

MUSTANG JOURNAL

MEDINA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



Exemplify Excellence in Education.

Spring 2025

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OCTEC ProStart Team Takes First in New York State/Vermont



(LtoR) Melissa Fleischut (President & CEO of The NYS Restaurant Association), Teacher James Atzrott, Emily Chambers (Medina), Selena Wolf (Lockport), Tirsia Converso (Medina), Justine Fitzsimmons (Medina) and Kevin Goggins (Chairman of the Board of The NYS Restaurant Association).

Congratulations to Culinary Arts teacher Chef James Atzrott and his ProStart team of Emily Chambers (Medina), Selena Wolf (Lockport), Tirsia Converso (Medina) and Justine Fitzsimmons (Medina).

The team, from the Orleans/Niagara BOCES' Orleans Career and Technical Education Center, took first place at the NYSRA (New York State Restaurant Association) ProStart Invitational held at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. They will be representing the state at the National ProStart Invitational May 2-4 in Baltimore, Maryland.

ProStart is a two-year, industry-backed culinary arts and restaurant management program for high school students that integrates practical skill sets and allows students to become familiar with restaurants and food service and prepare them for the workforce.

The team's menu consisted of flat iron steak with tri-colored baby carrots, polenta fries with a chimichurri sauce and strawberry fraiser for dessert. The team competed against seven other teams and were thrilled they came out on top of the competition. "We cried every day from the stress of everything," says Selena Wolf. "We were very emotional and they were things that were going wrong like the burners being higher than what we practiced with and having to use plastic thermometers as opposed to metal. We finished with seven seconds left."

The team said they started screaming when they were announced as the winners and then it was Chef Atzrott's turn to cry. "We were so excited and so glad to have won it for our teacher," says Selena. "We are so ready to go to Baltimore and hopefully win there too!"

Vision Statement

Exemplify excellence
in education.

Mission Statement

Educate to inspire all to
reach beyond the expected
and positively impact their
communities.





Medina's Food Services Career Week



Throughout the week of March 24th to March 28th, students had the opportunity to explore food preparation and the culinary arts interactively. They created "ants on a log" snacks, dressed up as food service workers, and welcomed a special visit from high school students to help them along.

For some students, this was their first time trying celery or raisins, and they enjoyed experimenting with different flavor combinations while learning how recipes are developed. The Oak Orchard Cafeteria provided ingredients, and parents, community, and high school student volunteers guided students in crafting their snacks.

As an AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) school, one way Oak Orchard focuses on early college and career exploration is by introducing students to a variety of professions. Through this activity, students learned about food service careers and enhanced their kitchen skills. After making their snack, they were encouraged to recreate them at home.

The week-long event also included video tours of local Medina businesses, including Han's Bakery, McDonald's, Coffee Pot, Oak Orchard Café, Tops, and Rudy's Diner. Oak Orchard School Counselor Miss Laroussi visited these locations to put together videos highlighting various food service careers.

Later in the school year, Oak Orchard students will explore careers in agriculture, with additional opportunities planned for the next school year.

To make the experience even more engaging, students had the chance to enter a raffle for a basket of ingredients to create a treat at home. To enter, they had to complete a challenge, which included greeting a food service worker at a local restaurant, café, or grocery store, and helping their family prepare a snack or meal at home. The turnout for participation in the raffle was incredible!





Bell to Bell No Cell Policy

The Pew Research Center reports that 95% of 13 to 17-year-olds have smartphones.

According to Seattle Children's Research Institute, teens spend an average of one and a half hours on their phones during the school day.

In January, Governor Kathy Hochul finalized plans to ban cell phones in schools as part of her executive budget. "A new statewide policy to make classrooms distraction-free, so our children can focus on the things that matter," she stated.

Medina Central School District has taken proactive steps by initiating a "Bell to Bell No Cell" policy, requiring students to place their phones in their lockers throughout the school day.



The Shared Decision-Making Team implemented the policy and carefully introduced it to ensure a smooth transition. The district communicated the changes to students, families, and staff through parent meetings and classroom visits from administrators. Additionally, lessons were designed to help students adjust to the new rules.

To ensure student safety, administrators reminded students of their locker locations and encouraged them to memorize or write down any important phone numbers in case of emergencies.

