

# *The* GROVE GAZETTE

Vol. VI, Issue 5

Union Grove ISD News

Jan. 2024



Elementary, JH UIL Teams  
*Dominante*  
Academic Meets

Band Members Earn  
All-Region Seats

# On the *Cover*

TJ Fowler (12) and Thomas Navarro-Gonzalez (11) play in the band's winter concert on Dec. 5. On Dec. 14, Fowler won third chair wind ensemble and Navarro-Gonzalez 10th chair symphonic band through All-Region auditions at Winnsboro High School. Fowler, August Vestal (11) and Casey Bogue (10) will advance to area auditions Jan. 11. Complete all-region results are listed on page 15. Photo by Briana Bowling

## The GROVE GAZETTE

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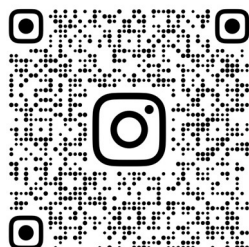
Editor-in-Chief: Jamie Russell  
Sponsor: Kimber Smith

### Staff

Briana Bowling  
Hannah Caperton  
Olivia Dabreu  
Bella Foster  
Hannah Haggard  
Alley Hale  
Bailee Hosak  
Jaxon Ledbetter  
Alexis Lee  
Konner Long  
Natalie Pritchett  
Taleah Samuels  
Connor Stanford  
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Lilly Lane  
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## LETTERS FROM THE PRINCIPALS

What a busy December!

The elementary won district at UIL! I am very proud of our students and UIL coaches.

The PTO ran a stellar Santa Shop!

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped with this. We appreciate you!

Thank you to all our PTO and all the parents who helped with Christmas parties. We couldn't do it without you!

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas break, with some time to rest and relax. I am looking forward to the second semester. These events are coming up in January:

- 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-grade UIL Reward trip to REO Skating Rink Jan. 15
- 5th and 6th grade UIL Reward Trip to REO Skating Rink Jan. 16
- Awards Assemblies Jan. 17
- MLK holiday Jan. 20 - No school
- Holocaust Remembrance Week Jan. 27-31
- 100th Day of School Jan. 29
- Charlie's Snoballs Jan. 31

Our campus note will continue to go home each Tuesday. That will give you more specific information about these events as well as other items of interest.

As always, you can contact me at 903-845-3481 or ballards@ugisd.org if you have any questions.

Sherrill Ballard  
Union Grove Elementary Principal

Welcome Back! It feels so weird writing 2025! We hope everyone had a restful break and had time to spend with family and friends. It is great to come back to all our students as move into our third nine-weeks of learning. The spring semester is always super busy and full of sports, theatre, FFA/AG and many more activities.

- Basketball is still going strong. Both boys and girls varsity teams have taken several wins so far. We look forward to their continued success!
- Band has all-state auditions coming up in the area competition.
- Powerlifting is up and running. We will look for BIG things to announce from them.
- Culinary winners of Shark Tank and Cupcake Wars will be celebrating with a field trip later this month.
- Monday, January 20 is a school holiday

Make sure your parents follow our Facebook and receive text messages for updates and information from Mrs. Moore.

Happy New Year!  
Amanda Childress  
JH/HS Assistant Principal  
childressa@ugisd.org / 903-845-5506

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# Embracing Change

## How to Make Resolutions Reality

by Briana Bowling and Konner Long

Resolutions date back to ancient Babylonians who made promises to the gods during the spring equinox and Romans who vowed to improve their moral character and seek forgiveness from those they'd wronged.

In modern times, the new year symbolizes a fresh start and a chance for renewed effort to learn, grow and change for the better. In 2024, Pew Research Center found that nearly 49% of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 took this opportunity to make at least one New Year resolution. Some of the most common included goals related to health (79% of reporters), personal growth (55%), finances (61%), improving relationships (57%), or furthering a career (49%).

Health and fitness resolutions are clearly among the most popular, as many people use the new year as an reason to adopt healthier lifestyles. This can include goals such as losing weight, exercising more regularly, eating a more balanced diet, or stopping bad habits like smoking, vaping or drinking alcohol. The motivation behind these resolutions is often to improve overall well-being and prevent health issues or to improve perceived physical appearance.

Personal growth resolutions focus on self-improvement in various areas of life. This can include learning new skills, pursuing hobbies, or furthering education. For example, someone might resolve to read more books, take up a new language, or enroll in an online course. These resolutions are driven by a desire to expand knowledge and abilities, leading to a more fulfilling and enriched life.

Financial resolutions aim to improve one's financial health and include saving more money, reducing debt, or creating a budget. These resolutions are often motivated by the desire for financial stability and security.

Lastly, relationship resolutions focus on enhancing connections with family, friends, or significant others. This can involve spending more quality time together, improving communication, or resolving conflicts.

Each of these resolutions can provide motivation, focus, and - when shared -

accountability. However, most people who set resolutions have given up by the second Friday in January, known as Quitter's Day. According to Baylor College of Medicine, 88% of resolution-setters fail before the end of January, and Dr. Michelle Rozen found that 94% of resolution-setters have given up by June. So what can a person do to improve their chances of success?

### Write the Right Goals

The adage "where there's a will, there's a way" is generally true, but many people fail due to unrealistic expectations or lack of planning. To improve chances of success, set specific, measurable goals that are within your means and you are willing to put in the work to accomplish.

### Plan Ahead

Change can be difficult, and making big changes is even harder without a clear plan in place. Some people may need to set aside dedicated time for activities, figure out how they will track spending, or seek advice or external help, such as counseling or mediation. It's important to brainstorm possible ways to get off-track and how to prevent them from occurring or how to respond when it happens.

### Share

A lot of people need someone to push them, especially when they're having trouble putting in the work. Having a partner or support group increases accountability and the motivation to get back on track and follow through with a goal, plus it gives the resolution-setter someone to celebrate with when they've achieved their goal.

New Year's resolutions give many the chance to set goals and strive for positive changes in their lives. Whether focusing on health, personal growth, finances, or relationships, the key to success lies in setting realistic, attainable goals, creating actionable plans, and increasing accountability by sharing goals with a partner or group of supportive friends or family. With dedication and perseverance, resolutions can lead to significant and lasting improvements.

## Grove Gazette Staff Goals for 2025

to stop procrastinating and get stuff done when I'm asked  
- Alley Hale (9)

to stay ahead on school work and not stress myself out  
- Bella Foster (9)

to become closer to God and read my bible more often  
- Charlotte Wright (9)

to have a more positive outlook  
- Natalie Pritchett (11)

to write 36 thank you cards, so I can show more gratitude  
- Jamie Russell (12)

to read more and widen my vocabulary  
- Susanna Sturkie (8)

to have a more positive attitude and outlook toward the future  
- Hannah Haggard (9)

to get into tumbling again and get my tuck back and learn my full  
- Kyleigh Blackstock (8)

to grow my ability to sight read and play the piano by ear  
- Kale Reeves (8)

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# Gold Medal

## Elementary, JH UIL

# Minds

## Dominates Academic District

by Natalie Pritchett

On Wednesday, Dec. 11, the junior high academic UIL competitors traveled to Ore City, where they earned a total of 1442.83 points and won the district championship over Ore City in second with 619 points. Sixth grade competitors totaled 581 points, seventh grade 399.3 points, and eighth grade 462.5 points. Elementary teams competed Dec. 13 at Big Sandy, where they also won their district championship with 599.83 points.

