

The GROVE GAZETTE

Vol. VI, Issue 1

Union Grove ISD News

Sept. 2024

Back to
School
Edition

Fall Sports Preview
Ballard Returns to
Theater Program

Are Energy Drinks
Worth the Risk?

On the Cover

Eighth-grader Zoey Johnston greets children as Lily the Lion at the elementary Meet the Teacher event Aug. 6. Photo by Briana Bowling

This page:
Families find classrooms, unload school supplies, shop for spiritwear and reunite with friends before school officially begins. Junior high/high school staff hosted their Meet the Teacher event Aug. 5, followed by the elementary Meet the Teacher on Aug. 6. Photos by Briana Bowling



The GROVE GAZETTE

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Editor-in-Chief: Jamie Russell
Photo Editor: Briana Bowling
Business Manager: Hannah Caperton
Sponsor: Kimber Smith

Olivia Dabreu	Alexis Lee
Bella Foster	Konner Long
Hannah Haggard	Isaac O'Neal
Alley Hale	Natalie Pritchett
Peyton Hancock	Connor Stanford
Bailee Hosak	Charlotte Wright
Jaxon Ledbetter	Bri Westmoreland



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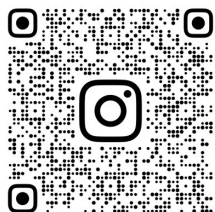
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LETTERS FROM THE PRINCIPALS

Hello Lions!

We are excited about the start of the new year. It has been a great start, and I have no doubt that this will be the best year ever! I'm excited about helping this year and all things UG!

A special shout-out to our new staff members:

- Kyle Adams
- Roger Adams
- Samantha Adams
- Hunter Ballard
- Kent Bilnoski
- Garrett Bowery
- Amanda Childress
- Donnie Cline
- Patricia Coleman
- Rebecca Early
- Garrett Gibson
- Ashley Hembrough
- Karen Hill
- Kourtney Loewe
- Lance Loewe
- Barry Woodruff

Let's make this the best year ever!

Go Lions!
Brian Gray
JH/HS Principal
grayb@ugisd.org
903-844-3900



We are so excited to have our students and staff back on campus! I am looking forward to a GREAT 2024-25 school year! I wanted to give out a few reminders as we begin the year.

Safety:

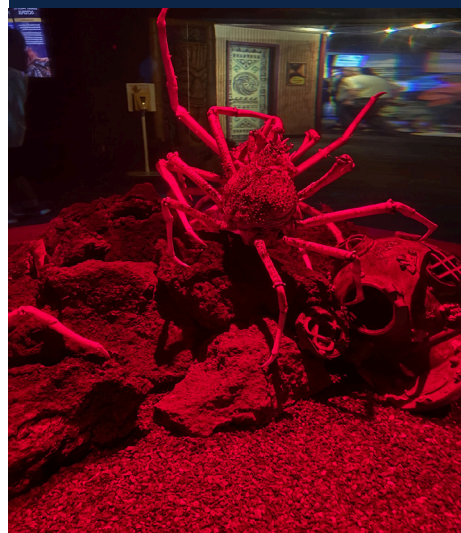
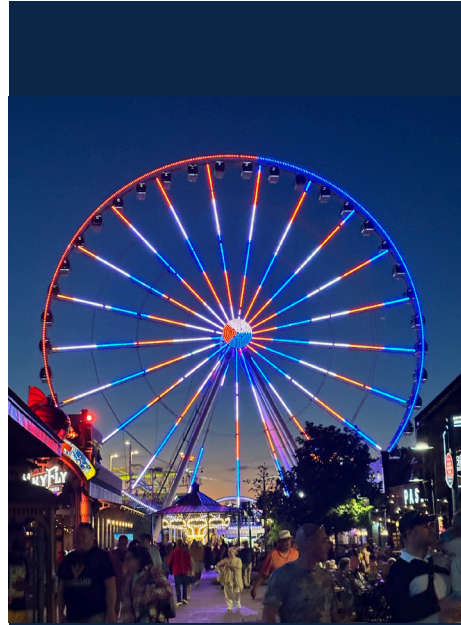
1. The campus is fenced off now. There are two gates on the campus. If you need to get in during the day, you can push the button at the box located near the multi-purpose building. Krystal will ask you why you're here and then open the gate for you. When leaving, you'll need to use the gate in front of our main building. Stay to the right of the drive, and it should open automatically. No parents should be behind the campus.
2. All inner and outer doors are locked during school hours.
3. Car pickup varies by the grade level of your student. PK-3 pickup is in front of the main building. You'll pull into the main gate and circle around. 4-6 pickup is at the north end of A-building. You'll pull into the gate by the multi-purpose building. If you have a PK-3 AND a 4-6 student, they can be picked up together after 3:25 in the main parking lot.
4. Dropoffs are all at the same location. You'll pull into the gate at the multipurpose building and circle all the way around and drop off in front of the main building.
5. We have extra pickup and drop-off maps if you need one.
6. All visitors must have a valid ID that will be run through Raptor. We will ask you to leave your ID with the office for the duration of your visit to the campus. You'll be given a badge stating the purpose of your visit.

General Information:

1. The first bell of the day rings at 7:40 this year, and the tardy bell rings at 7:45.
2. Parents will be allowed to have lunch in the cafeteria with their child(ren) beginning Sept. 5.
3. We have some new faces this year, and I wanted to introduce everyone. I know you'll make them feel welcome!
 - Jake Burgess - PE aide
 - Karen Bussey - Special Education Resource
 - Angie Glenn - Sixth grade Reading & Language Arts
 - Amanda Moore - Pre-K teacher
 - Melodie Washburn - Fifth grade Reading & Language Arts
 - Marisela Wedin - Special Education Life Skills

As always, I am here to help if you need anything!

