

AROUND

SPRING 2024



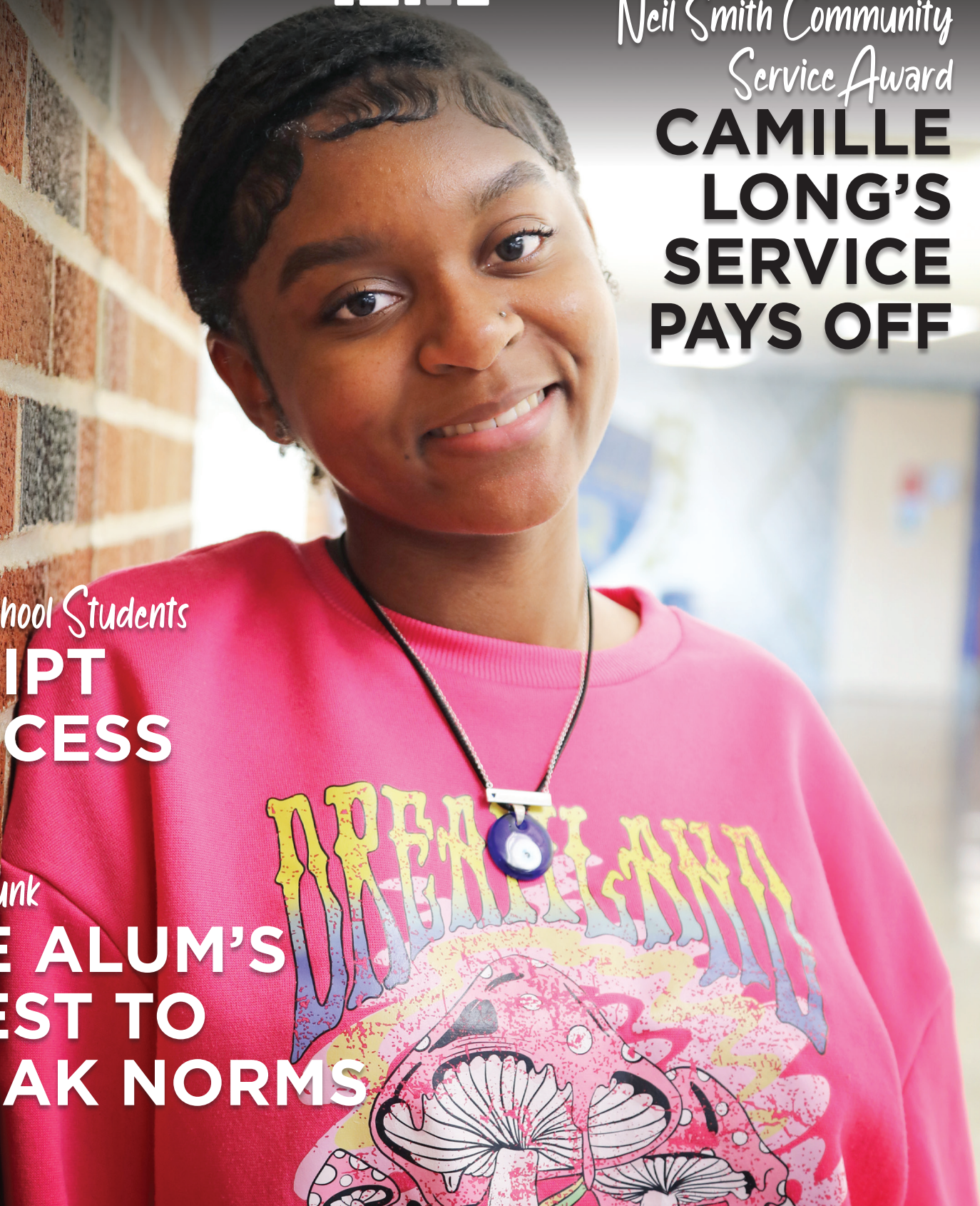
THE MILL

*Neil Smith Community
Service Award*

**CAMILLE
LONG'S
SERVICE
PAYS OFF**

High School Students
**SCRIPT
SUCCESS**

Slam Dunk
**ONE ALUM'S
QUEST TO
BREAK NORMS**





AROUND THE MILL

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RELENTLESSLY PURSUING the Future We Want