### First Place Teams

**5th Art Smart:** A.J. Dole (2nd), Rylann Venn (4th), Abigail Lakey (5th), Eliza Oxford (6th), Daniella Navarro

**6th Calculator Applications:** Skye Perez (1st), Nate Wilson (2nd), Xavier Tennison (3rd)

**7th Calculator Applications:** Brooklyn Scott (1st), Maycee Lewis (3rd), Hannah Hill (5th)

**8th Calculator Applications:** Kale Reeves (1st), Brady Pritchett (2nd), Wyatt Stanley (4th)

**2nd Chess:** Ridge Martindale (3rd), Elijah Croizer, Andee Pace

**6th Dictionary Skills:** Noah Dippold (1st), Kloe Payne (3rd), Brody Gumm (5th)

**5th Listening Skills:** Caitlin Daugherty (1st), Lilyanna Salazar (6th), Allison Hradecky

**7th Listening Skills:** River Martindale (1st), Breanna Badgett (2nd), Brooklyn Scott

**7th Maps, Graphs & Charts:** Cooper Littlejohn (3rd), Kenadie Holder (4th), Emmett Wright

**8th Listening Skills:** Brady Pritchett (1st), Kynan Birlew (2nd), Kyleigh Blackstock (6th)

**6th Maps, Graphs, and Charts:** Ian Adams (1st), Skye Perez (4th), Steffan Wallace

**6th Math:** Colsen Manley (1st), Embrie Long (2nd), Brooklyn Scott (3rd)

**8th Math:** Kale Reeves (1st), Brady Pritchett (3rd), Jillian Russell (4th)

**3rd Music Memory:** 1st Place Fynlee Bill (1st), Kennedy Gravely (2nd), River Noble (5th), Blakely Poole, and Brynlee Whitmire

**4th Music Memory:** Maddox Moore (1st), Allie Halcumb (2nd), Julie Navarro (3rd), Aerilyn Reeves (4th), Leslie Ramos (6th)

**5th Music Memory:** Sophia Norris (1st), Jim Hogue (2nd), Rylann Venn (3rd), Lilyanna Salazar

**6th Music Memory:** Hunter Hogue (1st), Ethan Archer (2nd), Cameryn Morrow (3rd), Lucie Pirtle (5th)

(6th), Ruston Roberts, Kenadie Holder

**8th Number Sense:** Kale Reeves (1st), Sussanna Sturkie (4th), Wyatt Stanley (6th)

**6th Science:** Kaydence Deller (1st), Gabriel Lormond (2nd), Harley Herrin (3rd)

**6th Social Studies:** Brody Madding (2nd), Skye Perez (3rd), Rayson Smith (5th)

**7th Social Studies:** Isaiah Yakityol (1st), Colt Moore (3rd), Trenton Dwyer

**3rd Spelling:** Lennon Denniston (1st), Ryder Mullins (2nd), Brynlee Whitmire (3rd)

**8th Spelling:** Ezekial Parham (1st), Izabel Parham (2nd), Cheston Martin

**6th Spelling:** Jake Steele (1st), Ryleigh Phillips (2nd), Reagan Walts (3rd)

### Second Place Teams

**7th Art Smart:** Kenadie Holder (2nd), Aubree Cooper (3rd), Kinley Smith (4th), Breanna Badgett, Garrett Travis

**8th Art Smart:** Natalie Delaney (4th), Blaiklee George (6th), Ian Adams

**4th Chess:** Ryder Adkinson (2nd), Julie Navarro (5th), Reese McGilvary

**5th Chess:** Jim Hogue (3rd), Emmett Orr (4th), Braxton Rich

**6th Chess:** Landon Caperton (2nd), Xavier Tennison (3rd), Scarlet Webb

**7th Chess:** Cortland Nykamp (3rd), Kayson Forster (5th), Jackson Coulter

**8th Chess:** Kale Reeves (2nd), Wyatt Stanley (5th), Ezekiel Parham

**5th Dictionary Skills:** Skye Love (1st), Alexis Gipson, Allison Hradecky

**8th Dictionary Skills:** Brady Pritchett (1st), Maddie Bower (3rd), Kyleigh Blackstock

**6th Listening Skills:** Olivia Barbee (6th), Embrie Long, and Gabriel Lormond

**5th Maps, Graphs, & Charts:** Lucas Puentes (3rd), Aristyn Johns (5th), Ember Burnett (6th)

**2nd Music Memory:** Audrey Crutsinger (2nd), Molly Willis (6th), Ridge Martindale

**4th Number Sense:** Leah Guthrie (1st), Leslie Ramos (4th), Ryder Adkinson

**6th Number Sense:** Xavier Tennison (3rd), Jake Steele (4th), Landon Caperton

**7th Science:** Colt Moore (6th), Coletton



Fifth grade Listening Skills team members Allison Hradecky, Lilyanna Salazar Thornton and Caitlin Daugherty prepare to enter their contest room. Photo by Mandy Cox

**7th Music Memory:** River Martindale (1st), Grayson Selph (2nd), Gunner Davis (3rd), Brooklyn Scott (4th), George Kennedy (6th)

