



# — CUFSD NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2024

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## Voice Ensemble makes Carnegie Hall debut



We've all heard the classic joke. Someone looking for directions asks, "Do you know how to get to Carnegie Hall?" To which a musician answers, "Practice, practice, practice!" That's just what the Chester Academy Voice Ensemble did, prior to making their Carnegie Hall debut on Saturday, April 6, 2024. The group commuted to and from New York City over the course of three days for rehearsals, culminating in their performance on Carnegie Hall's Perelman Stage as part of the organization's National Concert.

"It was after the students had given their performance at Radio City Music Hall, that they contacted us to see if the students wanted to audition for the Carnegie Hall program," said a proud Rachel Scali, Chester Academy Chorus Teacher. "Of course, the students were so excited, so Carnegie sent us five selections that the students had to learn, and then record and send in an audition tape."

**Continued on Page 4**



### Budget Vote May 21!

Voters are in for a special treat when they head to Chester Academy to cast their ballots on May 21st... a district-wide STEM & Art Showcase!



Educators in both programs have selected student work to be displayed outside of the voting area. We look forward to welcoming the community to enjoy works of scientific wonder, artistic expression, and persuasive writing from students at every grade level.

## IMPORTANT DATES

### April 23

- Passover - School Closed

### April 24

- Board of Education

### April 25

- Family Instructional Academy

### May 8

- MS Spring Concert

### May 9

- HS Spring Concert

### May 14

- Board of Education

### May 15

- SEPTSA Meeting

### May 16

- Jr./Sr. Prom

### May 17

- Half day

### May 21

- Budget Vote and BOE Elections
- PTSA Meeting

### May 22

- Board of Education

### May 23

- PTA Meeting

### May 24

- No School/Offices Closed



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## Celebrating and appreciating our CUFSD teachers!

*In anticipation of Teacher Appreciation Week May 6-10, we are highlighting a sampling of teachers in the Chester Union Free School District. Being a teacher is a valued profession and your dedication and passion has a lasting impact on our students.*

### **Christine Aliventi** **Teaches Spanish Grades 9-11**

"I became a teacher because of my love of the language and culture. My favorite part about teaching, especially here at Chester Academy, is watching my students grow into themselves, not only in language but in life. It's an amazing thing to see."

### **Dante Radeljic** **Teaches Chemistry Grades 10-12**

"I became a teacher to try to positively impact students' science confidence and understanding and let them know they can do science too. My favorite part about teaching is helping students succeed."

### **Alana Carnright** **Teaches Grades K-5 ENL**

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher since I was in Kindergarten. I watched my teachers and thought 'I can't wait to do this someday.' I truly love working with children and helping them grow into successful lifelong learners. Helping students learn English and watching them flourish has been extremely rewarding."

### **Jennifer Randacciu** **Teaches Grades 6-12 ENL**

"I became a teacher because I love the art of teaching something new to learners of all ages. It brings me joy to witness students in their 'a-ha' moments, which boosts their confidence and mine!"

### **Deborah Hyseni** **Teaches Grades 6-12 band and 7 General Music**

"I always had a love of learning and was inspired by my second-grade teacher's passion, creativity, and sense of kindness, so ever since having her, I have always wanted to teach. I was later inspired by amazing music teachers and decided to pursue music education."



**Ms. Aliventi**



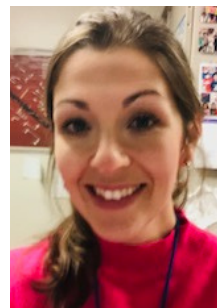
**Mr. Radeljic**



**Ms. Carnright**



**Ms. Randacciu**



**Ms. Hyseni**

## Music program hits high note with NAMM award



Chester Union Free School District has been honored with a Best Communities for Music Education Award by the NAMM Foundation!

The award recognizes outstanding music programs that demonstrate a commitment to music education and access for all students. This is the third time that Chester has received this award.

"We couldn't be prouder about having won this award again," said Chester band teacher Deborah Hyseni. "We do our best every day to offer enriching and inspiring experiences for the students in our music program. That's always been our goal, and it will be our goal moving forward."

Put simply, the award means that the strength of the Chester music program puts our community among the country's best locales for families who value music education to reside.

