



Blind Brook-Rye Union Free School District

A quarterly newsletter

Winter 2023

BMPRSS shows off its new spaces during grand opening celebration

As community members traversed the halls of the newly renovated Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School, many recalled memories and expressed excitement at what they saw.

“Wait, this was the Xerox room,” said one, peeking into a doorway.



“I want to head back to school,” said another, walking out of a new classroom.

The community was invited to see the renovations firsthand. Administrators, including Superintendent Colin Byrne, Principal Tracy Taylor and Assistant Principal Teresa Letizia along with PTA Co-President Correy Stephenson served as tour guides. They walked groups through the new atrium, main office and classrooms—both new and renovated—and into the cafetorium to enjoy refreshments before a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

“I think this is amazing,” parent Sean Zhou, whose son Jason is in third grade, said after the tour. “It’s a big opportunity to do more things and is quite an achievement for the community.”

During one of the tours, Dr. Byrne showed where the old wall of the original building had been and where a kindergarten classroom now stands where a road once ran behind the building.



“This space has been amazing,” he said of the new designated STEAM classroom, sharing a common sentiment among attendees.

Ms. Taylor agreed, calling herself a “proud principal.”

“We are all excited about the prospects, of what teachers and students will accomplish in the new classrooms,” she said.

Teachers will benefit from new storage units that were included in the plans, reflecting a request from the teachers themselves.

She noted too how the furniture is adaptable with wheels to move more easily, and the desks have a surface that allows students to write on them while they work.

“It’s beautiful. It was worth waiting for. It’s spectacular,” alumnus Dean Stanton, a student at the school from 1962 to 1972, said. During his time as a student, the school was a K-9 space and he witnessed several additions made.



Fellow RSS alumnus Kate Jaffee often returns to the school as a substitute teacher.

“It’s really nice,” she said. “It’s so much easier to navigate.”

Her brother, Will Jaffee, is a junior at Blind Brook High School. Will said being back here brought back memories.

“The Night of Music, I remember that so vividly,” he said of a special fifth-grade event celebrating music from movies. His class featured tunes from “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.”

As guests gathered for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony, Dr. Byrne welcomed them and thanked them for their support. This was the first significant renovation to the building since the 1965 wing was added.

“In my mind this is a big moment,” he said. “It really is a monument to this community and the support that it shows to this school district.”

The school's namesake, Bruno M. Ponterio, was also on hand to celebrate, having served as assistant principal, principal and interim superintendent before retiring in 1995.

"It's always nice to come home," he said to applause.

"I am proud to have served in a district that was visionary and set standards for the children, staff and administrators," he said. "We love our children and what they accomplish. We have a school system that has received national awards and recognitions. This is amazing."



"Tonight, I thank you and share this honor with you and our board members, staff administrators and community," he said. "Thank you for your kindness, thoughtfulness and support during the 32 years I served the district. Together we can continue to make a difference in the lives of our children and this edifice, this construction proves that point."

Board member Scott Jaffee noted that there were many people to thank, but he wanted to especially recognize Ms. Taylor and Ms. Letizia, who, he said, kept the school not only functioning but thriving during the craziness of the construction.

"I can say without exaggeration I have dreamed of this day for four years," Mr. Jaffee said.

Before he was even joined the board, he added, he saw the plans and thought "this is the school our kids deserve."

“Today we can officially say we have an elementary school facility where the building is as impressive as the hard-working students, teachers, administrators and staff that work in these halls every day,” he said.

Ms. Taylor said she noticed the number of “wows” and “I remember that’s” expressed by guests during the tours.

“We are so excited about what is to be, we know that there will be endless possibilities,” she said.

“We are just so excited about all the things to come,” she added, before inviting Mr. Ponterio up to help her cut the ribbon. *BB*

Signing Day: BBHS Athletes have made a decision



Athletes at Blind Brook High School are used to seeing red, white and blue — on their uniforms and in the stands. When a group of athletes walked into the library on Jan. 31, the space was awash in orange, blue and white, a change that represented their future. It was signing day and for a select

group of athletes, the change in colors now represented where they would attend college.