**8th Music Memory:** Neveah Bean (1st), Lori Lormond (2nd), Natalie Delaney (3rd), Gracelyn Jones (6th)

**5th Number Sense:** Avery Johnston (2nd), Charle Spruell (6th), Jaxon Glaze

**7th Number Sense:** Alex Moncada Sanchez

Burnett, Trenton Dwyer

**4th Spelling:** Leah Guthrie (2nd), Ryker Canaguier (6th), Noah McGougal

**5th Spelling:** Skye Love (5th), Ember Burnett (6th), Lucas Puentes

### Third Place Teams

**4th Art:** Allie Halcumb (2nd), Jake Kessler, Ariel Owens, Maren Thomas, and Everly Wadle

**3rd Chess:** Finley Edwards, Liam Morvan, and Brayson Rich

**8th Science:** Kale Reeves (2nd), Wyatt Stanley, Haven Stevens

**7th Spelling:** Coleton Burnett, River Martindale, Kinley Smith

### Individual Awards

**2nd Creative Writing:** Emery Gillette (1st)

**6th Editorial Writing:** Jake Steele (3rd), Brooklyn Scott (5th)

**7th Editorial Writing:** Nicholas Spears (1st), Isabella O'Neal (2nd), Gracie Mullins (4th)

**8th Editorial Writing:** Susanna Sturkie (1st)

**6th Impromptu Speaking:** Trenton Easley (3rd)

**7th Impromptu Speaking:** Kearney Mullins (2nd), Coleton Burnett (3rd), Hailey Lee (5th)

**8th Impromptu Speaking:** Jillian Russell (1st), Haven Stevens (2nd), Susanna Sturkie (3rd)

**8th Maps, Graphs & Charts:** Maddie Bower (4th)

**7th Math:** Gracie Mullins (3rd)

**6th Modern Oratory:** 2nd Place Olivia Diaz (2nd), Jake Steele (3rd)

**7th Modern Oratory:** Kenadie Holder (1st), Maycee Lewis (3rd), Phaedra Cole (4th)

**8th Modern Oratory:** Jillian Russell (1st), Haven Stevens (2nd), Lilly Lane (3rd)

**4th Oral Reading:** Jacob Noah McDougal (3rd), Reece McGilvary (4th), Gunner Allen (6th)

**5th Oral Reading:** Ember Burnett (2nd), Avery Johnston (4th), Zander Warren (6th)

**6th Oral Reading:** Boyd Potter (1st), Amber Lee (4th)

**7th Oral Reading:** Cooper Littlejohn (1st), River Martindale (4th), Maycee Lewis (5th)

**8th Oral Reading:** Susanna Sturkie (1st), Jillian Russell (2nd), Adalynn Orms (3rd)

**4th Reading Writing:** Leah Guthrie (2nd), Madison Ryan (5th)

**5th Ready Writing:** Sophia Norris (3rd)

**6th Ready Writing:** Jake Steele (2nd), Brooklyn Scott (4th)

**7th Ready Writing:** Adalyn Hampton (5th), Kinley Smith (6th)

**8th Ready Writing:** Jillian Russell (1st)

**8th Social Studies:** Addison Ellis (6th)

**2nd Storytelling:** Lucy Johnston (4th), Blakely Forester (5th)

**3rd Storytelling:** Laurel Thomas (3rd), Liam Morvan (5th)



Sophomore Grayson Nemeth uses his phone to explore different wavelengths of light during Rhonda Baker's honors chemistry class on Dec. 13. Using special glasses, the students could see the ROYGBIV spectrum; however, with each of six elements, one or two colors were prominent. Hydrogen produced a pink light, and CO2 produced a white light. After viewing six elements, Baker allowed students to leave the classroom to look at different lights in the hallway, including the Christmas trees decorated by each grade level. Students found that phone flashlights produced many lines of the ROYGBIV spectrum, with no single color overpowering the others.

Photos by Bailee Hosak



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**LET'S GO LIONS**

# Basketball Begins District Play



by Olivia Dabreu and Jax Ledbetter

## Lady Lions

The varsity Lady Lions won their first district game against McLeod 33-18 on Dec. 10. Junior Nico Carloni led scoring with 10 points, and senior Keira Taylor was close behind with seven. The JV team also won 28-20. They then suffered losses to Hawkins (49-23) and Harleton (33-32).

The JV girls played four district games in December and won three, losing only to Hawkins. In their most recent game against Big Sandy, the team defeated the Lady Wildcats 32-6.

"Basketball has always been a big part of my life," senior Jamie Webb said. "Moving to Union Grove gave me an amazing opportunity to play the sport I love with the girls on this team. I love to play offense over defense because it gives me the chance to improve my shots and work as a team to reach the same goal."

The Lady Lions also competed in a three-day tournament at All Saints in Tyler on Dec. 5-7. The first game, against Legacy Christian Academy, was a big win for the Lady Lions with a final score of 54-24, but the girls suffered two losses on Friday - 33-24 to Cooper - and Saturday - 37-30 to Bullard. Senior Taylor Campbell received an All Tournament award.

## Lions

The varsity boys also competed in a three-day tournament at Pine Tree, beating the home team 62-40 on Dec. 5. The next day, the Lions played two games, both ending in losses, the first 42-41 against Mount Pleasant and the second 65-32 against an international team from Australia.

On Dec. 7, they pulled out a 52-45 win against Marshall, which put them in the semifinal game of their bracket. In the game for third place, the Lions lost 54-50 against Pine Tree.

The varsity team started district play with a 54-42 loss against Hawkins but quickly recovered with a tremendous 70-45 win against Harleton, making them 1-1 in district.



JV and varsity basketball girls carolled their way through the community singing "Jingle Bells", "Silent Night", "Deck the Halls", "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" and "Let it Snow". "I enjoyed carolling together as a team," freshman Emma Dabreu said. "It was really fun, and we made countless memories. It was great getting to show off our vocal talents." After carolling, the girls went to McAlister's for dinner.

Photo by J.B. Littlejohn

# Pre-Season Stat Leaders

by Hannah Haggard

## SR Jace Roberts

Points - 117  
Rebounds - 80  
Assists - 7  
Steals - 17  
Blocks - 5

#15



#12

## SO Hudson Wightman

Points - 89  
Rebounds - 22  
Assists - 7  
Steals - 20

#21

## SR Cason Cowan

Points - 37  
Rebounds - 32  
Assists - 10  
Steals - 14  
Blocks - 7

#3

## SR Jesse Fulmer

Points - 73  
Rebounds - 11  
Assists - 5  
Steals - 7

#5

## JR Wrigley Roberts

Points - 30  
Rebounds - 19  
Assists - 19  
Steals - 8  
Blocks - 1



Left: Hudson Wightman (10), Wrigley Roberts (11) and Jesse Fulmer (12) play against Pine Tree, when the Lions won 64-49. Jace Roberts (12) and Cason Cowan (12) led the team through a close 58-56 loss against Marshall. Photos by Jaxon Ledbetter

Above: Sophomore Eliana Villamendez looks for an open teammate during the JV's Nov. 23 game against McLeod. Photo by Alley Hale

Rachel Potter (10) hands the ball off to Keira Taylor (12) during the varsity girls' game against McLeod on Nov. 23. Photo by Hannah Haggard

Opposite: Senior Jamie Webb drives downcourt to score against McLeod. Photo by Hannah Haggard

Senior Sarah Prince fights against Carlisle for a jump ball during the home tournament. "I felt that we performed well in the tournament and developed together as a team," Prince said. Photo by Jaxon Ledbetter



# ROARING Success

## Annual Athletic Banquet Celebrates Fall Achievements for Lions, Lady Lions

by Hannah Caperton and Charlotte Wright

Coaches recognized all fall-sport athletes at the annual banquet in the Lion Center on Dec. 12.

"I appreciated how Coach Adams introduced each individual athlete," junior Carter Cooper said. "I really enjoyed celebrating my teammates' achievements from this season."