Junior-Senior High School Principal Michael Cavanagh observed great benefits since the policy was enacted.

"Since our cell phone ban, we have seen many unintended benefits," he said. "Students are talking to each other, and they have self-reported that not having a cell phone in the classroom has greatly increased their ability to focus on lessons."

With reduced screen time, the hallways and cafeteria are louder—in a good way.

Cavanagh also emphasized the role parents have played in supporting the initiative, saying, "A consistent procedure followed when infractions are reported has helped improve communication and strengthen relationships between the schools and families."

Make Time to Read Day



MTA (Medina Teachers Association) members from our three buildings came to Oak Orchard to read a story to each of our UPK (Universal Prekindergarten) classes! This year's read aloud was "How to Catch a Class Pet". Each student received a copy of the story to take home, courtesy of the MTA. In the photo, Mrs. Scalzo reads to Mr. Decker's UPK class.



Clifford Wise Art Program

By Demerise Eadie, Art Teacher

Illustration allows students to depict their thoughts and bring ideas into existence. While photography captures what exists in the world, illustration develops things that only exist in the mind. Because of this, students practicing illustration helps them bring stories and ideas to life.

I hope that these projects inspire students to find beauty in every environment so that they understand that art is tied into every aspect of life. I use supplies that they can find anywhere, like using newspaper for the creature sculptures, so that they understand art is accessible, not just fancy supplies and museums. I choose topics that students experience in their lives so that they understand this connection and can then begin making their own.



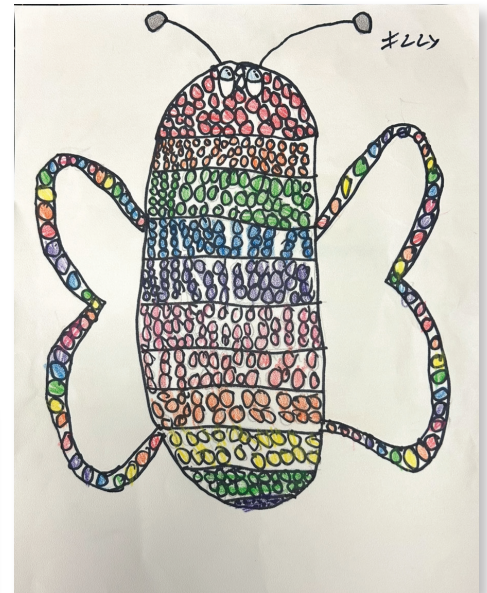
Faith Dix (botanical collage)

The 5th grade is finishing their botanical collages, where they learned about botany, cyanotype, and scientific illustrations.



Sabina Lanik (perspective aquarium)

The 4th grade is finishing their perspective aquarium drawings, which use one-point perspective, color theory, and shading skills.



Isabelle Verdesia (zentangle)

The 3rd grade is practicing symmetry and zentangle, which art therapist Kaitlyn Kirchmyer inspired.



Jace Grimes, Jameson Pilon, Nina Reeves (papier-mâché)

The 6th grade is finishing their papier-mâché creatures. They looked at the history of piñatas and traditional Mexican folk art, such as the work of Ricardo Linares for inspiration, then chose any animal, whether real or imaginary, to sculpt.



Mamma Mia!

Photos by Tom Rivers, *Orleans Hub*

Students performed *Mamma Mia!* in March under the direction of Rachel Trillizio. The musical follows a young woman preparing for her wedding on a Greek island, who discovers that one of three men her mother once dated may be her father.



From left in front include Arianna Lake as Tanya, Madelyn Elliott as Donna and Lyla Page as Rosie.



Donna struggles with running her tavern and also is jolted by seeing the three ex-boyfriends. Her best friends, Rosie (Lyla Page) and Tanya (Arianna Lake), help Donna to get her groove back. They are singing, "Dancing Queen." The musical includes songs by ABBA.



Sophie (Ava Blount) meets Harry Bright (Logan Trillizio) and Bill Austin (Ryder Jones), who fly in for her wedding. Sam (played by Riley Tompkins) also is in the scene and they sing, "Thank You for the Music."



Jackson McGrath plays the role of Sky, who is engaged to marry Sophie (Ava Blount). He sings, "Lay All Your Love On Me."