The athletes gathered in the library with their family, friends, teammates, and coaches for the special celebration.

Athletic Director Kim Saxton welcomed everyone and noted that along with



the athletes, the parents should be congratulated as well for seeing their son or daughter through the past four years and supporting their accomplishments.

“You have waited with patience to attend the college or your choice,” she told the athletes.

“We are thrilled to honor all of you today,” she said.

Nili Sprecher was the first to sign on the proverbial dotted line. She will be attending the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, where she will play Division 1 squash there for the Cavaliers.

“I chose it for the team atmosphere and the coach and staff there,” Nili said.

When asked to share her favorite memory from her athletic career, she referred to a match she played in the British Junior Open in England.

“I got to play in the British Open and play for the United States,” Nili said.

With a swipe of his pen, Nico Gonzalez made his choice official. He will be a Diplomat, playing soccer at Franklin & Marshall College, a National Collegiate Athletic Association Division III school in Pennsylvania.

Nico said he was looking for a Division III school that was close to home. He said when he visited the campus, he felt comfortable there and liked what he saw.

“I really liked the coaches and staff and the team culture,” he said of the athletic program.



He said he will always remember the “bonding moments” he had through the years with his soccer teammates.

For Ethan Taerstein, he committed to Colby where he will play lacrosse for the Mules.

“I wanted to challenge myself on the field and in the classroom,” Ethan said as to why he chose Colby College, a D-III school located in Maine. He said to that the team culture he saw on a visit was also a motivating factor.

He said his favorite part of playing lacrosse at BBHS was when he was a junior during Senior Day.

“I was a junior at the time, but it was just great to support our seniors,” he said of a favorite high school athletic memory.

In the fall Alyssa Trokie will be off to SUNY New Paltz where she will play tennis as a Hawk in the D-III program.

She met the head coach at a tennis tournament and decided to explore the school further.

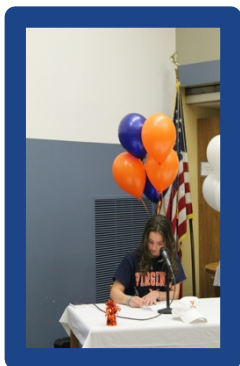
“It’s a nice community to start my college career with,” she said of what her research revealed to her.

“Definitely this year, we got to sectionals” Alyssa said as to her fondest memory of playing tennis at BBHS.

The team, she said, ended up making to the second round.

“Signees, you are now among the select few who have committed to go off to a school of your choice,” Ms. Saxton said. “Thank you for your talent and character at Blind Brook High School.”

The ceremony concluded with those gathered taking photos and enjoying refreshments, including a selection of blue, white and orange cupcakes. *BB*



“Signees, you are now among the select few who have committed to go off to a school of your choice. Thank you for your talent and character at Blind Brook High School.”
-Kim Saxton, Athletic Director

A Message from the Superintendent

While the weather may have been unusual this winter, the school year continued in anything but an unusual fashion and gave us much to celebrate.



Throughout the past few months, we celebrated the grand opening of the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School with a special event. The community was invited in to tour the new spaces and received much positive feedback. Students and staff have been enjoying the new space and we look forward to the completion of this project. There are still a few details that remain, and I will continue to update the community regularly.

I want to extend my congratulations to Blind Brook High School art students Junior Sophie Possick and Senior Jazmin Zeitune, our Scholastic Art Award winners. Sophie was awarded an Honorable Mention in the Film & Animation category. Jazmin came away with several awards. Among them, a Gold Key for Editorial Cartoon, a Silver Key for Mixed Media, Silver Key for Drawing & Illustration, an Honorable Mention for her Art Portfolio, an Honorable Mention for Digital Art and a Silver Key for Comic Art.

I would also like to pass along my congratulations to several of our senior athletes. We celebrated Signing Day earlier this season and watched four seniors committed to their futures. I wish them all the best with their athletic and academic endeavors!

Further congratulations go to our Middle School Drama team! They put on a delightful production of “Into the Woods, Jr.” They should all be proud of the work they did to make the story come alive!