Cooper, who Longview News-Journal announced as Player of the Week on Sept. 17 after he tallied more than two dozen tackles in the Lions' 20-16 win over Cushing and was third in the state in total tackles, won the Defensive MVP award. Senior quarterback Jace Roberts won the football team's MVP award, and Hudson Wightman won Offensive MVP. Senior Morgan Mayhan took home Defensive Lineman of the Year, and senior Gaige Polen won Offensive Lineman of the Year. Coaches recognized sophomore Kody Nutt with the Hold the Rope award, gave seniors Judson George and Kayden Day Protect the Pride awards, and presented senior Jacob Hart a Lion Heart award.

"It's an honor to receive an award like Hold the Rope," Nutt said. "I'm thankful for the bonds that I have formed with teammates from this past season and what God has done in my life this past year. I hope that God will continue to work in and through our school and athletics."

Sophomore David Shaver earned the boys cross-country team's Most Valuable Runner award by advancing to the regional meet, freshman Liam Mayhan was named Newcomer of the Year, and freshman Waylon Clift was recognized as Most Improved.

"From practicing as early as 6:15 in the

morning and as late as 6:15 in the afternoon, every athlete deserves recognition for the dedication they give to their sport," sophomore David Shaver said. "The opportunity to be able to do the thing you enjoy most is enough of an award but to be recognized for it is awesome."

Freshman Landry Harris won the girls cross-country team's Most Valuable Runner award after winning a spot on the 2A All-State Cross-Country Team. Sophomore Danica Vestal was named Most Improved, and sophomore Jill Taylor won Newcomer of the Year.

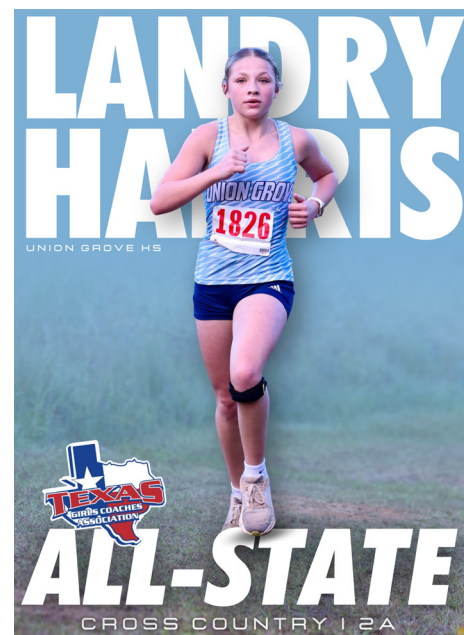
"I was surprised when I received the Newcomer of the Year award," sophomore Jill Taylor said. "But I'm very thankful that I was recognized for my hard work this season."

Varsity volleyball coaches awarded seniors Taylor Campbell MVP, Sarah Prince a leadership certificate, and Hannah Coulter an attitude and effort certificate.

"I'm honored to have received 1st Team All-District, THSCA 2024 Academic All State Honorable Mention, and the Attitude and Effort Award," senior Hannah Coulter said. "I'm thankful for the recognition of both my hard work and dedication on and off the court."

Juniors Makynlie Young and Natalie Woodard; sophomores Miley Nono, Lilly Hutton, Averi Cook, and Kaci Pirtle; and freshmen Charlotte Wright, Landry Harris, and Mia Mullican were recognized for cheerleading.

"I'm very grateful to have been recognized at the banquet as a member of the varsity cheer team," sophomore Averi Cook said. "Though this season has been chaotic, it has been a really great year."



Above: Freshman Landry Harris won the girls cross-country MVP award after advancing to state and earning a spot on the all-state roster. Graphic by Kris Kelley

Left: Senior Taylor Campbell accepts the volleyball MVP award from Coach Barry Woodruff. Photo by Hannah Caperton

Coach Garrett Gibson present junior Carter Cooper's Offensive MVP award at the fall athletic banquet Dec. 12. Photo by Hannah Caperton



Below: Senior Jamie Webb fields a grounder during the Lady Lions 2024 season. Photo by Bailee Hosak



## Springs Sports Preview

Springs sports won't start district play until March, but teams have already begun preparing for their seasons.

### Baseball

Baseball season begins Feb. 18 with a home game against Tyler Heat, and many of last year's key varsity players return this spring. Seniors Judson George and Jacob Griffin shared last year's MVP award after George was named 1st team All-District utility player and Griffin 2nd team catcher, and juniors Carter Cooper and Wrigley Roberts won 2nd team pitcher and infield awards. However, the Lions face a stacked district schedule against 2024 regional quarterfinalist Beckville (17-1) with eight returning starters and regional semifinalist Harleton (17-1) with seven.

### Golf

The golf team will play their first tournament at the Alpine course in Longview on Feb. 24. Senior Kayden Day barely missed a trip to state last year as a junior, and both the boys and girls teams, which included Carter Cooper (11) and Kaki Pharr (11), Natalie Pritchett (11) and Averi Cook (10), played in the regional tournament.

### Powerlifting

Powerlifting practice began in December in preparation for the boys first meet at Harmony on Jan. 13, followed by the girls meet at the same location on Jan. 23.

Three-time regional qualifier Savanna Clark returns with sophomore Mayci Boland, who qualified last year as a freshman, and several members of the boys team, including Tommy Branscom (12), Carter Cooper (11) and Ryan Hickerson (11).

### Softball

The Lady Lions begin practice mid-January with at least five returning seniors and will scrimmage at Pittsburg on Jan. 28 before their first home game against New Summerfield on Jan. 31.

### Track

The track team will start their season with White Oak Relays on Feb. 27 with most of last year's regional qualifiers returning, including seniors Rylee Aiken, Sarah Prince, Keira Taylor, Savanna Clark, Judson George, Jace Roberts, Jesse Fulmer, Cason Cowan and Jacob Griffin.

"I'm looking forward to a successful season with the leadership of the returners and the freshmen coming in," coach Kourtney Loewe said. "I'm excited to see the girls compete!"

Senior Andrew Jacobus pitches against New Summerfield during the 2024 season. Photo by Connor Stanford





# Season for Giving

## JH Dance Helps Community Celebrate Christmas

by Jamie Russell

The festive lights shone bright, party music played loud, and the sweet smell of cocoa filled the air as the spirit of giving lit up the cafeteria with every student's arrival.

To fill the community's need for Christmas gifts, the Student Council hosted their annual toy-drive dance, Morp on Dec. 14. Unlike the last few years, when Morp was a high school event, this year's dance was for the junior high students.

"The whole dance went perfectly and had way more kids than in the past," junior and Student Council officer Makynlie Young said. "Preparing for it was tiring, but it was all worth it for some little boy or girl to have something sitting underneath their tree on Christmas morning."

Students brought \$5 or a new toy to enter the Winter Wonderland dance.