Sherrill Ballard
Elementary Principal
ballards@ugisd.org
903-845-3481



Sights and Sounds

This summer, the high school's award-winning band took a week-long trip to Tennessee. The trip, which spanned from May 27-June 1, was packed with attractions, including Ripley's Believe It or Not Aquarium, Ober Mountain, Dollywood, Titanic Museum and The Island. Photos by Bailee Hosak

Busy Spring Paves Way for Summer Fun

Like every year, competitions and celebrations filled the spring of 2024. Elementary students performed end-of-year music programs, took class field trips and competed in field day.

Band members performed in their spring concert, competed in the state Solo and Ensemble contest and traveled to Splash Kingdom in Canton. Junior high theater presented "The Little Mermaid". Track students competed in the Special Olympics, academic UIL competitors traveled for the state UIL meet, and Rocketry students launched in Fredericksburg. Several FFA teams, including the vet tech team (for the third time), competed at state.

Whether at the cheerleaders' mini-camp, senior trip, prom or end-of-year banquets, students celebrated the completion of another successful year and summer coming soon.

Seventh-grader Gunner Davis plays "Alien Invasion", his favorite of the sixth-grade's set, during the spring concert May 2. "I think I did good," Davis said. "I was first chair most of the year, so I felt pressure, but I also felt proud, like I led my section well." Photo by Natalie Spruell



Freshman Hailey Carter and eighth-grader Cheston Martin play the junior high portion of the spring concert. Photos by Jamie Russell

Director Jonathan Stafford takes a group photo of the senior band members before their final high school concert. The high school portion included "March Ponderoso" and "Bravura". Photo by Jamie Russell

Andy Thompson awards River Martindale the sixth grade percussion award. Photo by Natalie Spruell



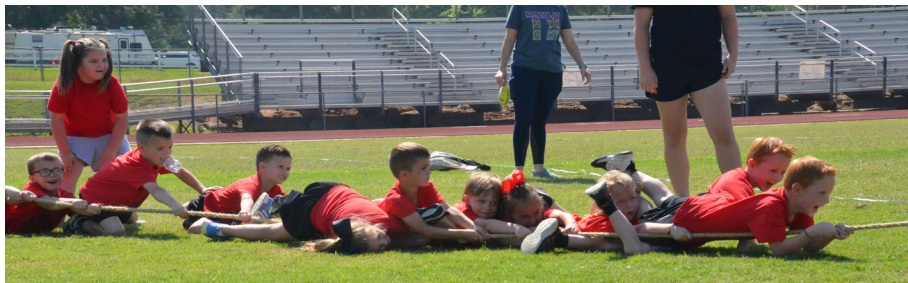
Fifth graders Gavin Pritchett and Xavier Tension race to win in the 100 meter dash. "It was super close," Pritchett said. "I was excited to get second place." Photo by Charlotte Wright



Eggshausting

First-graders strive to cross the finish line with intact eggs. Photo by Hannah Caperton

Mrs. Potter's kindergarten class fights to win a game of tug of war against the other kindergarten classes. PHOTO: Charlotte Wright



Above from left to right: Third grader Abby Hogue competes to win ring toss against fellow classmate Sophia Hankins. Photo by Connor Stanford

Fourth graders Ava Philips and Halle Martin play with bubbles. Photo by Connor Stanford



First grade teacher Ms. Tia cheers on Blakely Forster, Scarlett Edwards, and Chloe Freeman as they compete in softball throw. Photo by Hannah Caperton



Graduates Bryce Madding, Owen Matthew and Isaiah O'Neal try their hands at the arcade games of Andretti Racing, where the Class of 2024 traveled May 1 for the annual senior trip. Photos by Faith Woodall and Lucky Woodard

Heavy Medal

Academic UIL Team Members Earn Top Awards at State Meet

by Natalie Pritchett and Olivia Dabreu

One-Act Play

After two consecutive years of being one point away from advancing to state, the One Act Play cast and crew qualified first and competed at state with “Rivers and Ravines” for the second time in school history. The team placed eighth and won two individual awards: Sarah Clowers All-Star Cast and Daytona Vaughn Honorable Mention.

“It hit me when we walked off the stage that that was the last time I would be Wordy,” sophomore Peyton Hancock said. “It was a surreal feeling, because I had become so attached to not only my character but everyone’s character and everyone’s story.”

Accounting

After three of the previous year’s state runner-up team members graduated and the fourth chose to focus on another program, the odds were stacked against the accounting team, sponsored by Gailyn Sutton. However, first-year competitors Kolby Nutt (10), Parker Haley (11), Elise Daugherty (12) and Carter Cooper (11) finished third as a team.

“I am so proud of my team,” senior Elise Daugherty said. “For only having one school year to learn everything, I’m just amazed, and I hope we can improve this year!”

Daugherty, who took the class freshman year but couldn’t last year because of scheduling conflicts, used ninth period, lunch, and any extra minutes she could find to catch up and helped teach her classmates.

“At first I thought the scheduling conflicts would be an issue and that I would fall behind, but as it turned out, it was quite the opposite,” Daugherty said. “Getting one on one time to get help and to learn definitely helped. While I was ahead, I’d help the others catch up on groups that they were struggling with, and that definitely helped me cement concepts and ideas in my head.”

