



VOICE OF THE VALLEY

THE RIVER VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER - 2026 SPRING ISSUE

RV Community,

If you are like me, the end of winter is long past overdue. Especially after the frigid wind chills and snow over the last few months. Despite the challenging weather, our students and staff have been busy and hard at work.

We have continued our Celebrate America! focus, and in January, we aligned our coordination with the monthly themes of America 250 - Marion Celebrates! In January, every student in the district received a special RV Celebrates America! T-shirt to commemorate this historic occasion. The district was fortunate to receive grant funds to help offset a portion of the cost of the shirts, and we want to thank the Marion Community Foundation and Marion Area Convention and Visitors Bureau for their support.



Our 5th Grade Crew were excited to see and listen to a wide variety of paths available to them right here in Marion, Ohio. These included: Marion Flower Shop, Marion Technical College, Denton Chiropractic, OSU, OHSA, Alloway Environmental, Vaughn Industries, Marion Co. Sheriff, ODNR, EXP Realty, Marion Public Library.
Thank you for volunteering your time!

The February theme was: "America Works: Exploring Jobs & Careers" and there were a number of exciting opportunities to introduce our students to a wide range of career opportunities. Our 5th Grade students from Liberty and Heritage took part in a Career Fair activity with local community and business leaders speaking to the students in a rotating station format.

For our Middle School, 8th Grade students attended the Inspire Event hosted by Junior Achievement to learn about various career pathways. At the High School, Freshmen students took part in a Career Cafe Activity* which had a progressive lunch where students rotated to different tables focused on four career pathways aligned to their interest areas. At each table, they ate a different course for lunch, served by our River Valley Food Service Staff, and were able to listen to and interact with someone from that career field.

River Valley continues to focus on career pathways and exposure for our students. Over the past 6 years, River Valley has gone from 3 pathways to now having 8 pathways for our students. Also, in 2019, we had just one College Credit Plus (CCP) course taught by a River Valley staff member. Now we have six teachers credentialed who can instruct CCP courses, and RVHS offers over 10 college courses taught by our own staff, where students can earn free college credit. We continue to have strong relationships with Marion Technical College and OSU Marion, where students can take college courses at no cost to parents.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Voice of the Valley and are able to take a few minutes to read the articles and see the pictures of our students and staff. Go Vikings! - Adam Wickham, Superintendent

**This event was part of America 250: Marion Celebrations. Funding was provided through the Marion Community Foundation and organized in partnership with the Marion Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.*

Creating Tomorrow's Leaders - Redefining "Job-Ready"

At River Valley Local Schools, our motto is "Creating Tomorrow's Leaders." But what does that actually look like in practice? More than ever, it means equipping our students with the tangible, real-world skills they need to succeed in the modern workforce the moment they cross the graduation stage. To help our students reach their full potential, we have completely reimagined our approach to Career and Technical Education (CTE). By aligning our coursework with the real-world needs of local employers, we are ensuring our Vikings have a competitive edge. Sometimes, this means bringing in entirely new programs. Other times, it means upgrading the incredible work our teachers are already doing. For example, by investing in new technology tools, our talented art teachers have started evolving traditional electives into an Interactive Media pathway—preparing students for high-demand careers in graphic design and animation!

Why the push for career-tech? The reality of post-secondary education is shifting. According to a December 2025 report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, nearly 40% of students who enter college do not complete a degree within six years. At River Valley, we believe education is a lifelong journey, and we want to ensure our students have the ultimate safety net and launchpad. Our goal is for every high school student to graduate with at least four career and technical education classes on their transcript. Whether a student chooses to enter the workforce immediately or heads straight to a four-year university, these hands-on skills matter. A student heading to college with an industry credential or specialized skill has a much higher chance of securing well-paying employment to support themselves through school, and if college doesn't work out, they have marketable skills to join the workforce and succeed.

