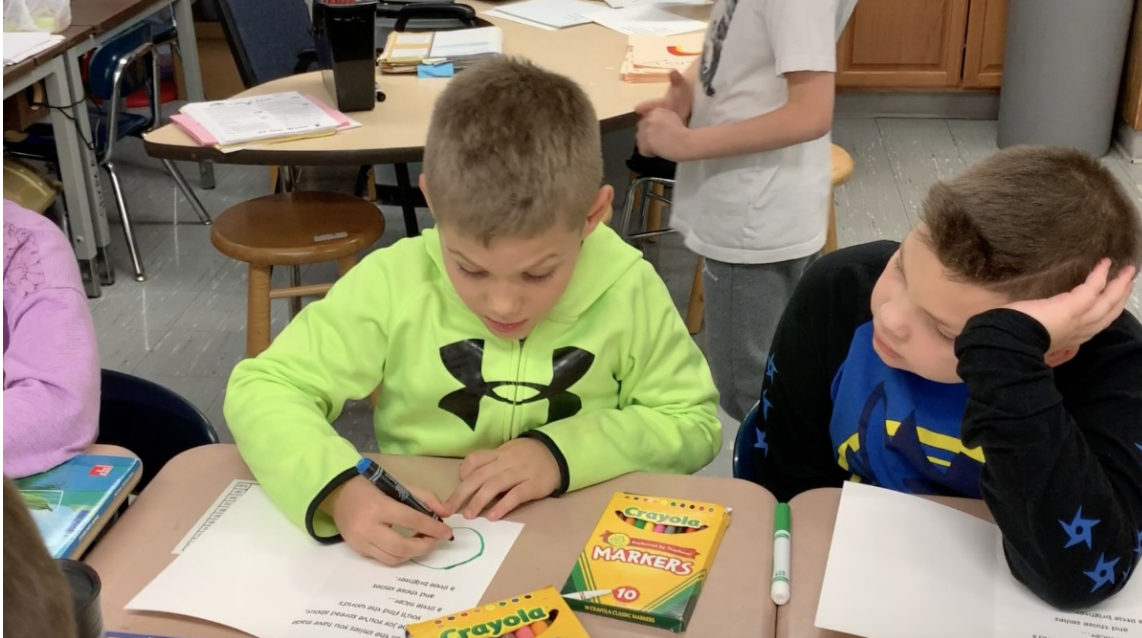
“There are three sayings I live by,” says Rios. “‘Dream big’, ‘work hard’ and ‘be humble’. I feel people should keep those three reminders in their heads.”

Rios approached principal Mark Bayer about doing the mural after seeing other murals on the high school walls. He is working locally as a muralist and wanted to share his work with Somers students. When developing the concept, Rios first chose Martin Luther King, Jr. because he was a dreamer. Then he identified other historic dreamers in art, government, music and sports.

“When creating a mural for clients I usually just do what they ask,” says Rios. “But Mr. Bayer really wanted my input and artistic vision. He trusted me, which is pretty cool.”

Rios specializes in sports art and portraits. You can see his work on Instagram [@rios_studios_](https://www.instagram.com/rios_studios_) or his website <https://www.riosartstudios.com>.

Creating Hope through Art



Students in Meredith Stirpe's second grade class work on their Hope books.

The children in Meredith Stirpe's second grade class grinned as they made an immediate connection between the art project they were starting, and a book they read during the week.

"That's from the book Pass It On!", several students shouted.

The project is a collaboration between certified art therapist Lynn Cukaj and Stirpe. Art therapy uses creative techniques such as drawing, painting, or coloring to help children express themselves artistically and examine the psychological and emotional undertones in their art. In this project, the students will each create a Hope Book with positive affirmations from books they read as a class, and their own illustrations.

"This type of creative process teaches children that social-emotional wellness is the ability to believe and understand positive affirmations," says Cukaj, "And how to use this type of cognitive thinking skill to reduce stress and anxiety in their lives."

The children will work on the book once a week for several months, and can go at their own pace. In the end they will each have their own, 20-page book filled with positive says and drawings that are meaningful to them. To watch the students prepare for the project through meditation and visualization, click [here](#).

Somers High School Community Service Fair



The annual Community Service Fair, sponsored by the Somers High School Parent Teacher Student Association, was held in October. The purpose of the event is to facilitate the introduction of students to local not-for-profit agencies to develop volunteer opportunities that cultivate individual passion, curiosity and career skills while promoting community citizenship. During the high school's Community Lunch period, students had the opportunity to meet representatives from many organizations. More information on the organizations that attended the fair can be found on the SHS PTSA [website](#).



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