Mediterranean Coast Experience 2025

Over spring break, 24 Medina High School students experienced Europe along the Mediterranean coast with EF Tours. Led by teachers Alexandra Peracciny, Samantha Rennie and Principal Michael Cavanagh, the group traveled through Italy, Monaco, France, and Spain, creating unforgettable memories along the way.

The journey began with a flight from Toronto to Paris, followed by a connection to Milan, Italy. From there, students headed to the breathtaking Cinque Terre, a collection of five coastal villages only accessible by train. Each of the five villages had stunning views and their own unique charm. Junior Aurora Owczarczak called it her favorite place, saying, "I loved the diversity of the landscape and the cultural adjustment." She added that trying authentic pesto was a dream come true. Fellow junior Molly Cook, a first-time international traveler, also named Italy her favorite country, and joined sophomore Teagan Balaban in sampling crepes in France.



Next, the group traveled by bus to Monaco, where they toured the royal palace, saw Grace Kelly's tomb, and visited the Monte Carlo racetrack. The trek continued into Nice, France, where students strolled the Promenade des Anglais, visited local markets, and explored Saint-Paul-de-Vence, a historic hilltop, known for its modern contemporary art museums and famous artists.

On the way to Spain, students stopped in the charming towns of Avignon and Arles, where they got to see the preparation of a traditional bull fight. "It was a great experience seeing the excitement of the locals waiting for this event, with people wearing their bandanas and scarves to show loyalty to their communities," said Alexandra Peracciny.

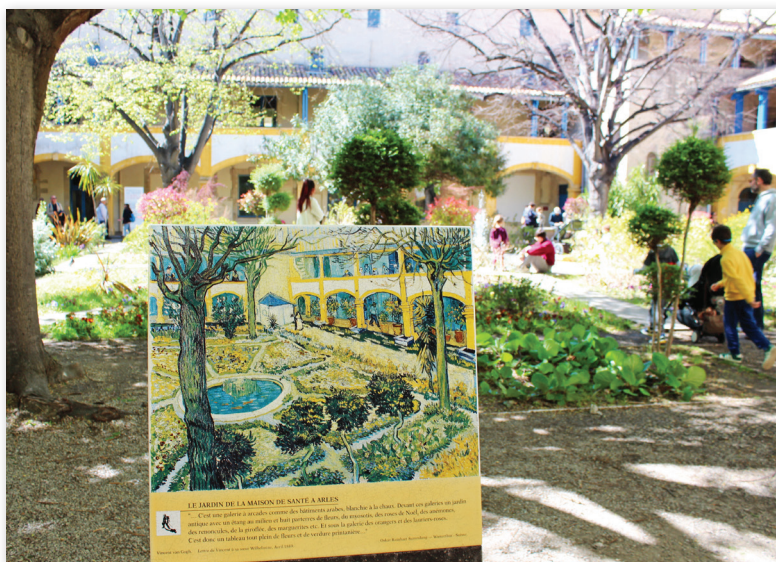
The group also team explored ancient Roman amphitheaters and the courtyard where Vincent van Gogh painted some of his most iconic works. For French students, this was an especially meaningful stop. "France was my favorite country," said Brennan Woodruff. "I can sum up my trip in three words, eye-opening experience!"

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Mediterranean Coast Experience 2025 *continued*



For many, the experience of speaking languages studied in school was a highlight. “Seeing our students use their French and Spanish in real-life settings made us incredibly proud,” said teachers Samantha Rennie and Alexandra Peracciny.

The finale of the trip brought the group to Spain, where they were welcomed in Pineda de Mar, just outside Barcelona. Students visited Gaudí’s Sagrada Família, Park Güell, and the boulevard Las Ramblas. They enjoyed a live flamenco performance celebrated Easter Sunday with a traditional paella lunch at the beachfront Salamanca Restaurant.

Emiliana Batista, on her second EF tour, said, “Italy and Spain were my favorites. I loved the small towns, and the seafood pasta in Spain was amazing!” Others, like Malloree Rinker, cherished the friendships she made. “My favorite experience was getting permanent bracelets with my friends in Spain.”