We are incredibly proud of our ongoing partnership with Tri-Rivers Career Center. While we will continue to send a large number of our upperclassmen to Tri-Rivers, we also recognize that their campus cannot physically accommodate every single RV student. To ensure all students have access to CTE, we have vastly expanded our own in-house offerings. This school year, we are thrilled to offer our high school students eight career pathways, including:

- Allied Health and Nursing (4-Year Pathway)
- Construction Technologies (4-Year Pathway)
- Air Transportation (4-Year Pathway)
- Agribusiness and Production Systems (4-Year Pathway)
- Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources Bioscience (4-Year Pathway)
- Engineering Design and Development (Initial courses that feed directly into the RAMTEC program at Tri-Rivers)
- Performing Arts (4-Year Pathway)
- Career-Based Intervention (CBI)

The response from our students has been incredible. For the 2025–26 school year, over 75% of our high school students are actively participating in a career technical education pathway. But we aren't stopping there. For the upcoming 2026–27 school year, we are expanding these programs down to the middle school! All 6th, 7th, and 8th graders will receive early exposure to career-based skills, giving them a massive head start before they even reach high school. With this growth, we are closing in on our ultimate goal: 100% of RVHS students graduating job-ready.

Several years ago, Marion County adopted a bold tagline: "America's Workforce Development Capital." We know that building the workforce our community needs starts right here in our classrooms. Without a capable, ready workforce, local businesses cannot thrive, and new employers won't bring jobs to our community. None of this growth would be possible without your continued support. Thank you for your partnership as we continue working together to build up our community, support local industry, and Create Tomorrow's Leaders!



Liberty Elementary School

Blast From the Past

In the month of November, our first-grade students had a wonderful visit from the Morrow County Historical Society! Students learned all about what life was like long ago—how families completed their daily chores, how butter was made by hand, how candles were created, and even what school looked like in the past.

Our students were engaged, curious, and excited to compare these traditions with the way we live and learn today. It was a hands-on experience that brought history to life! A big thank you to the Historical Society for providing such a meaningful and memorable learning opportunity for our Vikings!



Veterans Day at Liberty

Liberty Elementary was honored to host more than 90 veterans and their guests at our Veterans Day celebration. It was a memorable morning filled with gratitude, respect, and appreciation. Our students did an outstanding job recognizing the brave men and women who have served our country, demonstrating their thanks through songs, artwork, and heartfelt messages. We are truly grateful for the opportunity to welcome so many heroes into our school and to teach our students the importance of honoring those who protect our freedom.



Santa Dance

Liberty Elementary extends its sincere appreciation to the families, students, staff, and volunteers who helped make this year's Santa Dance event a fun and festive success. The evening was filled with music, dancing, and plenty of smiles—creating a truly special experience for our school community. We offer a special thank you to our PTO for their outstanding work and dedication in planning and coordinating the celebration. We are grateful for the continued support and are proud to see our school come together to create lasting memories for our students.



Sounds of the Season

Liberty Elementary had many students who took part in the Sounds of the Season throughout December! Students had a festive performance that showcased the talent and spirit of our young Vikings. From classic holiday melodies to upbeat winter tunes, the performance was great. It was a wonderful way to bring our school community together and close out the year on a merry and memorable note!



What We're Reading: Making Sense of the Digital Age

If you have ever looked at a group of teenagers sitting together in total silence, staring at their screens, and wondered, "How did we get here?"—you are not alone.

Parents and educators are constantly trying to better understand the rapidly changing world our kids are growing up in today. Recently, several teachers and staff members here at River Valley read a book that perfectly captures that struggle: Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*. It resonated so deeply with our team that we wanted to share it with our entire community.

The Shift: From "Play-Based" to "Phone-Based"

The book takes a hard look at how childhood has fundamentally changed over the past twenty years. In the past, kids spent the bulk of their free time playing outside, taking risks, exploring the neighborhood, and building friendships face-to-face.