Finally, I would like to thank Kara Santucci, MS, CCTP, and coordinator at the Adolescent Counseling and Bullying Prevention Resource Center of Westchester County. Ms. Santucci led an important workshop for parents, discussing the topic of bullying. She shared her insights in how parents can recognize the differences between conflict, what is just normal teen drama and when it crosses a line into bullying.

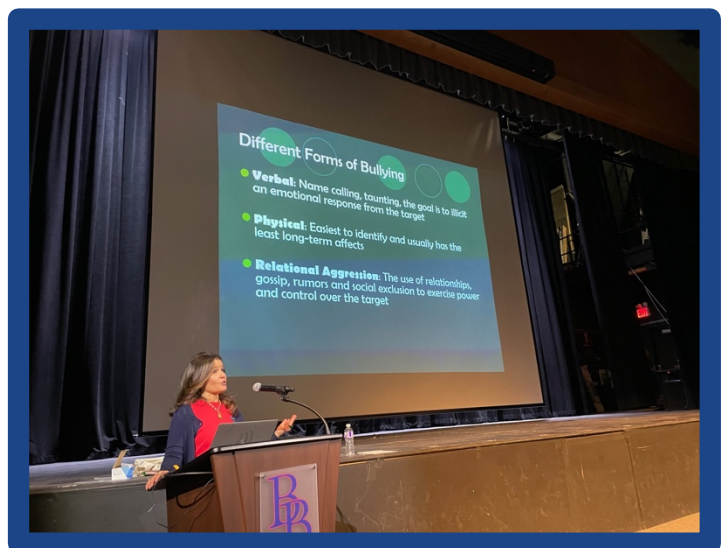
As spring arrives in true fashion, we look forward to continuing the hard work of our students, the diligence of our teachers and staff and I know we will have much more to celebrate in the weeks ahead!

Dr. Colin Byrne
Superintendent

Parent workshop offers insight on bullying, how to help

Kara Santucci, MS, CCTP, is a mother of three. She has seen it all, not only while raising her own children, but with the works she does as the Coordinator at the Adolescent Counseling and Bullying Prevention Resource Center of Westchester County.

On Jan. 17, Ms. Santucci presented a workshop for parents to help them identify what is a conflict, what is just normal teen drama and when it crosses a line into bullying. She offered tips on how parents can assist their child or children navigate whatever unpleasantness they may be experiencing.



“We have a lot of things at the middle school but it’s not bullying, it’s drama,” Blind Brook Middle School Principal Seth Horowitz said before introducing the guest speaker. He explained how the workshop developed after Ms. Santucci gave a presentation to staff. Many at the time noted that bullying is not conflict and while they must be attentive to when things go bad, sometimes teens just need help learning how to manage conflict.

Ms. Santucci identified conflict for parents as “normal.” Noting, however, that it can still be painful.

Young teens can also be confronted with microaggressions from their peers. Ms. Santucci noted how microaggressions are a form of toxic language.

“They are brief, commonplace, daily verbal behavior or emotional indignities that communicate hostilities,” Ms. Santucci said.

Bullying, she said, has its own definition—it’s an imbalance of power, a chronic pattern of behavior with an intent to harm and the perpetrator does not show any empathy towards their target, she said. Bullying can be verbal, physical or relational, that includes gossip, rumors or social exclusion.

“Nationwide verbal abuse is the most common form of bullying,” Ms. Santucci said. “Kids remember the names.”

Fortunately, she noted, “there is no direct correlation between bullying and suicide.”

“The majority of kids who are bullied do not commit suicide,” she said.

One of the biggest indicators that a child is being bullied is a change in their behavior. They may develop headaches or a change in eating habits.

There is a correlation, however, between bullying and substance abuse. Those children who are in pain are more like to self-medicate.

What has proven to help, is for a victim of bullying to have one friend stand up for them.

“It’s that social connectivity. Just one friend can make a difference,” Ms. Santucci said.

Naturally parents want to protect their child and help. But as Ms. Santucci noted, parents need to tread carefully. For starters, parents can call their child out if they hear them saying mean things about others. And, she said, modeling good behavior goes a long way too.

