

NOTEBOOK

LI LIFE S2

Musicians named to ensembles

Thirty-one Long Island students were among the 532 high school musicians nationwide recently named to this year's All-National Honor Ensembles by the National Association for Music Education.

The ensembles — which included a concert band, guitar ensemble, jazz ensemble, mixed choir, modern band and a symphony orchestra — participated in a virtual program Jan. 22-24. The program consisted of workshops with clinicians and the recording of a performance that will premiere online during Music in Our Schools Month, in March.

Teens were selected through an audition process after having qualified for their state's 2020-21 All-State Festival.

Long Island's selectees and their high schools were: Kate Marcino, H. Frank Carey; Jake Van Eycken, Commack; Emma Friel, East Meadow; Matthew Bhasin, Farmingdale; Jenny Zheng, Garden City; Sara Rafeil, Great Neck North; Mengyu Wu and Dayoung Yu, Great Neck South; Lila Goldstein and Mason Herman, Half Hollow Hills East; Angela Berg, Benjamin Capilets and Dustin Zhao, Hauppauge; Leonardo Gomez, Keneil Soni and Liam Tan, Herricks; Christopher Prainito, John F. Kennedy; Michael Varacchi, Longwood; Connor Gibbons and Dylan Wu, Manhasset; Nicole Ferretti, Massapequa; Izhaan Ahmed, New Hyde Park; Julia Mescallado, Northport; Vincent Palmero and Carly Salzano, Sachem North; Bryson Shaub, Paul D. Schreiber; Angela Dean, Seaford; Samantha Crush, Smithtown West; Jaiden Wettstein, South Side; Cara Cirasole, St. John the Baptist; and Stephanie Massimo, Syosset.

"I am very proud of each student for their hard work and commitment to music therefore enabling them to receive this great honor," said Anissa Arnold, director of fine and performing arts for Herricks, which tied for the most selectees from Long Island.

NORTHPORT

Expanded string program

The Northport-East Northport School District has its expanded third-grade string orchestra program by allowing parents to learn and play alongside their children four times per month. The expanded program is intended to help ensure students are practicing their instruments at home and reinforcing the skills built in class.

Participating parents were invited to bring their own instruments or were offered a discount to purchase or rent one from local vendors.

"It's one of the few opportunities for parents to come in and witness learning firsthand," said the district's director of orchestras, Michael Susinno.



Herricks High School's Leonardo Gomez, left, Keneil Soni and Liam Tan, have been named to the National Association for Music Education's All-National Honor Ensembles.

HERRICKS SCHOOL DISTRICT

SOUTH HUNTINGTON

Humane School District

The South Huntington School District has been named the first-ever Humane School District of the Year by the animal advocacy nonprofit Long Island Orchestrating for Nature.

The district was recognized for preservation efforts that include recently rescuing about 20,000 tadpoles and minnows, 2,000 goldfish and 150 bullfrogs as part of a relocation project of animals from a sump that was dredged behind South Huntington Public Library.

"The school district also recently rescued an owl, and the groundskeepers are always quick to help any animal who's in need," said the nonprofit's founder and president John Di Leonardo.

WYANDANCH

Shopping spree

A six-person family in need in the Wyandanch School District recently received a surprise shopping spree at the Puma flagship store in Manhattan as part of an effort coordinated by Phoenix Suns center Deandre Ayton and the Steve & Marjorie Harvey Foundation. The family was identified by Wyandanch High School Principal Paul Sibbles, who has been a virtual program host for the foundation's Steve Harvey Mentoring Program since 2019.

The program teaches the principles of manhood to young men to help them realize their potential and prepare for a "robust and productive future," school officials said.

"It brings me great joy to be able to help give back and fulfill a need," Sibbles said.

— MICHAEL R. EBERT



EAST ISLIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

SOARING LESSON

East Islip High School's robotics and video production students have been learning how to fly the technology department's DJI Mavic Mini 2 drones.

WAY TO GO!

Michael Keehner

Student extends kindness to Oxford teens

A Sayville High School student recently spearheaded an effort to send heartfelt messages to teens affected by a mass shooting in Michigan.

Michael Keehner, a sophomore, printed and cut out 1,700 heart-shaped cards that his classmates filled with handwritten messages to be sent to Oxford High School, where four students were killed in an attack in November.

To create the hearts, Keehner used gold card-stock paper — because both Oxford and Sayville share that school color — and printed them at home over a week and a half using a Cricut machine.

"I just really wanted to show how if there isn't kindness in this world, you always have to be that kindness," Keehner said.

The project was assisted by Sayville global history teacher Kaytie Ferremi, who distributed the hearts to the high school's other history teachers so as many pupils as possible could write messages. The finished hearts were then packed into a protective mailing tube with a letter explaining the activity and sent to Oxford by Sayville Principal Ronald Hoffer.

"His hope was that every student in the school would be able to participate, so that there would be a message for every student at Oxford," Ferremi said of Keehner.

Keehner, 15, is a second-degree black belt in taekwondo and a member of his school's chorale, Anchor Club, History Club and Peer Leadership Club.

— MICHAEL R. EBERT



LESLIE A. KEEHNER

NOMINATE A STUDENT for Way to Go! Send details and photograph to Michael Ebert, michael.ebert@newsday.com (photos should be high-resolution). Photos may be used in other publications affiliated with Newsday.