Today, much of that unstructured, real-world time has been replaced by the 24/7 connectivity of smartphones and social media. Haidt breaks down exactly how this massive cultural shift has affected our youth, leading to measurable changes in:

- Sleep quality and duration
- Focus and attention spans in the classroom
- The depth and quality of real-world friendships
- Overall anxiety and depression levels

What makes *The Anxious Generation* such a compelling read is that it validates what parents and teachers are already noticing. It connects the dots between the gut feelings we have as adults and the data that underlies them. Many of us have seen firsthand how a constant stream of notifications can dictate a student's mood, derail their focus during homework, or complicate how they interact with their peers. Haidt's research helps explain the "why" behind these behavioral changes, giving adults a shared language to talk about the problem.

Moving Forward, Together

Most importantly, the book isn't just doom and gloom. The author shares practical, actionable ideas for how families, schools, and communities can work together to help students achieve a healthier balance between their online and real-world experiences.

Whether you grab a physical copy, download the audiobook for your commute, or check it out from the local library, *The Anxious Generation* offers incredibly helpful insight. It serves as a fantastic starting point for important conversations around the dinner table—and helps us all work together to support our kids in a digital world.

River Valley Schools

River Valley High School
740-725-5800

Travis Stout, Principal
Kyle Strzelecki, Asst. Principal

River Valley Middle School
740-725-5700

Tom Bower, Principal
Marty Schuster, Asst. Principal

Heritage Elementary School
740-725-5500

John Wickersham, Principal

Liberty Elementary School
740-725-5600

Zach Burns, Principal

See our calendar of events at:
www.rvk12.org



RV Archery enjoying some time at the range.

Heritage Elementary School

The holiday season brought lots of fun activities and memories to Heritage Elementary. It provides a time for staff and students to celebrate the hard work being done in the classroom with moments to infuse spirit, tradition, and community into the fabric of Heritage. We are very thankful for the partnership and support of our PTO and community members helping to put on these events and volunteer their time to provide these experiences.

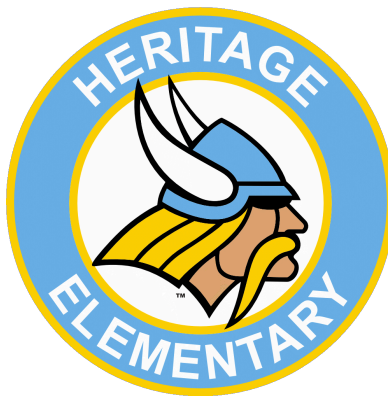
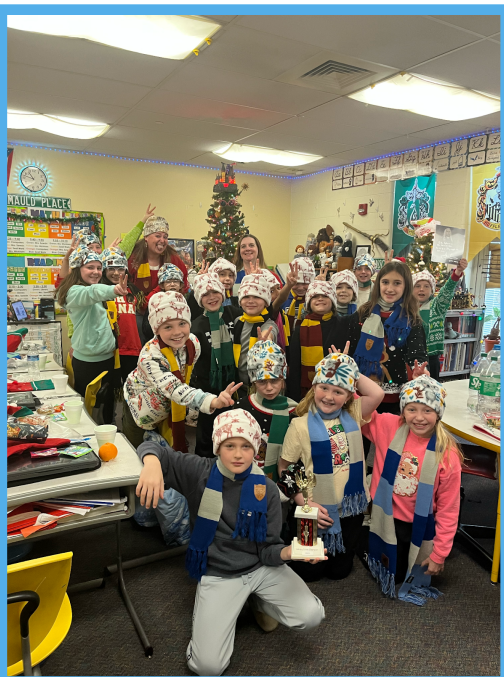
Halloween was a special treat this year as our Fall Festival landed on the same date. Students were able to dress up in their Halloween costumes. We celebrated with great fall weather and enjoyed a portion of the day being outside playing games, activities, and the fan-favorite hayride!