If their child is the target of a bully, parents should talk to them about their approach — does their child want them to call the school? In some instances, the severity of the issue necessitates alerting school officials as to what is happening and that something needs to be done. In other cases, a child may want a different approach and may feel they can handle the situation but want a safe place to vent about what they are experiencing.

“You want to present yourself as calm and cool,” Ms. Santucci said. “Make it about what you notice, it’s not a judgement.”

Sometimes it can be helpful to role model with your child what to say when facing a difficult challenge. This can give them the appropriate vocabulary and help build confidence too.

“The goal is to reinstation safety,” Ms. Santucci said. For children who may have difficulty talking to their parent about what is happening, it helps, she said, to reassure their child that they love them too much to allow them to handle this difficult situation on their own.

One parent in attendance noted how there was a gray area when it came to bullying.

“I think they are really smart about it,” the parent said of bullies. “Like microaggressions, the little things that add up. I feel like bullying has a different definition now than when we were growing up.”

“It really does take a village,” Ms. Santucci said. “This work has changed how I parent. Thank you for caring for your kids,” she told those in attendance. *BB*

Scholastic Art Award winners celebrate creativity and friendship

Junior Sophie Possick and Senior Jazmin Zeitune were two shy, creative types enjoying the middle school art club. They asked their club advisor if they could introduce them to one another, too shy to do it themselves. They have been best friends since and recently celebrated their success together as Scholastic Art Award winners.

“I remember finding my name and I was really happy,” Sophie said looking at the list of this year’s winners. “I said, I have to check for Jasmin, and called her and read her awards, she asked what are you doing?”

Sophie was awarded an Honorable Mention in the Film & Animation category for her piece “A Night in My Room.”



Jazmin came away with several awards. Among them, a Gold Key for Editorial Cartoon for her work “Besties,” Silver Key for Mixed Media, “Drowning in Words,” Silver Key for Drawing & Illustration for her “Living Thoughts,” an Honorable Mention for her Art Portfolio “My Moving Experience,” Honorable Mention for Digital Art for her “Packing Home,” and a Silver Key for Comic Art, “Sweet vs. Sour: Race.”

“I was a little surprised,” Jazmin said when she heard Sophie reading off the awards she had received. The Gold Key honor, she said was something she put together about an hour before she had to submit it for the deadline.

For the past 100 years the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, sponsored by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers, have been celebrating student artists in grades 7-12. Participants compete regionally, and those awarded Gold Keys go on to a national competition, these winners will be announced in March.

Last year, Jasmin said she participated in the awards program and came away with Gold and Silver Key awards, something that pleased her.

“The thing that is hard is it depends on what category you enter,” Sophie said. “Some don’t get a lot of entries, so it’s better to put something in there. It’s super subjective, what the judges look for.”



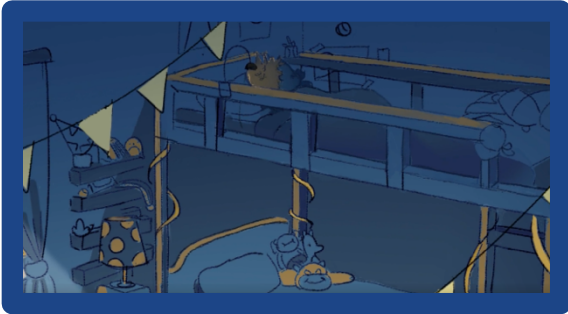
Silver Key for Mixed Media, “Drowning in Words,” by Jazmin Zeitune.

In the fall Jazmin will be attending the School of Visual Arts in New York and hopes to study animation. One day, she said, she’d like a career in cartoons or to become a story board artist.

Sophie has some time to think about her future but is leaning towards attending an art school to study illustration.

“As long as there is art, I’ll be happy,” she said of her future.

The two have taken as many art courses as their schedules would allow in their years at Blind Brook High School.



Honorable Mention in the Film & Animation category for her piece “A Night in My Room” by Sophie Possick. Click on the image to view video.