"The whole ticket set up was a very good idea and very thoughtful," eighth-grader Izzy Parham said. "I did not mind paying because I knew where the money was going, and I want kids to

receive stuff at Christmas who may not be able to afford it. I really enjoyed all of the things going on."

Door prizes, snacks, and a hot cocoa bar kept all students happy as they danced the night away in their Christmas pajamas. High school STUCO members also led rounds of "Head, Shoulders, Knees, Cup" and a dance competition.

"I loved dancing with my friends in the competition," seventh-grader River Martindale said. "We had a lot of fun and made it pretty far. I think everything was more fun because we knew we were at Morp to dancing for a purpose."

The dance collected around 30 gifts and \$260 to combine with the gifts National Honor Society members bought with the Change Challenge proceeds. NHS members wrapped the gifts, and nurse Jodie Mayhan delivered them to homes of students.

"I was ecstatic since we made so much in one night," the student council Vice President Brendon Deary said. "It all went really well. We had a really good turn out, and they had a blast."



The Change Challenge raised approximately \$7,550. Elementary raised about \$3200, the secondary campus raised about \$2800, and \$1550 was donated. NHS members spent the morning of Dec. 13 using that money to shop for the perfect gifts for 43 local children and the afternoon wrapping those gifts. Photo by Natalie Pritchett

Top: Ethan, Liam and Jaykob Rivera Jimenez have their photo taken with Santa during the Pictures with Santa fundraiser on Dec. 13. Maintenance Director Randy Davis and Transportation Director Jerry Croley pose as Santa and his elf in each year's photo shoot.

Photo by Jamie Russell

# Another Way to Give Back

## Save Lives Donating Blood

by Natalie Pritchett

A quick blood donation gives the donor a mini-physical - the phlebotomist checks donors' blood pressure, temperature and hemoglobin, and a lab checks cholesterol levels.

Donor sites often offer snacks and t-shirts.

Frequent donors can even earn gift card rewards.

But more important than what the donor receives, each donor gives multiple patients a greater chance at life.

The American Red Cross reports that someone in the U.S. needs blood or platelets every two seconds and, each day, around 29,000 units of blood are needed to save American lives, but with only about 3% of people in the U.S. donating blood, there is just not nearly enough for everyone who needs it.

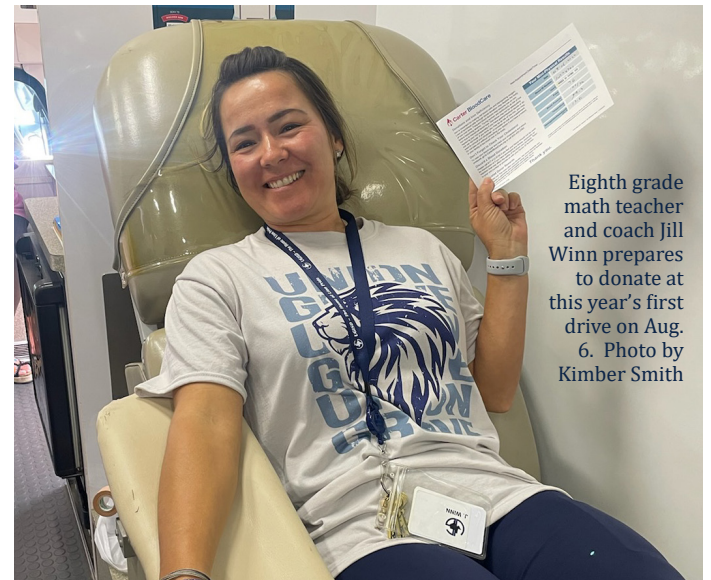
According to the American Cancer Society, 1 in 3 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer in a lifetime. Professionals expect more than 1.8 million new cases of cancer this year in the U.S., and the majority of these patients will experience a dire need for blood as a major component of chemotherapy.

Sickle cell disease affects 90,000 to 100,000 adults and around 1,000 babies each year. This disease can cause the body's red blood cell count to drop to life-threatening levels, but blood transfusions reduce the amount of hemoglobin S in the body and help treat or prevent complications, including reducing the risk of stroke.

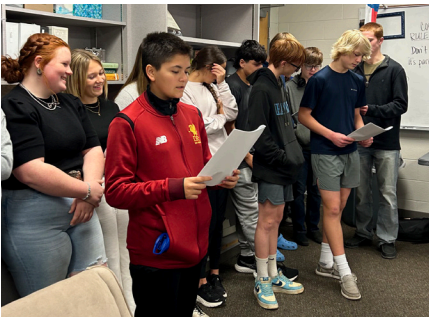
Blood transfusions help people undergoing surgery; people with infections, burns or liver failure; people who've been in catastrophic accidents. The victim of a single car accident can require 100 units of blood, and large-scale emergencies can require thousands of units.

This holiday season, not everyone could afford to donate time or money to help someone less fortunate, but almost every adult can give blood this spring and truly make a difference in the lives of community members.

Our next blood drive will be held on Feb. 12 in the student parking lot. Potential donors will be able to sign up online for their choice of a designated time to leave class and give blood. Remember, when you give, others live.



Eighth grade math teacher and coach Jill Winn prepares to donate at this year's first drive on Aug. 6. Photo by Kimber Smith



Left: After a class vote, Rhonda Baker's third period chemistry class travels from room to room caroling on Dec. 16. Photo by Jamie Russell

Below: Maycee Lewis (7), Susanna Sturkie (8), Gracelyn Jones (8) and Lawsyn Maines (7) dance at MORP on Dec. 14. Photo by Kinley Smith



Above: Nurse Jodie Mayhan supervises NHS volunteers' gift-wrapping after the annual Angel Tree shopping trip. Mayhan distributed around \$300 of Change Challenge proceeds to each volunteer who shopped to fulfill the Angel Tree kids' Christmas lists.



Left: After wrapping the gifts in traditional paper and gift bags, the NHS volunteers hid the gifts in trash bags, which Mayhan delivered discreetly to community families. Photos by Natalie Pritchett

25+  
MILLION

AMERICANS LIVE IN MENTAL  
HEALTH SHORTAGE AREAS

48%

OF MENTAL HEALTH  
PATIENTS IN RURAL AREAS  
RECEIVE TREATMENT

11

YEARS

AVERAGE DELAY FROM  
SYMPTOM ONSET  
TO TREATMENT

\*Data from the National Alliance on Mental Health

# The Harm of *Misconceptions* Social Media, Self-Diagnoses Compound Real Mental Health Crisis

by Bailee Hosak

Certain misconceptions are silly, like shaving will make hair grow back thicker or people only use 10% of their brain.

These are easily debunked – shaved hair only feels thicker because the razor gives the hair a blunt tip, and studies show that, at any time, all parts of the brain are active, no matter how little.

However, some misconceptions aren't as innocent.

Just be happy.

Over-Cleanliness Disorder.

It's just a joke.