November is a time to take a step back and be thankful for what we have accomplished in the first quarter of the school year. The students helped our community through our Thanks and Giving Drive to support Christmas Clearinghouse in raising nearly \$1,600 for the cause! The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is a time-honored tradition and Heritage celebrates with our own rendition. Inspired by the book, *Balloons Over Broadway* by Melissa Sweet, we take a look at the history and evolution of the Macy's Parade. Students design and create their own balloons, instruments, and floats to host a parade around the school!

The holiday season culminated in December with festivities, trivia, and excitement to cap off the end of the first semester. Our primary students put their building skills to the test by creating gingerbread houses. The Elementary Band and Orchestra displayed talents with their holiday concert. Staff and students enjoyed the Happy Heritage Holidays as we headed into Winter Break.

The first few months of the new year have been a great start to the next chapter in the school year as we gear up for the testing season ahead. Heritage continues to seek opportunities to collaborate, innovate, and elevate students as they exemplify Viking Pride and support within the River Valley Community.



River Valley Middle School

Victory in Overtime: Lady Vikes Capture the Championship!

The winter sports season at River Valley wasn't just about the final scores—it was about growth, grit, and the "Viking Way." Across the board, our basketball and wrestling teams showed continuous improvement, racking up wins and sharpening their skills with every match.

The undisputed highlight of the season was the 8th Grade Girls Basketball Tournament. In a championship game that kept fans on the edge of their seats, the Lady Vikes found themselves trailing late in the second half.

Displaying incredible mental toughness, the team staged a thrilling come-from-behind rally to force the game into overtime. When the final buzzer sounded, the Lady Vikes emerged as Tournament Champions. Their victory is a testament to what happens when talent meets a tireless work ethic.

While the athletes were battling on the court and the mats, our RVMS Cheerleaders were busy ensuring that the River Valley spirit remained at an all-time high. Often the unsung heroes of the season, our cheer squad does much more than just lead chants. They are the engine of school culture, responsible for:

- Sustaining Momentum: Keeping the energy high even during those tough, high-pressure moments in the game.
- Leading the Crowd: Bridging the gap between the players on the court and the fans in the stands.
- Building Community: Consistently bringing a positive, high-energy presence to every single event, regardless of the scoreboard.

A huge congratulations to all our winter athletes and spirit leaders for a semester of "all-in" effort!



Right to Left: Nora Dean, Carter Kloha, Garrett Obenour

Spelling Bee: Obenour Defends the Crown

The competition was fierce at the recent River Valley Middle School Spelling Bee, but Garrett Obenour held his ground to successfully defend his title as school champion! We are incredibly proud of all our top finishers who represented RVMS at the Marion County Spelling Bee at Tri-Rivers this February:

Placement	Student
1st Place	Garrett Obenour
2nd Place	Carter Kloha
3rd Place	Nora Dean
4th Place	Mason Ring
5th Place	Axel Bass
Alternates	Gracie Marcum & Cole Ringle



Future-Focused: RVMS Hosts Successful Career Exploration Day

The halls of River Valley Middle School were buzzing with professional energy recently as we hosted our annual Career Exploration Day. With over 50 community volunteers generously sharing their expertise, our students had a front-row seat to a world of future possibilities. Prior to the event, students completed a career interest survey to ensure they were matched with presentations that aligned with their unique strengths and career field interests. From healthcare and the trades to technology and public service, the feedback from both students and presenters was overwhelmingly positive. We want to extend a sincere "Thank You" to every professional who volunteered their time to invest in our middle school students!

You might wonder why we prioritize these conversations now rather than waiting until high school. Research shows that the middle school years are a "sweet spot" for several reasons:

- Bridging the Gap: When students see how their current math or English lessons apply to real-world jobs, their engagement in the classroom naturally increases.
- Low-Stakes Exploration: Middle school is the perfect time for students to "test drive" different career activities and discover what they don't like just as much as what they do—before they have to choose high school electives or college majors.
- Expanding Horizons: Many students are only aware of the careers they see in their immediate circles. This event pulls back the curtain on a vast economy of opportunities they might never have imagined, from professionals in our own community.