Current Events

Senior Tommy Branscom advanced to state in Current Issues and Events for the third year. He previously placed sixth as a freshman and third as a sophomore, but this spring, his score landed in tenth.

“Going in, I wasn’t really confident because of lack of sleep, leading to me feeling a bit underprepared,” Branscom said. “Only top 6 place, which I’m not really complaining about, but it’s not as good as I did the last

two years.”

Branscom noted that while the weather was better and the city was less crowded due to the state meet being scheduled after UT’s graduation, it was “odd” having to study on his birthday and not having Rappazzo there.

“It was definitely weird not having a sponsor because usually I have Rappazzo with me,” Branscom said. “The responsibility of me had to be divided among the other sponsors who helped out a lot.”

Journalism

Alum Sydney Pritchett also advanced to state for the third consecutive year. As a sophomore, she competed in Feature Writing; as a junior, she won the silver medal in Headline Writing; and this spring, as a senior, she won the gold medal in Feature Writing and fourth place in Headline Writing.

“Winning state has always been a goal of mine, and I spent most of my time in high school working toward that goal,” Pritchett said.

In journalism, state champions in each division advance to a second tier of competitions to determine which winner earns the Tops in Texas award. Pritchett’s gold medal put her in the running, and she came home with a large plaque.

“It is always a privilege to even make it to state, but to win Tops in Texas was something I had only ever dreamed of,” Pritchett said. “I was completely thrilled when they announced that I had won the feature writing contest, not only in the 2A division, but in the whole state of Texas. I am so thankful that I was able to end my senior year with such a major accomplishment and that all the time and effort spent was worth it.”

The two medals earned Pritchett 23 points and fourth place journalism team.

Prose and Poetry Interpretation

Senior Jamie Russell competed in Prose and senior Brendon Deary in Poetry.

“When I was told I was going to the State meet, I jumped so high with the biggest smile and tears in my eyes,” Deary said. “It was a great feeling.”

Russell began manifesting her trip as a sophomore.

“Within the first month of my first year

here, I was handed a little black binder with a piece inside and told to read it,” Russell said. “After my first time competing, I knew I loved the event, and I told my mom I wanted to go to state by my junior year. I can’t believe I actually did it. All the hours I spent cutting pieces, competing at invitationals and talking to walls felt worth it at that state competition.”

Because they were cross-entered in interp and One-Act Play, they both went first in their competition rooms and left immediately after performing to get ready for the OAP performance.

“Being cross entered was the craziest dream I could ever imagine,” Deary said. “I wasn’t nervous because I had practiced so much, but I was so excited to be competing for my school at the state level. As I entered in the room, though, my nerves were crazy since I had to go first and had to go to One Act right after.”



State Champion

2024 graduate Sydney Pritchett wins first place in Feature Writing, advancing to a second tier of competition against the state champions from 1A, 3A, 4A, 5A and 6A to win Tops in Texas. She also placed fourth in Headline Writing this spring. Pritchett won more than 20 total UIL medals during the 2023-2024 school year, earning more than twice as many points as she needed for a spot on the All-State Journalism Staff, as well as a TILF Scholarship for her UIL success.

Photo by Kimber Smith

Where Did They Go?

Last year's grads committed to:



Above: Elizabeth Driggers accepts her eighth-grade graduation certificate May 17 from 2023-2024 Assistant Principal David Chatterton. Photo by Jamie Russell

Above Right: Daysha Natera poses for family photos after the eighth-grade graduation on May 17. Photo by Jamie Russell

Right: Addison Smith delivers her valedictory address at the high school graduation ceremony at Mobberly Baptist Church in Longview on May 18. Photo by Emma Holder



One tribal area we visited physically abused and killed Christians only a couple of years before, but now the people filled the building with beautiful dances and loud praises. We witnessed a Quichua Sunday service, and I loved experiencing God move in people in a way I had never seen before. Photo by Jamie Russell



My sweet friend Alison cried when she realized this is the last of VBS, until we handed her the snack. She then enjoyed her roll and fruit punch and gave everyone on our team big sticky hugs. Photo by Jamie Russell



Above: Seven kids load into the truck bed with arms full of snacks and crafts. Two were only four years old, and the oldest was seven. They laughed, dancing on the truck bed before being told to sit, but all I could see was the dangerous ride they had for 10 miles or more. Right: The team stayed in Camp Chacaucó, located in the central mountain region near the active volcano Tungurahua. The staff assured me the volcano barely stayed within the qualifications of being active, but a quick Google search revealed Tungurahua is one of South America's most active volcanoes. Photos by Jamie Russell

Summer of Returning to Ecuador *Service*

by Jamie Russell

A rainbow of names meticulously sketched on the black concrete.

Names I quickly scribble inside my Bible.

Names that hang on a poster in my bedroom with hand-drawn hearts.

Two summers ago, I took my first international mission trip to Ecuador and fell in love with the people, their culture, and the mission. This June, I returned, this time as part of a 59-person team, including 42 students and 17 sponsors from Mobberly Baptist Church, to share the gospel, serve at the camp facility, and host three vacation Bible schools. The people I met there changed my life -- especially those four little girls whose names I will never forget.

Once in Ecuador, our group traveled to different churches and then divided into three VBS teams. From there, we separated into Bible stories, crafts, and games.