What an exceptional school year it has been! During my visits to our buildings on the first two days of school, seeing our students beaming with smiles and teachers brimming with enthusiasm for the new academic year was heartwarming. With just two months remaining, the anticipation is building. Yet, it's remarkable to note that behaviors remain positive, with students smiling and teachers eagerly diving into their classrooms!

This year has brought remarkable progress for both our students and staff. As Ingels Elementary wraps up its first year as a full-year school, the impact of the additional classroom time is already evident. Test scores have seen a positive uptick, with math scores increasing by 7% and reading scores by 4% from the beginning of the school year to the end of the first semester. This remarkable achievement reflects the unwavering dedication of our families to their children's education and the tireless efforts of our passionate teachers.

The positive trend extends across the district, with students experiencing math, science, and reading improvements. Reading proficiency has risen 11% and math 10% district-wide, with kindergarten through second-grade students demonstrating the highest reading skills in recent memory. This is particularly significant as research indicates that students not reading proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to face challenges throughout their academic journey. Ensuring students achieve or surpass grade-level expectations sets them on a path to high school graduation and success beyond.

Preparing students for life after graduation remains a primary objective for us all. Our commitment to providing valuable skills is evident. Initiatives like Ruskin High's "market value asset" program saw seven high school seniors earn their certified medical assistant (CMA) license from the University of Central Missouri in March.

In May, we eagerly anticipate honoring our exceptional Building-Level and District Teacher of the Year and recognizing the outstanding contributions of our Support Person of the Year recipients. Additionally, we will spotlight three remarkable HMC-1 Leaders of the Year and express our heartfelt gratitude to our esteemed district retirees. With immense pride and appreciation, we eagerly anticipate celebrating these outstanding leaders who embody the spirit of excellence within our district.

Excitement builds momentum with the upcoming opening of three new schools in the fall. The Real-World Learning Center will offer diverse programs, including skill trades, health sciences, and a student-led coffee shop. We will also open our two new middle schools this fall – Hickman Mills Middle School and Hickman Middle School South. Each will serve grades sixth through eighth and provide specialized education in performing arts and STEAM subjects, respectively, ensuring our students are well-prepared for future challenges and opportunities. We warmly invite all to join us in embracing the exciting journey ahead!

The adventure continues to get exciting; join us on this relentless journey toward the future we want.

Yaw Obeng, M.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools

On the cover:

Ruskin High School Senior Camille Long pauses from her bustling senior schedule of academics, sports, and community service to capture a moment in the halls of the high school. Recently, Camille was honored with the Neil Smith Community Service Award for her 100+ hours of community service. Read more on page five.



Below:

Students at Warford Elementary showcased their talents during a Black History Month performance on February 29, 2024. The diverse program featured performances ranging from “Edward’s Rhythm Sticks” and poetry recitations to powerful spoken word pieces. Students also performed the African American spiritual “I Got Peace Like a River” and the iconic anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing.”

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From the Co-Presidents

This school year, the HMC-1 Board of Directors developed an unprecedented solution to an unconventional issue and agreed to vote for Co-Presidents for the Director of the Board. Ann Coleman and Irene Kendrick have partnered to work together to benefit the school district and our community.

What an extraordinary year it's been at HMC-1! As a Board, we embarked on an unprecedented journey last spring when we came together and voted to have Co-Presidents. It's been a resounding success! Together, our Board set ambitious goals for the school year, and we're thrilled to share the remarkable progress we've achieved so far.