By starting these conversations early, we aren't asking students to choose a lifelong path today; we are simply giving them a compass to help navigate their tomorrow.

A Lifesaving Donation for River Valley

You have probably seen the commercials on television or watched the dramatic rescue videos on social media. You may have even wondered: *What exactly is that device, and does it really work?* We are talking about the **LifeVac**, a revolutionary airway clearance device—and we are thrilled to announce that River Valley buildings are now equipped with them!

What is the LifeVac?

When a choking emergency happens, every single second counts. The LifeVac is a non-powered, non-invasive device designed to safely remove an airway obstruction. While standard first-aid protocols like the Heimlich maneuver are always our first line of defense, the LifeVac serves as an essential, life-saving backup when traditional methods are unsuccessful. Its simple, suction-based design makes it incredibly effective in a crisis.

An Extra Layer of Safety

In a bustling school district where hundreds of students eat lunch and snacks every day, having the right emergency equipment on hand brings incredible peace of mind. Thanks to a recent initiative, these devices have been strategically placed throughout our district buildings, giving our staff another vital tool to keep our students, staff, and visitors safe.

Thank You to Our Local Heroes

Schools can't do it alone, and we are incredibly fortunate to have strong partnerships with our local first responders. We want to extend a massive and heartfelt **"Thank You" to Chief Canterbury, Lt. Severns, and the 1st Consolidated Fire District**. Because of their generous donation, River Valley was able to bring these valuable devices into our schools. It is just another example of our community stepping up to prioritize the health and safety of our Vikings!



Mapping the Future: A Season of Discovery at RVHS

Over the last few months, River Valley High School has intensified its commitment to "College and Career Readiness" by taking students out of the building and bringing experts into it. From the sterile halls of modern hospitals to the high-tech floors of local manufacturing plants, our Vikings have been busy mapping out their futures. Here is a look at where they've been and what they've been learning.

The Freshman Career Café: Lunch with a Purpose

The highlight of the winter for our 9th graders was the annual Freshman Career Café. Hosted every February by our counseling and career readiness team, this event transformed the typical lunch hour into a high-impact networking session. This year, over 16 local employers joined our freshmen for lunch. But this wasn't just a social visit—it was a strategic rotation. Based on their personal interests and skills, students rotated through four different employers to hear first-hand accounts of what it takes to succeed in Marion. Whether students plan to enter the workforce immediately after graduation or pursue a degree first, they walked away with a clearer understanding of the opportunities waiting for them right here at home.



The World of Work: Workplace Tours

Nothing beats seeing a career in action. This winter, students have had the opportunity to step inside several local industries to see how their current studies apply to high-demand jobs. Recent and upcoming visits include:

- STAR Turbine: Students explored the precision and engineering required in modern power generation.
- Graphic Packaging: A look into the massive scale of local manufacturing and logistics.
- OhioHealth: A deep dive into healthcare careers, ranging from nursing to medical technology.

College & Academic Partnerships

For those looking toward a degree, the Counseling Office has been a hub of activity. RVHS isn't just sending students to colleges; the colleges are coming to us. Marion Technical College (MTC): Taylor Wright from MTC has been a regular fixture on campus, holding one-on-one sessions with students to discuss career pathways and course registration. Ashland University also recently highlighted an Open House for their Nursing program, specifically targeting our aspiring healthcare professionals.

Civic Duty: "Youth at the Booth"

Career readiness isn't just about a paycheck; it's about being a productive citizen. Mr. Stout has been actively recruiting students who are (or will be) 18 to serve as volunteer poll workers for the upcoming elections. It's a unique way for students to gain "workplace" experience while serving their community.

Why It Matters

As Principal Stout often emphasizes, the goal of these visits is to connect the "Why" to the "What". When a student sees how their physics lesson helps a turbine spin at STAR Turbine, or how their Spanish commands help them communicate in a diverse workplace, their education takes on a new level of meaning. Whether our students are heading straight into the workforce, enlisting in the military, or enrolling in a four-year university, RVHS is making sure they don't start that journey blindly.