To earn the award, a district must offer not only a comprehensive music curriculum at every grade level, but provide multiple ensemble and performance opportunities, enable access to outside programs like NYSSMA and OCMEA All-County, and encourage community engagement.

"Our music department has worked hard to establish a program that builds bridges to make connections within the school, the community, and beyond," said Rachel Scali, Chester vocal teacher. "These connections help give our students the best possible opportunities – personally, collegiately and professionally – for the hard work they put into their education."

The far-reaching benefits of music education on children cannot be overstated. The research shows that studying music impacts so many critical aspects of growth and development, including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, listening and comprehension, and an overall ability to focus.

Bravo, music teachers!







## CES artists collaborate with animal shelters on adoption campaign

Third graders at Chester Elementary School have been hard at work on a community-centered campaign that's had them combining their literacy and art knowledge in new ways. Visual art teacher Emily Daunicht organized the cross-curricular lesson, which teaches students how art can be used to bring attention to important causes.

The students have been combining their art and writing skills, collaborating with representatives from both the Blooming Grove and Warwick Valley Humane Societies to raise awareness of cats in need of adoption, especially at a time of year when shelters often find themselves caring for new litters of kittens.

"It's a lot of cats," said Ms. Dauniocht, with a smile. "In fact, just about every student – the entire third grade – has had their own cat to focus on."

Ms. Daunicht said that each student painted a portrait of their cat in art class, and have used some of their literacy class time to write persuasive essays about the benefits of adopting a cat from the humane society.

"They did such great research, and included information from the Warwick Valley and Blooming Grove websites," said Ms. Daunicht. "Their essays get very specific, including any special needs their cat has, if it requires medications, or if it's part of a bonded pair. They incorporated all of that information into their writing."

The next part of the plan is to put the artwork and essays in front of the public to raise awareness and, paws crossed, result in some adoptions. Ms. Daunicht is planning to show the students' work at the upcoming Budget Vote Art Show on May 21, 2024.

"That'll be a large turnout of community members, so the students all have high hopes for our attempt to get some of these cats adopted," Ms. Daunicht said.



"When we display them, we'll be including QR codes linked to the adoption details of the exact cat featured in each picture."

Leading up to the big exhibit, the students have also organized a donation box at Chester Elementary, where anyone can drop off donations for the humane societies. That can include anything from food to towels to toys. Everything the students collect will be delivered to the humane societies following the Budget Vote Art Show on May 21, 2024!





## Voice Ensemble

*Continued from Page 1*

Ms. Scali said that the students were 100% committed to nailing their audition, even though they only had a month to complete and submit their recording. The audition had to meet a set of rigorous standards to be accepted.

"They worked so hard," said Ms. Scali, recalling their dedication. They came in over their February break to practice. It was during a time that they were also working on their spring concert repertoire, their NYSSMA preparations; they were helping out with the elementary school musical. It was an intense process, and those kids had the dedication and resilience to make it happen with all of these things going on."

The chorus traveled to NYC for three days to rehearse with other top musicians selected from all over the country. The weekend included Thursday and Friday evening rehearsals, a Saturday morning rehearsal, and then a soundcheck that evening, followed by the performance.

Ms. Scali said that students have shared with her just how deeply meaningful and inspiring it was for them to work with such high-level maestros, including the actual composer of a commissioned piece being performed, a song entitled "Echo," by Tracy Wong. They were also encouraged by seeing ensembles made up of people of all ages and backgrounds, whose love music keeps them performing.

"They were just so impacted by the people they met who loved music, most of whom were not their age, and how they were all connected through music despite other differences," said Ms. Scali.



## Law enforcement officers demonstrate robotics for fifth grade students

Fifth grade students in STEM specialist Jen Rende's classroom welcomed local law enforcement officers on April 5 for a demonstration of how they apply robotics in their field. Chester Police Officer and Elementary School Resource Officer Jeff DeLuca was a familiar face in a group, which also included Police Officers Roberts (Woodbury) and Siniscalchi (Warwick) of the Orange County Tactical Response Unit, along with Orange County Sheriff Office Special Operations group Deputies Pullin and DeWitt.