Students reflected on the unique experience of traveling with their teachers and principal. “It was so cool to experience another culture with them,” a student shared.





Time for Play!

Mr. Decker's Class.



SkillsUSA 2025

Orleans/Niagara BOCES would like to congratulate the over 160 SkillsUSA members who competed on April 24th at the New York State Fairgrounds in dozens of competitions at the 2025 NYS SkillsUSA Leadership Conference. SkillsUSA is a partnership of students, teachers and industry working together to ensure America has a skilled workforce. SkillsUSA helps each student to excel and empowers its members to become world-class workers, leaders and responsible American citizens.

Many of the students winning medals have the opportunity to move on to the National competition in Atlanta, Georgia, this June.



Sophia Goyette (Medina), a student in the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering program at the Orleans Career and Technical Education Center took a gold medal in the Technical Drafting competition. The competition will focused on the application of appropriate entry-level technical drafting skills to solve visualization and presentation problems of a mechanical nature as designed by the national technical committee.



Brady Christiaansen (Medina), a student in the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering program at the Orleans Career and Technical Education Center who took a gold medal in CNC 3-Axis Milling Programming competition. This competition assessed the ability to program CNC milling machines, interpret prints (including GD&T), and measure/gauge parts. The competitor will also demonstrate theoretical knowledge of CNC machine configuration, setup, and operations.





Play, Learn, Grow: Medina's UPK Program Prepares Young Learners for Their Future

Medina Central School District's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program at Oak Orchard is doing far more than preparing students for kindergarten, it's providing an academic environment where young students can build strong academic, social, and emotional skills through play, exploration, and hands-on learning.

The UPK program is aligned with the district's academic initiatives to teach age-appropriate instruction that mirrors what students will experience in future grade levels. The goal is to support learners in becoming curious and independent learners.

The program focuses on literacy, math, and social-emotional development, engaging learners in a variety of structured activities that promote number sense and early literacy.

Hands-on learning is central to how UPK students explore math. From counting friends in line to going on shape hunts around the classroom, math becomes a natural part of their everyday routine. Educators create engaging stations that combine manipulatives, partner games, and student collaboration.

Everything from playdough to board games is used to teach concepts like counting, comparing, and ordering. Cooking activities are also incorporated to reinforce mathematical thinking, allowing students to count ingredients, compare amounts, and follow sequences. Counting games feature dice, spinners, and ten frames, while theme-based manipulatives, like yellow counters used as "bees" in a hive, make math visual and fun.

Literacy is just as hands-on. Students use letter and sound tools, participate in partner reading, and engage in games that promote language development and teamwork. The curriculum follows the Science of Reading framework to ensure a strong foundation in early literacy skills.

The UPK program places a strong emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) to help students recognize emotions, develop coping strategies, and build meaningful relationships. Students are taught to name their feelings and choose calming strategies that work for them. As the year progresses, students become more independent in regulating their emotions and solving problems on their own.

SEL is woven throughout the school day, and counselors regularly join the classroom to teach these life skills. This approach reflects practices used in upper grades, preparing students for the future and reinforcing the idea that emotional growth is just as important as academic success.

Confidence starts in an environment where students feel seen, celebrated, and supported. At Oak Orchard, classrooms reflect the diverse cultures and needs of students, allowing every child to see themselves in the curriculum and activities.

For parents considering enrolling their child, the UPK program offers a fun and nurturing place where children grow academically and personally. By joining UPK, students will become familiar with the staff, routines, and the learning environment to make the transition to kindergarten much smoother.





Medina's PE Program Keeps Students Moving

By Steven Luksch and Eric Gross, Physical Education Teachers

Physical Education (PE) supports physical, mental, and social well-being while building important life skills. It helps students develop fitness habits, motor skills, and discipline, which are factors that can lead to better academic performance.

PE isn't just about sports. Physical activity can include dancing, rock climbing, swimming, martial arts, hiking—whatever gets you moving and keeps you engaged. Hanging out with friends could mean going for a walk, riding bikes, or playing outside. The goal is to make fitness fun by learning new skills, not just competing.

Just like homework and chores, staying active should be part of your weekly routine. Set a regular time for movement that fits into your schedule. A walk after dinner or a bike ride with family benefits everyone. A little planning goes a long way in building lifelong healthy habits.