See Upcoming Events at:
rvk12.org/calendar



A Season of Champions: RVHS Athletics Update

With spring around the corner, it's the perfect time to look back and celebrate the incredible accomplishments of our River Valley student-athletes. From the greens in the fall to the courts, mats, and pools this winter, the Vikings have delivered a season full of grit, growth, and championship titles that make our community proud!

The fall season started with a massive victory on the links. For the first time in over a decade, our Boys Golf Team captured the MOAC Championship! The fall season started with a massive victory on the links. For the first time in over a decade, our Boys Golf Team captured the MOAC Championship! The team success also translated into major individual honors from the conference. Asher Gates was officially named the MOAC Boys Golf Athlete of the Year, while both he and Chase Smith earned First Team All-MOAC honors. A huge congratulations goes out to the entire golf program, and to Josh Gast, who was appropriately honored as the 2025 MOAC Coach of the Year for bringing the title back to River Valley.



Fall 2025 MOAC Champs - River Valley Boys Golf - Congratulations to Coach Gast and team!

On the cross country trails, Erica Mason proved that hard work pays off by qualifying for the State Cross Country Meet at Fortress Obetz. She represented RVHS with an impressive time of 20:44. What a major accomplishment to compete at the highest level in the state!



Erica Mason finished in the state cross-country meet with a time of 20:44. Great job, Erica!

In the water, Junior swimmer Braden LeVois has been making headlines all season long. His incredible performance in the pool earned him a prestigious Fahey Bank Award in December. He continued to build on that momentum by making a massive splash at the MOACs and ultimately capping off an elite winter season by qualifying for and competing at the OHSAA Division II State Swimming Championships.

As the weather turned cold, our indoor sports heated up. The Boys Basketball Team officially secured their status as a dynasty-in-the-making by winning the Mid-Ohio Athletic Conference Championship for the second year in a row, sealing the deal with a thrilling victory against Shelby High School.

Meanwhile, our Wrestling Programs have been dominating the mats. Both the boys' and girls' teams have seen fantastic individual success and strong team placements in recent tournaments, highlighted by the boys' 2nd-place overall finish at the Elgin Tournament.

Finally, the RVHS Bowling Program wrapped up a very strong winter season, showing great consistency and teamwork down the stretch.



We are incredibly proud of the dedication our student-athletes, coaches, and parents have shown this year. Go Vikes!

From Classroom to Career: River Valley Teachers Explore the Future at Graphic Packaging

At River Valley, we believe preparing students for the future starts with understanding the world they will enter. Recently, our District Leadership Team had the opportunity to visit **Graphic Packaging International and OhioHealth** to learn firsthand about the skills today's employers are seeking and the career opportunities available right here in our community.

During the visit, teachers saw much more than a production floor. They observed teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and advanced technology in action. The experience reinforced that the same skills we emphasize in our classroom (responsibility, collaboration, timeliness, and a positive attitude) are the very qualities businesses depend on every day.



Industry leaders shared the growing need for skilled workers in areas such as advanced manufacturing, engineering technology, and logistics. Many of these careers offer strong opportunities without requiring a traditional four-year degree, but they do require solid academic foundations and strong work habits.

This partnership helps us better connect classroom learning to real-world applications. When students ask, "Why does this matter?" we can confidently explain how the skills they are building today translate directly into future opportunities. At River Valley, we are committed to keeping these conversations going with students, families, and our community. Together, we can prepare our children for meaningful and successful futures.

LET'S GO VIKINGS!



Congratulations to all the student-athletes, coaches, and teams that made it to the state tournaments this winter! Talent wins games, but hard work and dedication wins championships.

RIVER VALLEY LOCAL SCHOOLS



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**“It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.”
– James Thurber**