We celebrated a significant milestone with the groundbreaking of our new Real-World Learning Center. In December, we launched free internet hot spots and tablets for qualifying families, empowering them

with invaluable access to online resources. Our partnership with Swope Health to establish a family health clinic within our school boundaries addresses a critical need for accessible healthcare, particularly for those with limited transportation options.

As we relentlessly pursue the future we want, we realize new challenges will come our way. The board elections in April 2024 will change the dynamic that has worked successfully these last several months. Our six-member Board will return to a whole seven-person team. The additional members cause a restructuring from the co-president model back to the traditional president, vice president, and secretary structure. Although the traditional structure has provided us with challenges in the past, our current team is confident in our ability to



(Left to right) Director Beth Boerger, Superintendent Yaw Obeng, Co-President Ann Coleman, Ingels Elementary Teacher Jennifer Hoyt, and Co-President Irene Kendrick. Ms. Hoyt was honored at the February Board Meeting by the Veterans of Foreign War with the National Citizenship Education Teacher District Recognition Award.

navigate change, drawing on the spirit of collaboration and achievement that has defined our year.

We sincerely thank the entire HMC-1 community for your unwavering support. It has been an honor to serve as your Co-Presidents, and we look forward to continuing our

journey together toward an even brighter future for our district. Reaching across the aisle and working together for the betterment of our school district is what our students, staff, and community deserve.

**Ann Coleman &
Irene Kendrick**
Co-Presidents,
Board of Directors

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Scripting Success

MEET RUSKIN'S MASTERS OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Gathered around the conference table, six high school students reminisced about their earliest writing endeavors. For sophomore Alexis Harper, it began with an elementary school assignment at the age of eight. Kody Walrod penned a short story about Halloween in second grade. At the same age, Gomer Krieger delved into sci-fi and adventure tales, and sophomore Chris Fisher found inspiration in video game storylines. When presented with the opportunity to enter the Young Writers USA contest, which receives entries from around the globe, these students eagerly seized the chance. Their enthusiasm paid off when seven Ruskin High School students were chosen for publication in an upcoming short story collection.

Nicole Grant, an English Language Arts Teacher, emphasized the significance of this achievement. She noted that while the contest is international, it's particularly gratifying for Ruskin students to be recognized, highlighting the depth of talent within the school.

"To have one student from Ruskin get selected is awesome because I don't think many people in the greater Kansas City area recognize how awesome Ruskin is," Ms. Grant explained. "To say that we have SEVEN students selected to be published in a short story collection is a pretty big

deal. It shows our students' talent and what they're doing here."

Beyond their success in the contest, many of these students are pursuing their writing projects. For instance, Kody is crafting a book of poetry titled "Am I a Poet or Just a Teenage Girl?" Alexis is immersed in a fantasy novel called "Project Go Gone." Senior Jaylin Briscoe draws inspiration from psychology for his book, exploring societal trends and mental health.

Reflecting on their accomplishments, the students expressed gratitude and humility. Gomer expressed astonishment at the recognition, while Kody viewed writing as a means of self-expression.

"This is one of the first big things that has happened in high school," Gomer shared. "I feel honored that I get to have my work published."

"This isn't my first time published; in third grade, I wrote a little poem about my brain, that was published," Kody shared. "I am very honored to earn this award because writing for me gives me a voice."

Chris aspires to become a video game designer, using his storytelling skills to craft immersive game narratives. He is currently writing a storyline for a new video game, and his goal is to learn how to program and build his own game in the future.



JaVion and Jaylin Briscoe, 12



Alexis Harper, 10



Chris Fisher, 10



Gomer Krieger, 10



Kody Walrod, 10

"Alexis and I have become friends over the idea of writing video game storylines," Chris said.

For JaVion and Jaylin, both seniors, writing has proven invaluable in scholarship applications and personal expression. Their bond as twins adds more significance to their shared achievement. "It was great that my brother's and my story got noticed," Jaylin said. "The fact that it was both of us, instead of just one of us, was perfect. Because we're twins, we were born together and will ride together."