I served on the Bible study group for the church in Huambaló. My group spent the morning preparing and rehearsing for the

afternoon's performance, then I went to help prepare lunch in the kitchen. I quickly learned the kitchen staff didn't speak English. While I learned more Spanish in that kitchen than in any course I could have taken, I also learned we didn't need to speak the same language to enjoy each other's company: the shared laughter, dancing, even pranks. One of the chefs tricked me into going in the pantry so she could close the door and turn off the lights. She quickly became one of my favorite people.

But I met my girls at the VBS site.

Lia

I didn't know what to say to these kids. I felt so nervous I couldn't remember anything from Spanish class except "Cómo se dice?"

I pointed to Lia's shirt and asked her, but I mispronounced the phrase. I felt so embarrassed, but she didn't care. She smiled wide with a giggle and answered. This silly communication soon became a game we played all week.

Hanna

One tiny girl hid in the corner wearing a beautiful dress. She wouldn't let anyone near her. I didn't know how to connect with her, but then a translator handed me a sucker and told me to smile.

I walked up to her, gave her the sucker, smiled, and said "tu es muy bonita". Hanna immediately hugged me and started speaking broken English. I never saw her without a smile again.

Gabriela and Emiy

These two girls stood together in confidence and inspired me. They performed the motions to the Bible verse and recited it perfectly then turned to help others who were struggling. I fell in love with their heart for each other, for the other kids, and for learning. They didn't want to stop reciting the verses and hearing the bible story. They wanted to learn more and more.

The children of Huambaló and I applied chalk with enough pressure to create powder and used our hands to make printed designs. We wrote out the words we couldn't say. We sang and danced and performed skits in costume. We laughed and learned more about each other and about God each day.

They stayed near me all week, and it touched my heart every time they remembered my name or hugged me.

Watching them learn the verses and dance to the songs brought me so much joy.

At the end of the week, as I danced to the worship song, my four little girls - Emiy, Lia, Hanna and Gabriela - approached me with a poster and a little gift. The poster said "We will miss you" in both English and in Spanish, and it was covered in hand-drawn hearts.

As we shared goodbye hugs, I felt my throat catch. My eyes filled with tears and so did theirs, but we couldn't stop smiling. I felt so joyful and so thankful, but I also felt a sense of loss.

I don't think it's even possible for me to forget those four cousins or the beautiful country of Ecuador. It has a forever hold on my heart. If I was offered a one-way ticket to Ecuador, I'd leave everything behind and get on that plane right now.





Reserve your 2024-2025 yearbook online at <https://yearbookforever.com/>

Yearbooks cost \$50 until Nov. 1, but families don't have to pay it all now, as online orders will have a payment plan option. Books will be distributed in August of 2025, a change from recent yearbooks which were distributed in May and supplemented by an insert in August.

Senior parents and businesses can also purchase ads in the 2024-2025 yearbook. Ad prices will remain the same until the deadline of Dec. 20. (Full Page - \$250; Half Page - \$135; Quarter Page - \$75; Eighth Page - \$50) Lions Roar staff will design ads according to specifications and send proofs for approval before publication.



Hands-On Learning

1 Seventh-grader Cheyenne Willis works on her group's Cisco kiosk for Patty Jones's Tech Apps class. Each group created a mini-museum documenting one company's history. Photo by Kimber Smith

2 Eighth-graders Brady Pritchett, Maddison Bower, Susanna Sturkie, Wyatt Stanley and Derick Anderson discover their values by playing the bean game with Skittles in Gailyn Sutton's Money Matters class. Each student was given 20 Skittles to represent their incomes and had to make choices regarding housing, transportation, clothing, personal care, phone and internet, spending their Skittles on choices from each category. Photo by Gailyn Sutton

3 Freshman Hannah Pillow practices chest compressions on a CPR doll. Texas law requires students complete CPR training at least once before graduating high school. Photo by Jamie Russell

Saving the World One Outfit at a Time

Op-Ed: Thrifting Answers Fast Fashion Crisis

by Peyton Hancock

Fast fashion - the rapid production and distribution of cheaply-made garments - has become increasingly popular, and giants like Shein, Temu, Zara and H&M have unlocked new levels of revenue by capitalizing on customers' desire to keep up with trends at low cost.

Fast fashion is unethical. Most fast fashion is produced in countries like China, Vietnam, India and Bangladesh, where governments do not regulate clothing manufacturers which allows companies to create unethical work environments. This was obvious when the Rana Plaza Factory in Bangladesh collapsed in 2013. Although engineers had recommended the building be condemned, the factory remained open, and 1,100 people were killed. Wages for workers are another problem. The Lowest Wage Challenge estimates that less than 2% of fashion industry workers - 75 million around the world - make enough money to live on, and workers at these industries often work 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. Since these clothes are easy to produce, many companies exploit children as cheap labor.

The quality of materials is another drawback. Fast fashion companies use synthetic fibers like nylon, polyester, or acrylic and azo dyes, some of which have been banned in many countries because they can cause skin and eye irritation and even cancer. Greenpeace International's 2012 report "Toxic Threads: The Big Fashion Stitch-Up" reported finding nonylphenol ethoxylates (NPEs), substances that can release cancer-causing compounds, in 89 of 141 articles of clothing tested. These chemicals pose dangers to the wearers of the clothing but even more so to the factory workers who have to work with them daily.