Limiting screen time is also important. Children ages six to 12 should have no more than one to two hours of screen time per day. Excessive screen time is linked to obesity, sleep issues, and decreased focus in school.

The current PE unit is bowling, which helps improve balance, coordination, and motor skills, which are essential for sports and everyday activities. It can also reduce stress, boost mood, and strengthen social connections. As a bonus, students will put their math skills to the test by keeping their own scores.

Fun fact: Around two million people bowl in leagues across the U.S. each week. It's an inclusive, lifelong sport that brings people together in a rewarding way.

Upcoming PE units include shuffleboard and track and field.

Track and Field schedule:

- June 10th - 6th grade
- June 11th - 4th grade
- June 12th - 5th grade
- June 13th - 3rd grade





Medina School Students of the Month

The Medina Teachers Association, the Medina CSD and the Medina Area Partnership are proud to announce the selections for Students of the Month.

This award is a joint effort between the organizations to recognize students who go above and beyond to help teachers and fellow students succeed and enjoy school.

The February winners are:

- Oak Orchard Primary: First-grader, Alayna Casanova nominated by Mrs. Woodruff.
- Wise Intermediate School: Sixth-grader, London Brown nominated by Mrs. Wroblewski and Mrs. Webster.
- Jr-Sr High School: Eighth-grader, Michelle De La Torre nominated by Mrs. Rennie.

The month of February's business sponsor was Creekside Floral.



(LtoR) MTA President Joe Byrne, Michelle De La Torre, Alayna Casanova, Creekside Floral owner Mary Lewis, and MCSD Director of Community Partnerships Daniel Doctor.

The March winners are:

- Oak Orchard: First-grader Abby Jobe, nominated by Mrs. Markarian.
- Wise Intermediate School: Fourth-grader Aoife Kelleher, nominated by Mrs. Kyle.
- Jr-Sr High School: Freshman, Levon Fuller, nominated by Mrs. Dunham.

The month of March's business sponsor was Lee-Whedon Memorial Library.



(LtoR) MTA President Joe Byrne, Levon Fuller, Aoife Kelleher, Abby Jobe, Lee-Whedon Library Assistant Director Samantha Covis, Medina Jr-Sr High School Assistant Principal Mollie Mark.

The April winners are:

- Oak Orchard: First-grader, Ivy Wroblewski nominated by Mrs. Woodburn
- Wise Intermediate School: Fifth-grader, Maxim Maksimchuk nominated by Ms. Gates
- Jr-Sr High School: Junior, Vincent Gray nominated by Mrs. Kyle

The month of April's business sponsor was The Coffee Pot Cafe.

Congratulations to all our winners!



(LtoR) Maxim Maksimchuk and Ivy Wroblewski. In the back row of the photo from left to right is MTA President Joe Byrne, Medina Jr-Sr High School Principal Michael Cavanagh, Vincent Gray, and The Coffee Pot Cafe Owner Daniel Rosentreter.



MEDINA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

One Mustang Drive
Medina, N.Y. 14103
Phone: 585-798-2700
Fax: 585-798-5676
www.medinacsd.org

Dr. Mark B. Kruzynski, Superintendent

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Students Rebuild Memorial for Teacher Andrea Lonnen

Andrea Lonnen dedicated her life to education, serving as an elementary teacher from 2000 to 2018. She was passionate about reading to children, supporting Mustang athletics, and advocating for her fellow educators through the Medina Teachers Association (MTA). After her passing in 2018, a memorial was created to honor her legacy.

Over time, the weather had taken a toll on the structure. In a heartfelt tribute, students took on the project to restore the memorial. Using plywood, paint, and hard work, they carefully reverse-engineered the design. With the help of tools like a mitre saw, table saw, and CNC machine, the memorial was given a fresh look. The rebuild was constructed using newer materials designed to resist fading from sun exposure and withstand all weather conditions, unlike the original version, which had been made from plywood and degraded over time.

The memorial features a stack of blocks, Andrea's initials engraved on one side, and "MTA" on the other. On top lies a schoolhouse resembling a library, reflecting her love of reading. The door is covered in polka dots, her favorite pattern to wear.

Each year, teachers honor her memory by wearing polka dots.