Looking ahead, these students are determined to continue pursuing their passions. "I want this to expand into something more," Alexis shares. "I want someone to use this publication to recognize my work. I will continue to submit work and hopefully get those things published."

Community Service Pays Off

CAMILLE LONG EARN'S NEIL SMITH AWARD

Camille Long, a senior at Ruskin High School, stands out as a shining example of dedication, ambition, and community service. Recently honored with the prestigious Neil Smith Community Service Award and Scholarship, Camille's journey is not just one of academic achievement but also of profound commitment to making a positive impact.

"I am honored there are organizations who acknowledge good deeds and work," Camille



shares about earning the Neil Smith Community Service Award. "Community service isn't in the spotlight, and I'm happy to be in a community of young leaders."

As Camille eagerly anticipates her next chapter after high school, she plans to pursue a major in finance at Missouri State University, with aspirations of becoming a financial analyst. Reflecting on her decision, Camille shares how her interest in numbers and data analysis, coupled with inspiration from her

aunt's career in marketing, steered her towards this path. Her choice of Missouri State was influenced by its welcoming environment, affordable tuition, and robust business program, promising ample opportunities for growth and development.

Camille has left an indelible mark throughout high school through her involvement in various activities. Camille has demonstrated exceptional dedication and leadership in every endeavor, from excelling in softball and serving as a leader in the A+ program and Success Leadership class to actively participating in FCCLA and FBLA.

Camille's commitment to community service is equally commendable. With over 100 hours of volunteer work, including initiatives with Harvesters, mentoring young softball enthusiasts, and contributing to her school's store, Camille's altruism knows no bounds. For her, giving back to the community isn't just a duty but a way to uplift her neighborhood and inspire fellow students to strive for excellence.

"Ruskin is my community; I want to improve it," Camille explained. You don't just do the work for nothing; you do it for your school

Navigating through the tumultuous waters of adolescence isn't easy, especially when faced with personal challenges. For Essynce Love, a student at the Hickman Mills Middle School 6th & 7th Grade Center, her expedition through middle school has been one of transformation, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to self-improvement.

Reflecting on her early days at the 6th Grade Center, Essynce candidly shares, "My behavior was not great. I gave a lot of trouble to Dr. Ryerson and the staff." However, a pivotal moment during the summer prompted a profound realization – a moment of clarity that sparked a desire for change. "I thought about all of the stuff I

Above & Beyond Essynce Love's Resilience Story

did; I know I can do better," she recalled, thus beginning her journey toward personal growth.

In sixth grade, Essynce struggled with behavioral issues, often finding herself suspended and having a negative attitude. However, fueled by a newfound determination to make positive choices, she embarked on a transformative path, and the results speak volumes. "I have not been suspended this year," she proudly shares, a testament to her commitment to change.

But Essynce's journey isn't just about avoiding trouble; it's about embracing academic excellence and emerging as a leader. With her mother's unwavering support, a first-grade teacher, Essynce has excelled academically, seeking help and maintaining impressive grades. "I'm taking a bit of a leadership role, and that feels great," she



acknowledges, highlighting her newfound confidence and sense of purpose.

Looking ahead to eighth grade, Essynce remains steadfast in her commitment to personal growth and academic success. "I just hope I keep up the good work

“Ruskin is my community; I want to improve it. You don’t just do the work for nothing; you do it for your school and community. But more importantly, you do it for yourself.”

– CAMILLE JOHNSON
Ruskin High School,
Senior

and community. But more importantly, you do it for yourself.”

When asked about her most cherished high school memories, Camille fondly recalls her experiences in softball and the invaluable lessons she learned in her leadership class. She credits her teachers, particularly Ms. Sixta and Coach Miss Tolbert, for their unwavering support and mentorship, guiding her through academic and personal challenges.