Americans currently face a real mental health crisis. So many people suffer from disorders and so few providers are committed to this specialty that many sufferers can't get the help they need, yet many of the limited resources available are misused due to inaccurate self-diagnoses. Furthermore, mental health disorders - real illnesses with different subtypes, causes, triggers and symptoms - are sometimes thrown around like quirky character traits. Those who claim to only have the "fun" symptoms of a disorder - or who blatantly make fun of the less-fun symptoms - harm and discredit those who truly suffer.

## Outright Making Fun

During the pandemic, many people started opening up on social media about their mental and physical health, hoping to make others feel less lonely and educate their community. Most people posted videos sharing their experiences and struggles, but two diagnoses became popular within the younger TikTok community: Tourette Syndrome and Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). These two real disorders inhibit the daily life of the people who suffer from them.

Tourette Syndrome is a disorder of the nervous system that causes two types of tics:

vocal tics – uncontrollable sounds or words, often repeated in the moment and but sometimes reoccurring in future tics, and motor tics - sudden muscle movements that can cause features like the head, face and mouth to jerk. Tic attacks, periods of uncontrollable, repetitious, severe tics that can last from a few minutes to a few hours and can cause self-harm or harm to others, muscle tensing and non-epileptic seizures, may seem random, but they're often caused by constant thoughts of the tics, attempting to suppress tics, or negative thoughts about a place or action. Yet TikTok users flooded the app with videos parodying symptoms by standing in front of their phones with blankets over their heads and lightly swaying to music playing in the background but having a 'tic attack' when the beat dropped and thrashing around violently until the video ended.

While Tourette Syndrome is hereditary, DID is caused by traumatic events such as abuse. Diagnosis criteria for DID include two or more identities that result in change in personality, behavior and thinking and continuous blanks in memories from the past as far back as childhood up to the day before. Switching personalities can occur when the person is triggered by a past memory or in a stressful situation they don't think they can handle and usually causes disorientation, confusion and sometimes fear. The sudden 'switch' between identities can cause distress to the 'host', or the original mind to the body or take a person from feeling like an outsider in their own body and then suddenly feeling in control.

Catching a 'switch' before it happens is quite difficult - even during the moment, it's hard for those who suffer from DID to communicate enough to have someone else start the camera, but several TikTok users pretend to switch while driving and become characters from popular video games or other media. One TikToker who faked a switch while

driving but miraculously didn't drift or wreck claimed switching happened so often the alters got used to switching fast, even though most switches are unpredictable and disorienting. This is why some people who have a traumatic experience around driving avoid it, so they don't cause harm to themselves or others on the road. Some of these DID fakers revealed later what most had already guessed: they did it for the attention and the ability to say or do whatever they wanted with minimal repercussions because it "wasn't really them".

The stigma around mental health wasn't great to begin with; however, the creators of these videos present disorders as punchlines instead of life-crippling illnesses that affect not only the lives of those who suffer directly but also the lives of their loved ones and peers. Making fun of any illness reduces the comfort and openness of those who suffer from it, sometimes preventing them from accepting help.

## Claiming the "Cute" Symptoms

There are people who use OCD as a complimentary self-description for being tidy, but "Over-Cleanliness" Disorder, actually Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, causes long-lasting uncontrollable thoughts, obsessions and compulsions, most of which have nothing to do with cleaning. The lightheartedness of claiming OCD as a cute character trait dismisses the fact that OCD is a real mental disorder with real symptoms that affect everyday life.

Bipolar disorder gets similar treatment. It's often used as an excuse for changing one's mind or being really happy one moment and super sad the next, but for sufferers of bipolar disorder, the highs are really high - manic episodes that can make people talk faster, feel like their minds are racing and engage in risky behaviors - and the lows are really low, often resulting in depleted energy, severe

depression, excessive worry, thoughts of self-harm and sometimes even delusions. Bipolar disorder also isn't about one minute to the next. People with Bipolar 1 often experience manic episodes that can last up to weeks with an occasional depressive episode. Bipolar 2 consists of mainly depressive episodes with symptoms of hypomania—a milder version of mania, extreme mood changes with abnormally elevated energy levels that sometimes require hospitalization. People who actually suffer from bipolar disorder can't turn it on or off any more than those who truly suffer from depression can just "be happy".

Some people take their claims so far as to start charities or GoFundMe accounts to support an illness they don't have. They feed off the sympathy they receive from others, and the money and attention fuels a different mental illness that's hidden under the surface, an illness Mayo Clinic calls factitious disorder but in severe cases is also known as Munchausen syndrome.

WebMD's article "Dying for Attention: Faking Illness Becomes an Online Epidemic" explains that faking illnesses has become so common there's even a hashtag for it: #malingering. The article also explains one of the most famous cases, that of Belle Gibson, an Australian woman who milked a fake, inoperable brain tumor for fame and thousands of dollars back in 2014. Gibson created a wellness app that accumulated 300,000 downloads and promised to give a portion of her proceeds to charity. When the news came out that she'd made up the tumor and its later spread to her blood, spleen, uterus and liver, her 200,000 Instagram followers were furious, and a federal court fined her \$410,000.

Mental illness isn't some "quirky" label to make someone seem special. Claiming these and other mental illnesses to get attention or as an excuse for minor behaviors harms those who actually suffer because it reduces belief, concern and empathy within the people from whom real sufferers seek help.

#### Inaccurate Self Diagnoses

Social media has helped many teens identify their symptoms and locate resources to get help. However, before the pandemic, teens with no specific diagnosis in mind sought general information; now many teens wanting a specific diagnosis seek justification, and creators are happy to oblige. Videos describe vague symptoms that apply to multiple illnesses but attribute those symptoms to specific mental illnesses for the sake of viewers' self-diagnoses. People convince themselves that these vague symptom descriptions prove they have a specific disorder.

For example, everyone has anxiety. It's what motivates most people to get out of bed and perform to the best of their abilities. Psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson created the Yerkes-Dodson law or inverted-U model, which demonstrates the relationship between stress or anxiety and performance of tasks. Basically, the pair experimented on mice and proved that intermediate stress levels (mild electric shocks with the mice) motivate subjects to adapt, learn or strive for