The fifth grade group has been studying robotics for the past couple of years with Ms. Rende, and brought a solid understanding of coding and the vocabulary around robotics to the experience. They were treated to a compelling presentation to see firsthand how and why strategic and tactical police groups apply robotics in their jobs. The students learned how, in a dangerous situation, robotics help us minimize risk by keeping people out of harm's way by having robots gather and transmit enough evidence for officers to plan a solution. The collaboration reflects the district's Career Connections initiative.

The officers also brought a larger robot with the ability to turn door handles and carry out other physical tasks that help keep humans out of harm's way. They also shared some of the latest law enforcement tech being used today, including night scope security robots like the ones implemented this past summer in the New York City subway system. Students noted similarities between the video feeds provided by the robots' and video game interfaces, which was great insight into the need for and role of human reactivity.

"It's so important for our students to see the ways in which STEAM, and robotics in particular, impact their lives," said Ms. Rende. "So, we want them to see for themselves how the things we are learning in the classroom are pertinent; that what they're learning in here is applied in the real world. I was so proud of them for applying their prior knowledge to ask such great questions of the officers."





## Honoring Women's History Month in March

*This Women's History Month, the Chester Union Free School District recognized some of the leading women in our district whose impact and dedication helps our schools run. Congress dedicated the month of March as Women's History Month in 1987. It is celebrated as a national holiday by many countries around the world to recognize and highlight the contributions of women to events in history and contemporary society.*

### **Sandy Nagler, Board of Education President**

"Girls and young women continue to need role models in leadership positions. Being president of the Board shows students, boys and girls, that women hold education in high value. I hope to demonstrate that women can make valuable contributions at all levels within an organization."



Ms. Nagler

### **Kim DiCurcio, Board of Education Vice President**

"Female representation at all levels of education is so important! Even though Chester UFSD is a small district, we are so fortunate to have women in a variety of educational roles to serve as models to our students. As a Board of Education member, I hope to continue to support policies and programs that promote learning for the entire Chester UFSD family."



Ms. DiCurcio

### **Diane Arnett, Board of Education Member**

"I believe it is important to have female representation within our school district to show the importance of all voices. It is my job as a parent and professional to remind and to focus on the fact that we are all equals as humans vested in the same world, the same country, the same county, the same town and for the same children. I believe that all voices need to be heard. I hope to remind others that you always have a voice and to remind them how to use it peacefully and respectfully to empower all."



Ms. Arnett

### **Caroline Negersmith, Board of Education Member**

"I think that female representation within our school district is important because as women and mothers, we are immersed in all aspects of our children's school experience and education. We can offer a unique perspective on the daily experiences of our children, such as how they are managing homework, how prepared they feel for tests, how they feel about classes and socially/emotionally, etc. That insight and feedback is valuable in helping us make continuous improvements within our district."



Ms. Negersmith

### **Erin Stamp, SEPTSA President**

"Female representation ensures diverse perspectives, empowers girls, and challenges stereotypes. As a woman in education, I strive to inspire students, promote gender equality, and create inclusive environments where all learners can thrive."



Ms. Stamp

## Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers inducts 5 students

Five students were inducted into the Today's Students Tomorrow's Teachers program as part of the new cohort of students who have joined the program for the 2023-24 school year. Participants were celebrated by family, friends, faculty, and administrators. The inductees featured ninth graders Elizabeth Doyle, Liliana Vivar, Kean Flores, and 10th graders Sage Johnson and Elvin Momanyi.

TSTT is dedicated to "recruiting, mentoring, and training culturally diverse students from high school through college," aiming to place them as effective teachers and committed leaders who strengthen schools and communities.





## CHESTER CHAMPIONS



### Mykhaylo Hychka

Mykhaylo Hychka, a senior at Chester Academy, hopes his success in track and field will spark others to join the sport. The Boys Weight Throw Section IX Champion also placed 14th in the state championship meet.

Track and field is a relatively small community where everyone knows and learns from each other, he said. He credits his start in track and field to Bobby Santangelo, who graduated from Chester Academy two years ago. Bobby is now a member of The Catholic University of America track and field team, a Division III program in Washington D.C.

Mykhaylo started in his sophomore year. He left basketball to focus on track and field.

