



Bulletin Board

Middle Country Central School District

ISSUE VI OF DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

COMMUNITY SERVICE IN THE MIDDLE COUNTRY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT: *An Ongoing Mission*

Community service is, at the most basic level, the act of helping and looking out for one’s neighbors. It’s a concept that means a lot to all of us in the Middle Country Central School District; indeed, acts of community service are woven into the student experience. Highlighted by a diverse variety of fundraisers, donation drives, community clean-ups and so much more, community service is something the entire District—from pre-kindergarteners to District administration—cares deeply about.

Community service allows children to learn while improving the environment around them. It also instills important values within our youngest minds, including leadership, selflessness and teamwork. When our students carry out their community service projects, not only are they deepening their connection with the community, but they are also developing invaluable life skills such as planning, organizing, task management and problem-solving with creative solutions. Community service displays character development—it fosters a sense of civic responsibility that children will take with them as they enter the world after high school. It also helps students on a personal level; graduating seniors, for example, receive special cords for their hours of hard work dedicated to their community service, which gives them an advantage over their peers on their college applications.

Volunteer projects and community service initiatives introduce students to the social fabric of the community in which they live, allowing them to learn about the individuals who comprise the Middle Country family, and increasing their awareness of social issues that affect people in their own backyards. Here at Middle Country, community service means more than a fundraiser or donation drive—it’s a way of life, an attitude of helping others, and the foundation on which we build a culture of upstanding young adults. It aligns with our mission statement, which states that each student will choose to continually contribute to the community in a responsible manner.

“I am grateful for what this community has provided for me and my family. Being a community member since 1980, my character and my work ethic is a product of the education I received from this District. I believe in the concept of giving back. I am hopeful my involvement in Middle Country will allow current students to experience an engaging learning environment which will prepare them for future success.”

– **John DeBenedetto, Board of Education Trustee**

Internally, District staff members who have demonstrated distinguished service to the school community are recognized by their peers when nominated for the SPARC Award, or the Special Performance Achievement Recognition and Accommodation

Award. Started by the Board of Education 17 years ago, staff members are rewarded for going above and beyond the call of duty in the District. Staff are recognized for their activism and dedication to the betterment of Middle Country.

“Community service is a core value in all of our Middle Country Schools. As a member of the SPARC committee, I am honored to read about and recognize so many outstanding staff members excelling in all areas of community service.”

– **Arlene Barresi, Board of Education Trustee**



In this newsletter, we have provided you with a sampling of the many community service efforts of our students, Pre-K - 12. Visit our website and follow us on social media throughout the year for more news about our students’ efforts to make a positive impact in our community, across our region and around the world.

Community Service at the Elementary Level

Beloved Children’s Book Inspires Holiday Donation Drive

The holiday season—with its spirit of togetherness and giving—is a perfect time to embrace community service, particularly in the young. Middle Country educators and students know this well, as evidenced by our Unity Drive Pre-K/Kindergarten Center holiday mitten collection. Inspired by the well-known children’s book, *The Mitten Tree* by Candace Christiansen, the mitten drive takes place every holiday season, and sees the children collecting donations of mittens, gloves, scarves and hats to display them on the Mitten Tree in the front of the school. The collected clothing is then donated to the Lighthouse Mission in East Setauket.

“The mitten tree drive is such a special time of year for us,” said Phyllis Gorwitz, a teacher at Unity Drive. “To see our youngest students rallying to collect hundreds of pairs of gloves and donate them to the less fortunate is truly heart-warming.”

Holbrook Students Reach out to America’s Heroes

Junior Leaders of Holbrook—a club at Holbrook Road Elementary School run by teachers Lexi Mitchell and Aleema Bacchus-Hosein—helps to foster the next generation of leaders in our community. One need look no further for evidence of the club’s effectiveness than the Junior Leaders projects for American veterans. Last year, the student members wrote letters to deployed Americans and created a display in the school lobby for Veterans Day. Later in the year, they created holiday crafts and Valentine’s Day crafts for older residents in two local assisted living homes.

Additional work undertaken recently by the Junior Leaders of Holbrook include a newspaper drive for pets in an animal shelter, an Earth Day display in the school’s lobby that was the result of months of research on animals and the environment, and created inspirational gifts for children struggling with cancer at Stony Brook Hospital.



“I collected mittens and put the mittens on the tree to give them to the other children who didn’t have any. I brought in two pairs last December and will bring even more this year!”

– **Miray Akkaya, Kindergartener**



Collaborative Fifth Grade Projects Districtwide Focus on Citizenship and Cooperation

Throughout the Middle Country School District, fifth graders were tasked with coming up with creative projects to put their recent character education words—citizenship and cooperation—into action.

Eugene Auer Elementary School

Students pledged their support to a local food drive.