Fast fashion has also made an undeniable impact on the environment. The clothes are mass-produced and sold so cheaply that when they go out of style, consumers simply discard them. George Washington University Law School reports that 80 billion pieces of clothing are consumed each year, and 85% of them end up in landfills, where they take years to decompose. Fabrics like nylon take 30-40 years to decompose, while more com-

monly used polyester can take up to 200. Decomposition also releases methane gas, which is the leading factor of global warming - according to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the industry produces about 10% of carbon emissions and is the second-biggest consumer of water - and while the garments sit decomposing, harsh weather breaks the fibers, and wind and water wash them away to pollute other areas like the water sources. A CNN report showed waterways in China and Bangladesh that dye dumping turned black and red. A 2020 CNN interview of Ma Jun, one of China's leading environmentalists, revealed that many rivers and lakes in China were so polluted by dye that they were "effectively dead", making unpolluted water a rarity.

Customers who shop fast fashion generally do so because of the price, but there's a better option: secondhand fashion.

Handing down quality pieces of clothing allows them to be used for years, and purchasing clothing at independent thrift shops and consignment stores like Uptown Cheapskate and Hope's Closet keeps items out of landfills and limits the need for new production.

Thrift shoppers can find a variety of clothing options, including brand-new, tags-still-attached items. Another benefit of secondhand fashion is the likelihood of finding an original piece. Unlike the mass-produced, cookie-cutter fast fashion so many other people wear, thrift shoppers willing to dig can often find higher-quality and longer-lasting garments.

Skilled crafters can even upcycle secondhand fashion by sewing previously-owned but no longer stylish pieces into fashionable works of wearable art.

More people should shop secondhand instead of consuming fast fashion that upholds unethical business practices, could harm its wearers and workers, and negatively impacts the environment.



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Ballard's *Back* OAP Alum Returns to Theater Program

by Peyton Hancock and Jamie Russell



Photo by Peyton Hancock

He unlocks the big double doors and flips the switch, lighting up the stage.

The stage he had to see go through construction but never got to perform on.

The stage he'll direct musicals and One-Act plays on for years to come.

His stage.

Eight years after his team made the district's first trip to state, Hunter Ballard returns as the new theater director and speech and debate coach.

"I'm part of the Union Grove legacy of when we started to see a massive boom of success," Ballard said. "When Sandy [Spears] came in my sophomore year, she showed us how we could be, so we created this winning mindset. We wanted to be the best of the best. I like that as an educator, and I want the kids that want to be successful to be a part of our program."

Ballard has a history of success, competing in state cross-examination debate and qualifying for NSDA nationals in several events, including Duo Acting. He also demonstrated his skills in his roles in the first state-qualifying One-Act Play, Kilgore College and SFA performances as a theater major, and directing the theater and debate



Photo by Jamie Russell

program at Quitman ISD.

"[Quitman] was a great school district to start out in, and it gave me a lot of understanding about who I was as a teacher and what I aspire to be," Ballard said. "But I knew that Union Grove was a goal in my brain. Union Grove is what gave me a start in debate and theater, and I wanted to see that continue for the future generations of Union Grove students."

Ballard had a deep connection to the school, but he needed to build a connection to his students, some of whom he met at UIL invitationals and One-Act Play performances. So he came to campus in the spring to introduce himself and immediately began to develop rapport with his team.

"I was very excited for Mr. Ballard to come," senior Brendon Deary said. "I knew who he was. I mean, I knew of him. When he got here, I realized I'm a lot like him because we both went to state in oral interp. He told me everything he did at state with his critiques, and I've gotten those same critiques, so that made me feel like he can really help me. He also gets what we're saying, more than I thought he would. He kind of got the gist of who we were really quickly, and the closer age range helps us understand him better when he gives us critiques."

During the summer, Ballard also hosted theater days to clean out and organize costumes and build familiarity with the team.

"During the clean-up days, it was a lot of trying to figure out the dynamics, because the students didn't know me and I didn't know them," Ballard said. "They didn't know if I was a carbon copy of Mrs. Spears or a separate person who does things in my own way. After we started essentially throwing a lot of things out that didn't have a home, they realized quickly that I was different."

These introductions built confidence that the team was on the same page.

"I was feeling a lot of excitement before

the first day because I knew the expectation of the students coming in was they're going to perform at a high level," Ballard said. "I was ready to maintain that expectation."

To make sure he provided the instruction students needed, he decided to evaluate the students' knowledge and skills, especially in speech and debate.

"I didn't know the baseline of understanding," Ballard said. "I had to come in and figure out where we needed to get started, because if I just started as if everyone was an advanced debater, and we started with some high-level information, then it would have left behind a lot of newer students and made it to where they could not compete."

Ballard says he will not settle for second place speech team when the district meet rolls around.

"I want to grow and be better than where we were last year," Ballard said. "Growth is the most important thing that a program can have, and we want to grow in results as well as experience. I want us to be the kind of school that we continually see at the state level, and not just because it is a special group."

IS THE

WORTH IT?

Monster Ultra Strawberry Dreams

Pop Rating: 10/10

Taste Rating: 9.3/10

150mg caffeine, 10 calories

Tastes like the original Monster's smooth and refreshing blend of sweet and salty tartness with the addition of a vibrant creamy strawberry flavor.



Alani Breezeberry

Pop Rating: 9.2/10

Taste Rating: 8.1/10

200mg caffeine, 15 calories

Tastes like a blue raspberry slush. The bubbles create a sweet crystal froth and don't die down. Imagine a blend of blueberries, raspberries, and a hint of mint with an energy boost.