“I took a figure drawing class,” Jasmin said, adding that it was awkward at first, but realized it was fun to draw something that was right in front of you.”

Jasmin said she loves the creativity of doing art and she is always drawing.

“I feel like everyone should be doing a little bit of art, even if they don’t think they are good at it. It’s such a great way to destress.”

“I really like the artistic community,” Sophie said, encouraging students to take an art or music class just to have the experience.

“When I talk to people about doing art they say, ‘I could never draw or paint,’ but I think everyone can do it,” she said. “Everyone can learn to do it; you just need to practice.”

“Art isn’t perfect,” Jazmin said. *BB*

BBMS “Into the Woods, Jr.” shines spotlight on talent, friendships of performers and more

All your favorite fairy tale characters come to life in this lively production of “Into the Woods, Jr.” by the students at Blind Brook Middle School for a one-of-a-kind performance.

Producer Cher Treacy, who teaches English at BBMS, explained that following the auditions it was obvious what student would get what part immediately. And due to the fact that they had been rehearsing since before Thanksgiving, she knew they had chosen wisely.



“I think this is probably one of the best groups of kids,” said Ms. Treacy.

“They gel. They help each other, they listen to other parts. People don’t expect a middle school show to be as good as other shows here.”

“They’ve put a lot of work into this,” she said.

During a recent rehearsal the cast received their costumes. One by one they were called up to try on their outfits, and to wear them for a run through of the show. There would need to be some adjustments, hemming done and a trick to help with the capes, but it was one more step in making the production come to life.



The story features Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and his beanstalk, the Witch and the Baker and his wife among others. All of their lives collide when the Baker and his wife set out on a quest to undo a curse while the other characters are trying to get what they want too. Naturally, things don't go as expected.

"Personally, I love how a bunch of different stories combine into one show," said Cassandra Brunetti, an eighth grader who plays The Baker.

"We've worked so hard on this, everyone loves doing what they do," Cassandra said. "Everyone is just amazing."

"I love the music," Maya Hazan, who plays The Witch, said. "The music is so fun and entertaining."

The "junior" version of the show has many fun features, director Julie Doré said. Among them are a happy ending for the characters and the



parent/child and husband/wife relationships that develop as the story unfolds.

"It's such an unequivocal group of eighth graders," she continued. "They are so versatile; they can handle anything. These kids are strong, I am so excited to see them shine."

In addition to the work they have done on the show, several cast members have been performing together in other recent productions, including The Adams Family and Beauty and The Beast, creating a special relationship among the performers.

“It’s the friends,” said eighth grader Hannah Levine, who plays Cinderella, that keeps her coming back. “It lets you be something you are not. In class you may be quiet, but here you can be crazy when you are with your friends.”

“I like being dramatic, to be someone else, personally,” Cassandra agreed.

“I like working with the people,” Maya said. “I am doing things with them that you can do here but can’t do outside of the theater. You can be yourself more than in other places.” *BB*

Winter Concerts

Although we’ve had winter weather that wasn’t, it did not stop our talented musicians from sharing some seasonal tunes!



BMRSS Winter Concert



BBHS Winter Concert



BBMS Winter Concert



BBHS Choral Concert

RSS students celebrate the Lunar New Year with special assembly

Lion? Tiger? Ox? All good guesses, but students at the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street School learned that 2023 is the Year of the Rabbit!

The information was presented to them during an assembly celebrating the Lunar New Year. Students,



dressed in traditional clothing, took turns sharing how the new year is celebrated. The students were also joined by members of the Chinatown Community Young Lions, who demonstrated a tiger dance.

“The upcoming Lunar New Year will start on Sunday and last 15 days,” said fifth grader Zimu Q. referring to January 22.

Third grader Jason Z. explained how the traditional new year celebrations began in China. He told the story of a monster who would come to a village and frighten its inhabitants each year. One year, there was a traveler passing through who suggested the villagers find ways to frighten the monster away. They did so by hanging red lanterns outside and setting off fireworks.

“They never saw the monster again,” he said, adding that the tradition of wearing red and using fireworks to celebrate the new year continues to this day.