Hawkins Path Elementary School

Students opted to hold a book drive to help put more books into their school library and the Middle Country Public Library.

Holbrook Road Elementary School

Students held a hat and glove drive.

Jericho Elementary School

Students decided to do an animal shelter drive for Save-A-Pet in Port Jefferson Station.

New Lane Elementary School

Students held a coat drive for people in need.

North Coleman Road Elementary School

Students collected socks and toiletries for a local community church.

Oxhead Road Elementary School

Students held a school supply drive.

Stagecoach Elementary School

Students opted to hold a book drive to help put more books into their school library and the Middle Country Public Library.

“It was fantastic! Our fifth graders took initiative and it didn’t matter academically where they were or anything else, just that they were part of a group, and they were displaying the things that we had been already talking about for months in character education.”

– **Maria Rivera Jespersen,**
Coordinator of
Universal Pre-Kindergarten

To read more about community service at the elementary level, see page 5.

Community Service at the Middle School Level

Giving Tree Holiday Shopping Trip

The holidays can be such a wonderful time, but they are often a source of anxiety for families. This makes programs such as the Giving Tree Holiday Shopping Trip an important part of the holiday season.

Dawnwood Middle School National Junior Honor Society members get involved annually, carefully selecting toys for the Giving Tree at a local Target. The toys are then donated to the Stony Brook Children's Hospital to benefit children in need.

Save-A-Pet Project

Dawnwood's National Junior Honor Society also held a fundraiser to benefit Save-A-Pet Animal Rescue at Petco in Selden last March. Students collected hundreds of dollars' worth of pet food and supplies to benefit the rescue. Save-A-Pet helps to rehome animals who may have otherwise been sent to a kill shelter.



Selden Middle School Science Club and STAR Foundation

The Selden Middle School sixth grade Science Club, in a collaboration with Centereach High School teacher Agnieszka Taciak, collected used sneakers to raise money for the STAR Foundation, a wildlife rescue in Middle Island which stands for Save the Animals Rescue Foundation. April Mindlin, a Selden Middle School science teacher who volunteers as a wildlife rehabilitator, helped coordinate the effort.

By donating gently worn or new sneakers, volunteers are helping the organization rescue and rehabilitate animals. Got Sneakers?, the national campaign associated with this initiative, works to decrease the number of sneakers that end up in landfills, which also reduces toxic chemicals being released into the air and soil, helping to protect the environment. The organization receives funds based on the amount of used sneakers that are collected, and those shoes are then recycled or repurposed. The bin is kept at the front of the building for this ongoing donation drive.

"Every pair of sneakers that we collect, we get \$1 to \$5 that goes straight to the STAR Foundation," said April Mindlin. "It's such a hands-on thing and the kids were so excited when we did it. The students created commercials where they would go on the loudspeaker and say, 'We want your smelly sneakers, that's right, your old, smelly sneakers!' It gets the excitement going, and it made it more fun."

To read more about community service at the middle school level, see page 5.

Community Service at the High School Level

As the young adults of Middle Country School District prepare to enter college, the workforce and beyond, educators in Newfield and Centereach High Schools take great care to instill in students a sense of citizenship and altruism—in their communities and for their country.

A variety of donation drives, projects, and community service initiatives take place at Newfield High School and Centereach High School each year. Through these efforts, Middle Country high school students are making a difference locally and globally.



Gold Shoelace Initiative

September was National Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and throughout our District, students took stands and joined programs to raise awareness and make a difference. Of course, student-athletes are often great role models, so it was wonderful to see them embrace the Gold Shoelace Initiative. Districtwide, Middle Country student-athletes bought and wore gold shoelaces, joining with people from around the country in an important campaign to bring attention to the Daniela Conte Foundation, an organization that provides financial assistance to families of children with cancer.

Helping these families means alleviating some of the financial burden that unfortunately arises when a child goes through cancer treatment. Erin Ersoy, of Centereach High School, who coordinated the Gold Shoelace Initiative, said it was heartwarming to see how much support the initiative received from teachers and students.



“I am fortunate enough to be cancer-free now, but cancer continues to affect me and my family every day,” Erin said. “My main motivation for this campaign was that I have lost a lot of friends from the hospital to cancer growing up. I do it for all the kids fighting cancer, surviving cancer, and who lost their battles with cancer.”

Creating Art for Senior Citizens

The arts, in addition to being a source of creative output for our students, are also a great tool for community service. Case in point: Recently, members of the National Art Honor Society at Centereach High School painted bright, colorful ceiling tiles that featured serene images of nature and compelling, uplifting quotations. The students then donated about 40 of them to a local nursing home. Residents of the home could then enjoy the uplifting and visually compelling artwork at their leisure.

Samantha Brodsky, a junior who painted a scene of two hills with flowers, spoke about how fulfilling the project was.