"There are a lot of people (in track and field), but it's not a very popular sport like football or basketball," he said. "You kind of have to nag people to join. Bobby was the person who nagged me and got me to finally go to one practice. And, I fell in love with it. If I would've known about it, I definitely would have joined sooner."

Mykhaylo hopes to introduce younger students to the sport and mentor them.

His coaches know his work ethic and talent will continue to help him be successful. "Mykhaylo is a hardworking student and athlete," said Coach Kiara Nahoum. Coach Harry Laboy added: "He will go extremely far with his incredible talent and will be greeted with amazing opportunities in the future."



### Michael Franco

Michael Franco's father, uncle, and brothers all wrestled in high school. Michael, however, loved football and used to play. An unfortunate spine and head injury in middle school led him to make a switch in sports.

Michael transferred to Chester Academy during his sophomore year and started wrestling. This year, the senior ranked second entering the Section IX tournament and won the section finals, 8-5. He is a three-time All-Section Wrestler and 2024 Section IX Champion at 170 pounds. He also received the 2023 and 2024 National Wrestling Coaches Association Character & Leadership Award, which honors athletes who have demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and strong character. He also has been captain of the varsity team for two years.

"I went to high school with (Michael's) dad," Hambletonians Coach James Ehlers said. "So, when Michael moved in, I got to coach somebody I've known for a very long time and that was awesome."

Michael is looking forward to going to college and taking time to explore academics and other interests.

"I either want to be a police officer and work my way up to a narcotics detective or I want to be a psychologist for children or a social worker," he said. "I don't think I'm going to wrestle in college. I'm just trying to focus on my future in academics."



## Building futures at the construction career fair

Chester Academy students, supervised by Chester Union Free School District School Counselor and Internship Coordinator Jennifer Burreto attended the 23rd Annual Hudson Valley Construction Career Day at Rockland County Community College on April 12. Students interested in exploring career pathways in the trades had the opportunity to interact with business and labor professionals, as well as skilled tradespeople, who have their collective finger on the pulse of regional job opportunities in the field.

"This annual career fair focuses specifically on construction trades – jobs in welding, electrical, plumbing, masonry, general contracting, construction, HVAC – there are so many fields represented," said Ms. Burreto. "And our students get to ask questions of tradespeople who are working in these various niches every day."

Students connected with reps from labor unions and private-sector companies who shared their insights on topics including job training, potential salaries, and benefits. There was a particular focus on apprenticeships, and how they offer young people the opportunity to "learn as they earn," even acquiring nationally recognized credentials while working locally.



The RCCC Fieldhouse was literally buzzing (and clanking, and banging) all day long, as students took part in skill-building demonstrations.

"The students interacted with so many hands-on, real-world exploration activities," said Ms. Burreto. Some of their favorites? Operating jackhammers, spot welding, climbing into the giant boom cranes, carpentry and masonry, and even confined space rescues. "It's such a great trip, and one that our students enjoy every year."

With more and more infrastructure investments being made at the state and federal levels, the demand for skilled labor and leadership in the field continues to grow. Events like this one give students invaluable insights to help them identify, pursue and, most importantly, thrive in the opportunities before them.



## 2 CA students earn OU-BOCES honors

Two Chester Academy students were honored with the Humanities Honoree Awards hosted by Orange-Ulster BOCES at the Otterkill Country Club. This event celebrates seniors and juniors who have stood out amongst their peers by showing impressive dedication, skill, and commitment to the arts and humanities. Arianna Doughty and Jailyn Fernandez, who are both juniors, were among the 34 students honored at the breakfast on March 19, 2024.

Arianna Doughty is a talented musician with an exceptionally positive mindset and strong work ethic. She displays her exceptional musical talent by singing in voice ensemble and chorus and participating in drumline and band. Arianna has performed at Radio City Music Hall and Carnegie Hall. She excels academically earning a seat in all honors and AP classes. Arianna is considering majoring in business and minoring in music in college.

Jailyn Fernandez exhibits extensive musical talent, playing the clarinet, bass clarinet, and currently learning the saxophone. Jailyn also participates in drumline, has been in the jazz beans for three years, and was principal bass clarinet in the Orange County Music Educators Association High School Band. She is an All-State bass clarinet soloist for the New York State School Music Association. Jailyn has been studying music theory as an independent study for the past two years and plans to major in music performance in college.