Camille’s recent accolade, the Neil Smith Community Service Award and Scholarship, underscores her outstanding contributions to athletics and community service. Nominated by her teachers, Camille’s dedication and pas-

sion for service shone through, earning her well-deserved recognition.

“Camille is the type of student and person that makes a teacher remember why they went into education,” HMC-1 Athletic Director Christopher Barker said. “Camille came to Ruskin as a freshman and immediately began to make her mark. She is motivated and bright and makes decisions as carefully and thoughtfully as she completes her schoolwork. Camille will be successful in the future just because of her desire to always aim high and an attitude of success.”

Looking ahead, Camille remains focused on her goals, eagerly awaiting the scholarships she’s applied for to help fund her college education. Her advice to incoming freshmen resonates with wisdom beyond her years, emphasizing the importance of cherishing high school achievements while keeping an eye on the future.

“High school is more than grades and classes; it’s about opportunities,” Camille explained. “There are opportunities to network, get nominated for scholarships, start your career, and graduate with purpose. Or you can do nothing and graduate confused with nothing. Don’t be that student. Go take advantage of



Above (L to R): Neil Smith, Camille Long, and Superintendent Yaw Obeng at a recent ceremony at Ruskin High School.

all of the opportunities.”

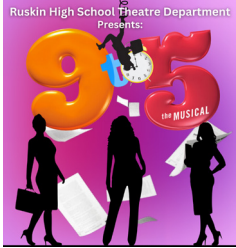
In a final message to younger students, Camille urges them not to shy away from opportunities and to cultivate strong relationships with teachers and mentors. “Get close with your teachers and administration,” Camille shares. “They will be the ones that will help you after high school.”

The Neil Smith Community Service Award honors Camille’s dedication to serving others and the compassion instilled in her by her mentors and experiences at Ruskin High School. As she prepares to embark on her collegiate journey, Camille’s legacy will leave an indelible mark on her school and community.



Ruskin's Theatre Department Takes the Stage with an Electrifying Performance of "9 to 5: The Musical"

The Ruskin High School Theatre Department brought the unforgettable world of Dolly Parton's classic tale to life on stage on March 7-9, 2024. The production "9 to 5: The Musical" follows the hilarious and empowering story of three dynamic women who band together to take down their chauvinistic boss and revolutionize their workplace.



Based on the beloved 1980 film of the same name, this production features music and lyrics by Dolly Parton. Theatre patrons were able to groove along to timeless hits.

With catchy tunes and a message of empowerment, this musical offered a lot of laughter, inspiration, and plenty of toe-tapping moments, thanks to the electrifying performances of Ruskin's talented cast and crew.

The next production is "The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon," scheduled for April 25-27, 2024. Visit <https://bit.ly/RuskinTickets> to purchase tickets.

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SLAM DUNK

Hickman Mills Alum's Journey from Cougar to Miami Heat

Few careers shine as brightly in sports entertainment as Vincent Pace's. A proud Hickman Mills High School graduate, Vincent's journey from hometown hero to Mascot Coordinator for the Miami Heat's beloved Burnie mascot is a testament to the passion, perseverance, and power of chasing one's dreams.

Vincent's story begins in Symington Elementary during his formative years when he discovered his knack for bringing joy and spirit to his school community through mascot performances. Vincent's infectious enthusiasm set him apart from his peers, from his early days donning a costume in middle school to his memorable appearances at Hickman Mills High School events.

"One of my best memories was when I had the privilege to mascot at one of the high school games while I was still the middle school mascot," Vincent shared. "I loved all the pep rallies before the games like homecoming and the football games. It was a



blessing to contribute to the school spirit."

Fueled by his love for entertainment and desire to make a difference, Vincent embarked on a path leading him to the heart of professional sports entertainment. After leaving college to pursue his passion,



Vincent found himself on the roster of the Tulsa Drivers baseball team, where he honed his skills and laid the groundwork for his future success.