“I appreciated having the opportunity through National Art Honor Society to go and help and make other people smile.”



Make-a-Wish Fundraisers

Members of the Newfield High School community raise money for the Make-a-Wish Foundation each holiday season. Students write letters to Santa that are dropped off at Macy’s, and for every letter, it is a dollar donated to the organization to help grant wishes for children who have fallen ill. Newfield High School has raised almost \$150,000 since 2018.

“It’s definitely a community effort,” said Maureen Marchitto, special education teacher at Newfield High School who helps coordinate the effort. She also runs a St. Baldrick’s Team during March to help raise money for pediatric cancer research. Her team, Kaelyn’s Crusaders, has participated every year since 2016 and has raised \$55,000. People have their heads shaved and video recordings are posted to Facebook Live. It’s a very successful initiative each year!

To read more about community service at the high school level, see page 6.

Elementary Level Community Service, Continued

Fifth Grade Collaboration Projects

Part of what our Middle Country fifth grade students learned through the character education program last year was how to embody respect and responsibility. These characteristics were certainly evident while students worked on their projects: Organizing and conducting the community service efforts taught them how to figure out how they were going to work collectively and come up with a plan of action. Students reflected on how it felt to give back to their community.

“Every year our school does something called ‘The Giving Tree,’ which is where we donate food to families in need. Last year we took it upon ourselves to make about 20 big boxes of food to deliver to each family. I love to help people, and I just want people to feel good. This may not solve all their problems but it’ll definitely help.”

– Kelsie Curran, Eugene Auer

Middle School Level Community Service, Continued



Food and Toiletries Drive

Six different Selden Middle School clubs—consisting of more than 100 students—worked as a unified body last year to collect 536 non-perishable food items and 328 toiletry items to donate to those experiencing homelessness.

Selden Middle School alumna Rachel Cortes, a Stony Brook University student, spearheaded the donation drive in conjunction with her organization at Stony Brook. As a kickoff to the week-long collection drive, Rachel and two of her peers spoke to club members and their advisors, sharing that there are over 3,800 homeless people on Long Island, of whom about 1,200 are children. Club advisors gave a heartfelt “thank you” to the Selden Middle School students, families, faculty and staff members who donated items and helped collect and count the donations. It was truly a team effort. The drive was such a tremendous success that the advisors have committed to making this an annual springtime event.

Teal Pumpkin Project

The members of the Selden Middle School Home and Careers Club assembled 277 non-food, allergy-friendly goody bags as part of the worldwide Teal Pumpkin Project movement to create a safer, happier, more inclusive Halloween for all children. By placing a teal-colored pumpkin on their doorstep during Halloween, a homeowner signals that they offer non-food trinkets and treats that are safe for all trick or treaters who may have food allergies or intolerances. Raising food allergy awareness and offering options besides candy makes this festive and exciting holiday safer and more inclusive for all. The goody bags, along with over 200 Halloween-themed pencils and over 200 plastic rings, were sent to Newfield High School for its Trick or Treat Street event.

Selden Middle School Thanks Veterans

Last year, students at Selden Middle School volunteered to apply their creative design and sewing skills to create mini patriotic pillows that were donated to veterans residing at the Long Island State Veterans Home in Stony Brook for Valentine’s Day. This initiative was sponsored by the Selden Middle School Home and Careers Club. Additionally, on behalf of SMS students, members of the Long Island HOGS delivered 455 beautifully written cards to the residents of the veterans home. The outpouring of support from the students and staff for our veterans was inspirational.



High School Level Community Service, Continued



Community Cleanups

The Centereach High School E-STEM Environmental Club, which works on projects to help the school and community become greener locales, participates annually in the Great Brookhaven Cleanup. The students remove litter from around the school campus and the surrounding neighborhood, beautifying and improving the environment. The club's members—about 40 students—also participate in West Meadow Beach Cleanups. The cleanups are held regularly and the club recently received assistance from Nicole Pocchiare, the Town of Brookhaven environmental educator. The group was also joined in their cleanup efforts by Town of Brookhaven Councilman Neil Manzella and his daughter. Agnieszka Taciak, a teacher who runs the CHS E-STEM Environmental Club, said the students love helping the environment. It also engaged students' parents, many of whom joined the cleanup effort.

“We had a great time and helped the environment out.”

– Cemal Tastan, Centereach High School



“The fact that parents are bringing their kids on a Saturday morning speaks volumes.”

– Agnieszka Taciak, CHS teacher



Volunteering at a Community Farm

Newfield High School students visit Bethel Hobbs Community Farm on an annual basis to volunteer their time to help local families in need. At the farm, students help plant and harvest the organically grown fruits and vegetables, which are donated to local residents. The initiative benefits community members while educating students about environmentally sound methods for growing nutritious produce.