Bang Radical Skadattle

Pop Rating: 8.7/10

Taste Rating: 3.4/10

300mg caffeine, 0 calories

Tastes like a purple Skittle and Lifesaver medicine mix that transitions into pungent grape-flavored chalk and leaves the mouth feeling dry enough to want more.



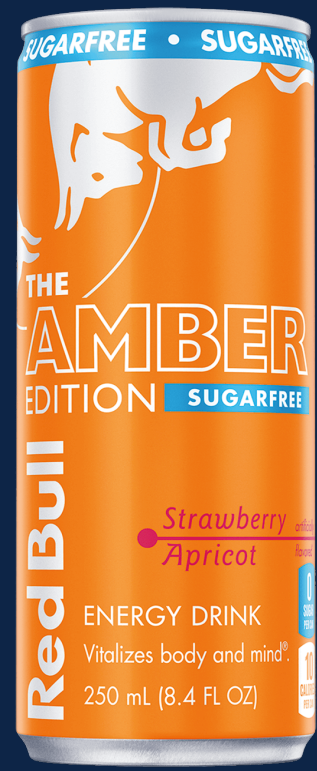
Red Bull Amber Edition Strawberry Apricot (Sugar Free)

Pop Rating: 5/10

Taste Rating: 4.2/10

80mg caffeine, 110 calories

Tastes like we really mixed a strawberry with an apricot, with just a hint of peach. Its smooth, subtle flavor reminds us of strawberry yogurt and doesn't quite hit just right at first but grows on us and goes down without being super fizzy.





Senior Izzy Gregg drinks an Alani before school. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends against any caffeine for children and adolescents, many teens turn to energy drinks for a boost. Photo by Bella Foster

The Buzz on Energy Drinks

by Briana Bowling, Konner Long and Jaxon Ledbetter

Energy drinks full of caffeine and unhealthy sweeteners have become a staple in the lives of many teens and young adults, but consumers risk more than they may understand when they grab a can of Monster, Bang or Alani for a short-term pick-me-up.

High caffeine levels alone can cause headaches, trouble sleeping, high blood pressure, nervousness and dehydration, but, in addition to excess amounts of caffeine, some energy drinks contain other stimulants and artificial ingredients whose long-term effects are not yet fully understood.

Worst case scenario? Chugging an energy drink can trigger a seizure, heart problem, or stroke that causes death.

In 2023, a 21-year-old University of Pennsylvania student with a heart condition died after drinking a heavily caffeinated energy drink at a Panera restaurant.

This year, a seemingly healthy high schooler from Oklahoma died during sparring practice after making a habit of taking pre-workout and drinking energy drinks before hitting the gym.

According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, the

number of energy drink-related emergency room visits doubled from 2007 to 2011, and in 2011, 10% of those visits required hospitalization.

Of course, it's much more likely drinkers will experience milder effects.

Energy drinks are also associated with anxiety, depression, diarrhea, hallucinations, mood swings, nausea, rapid heart rate, stroke, and tooth decay.

The high sugar content of some energy drinks can cause significant weight gain and increase a drinker's risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

However, the drinks can be even more dangerous for those who already have a medical condition.

According to Cleveland Clinic, "the combination of caffeine and added sugars in energy drinks is associated with decreased insulin sensitivity and increased blood sugar, so they may not be a smart choice for those with diabetes".

Energy drinks can also complicate mental illness, as the caffeine may interfere with anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications.

Despite harmful ingredients and all the health risks, teens are still heavy consumers of these products. Nielson IQ, a collector of consumer data, reports that energy drink companies saw more than \$22 billion in sales last year and food and beverage searches for "high caffeine" increased 113%.

Why are people risking their health for a drink?

Energy drink companies use marketing labels, such as zero sugar or "contains

L-Carnitine", which helps turn body fat into energy, to make the unhealthy drinks appealing, but in reality, most healthy bodies make all the carnitine they need. Those that do not, such as patients with angina - a type of heart disease, should not consume energy drinks without a doctor's approval, as the excess caffeine is more likely to make heart problems worse. Supposed health benefits are null, so that can't be the reason.

The combination of high levels of caffeine and sugar gives the brain a hit of dopamine, which basically makes the consumer feel good. This sensation is so addicting that consumers who try to go without can experience withdrawal symptoms such as fatigue and changes to mood and ability. Subsequently, many consumers have become dependent on energy drinks for their daily boost.

Although Americans consume more energy drinks every year, the bottom line is that energy drinks shouldn't be consumed regularly, if at all. Coffee or tea are far healthier options for a caffeine boost, and coconut water and other electrolyte replacement drinks support workouts more effectively.

If teens feel they *must* have these drinks, they should choose brands with comparatively low levels of sugar and caffeine.

WHO'S WHO FALL SPORTS PREVIEW

Key Players, Head Coach Return for Varsity Volleyball Season

by Bailee Hosak, Bella Foster and Connor Stanford

Seniors Taylor Campbell, Sarah Prince, Hannah Coulter and Gracie Lawrence return with Coach Carolee Musick. In last season's All-District selections, Prince won Most Valuable Server, Campbell was named first team, and Coulter was named second team. Setter Karen Chavez (11 - Honorable Mention All-District) will also be a key player this season, and former coach Barry Woodruff, who coached here for 26 years before retiring, returns to assist Musick.

"I'm happy to be back home, especially in the place where I made a lot of memories and helped a bunch of kids obtain success," Woodruff said. "The time was finally right and everything worked out perfectly."