However, Vincent's role as the Miami Heat's mascot coordinator truly solidified his place in the spotlight. Tasked with orchestrating Burnie's dynamic performances and proudly representing the Miami Heat, Vincent's dedication and talent has made him indispensable to the team's game-day experience.

"It has been a privilege working with Burnie and helping our community grow from a fun standpoint and get involved in all the in-game opportunities," Vincent explained. "I'm like Burnie's biggest hype man. He's a celebrity in Miami, and he's loved worldwide. It's a lot of fun working with him."

Vincent's journey is a testament to his achievements and a source of inspiration for future generations. As we spotlight our alumni, Vincent's story reminds us of the limitless potential within each of us and the importance of pursuing our passions with unwavering determination.



In addition to his professional accomplishments, Vincent remains deeply committed to giving back to his community and inspiring others to chase their dreams. Through mentoring programs, motivational speaking engagements, and community outreach initiatives, Vincent continues to impact the lives of those around him positively.

As we honor Vincent Pace and his remarkable achievements, let us celebrate the success and contributions of our alums, inspiring future generations to reach for the stars and chase their dreams with the same enthusiasm and determination that defines Vincent's journey.



LET'S GO EAGLES! SHOWCASING RUSKIN WINTER SPORTS



Compass Elementary Scores Big with Donation from Paragon Star



Stefan Hodes, the Compass Elementary Art Teacher, was delighted to receive a \$5000 donation for the Compass STEAM Club, a program he initiated. The generous contribution came from Flip Short, the owner of Paragon Star Sports Complex, on Monday, March 18.

Mr. Short's philanthropic spirit didn't stop there; he also decided to match the donation, providing an additional \$5000 to Compass Elementary School for further STEAM

needs. This significant contribution will significantly benefit the STEAM Club, which caters to school-age children interested in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math. With the additional funding, the club can now acquire a 3D printer, enhancing the scope of projects available to its members.

Heartfelt gratitude goes out to Mr. Short and Paragon Star for their remarkable generosity and support!

ACING THE EXAM



SEVEN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS EARN CMA LICENSE FROM UCM

In a remarkable display of dedication and determination, seven exceptional seniors from Ruskin High School and Burke Academy have achieved a significant milestone even before crossing the graduation stage. Through rigorous training and hands-on experience totaling over 160 hours of classroom learning and 80 hours of clinical work, they have proudly earned their certified medical assistant (CMA) license from the University of Central Missouri.

Students include: Rylee Foster, Jazmin Zepeda, Sarrah Sharaf, Alexis Brown, Seniya Copeland, Lujain Taleb, and Margaritia Macias.

These budding healthcare heroes have demonstrated their commitment to excellence and are poised to make a meaningful impact in the medical field.

"Our goal as a district is for every senior to graduate with at least one market value asset," Real-World Learning Coordinator Bethany Kelly, Ed.S. said. "Earning their CMA is a valuable asset these students will have if they want to go into the workplace or if they want to go into nursing after graduation."

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to these outstanding graduates as they embark on their journey to change lives and inspire others with their unwavering passion for healthcare.

Resilience Story (cont.)

Continued from page 5

and stay who I am now in the eighth grade," she shares, underscoring her determination to continue her path of positivity and achievement.

Beyond academics, Essynce finds joy and fulfillment in extracurricular activities, particularly dance. "I love dance; it makes me feel like I can do

anything I want," she enthuses, highlighting the power of self-expression through movement.

As she continues to navigate the ups and downs of adolescence, one thing remains abundantly clear — Essynce Love is a force to be reckoned with, an embodiment of determination, positivity, and unwavering resilience.



CALLING HMC-1 ALUMNI!

Have an interesting origin story? Did you go on an adventure, have a unique career, or just want to plug into HMC-1? Reach out today! Contact Communications at communications@hickmanmills.org.



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