

Press Clippings 12/20/19

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Elgin Salvation Army provides winter coats for U-46 students in need

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Julie Reuter, left, a teacher at Coleman Elementary School in Elgin, with husband Jim, executive director of the Carol Stream Park District, sponsored a coat closet at the school. The Salvation Army in Elgin has placed closets in 25 schools within Elgin Area School District U-46 that will be stocked with new winter coats for students in need.



Martha Minehart, second from right, and her family and friends sponsored a coat closet at Willard Elementary School in South Elgin in honor of Minehart's 80th birthday. The Elgin Salvation Army has set up 25 such coat closets in Elgin Area School District U-46 schools.

The Salvation Army in Elgin has launched a new initiative to provide winter coats to Elgin Area School District U-46 students in need.

Since October, the group has set up coat closets in 25 schools -- 22 elementary and three middle schools -- throughout the district.

Schools were identified by U-46 employees based on student need, available space and if they didn't already have a similar charitable program.

Each elementary school is allotted 16 new coats, and middle schools get 10 coats each. The group will restock closets as coats run out.

"We are committed to doing that through the winter season," said Rick Reigner, resource development director for the Salvation Army in Elgin. "We've provided 840 coats so far."

Reigner said Project Coat Closet was inspired by a discussion with U-46 officials who said some students came to school in hooded sweatshirts during last year's polar vortex.

Now, if a school employee notices an underdressed student in severe weather, a social worker will help the student to pick out a winter coat from the closet to keep. U-46 schools without coat closets can contact one of the partner schools with closets if a need arises, Reigner said.

The Salvation Army in Elgin purchases coats at a reduced rate through a nonprofit organization. Individuals and organizations have stepped up to sponsor closets in 17 of the 25 schools. Sponsorship costs are \$500 for an elementary school and \$300 for a middle school.

Sponsors can have logos or names and a message placed on closets. Sponsors are needed for Horizon, Laurel Hill, Ontarioville and Parkwood elementary schools in Hanover Park, Lincoln Elementary in Hoffman Estates, Wayne Elementary, and Harriet Gifford Elementary in Elgin.

To sponsor a closet, email richard.reigner@usc.salvationarmy.org or call Reigner at (847) 741-2304, ext. 308.

Reigner said the agency will evaluate the program in the spring to determine whether to continue and expand it to more schools.

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Small property tax hike for most U-46 homeowners on horizon

By: Rafael Guerrero



Rafael Guerrero

School District U-46 board members have approved a \$288.5 million tax levy, resulting in a small tax increase for most property owners.

The 2019 levy resolution is 2.1% increase over last year. Like other school districts, U-46 officials must submit tax levies to the Kane County Clerk's Office by the last Tuesday of the year.

School board members unanimously approved the tax levy with little discussion at Monday's U-46 board meeting, which was the last of 2019.

Under the levy, a \$5,000 tax bill would increase to \$5,105, according to a district analysis. District spokeswoman Mary Fergus said the percentage amount of the tax bill that goes to U-46 will vary depending on where the resident lives; the Elgin-area district is split between 11 cities/villages in three counties.

The levy will provide just under half of the revenue for the district's operating budget. Earlier in the year, the school board approved a \$594 million budget for the 2019-20 school year.

The levy will collect nearly \$180 million in property taxes for educational purposes, according to the tax levy certificate. Another \$36 million-plus will be collected for the operations and maintenance fund. Another \$36 million will be collected for the district's special education services and \$12 million-plus is earmarked for transportation.

Dale Burnidge, the district's financial operations director, told board members in October the levy amount is determined by estimating equalized assessed values of new construction and changes in the values of current property within the district boundaries. Equalized assessed values are not generally known until approximately April for Kane and DuPage counties and July for Cook County, according to school board documents.

SPORTS

---Daily Herald---12/20/2019

U-46 co-op gymnastics team forging strong bond

By: Chris Walker

Just as if they were learning about Cuba while having some food in history class, gymnasts from Bartlett, Elgin, Larkin, South Elgin and Streamwood are able to compete in a sport they love while simultaneously making new friends.

The U-46 co-op girls gymnastics team isn't just unique in that as many as five schools can feed into the squad, but that friendships that never would've been made have developed because of it.