Musick and Woodruff began training their team during summer workouts, then filled the July 15-17 camp and Aug. 5-7 two-a-days with reps to support their mantra that "If you can't do the little things, the big things don't matter."

"It was very tiring, we're trying to fit so much into three days and then we start in four days," Musick said. "We have to pick teams and that's an emotional process, especially having to cut people, but that's part of the job. We as coaches are trying to make the strongest teams we can and hopefully that will include the athletes that are putting in the extra work."

The season started with losses against Gary, Arp and Garrison.

"We hit a little spot where we made a few errors and then we didn't really bounce back from that," Musick said. "But that's the lesson to learn. That's all part of the process. The girls are trying to learn their jobs and their roles."

The team finally began to mesh in the West Rusk tournament, where they took third place in the silver bracket.

"We all have the potential to be a great team if we focus on improving our communication, building confidence, and keeping our energy high," Coulter said. "We will excel this season if we keep our heads high even when we lose."

Newcomers Olivia (11) and Emma Dabreu (9) should add depth and competitive experience.

"I really look forward to the opportunity to play with and learn from the older and more experienced girls and play against a higher level of competition," Emma said.

District play begins Sept. 27.



Above: Junior Karen Chavez sets senior Hannah Coulter in the varsity girls' Aug. 20 game against Gary. Chavez totalled two aces, 13 assists and six digs, and Coulter scored two kills, two assists and a dig for the Lady Lions. Photo by Jaxon Ledbetter

Right: Senior Taylor Campbell serves an ace against Gary. Campbell tallied eight aces, eight kills and five digs. Senior Sarah Prince threw in one ace, six kills and three digs, junior Mallorie Cannon added one ace and four kills, and senior libero Gracie Lawrence grabbed 17 digs. Photo by Jaxon Ledbetter





Junior Luis Fernandez kicks a field goal in the scrimmage against Overton. Fernandez made 25 extra points and five field goals last season, scoring 40 total points, and was named to second team All-District.
Photo by Briana Bowling

Lions Kick Off Season with Scrimmages

by Hannah Caperton

All but four of last year's varsity football lineup returns this season - the three 2024 seniors who graduated and injured senior Jacob Griffin - and with so many key returners, including senior quarterback Jace Roberts who totalled 823 passing yards and 800 rushing yards last year and won a first team All-District award last season, senior Judson George (second team All-District) and junior Wrigley Roberts as receivers, and junior Carter Cooper and seniors Morgan Mayhan (second team All-District) and Kayden Day on defense, as well as new direction from athletic director

Kyle Adams, the team expects to see more success than last year.

The boys started their season with scrimmages against Overton on August 16 and All Saints the following week.

"I feel really good about this upcoming season," Adams said. "We've progressed a lot quicker than I anticipated, and we've installed a lot of the plays offensively in our playbook, which I think is a good testament to the kids and their work ethic."

The Lions won the scrimmage against All Saints 20-0 but won't let it go to their heads.

They plan to use what they've learned to keep improving in preparation for district play.

"Part of our job as coaches is to go back and watch the film, analyze some of those deficiencies and address them within the next week for practice," Adams said. "You have to own your skills and, if you wanna be good at something, then you have to practice."

They test those skills in their first regular season game at Como Pickton August 30.

by Hannah Caperton

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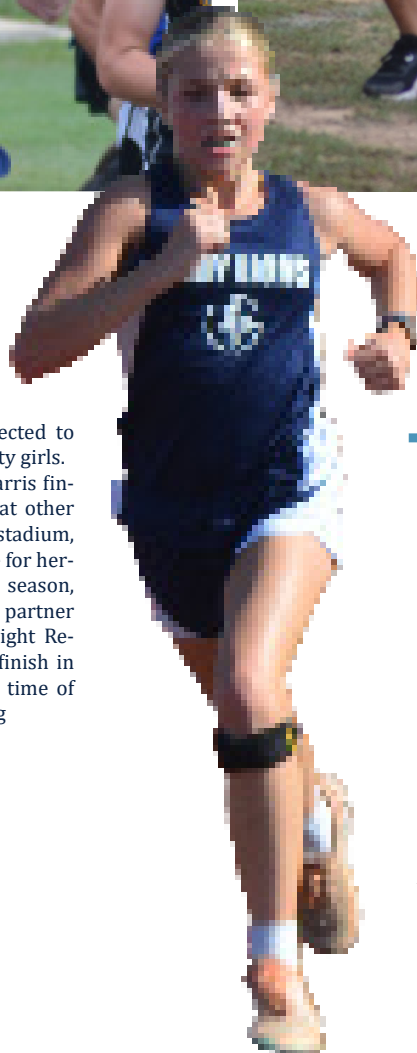
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Sophomores Danica Vestal and Rachel Potter return to the varsity girls' team with senior Keira Taylor and sophomore Averi Cook. Last year, the girls advanced to state for the fourth consecutive year.

Sophomore David Shaver qualified to run in the regional meet last year after placing seventh at district. He is the only returning male athlete to do so.

Photos by Briana Bowling



Freshman Landry Harris is expected to be a top-finisher among the varsity girls. Last year, as an eighth-grader, Harris finished races so far in advance that other runners hadn't even entered the stadium, and she has already made a name for herself in the first few races of this season, with a first place finish - with partner Danica Vestal (10) - in the Twilight Relay Aug. 17 and a second place finish in the Gilmer meet Aug. 24 with a time of 13:22.3. Photo by Briana Bowling

Run for the Hills

Cross Country Teams Top First Meet

by Charlotte Wright

The cross country teams ran their first meet on Aug. 17 at home - a different race than usual, a Twilight Relay.