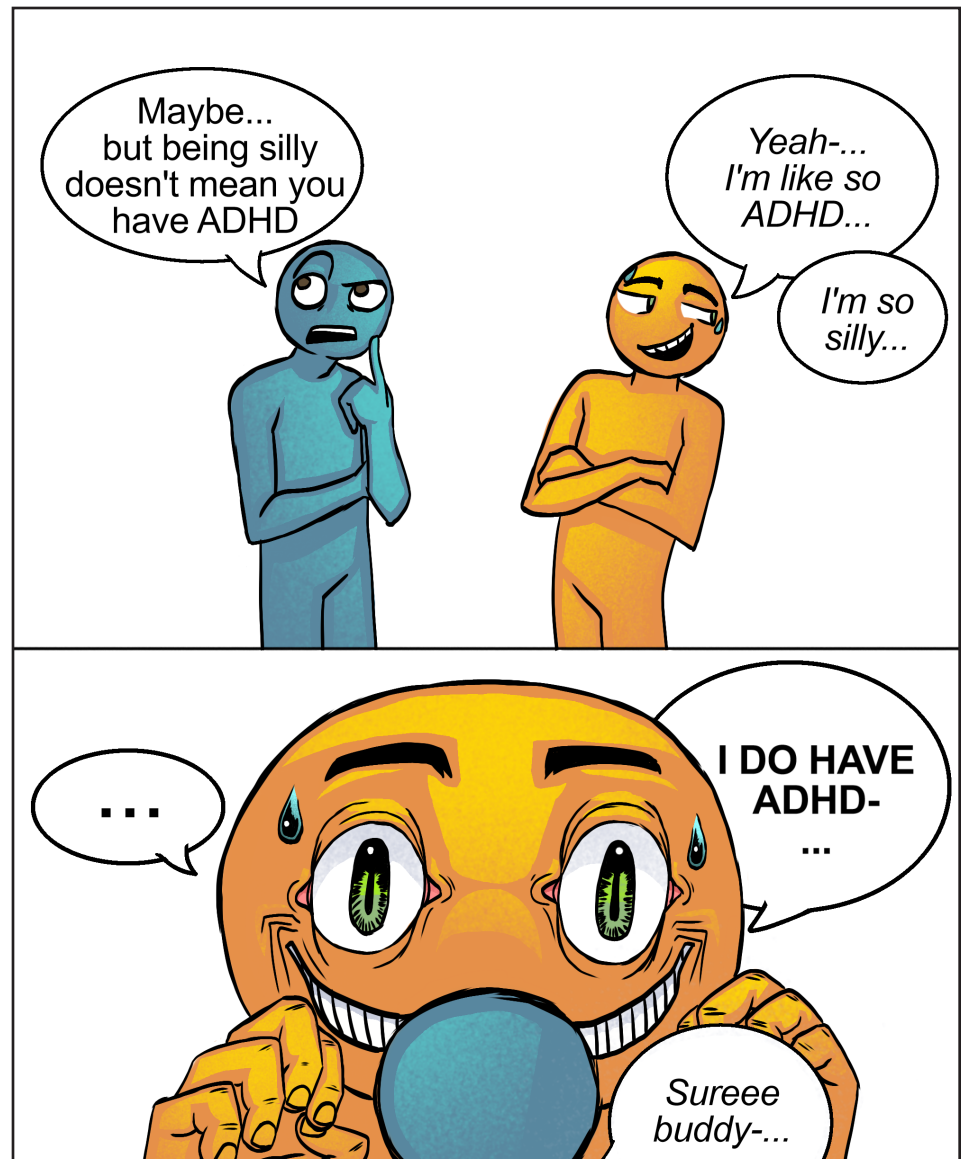
a reward. However, too much stress is counterproductive and, in some cases, can be dangerous. People with excessive anxiety may be overwhelmed; the stress prevents them from doing their best or sometimes much at all. Small, everyday tasks can seem daunting, and choices can feel like the difference between waking up tomorrow or not waking up at all, leading to near-constant panic attacks and irrational fears, agoraphobia, social anxiety, separation anxiety and selective mutism. Most people who experience anxiety, though, do not experience it in this extreme form and do not need any treatment.

Depression isn't just being really sad - it affects the brain on a biochemical level. Depressed people have an increased level of monoamine oxidase A, an enzyme that breaks down important neurotransmitters, resulting in lowered serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. Therefore, self-diagnosis is impossible. Furthermore, depressive episodes may last up to a year and reduce a person's willpower, making it difficult to even get out of bed, brush their teeth or eat - unlike regular sadness that will likely go away

in a day or two.

Self diagnosis of these and other illnesses takes away already-limited resources for those who need help. Mental Health America ranks Texas dead last in access to mental health care. The bottom line is there are not enough mental health providers, existing mental health professionals are overwhelmed with cases, and many psychiatric facilities are at capacity. In 2023, the federal government designated 251 of 254 Texas counties "mental health professional shortage areas". Many Texans don't have health insurance at all, and even when insurance is available, it doesn't always cover treatment. Poverty compounds the issue, as many families cannot afford private care, many providers do not accept Medicaid, and medications are often out of budget.

Limited resources are available. For instance, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has a free help line (800-662-4357) and anyone can text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988), but it's vital that these resources be left for people who truly suffer from mental illness.



Art by Alexis Lee

M'Kenzie Smith (11), Emma Klein (10) and Izzy Kirbis (9) perform in the band's Christmas concert on Dec. 5. Photo by Briana Bowling



# Band Members Advance to Area

by Alley Hale

Six high school band members earned seats in the all-region band by auditioning at Winnsboro High School Dec. 14, and three members placed high enough to advance to the area competition Jan. 11: August Vestal (11) won second chair French horn in the wind ensemble, and T.J. Fowler (12) was named third chair trombone. Casey Bogue (10) will also advance as fourth chair trombone in the symphonic band.

Thomas Navarro-Gonzalez (11) will sit 10th chair trombone, Emma Klein (10) 14th chair clarinet and M'Kenzie Smith (11) 17th chair clarinet in the symphonic band.

Thirteen junior high students won all-region accolades during the Dec. 6 auditions. Lori Lormand (8) won first chair trombone followed by Kale Reeves (8) in sixth chair, Izabel Parham (8) won first chair euphonium with Derick Anderson (8) in second chair, Ezekiel Parham (8) won second chair trumpet, Colin Deaton (8) won second chair French horn followed by Lilly Lane (8) in fourth chair, Nevaeh Bean (8) won third chair Bb clarinet with Avelyn Wendel (8) in 18th chair and Isabella O'Neal (7) as first alternate, Natalie Delaney (8) won sixth chair flute with Iliana O'Neal (7) named third alternate, and Grayson Selph (7) was named first alternate tuba.

The bands also performed their Christmas concert on Dec. 5. The sixth-grade band started the concert with "Jingle Bells", "Jolly Old Saint Nick", and "Beethoven's Ninth". Then the junior high band played "From the Realms of Glory!", "Santa Baby", "Holiday Flutecake", and "Deck the Halls with Dazzling Drummers".

The high school band concert started with "Christmas Winds", which begins suddenly with percussion and then swaps over to woodwinds and brass, then played "First Noel", "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas", and "Cowboy Christmas", which includes different Christmas carols. Their final piece was another classic, "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch".

Band Boosters also hosted their annual Christmas auction between songs, selling bread, desserts and other items after almost every piece. The band members also created gift baskets that were auctioned. The sixth grade made a "Game Night" basket, junior high made an "Everything Dad" basket, and the high school made an "Everything Mom" basket. The auction earned \$3,500, which will go toward trip expenses and supplies that help create the best experience for band students.