"I think what's really cool is watching them be friends," U-46 co-op coach Mary Kate Dieter said. "There are friendships that have literally grown that wouldn't if the co-op didn't exist. It's not really about winning, but about kids from Streamwood becoming friends with kids from South Elgin who would not have met if this sport, this team, didn't exist."

U-46 co-op finished third during Thursday's quadrangular at Oswego with 123.35 points. Glenbard East, coming off its first state appearance, posted a season-high 141.45 and was followed by runner-up Oswego co-op's 138.75. Geneseo also competed with a 114.9.

"The team is really great and we have some pretty lit routines this year," U-46 co-op's Frannie Kuzyk, a senior at South Elgin, said. "All of us are really close together. As a senior we kind of have to lead the freshmen and sophomores. It's different for those who came from club so we have to prepare them for lower scores because of the different scoring methods and we're not as serious. We get them prepared for a fun and happy environment."

High school gymnastics is unique in that it's common to see a varsity team field a team with members from all classes. That presents a different dynamic when you have a freshman just getting her feet wet in high school contributing on a team with seniors who drive and are less than a year away from college. And once you consider that your teammates are from different schools, there certainly can be challenges, but U-46 co-op has embraced them.

"It's really not that hard because people who drive are open to driving others and I'll pick them up from school and we'll chill in my car and have fun there," Kuzyk, who had a 7.9 on floor, said. "Some teammates have classes together and bond there and we hang outside of gymnastics and we're already planning team bondings during winter break, with Secret Santa and going out to lunch after practice."

Sophomore Madi Aycock from Bartlett had the team's top finish, taking fourth on floor with an 8.8. She also had a 7.7 on beam.

"My floor wasn't my best but I competed a new skill," she said. "It's cool when you do something new that you haven't competed before. I did a front full today on floor which was new. Even if you fall you still think, 'Wow, I did it,' and that's an accomplishment and you're proud of yourself."

Other scores for U-46 co-op included South Elgin's Kallie Christopherson (8.3 vault, 7.4 beam, 6.8 bars), Amelia Lis (7.8 vault, 7.1 floor, 6.3 beam), Zoe Lee (8.1 bars and floor, 7.2 beam) and Nikeata Schuler (8.5 vault, 7.3 floor), Elgin's Naomi Johnson (8.3 vault, 7.1 beam, 6.45 bars) and Larkin's Zoie Adamson (7.05 bars).

Glenbard East had a terrific night behind all-arounders Rebecca Honig (37.05), Kelsey Donovan (36.9) and Erin Donovan (35.4). Honig won vault and floor and Erin Donovan edged her older sister for top honors on bars.

"We have been working hard to tighten up our routines to increase our team score," Rams coach Jessica Bugajsky said. "It paid off tonight."

The Rams will get even better when junior Kali Kartheiser, an all-state honoree a season ago, returns to action.

Oswego co-op freshman Emily Thomas dazzled on beam, edging Honig's bid for a third event title, 9.2 to 9.1.

---The Courier-News---12/20/2019

Friends, but now foes

South Elgin graduates Kamienski, Kumerow face off in Division III national championship

By: Paul Johnson



North Central College's Andrew Kamienski looks over his shoulder before scoring a touchdown against Augustana during an Oct. 12 game.



Kamienski protects the ball against Carthage in an Oct. 26 game.

What are the odds of two kids from the same hometown who graduated together from the same high school would eventually play against each other for a national championship?

That's the question North Central College's Andrew Kamienski and Wisconsin-Whitewater's Derek Kumerow are asking ahead of Friday's Stagg Bowl in Shenandoah, Texas.

Both players grew up in Bartlett and graduated from South Elgin in 2016. They will be in their respective starting lineups at receiver with the NCAA Division III football title on the line.

“It’s something out of a movie or a TV show,” Kamienski said. “It’s something that doesn’t come true.”

It wasn’t until NCC reached the national semifinals that Kamienski even knew it could be a possibility.

“I wasn’t worried about the other side of the bracket because of the teams we had to go through,” Kamienski said. “When we got to the Final Four, I realized we had a chance to play each other.”

Kumerow said he was keeping tabs on the Cardinals (13-1) as the Warhawks (13-1) made their run, but the two didn’t talk about it.

“He was doing his thing, and I was doing mine,” Kumerow said. “It’s amazing. We’ve been playing together since grade school, basketball, football. I can’t wait to see him.”