Unlike the normal two-mile course, pairs alternated running a collective four miles, the meet began at 8:00 p.m., and competitors dressed in neon and glow-in-the-dark apparel and accessories.

"The Twilight Relay was a great way to kick off the season," freshman Landry Harris said. "We had lots of fun dressing up and starting what hopefully, will be a new tradition."

Harris and Danica Vestal (10) won the girls' varsity race, followed by Jill Taylor (10) and Rachel Potter (10) in fifth place; Averi Cook (10) and Olivia Dabreu (11) and Kenneth Flanagan (11) and Waylon Clift (9) placed second in the JV divisions; and Susanna Sturkie (8) and River Martindale (7) and Brady Pritchett (8) and Kynan Birlaw (8) won the junior high divisions.

"I was excited to see our kids compete for the first time," coach JB Littlejohn said. "Especially in a new format like The Twilight Relay."

Upcoming Events

Sept. 2

School Holiday

Sept. 3

Dress Up Day: Color Wars

HS Volleyball v. Waskom - 4:30 p.m.

Sept. 4

Dress Up Day: Rhyme without Reason

Sept. 5

Dress Up Day: Hawaiian Day

JH Volleyball @Waskom - 4:30

JH/JV Football @Cushing - 5 p.m.

Sept. 6

Dress Up Day: Blue Out

V Volleyball v. West Rusk - 4:30 p.m.

Homecoming Ceremony - 6:30 p.m.

V Football v. Cumby - 7 p.m.

Sept. 7

JH Volleyball @Hawkins Tourney

UIL Academics @TJC

Sept. 9

PK-2 Grandparents Lunch

JH Volleyball @Hawkins - 4:30 p.m.

Sept. 10

3-6 Grandparents Lunch

HS Volleyball v. Cumberland - 4:30 p.m.

Sept. 12

JH/JV Football v. Cushing - 5 p.m.

Sept. 13

Dress Up Day: Adam Sandler

Senior Portraits

V Volleyball @Union Hill - 4:30 p.m.

V Football @Cushing - 7 p.m.

Sept. 14

Fishing Team @Lake Palestine

Cross Country @Quitman

Sept. 16

JH Volleyball v. Harleton - 4:30 p.m.

FFA Alumni Meeting - 6 p.m.

Sept. 17

HS Volleyball v. Rusk - 4:30 p.m.

Sept. 19

JH/JV Football @Waskom - 5 p.m.

Sept. 20

Dress Up Day: Gold Out/Fight like a Kid

HS Cross Country @Pine Tree

V Volleyball @Overton - 4:30 p.m.

V Football v. Waskom - 7 p.m.

Sept. 21

JH Cross Country @Pine Tree

Sept. 23

JH Volleyball @Big Sandy

Sept. 24

HS Volleyball @Elysian Fields - 4:30 p.m.

Sept. 25

Upshur Co. Career/College Day

Sept. 26

JH/JV Football v. Hawkins - 5 p.m.

Sept. 27

Student Holiday/Teacher Workday

V Volleyball @Hawkins - 4:30 p.m.

V Football @Hawkins - 7 p.m.

Sept. 28

JH/HS Cross Country @UG

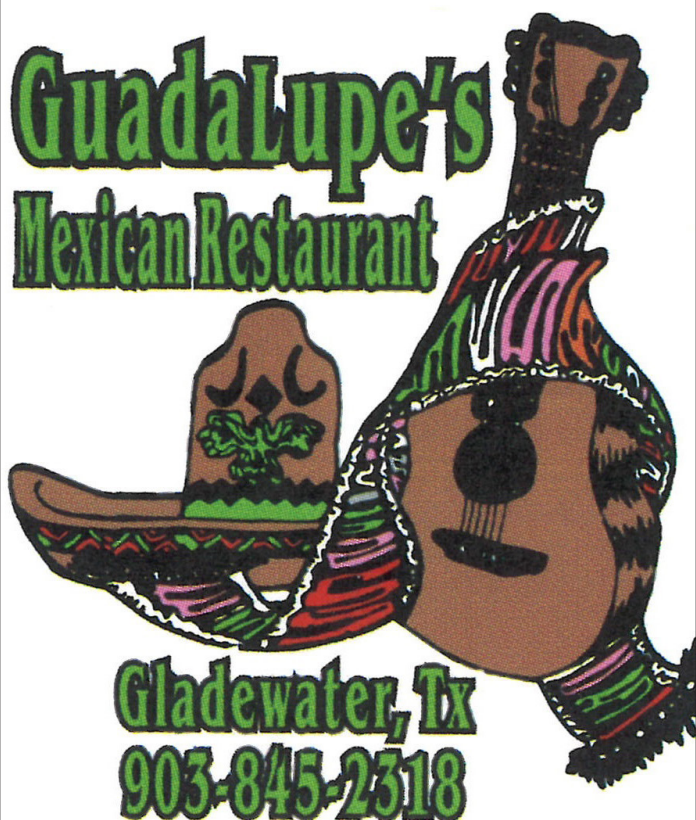
Sept. 30

Elementary Book Fair Begins

JH Volleyball v. Linden Kildare - 4:30 p.m.



Junior Olivia Dabreu, sophomore Averi Cook and freshman Bella Foster participate in a scavenger hunt as part of FFA's back to school kick off meeting on Aug. 19. Photo by Landry Harris



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