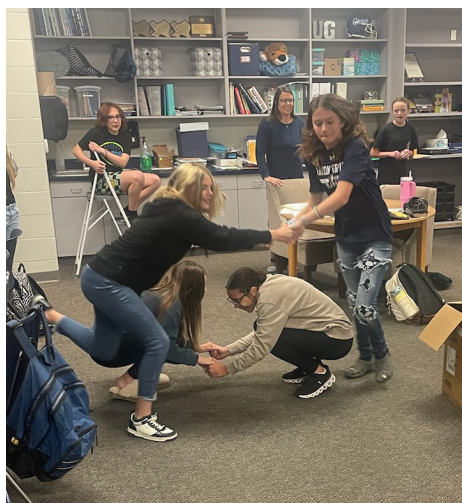


Left: Gracelyn Jones (8) plays "Holiday Flutecake" with the flute ensemble that also included Kelsey Kent (8), Iliana O'Neal (7) and Natalie Delaney (8). "All the flutes sounded beautiful, and all of our notes blended beautifully together," Jones said. "All of us had to put in the work to learn our parts and the right notes. Everyone did an amazing job and sounded really good. I'm so proud of us." Above: Jonathan Stafford directs the junior high portion of the winter concert. Photos by Briana Bowling



From Left: Superintendent Kelly Moore and school board members Justin Smith and Tim Turner distribute bonus checks to staff.

The administrative team also treated teachers to tacos from Kerime's Kitchen. Photos by Kimber Smith



From left: After finishing their class reading of "A Christmas Carol", seventh-graders Andrew Rhodes, Sean Pilcher, Trenton Dwyer Isaiah Yaktiyol and Grayson Selph study for their upcoming test by playing a Jenga review game on Dec. 10. Each Jenga tile contained a test question so the students would know exactly what to expect on the following day.

Eighth-grade journalism students Nevaeh Bean, Lori Lormand, Carmen James and Morgan Morrow race another group in the class's Up-Down teambuilder Dec. 6. Photo by Jamie Russell

# Lights, Curtain, Action

## JH, HS Theater Students Prepare Trio of Spring Productions

Jamie and Jillian Russell

Three shows will take the stage this semester: the junior high's "Seussical the Musical Jr.", high school One-Act Play's "Golden Boy", and high school theater students' "Alice in Wonderland".

Musical auditions start in January, and the "Golden Boy" cast and crew will attend their first workshop on Jan. 30.

"I am excited about all of the shows," director Hunter Ballard said. "'Golden Boy' was a happy accident, but it really matched the people we have and the talent levels. I have directed 'Seussical' before, and it was a great experience."

While Ballard previously directed 'Seussical' as a junior high musical at Quitman in the spring of 2023, it hasn't been done at Union Grove.

"I'm excited for the Seussical," eighth-grader Jacob Rodgers said. "I think we can put a spin on it and make it new and fresh."

The senior theater aids announced the junior high show by creating a tree of 10 musical posters and pulling down two each day during the last week of school.

"It was fun, and I really enjoyed seeing each musical leaving one by one," seventh-grader Cooper Littlejohn said. "[The play] is different and will give people an opportunity to be a unique character."

For the high school One-Act Play, Ballard considered the cast and crew's performance in the fall production of "Oklahoma!" and a week of cold reads. Students were given the script for "Golden Boy" the following week. Ballard originally chose a different play, but that show's producer wouldn't allow cuts to the script, and Ballard stumbled across "Golden Boy", which matched the team's talents perfectly.

"I had reservations when receiving the script, but now that we've really started to work on it, I'm optimistic it'll go well," senior Colton Mead said. "I'm also excited to be acting on stage with my little brother. I believe

most of the actors on stage have roles that reflect their ability."

Mead, junior Hunter Rogers, senior Jamie Russell and junior Shane Deaton will lead the play, which will go to district contest March 4-5. While OAP prepares, other high school theater students will start on their show, "Alice in Wonderland".

"I am so glad I get to be a big part of this production," sophomore Ashlyn Heard said. "I am really excited to perform because this is my first main role in theater. I think the kids will really enjoy it."

Heard will play Alice, with sophomore Emma Diviney as the White Rabbit in their performance for the elementary students.

"Alice in Wonderland is going to be fun, because there is no set way to perform it," Ballard said. "At the heart of new shows is always excitement, but also some nerves. We get the opportunity to create something really great."

# Upcoming

# Events

**Jan. 3**

HS Basketball @Big Sandy - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 4**

FFA District & Area Officer Testing  
@Grand Saline

**Jan. 7**

HS Basketball v. Linden-Kildare - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 8**

Skeet Shooting Team @Ben Wheeler

**Jan. 9**

Eastman Presentation @HS Library - 9 a.m.  
JH Boys Basketball v. Ore City - 4:30 p.m.  
JH Girls Basketball @Ore City - 5 p.m.  
Girls Powerlifting @Union Hill

**Jan. 10**

HS Basketball @Ore City - 4 p.m.  
FFA Conference @SFA

**Jan. 11**

ATSSB Area Band Auditions @Chapel Hill

**Jan. 14**

HS Basketball @McLeod - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 15**

Grades 2-4 UIL Reward Trip to REO Skateplex  
@Longview - 10:30 a.m.

**Jan. 16**

Grades 5-6 UIL Reward Trip to REO Skateplex  
@Longview - 10:30 a.m.  
JH Girls Basketball v. McLeod - 4 p.m.  
JH Boys Basketball v. McLeod - 5 p.m.  
Boys Powerlifting @Harmony

**Jan. 17**

Elementary Awards Assemblies  
Fifth/Sixth Grades: 8 a.m.  
Third/Fourth Grades: 9 a.m.  
JH All-Region Band Clinic & Concert @Gilmer

**Jan. 21**

Young Athletes in Training  
@Multi-Purpose Building - 9 a.m.  
HS Basketball v. Hawkins - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 22**

TSIA2 Testing in HS Library  
SE Basketball Tournament @Gladewater - 9 a.m.

**Jan. 23**

JH Girls Basketball @Spring Hill - 5 p.m.

**Jan. 24**

HS Basketball @Harleton - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 24-25**

HS All-Region Band Clinic & Concert @Gilmer

**Jan. 27**

JH Girls Basketball v. Hawkins - 4:30 p.m.  
JH Boys Basketball @Hawkins - 4:30 p.m.

**Jan. 28**

HS Basketball v. Big Sandy - 4 p.m.

**Jan. 30**

Boys Powerlifting @Home  
FFA District Convention @Lion Center

**Jan. 31**

Charlie's Sno-Balls @Elementary  
HS Basketball @Linden-Kildare - 4 p.m.  
Softball v. New Summerfield - 4:30 p.m.



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