Former South Elgin coach Pat Pistorio, now the coach at Niles North, recalls summer camp with Kamienski and Kumerow.

The Storm held their overnight camp every summer at NCC. Coincidentally, Kumerow’s father, Eric, also was on the Cardinals’ coaching staff in 2003.

“That’s where the guys bonded throughout their high school career,” Pistorio said. “It’s weird how we did our summer camps at NCC, and now Andrew is there, and Derek is up at Whitewater.

“It’s two great programs and two kids who were tremendous workers for us. Those are two kids you dream of coaching.”

NCC is making its first appearance in the title game, and Kamienski has been an integral part of the program’s success.

He established a new Division III single-season record with 30 touchdown catches. For the season, he has 124 catches for 1,882 yards.

“It’s still kind of a dream,” Kamienski said. “To see myself go through all the hard work and finally get the reward I wanted, I’ve been overlooked since I was born. To do what I do and have all of this support, it’s been awesome.”

Whitewater is in the championship game for the 10th time, having won six national titles. Two of them came when Jake Kumerow, Derek’s older brother who’s now a receiver with the Green Bay Packers, was a Warhawk.

“He’s excited for me,” Derek said of Jake. “He wants to fly out, but he’s got a big game Monday (in Minnesota). We do our thing and talk about it later.

“He’s setting the bar pretty high for me. I love every second of it.”

Kamienski hopes that South Elgin’s players take the success the two are having to heart.

“Hopefully, it can benefit the kids there now,” Kamienski said. “It’s not just a school out in the middle of nowhere. There’s actually talent at that school.”

Pistorio is proud to see two of his former pupils experiencing success.

“It’s special to see two South Elgin kids that helped define our program,” Pistorio said. “They made the decision after their sophomore year (of high school) that they were going to do something special.”

Coney no island

Senior comes off bench to spark Streamwood over Elgin in conference game

By: Paul Johnson



Streamwood’s Lorenzo Coney gets past Elgin’s Christopher Toolsie during the Upstate Eight Conference game on Tuesday.

After missing some time with a hand injury, Lorenzo Coney returned to the regular rotation Tuesday night for Streamwood.

Rustiness? Soreness?

That was to be expected, and his hand was still sore after hoisting 24 shots, but the senior guard felt better after the final result. Coney came off the bench to score a game-high 22 points as the Sabres rolled to an 80-59 Upstate Eight Conference victory over host Elgin.

“Coach (Kent Payne) told me to keep shooting, so I kept shooting,” Coney said. “When my shot was off, I started passing.”

The 6-foot Coney added 11 rebounds, four steals and four assists for Streamwood (4-4, 2-1).

“He’s been getting better every game,” Payne said. “He’s just really aggressive. He’s been out a week, so he’s just coming back. He could start for us.”

Coney had a big role in the end of the first half, when the Sabres pulled away from Elgin (3-6, 0-3).

The Maroons cut the deficit to 34-29 on a free throw by Xavier Bonds midway through the second quarter.

The Sabres finished the first half on a 13-2 spurt for a 47-31 lead. Coney scored six points as Streamwood put up 29 in the second quarter.

“I think it was our pressure,” Payne said. “We got to press them a little bit. We hit our shots. We got on the offensive glass, which gave us a few more shots.”

Capped by a 3-pointer from Zach Marquez, Streamwood produced a 9-0 run to push the advantage to 58-38 with 4:40 left in the third quarter.

The Sabres led by as many as 25 points in the second half.

“We just work hard in practice,” Coney said. “We’re focused. We come out, play hard, compete.”

Elgin was paced by Bonds’ 20 points off the bench. Jeffrey Lomax scored 13 points. Darien Jackson added nine points and 13 rebounds.

“We’re a team that has to value every possession,” Elgin coach Todd Allen said. “Right now we’re not doing that.”

“I thought we played well until three minutes left in the half. We were right there. We were sitting pretty. They were in foul trouble. We just couldn’t take advantage of it. The wheels fell off. We just have to get better at taking care of the ball. We have a lot of work to do.”

Coney was one of four scorers in double figures for Streamwood. Marquez scored 17 points. Kyle Maybrun added 14 and Jakobe Strong had 10.

“It’s amazing,” Coney said. “We play differently. When we’re in transition, we shoot a lot of transition threes. We’re working together. We make things happen.”