Brandon W., who is in the fifth grade, said the new year is “a time to meet with family and get red envelopes filled with money.”

“I also like to eat dumplings,” noted Ivyn S., also in fifth grade, as to what he enjoys most when his family celebrates the holiday.

Families in other Asian countries also celebrate the Lunar New Year. As one student explained, in Korea they eat rice soup and pay their respect to their elder family members by kneeling in front of them.

Madison W. had the honor of introducing the Lion Dance to those assembled in the cafetorium.

“The dance,” she said, “is to bring good luck.”

Before students realized what was happening, the curtains on the stage parted and a purple, white and pink lion appeared. It moved its head up and down and its body around the stage before heading out to the audience. As drums and cymbals played, the lion made its way through the seats, pausing sometimes to shake its big head at students and teachers much to the delight of the children in the audience.

When the lion returned to the stage Principal Tracy Taylor held up a head of lettuce and the purple lion gingery took it from her. Moments later the lettuce was spit out and green leaves were strewn about, as students who witnessed the interaction laughed at the sight.

The lion was not being disrespectful. Rather, it is a tradition for the beast to throw it back.

“Having the lion throw it back to you is a symbol of luck and wealth,” explained Kyle Lew, a member of the Chinatown Community Young Lions. The character is so large that one person oversees moving its head, which weights 30 pounds, while another supports its back.



The lion, Mr. Lew assured, does not eat anyone.

“We are here to have fun,” he said. “We want to share our culture and holiday.” BB

Saturnalia Festival brings students together

Students at Blind Brook High School dusted off their togas for a special celebration, the annual Saturnalia Festival. The event, hosted by the school's Latin and Italian classes, is a modern twist on the ancient Roman festival.

Traditionally, ancient Romans celebrated to honor Saturn, the god of agriculture, in a mid-December soiree that often consisted of giving gifts and a feast. Many of the traditions practiced by the ancient Romans would later be adopted by Christians when they celebrated Christmas.



Spanish and Latin teacher Christine Sabatella explained that the event brings together ancient and modern Italy.

“It’s a chance to get together and have some fun and enjoy one another’s company,” she said. “It’s been a tradition for many years.”

The celebration took place after school on Dec. 12. The highlight was the food. Students prepared Italian dishes from pasta and pizza to zeppolas and more.

“As a senior we finally got to eat first,” joked Sarah Mintz, President of the Italian Club, who contributed a cold pasta salad to the offerings.

“I always thought it was a wonderful day,” she continued, adding that the celebration has been a tradition at the school for as long as she can remember.

“It’s more of a Latin festival, but we kind of took it over,” Italian Club co-vice president Ciella Angel-Lalanne said. Her contribution consisted of Italian Cookies made with a fruit extract imported from Italy.

“It’s a way to bring together a lot of people over food,” said Italian Club co-vice president and senior Lindsey Rosenberg.

The menu did contain a few ancient foods too, including enkhytoi, a type of honey cake rumored to have been a favorite of the god Hercules. Students could also try an herb puree served with chips.



Ms. Sabatella said it is difficult to find the ancient Roman recipes and ingredients. So, in many cases today’s cooks must improvise. While students tend to gravitate to the more familiar Italian fare, she does encourage them to try the ancient foods too.

“It’s a fun way to unify ancient Rome and modern Italy,” said Italian teacher Madeleine Salvatore. “We have fun and want to celebrate ancient and modern Italian culture. The kids really get into it.”

BB

Winter Midnight Madness



The Blue Team were the winners during the winter Midnight Madness. They beat the White Team, 75-63! It was a night of great competition when members of the Boys and Girls Varsity Basketball teams joined forces playing against teachers, staff and members of the Rye Brook Police Department all in the name of fun and to help raise money for our athletic department. Thank you all who came out and participated and also to those who cheered from the stands!

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 7, 2023, Board of Education Meeting, Budget Draft #1

March 9-11, BBHS Musical “Something Rotten”

March 11, Board of Education Budget Discussion, BBMS/HS
Library

