

Press Clippings - 2/22/2023

– Daily Herald –

'A relationship that will last forever': Program working with homeless U-46 students needs mentors

Feb. 21, 2023

By Rick West



Danielle Valkner of St. Charles is the founder of Fostering Success, a mentorship program launched last year that has been working with students from U46's Project Access. The group is seeking more volunteer mentors that will begin training in March. Rick West | Staff Photographer

A mentorship program working with homeless kids in Elgin Area School District U-46 needs volunteers.

Fostering Success was founded last year by Danielle Valkner, a former CASA Kane County child advocate from St. Charles.

The group's mission is to provide meaningful connections with mentors and financial assistance to teens and young adults facing life's difficulties throughout their transition into adulthood.

"The challenges a lot of these kids are dealing with are overwhelming," Valkner said. "These kids are displaced. They don't have permanent housing. Many don't live with their parents. And for those that do, the parents tend to work a lot."

Fostering Success was initially going to focus on helping kids in the foster care system. But complications working with DCFS allowed it to shift focus to at-risk kids in the Project Access program of Elgin Area **School District U-46**. That program serves more than 1,000 homeless and displaced students in the district and works to ensure equal access to education and all programs while maintaining their dignity.

The mentorship program started working with 10 kids last May and recently added five more. [Now the program is searching for more mentors](#) to meet the growing need.

"It's going great, and we were really blessed with some wonderful mentors," Valkner said. "We were able to make some big impacts."

Mentors talk with their mentees by phone at least once a week and meet up with them a couple of times a month.

John Puglia of Carol Stream was one of the first group of mentors.

"It's very rewarding to help a kid that doesn't have anything like this in his life," he said.

Puglia's mentee is an 18-year-old with what he says is a slight form of autism. He said it took about six months to build a level of trust to get him to open up.

"Since then, it's been great," Puglia said. He's taken his mentee fishing and out to dinner, among other things.

"We've been doing things he's never done before," he said. "We gave him a big turkey at Thanksgiving, and he's never had a turkey in his life. He was just thrilled about being able to have a turkey dinner with his mom and sisters."

Mentors go through about 20 hours of self-study and training. After a background check, they're paired with a kid, most of whom are between 12 and 20 years old.

Valkner said there is an increased need for Spanish-speaking volunteers.

"A lot of these kids speak minimal English, and they're really struggling in school," she said. "They just need that extra support to kind of find their way."

School attendance is a major focus for the mentors.

"The kids are alone a lot, and there's not really someone to enforce them going to school," Valkner said. "So the mentors have been a really good, consistent influence in helping the kids realize how important it is to go to school."

The program developed an incentive program to help entice school attendance, setting up a point system that can ultimately earn them rewards. Points are given for achieving goals like showing up for school and communicating with their mentors. The points can then be used to get gift cards.

Fostering Success has also provided backpacks and school supplies for the mentees, as well as helped them with registration and transportation. The group has provided the kids with winter coats, food assistance and holiday gift cards. In one case, it assisted an 18-year-old who was evicted from a family member's house with emergency housing and rental assistance.

"Now he's got two jobs and is fully self-sufficient, and has kind of graduated out of our program," she said.

Mentors are asked for a one-year commitment to start. Puglia's experience has been so good that not only is he continuing with his mentee, but his wife is joining the program as well.

"If you're open-minded and want to help a kid that's in need, it's a great program," he said. "It's a year commitment, but it's a relationship that I think will last forever."

– Examiner of Bartlett –

U-46 Board of Education to vote on expense items

(This article also appeared in the Examiner of South Elgin/Examiner of Streamwood)

Feb. 22, 2023

By Seth Hancock

The Board of Education in **School District U-46** is set to vote on \$944,998 in expenditure proposals at its upcoming meeting on Monday, Feb. 27. The items were presented on Feb. 13.

The largest item is \$640,000, from the operations and maintenance fund, if approved, with International Contractors for an owner's representative for the upcoming work to convert **Bartlett's Hawk Hollow** from an elementary to a middle school.

The proposal states that the "size and scope" of the project is the rationale for the project.

"In order to ensure the project is monitored and guided appropriately throughout the entire process, an owner's representative is recommended," the proposal states. "The owner's representative protects the district's interests, coordinates, and effectively communicates to the **Executive Cabinet and Board of Education** throughout all phases of the project while performing all site civil inspections, building inspections, overseeing

budgets, payout requests, and addendums.” With Northwestern University Center for Talent Development, the district is asking for \$108,600 through the national Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. The proposal is for “summer enrichment programming” for “students in gifted programming,” it states.

Costing \$94,160 (operations and maintenance fund) with Sound Productions, the district is seeking to purchase auditorium equipment for its high schools.

“The cable snakes at the five high school auditoriums and the sound boards at all but **Larkin High School** are in need of replacement as the technology has become outdated and no longer adequately supports this important district space,” the proposal states.

With Virtuoso Education Consulting, the district is asking for \$58,200 (federal grant funds) for a so-called “disproportionality” consultant “for staff to understand and address academic and behavioral challenges prior to consideration for special education services,” the proposal states.

A \$44,038 (operations and maintenance fund) with Russo Power Equipment is for the purchase of snow removal equipment. It will go towards the purchase of two Rugged Terrain Vehicles (RTV), two snow plows and two salt spreaders at \$70,528 but reduced to the final price with the trade-in of one RTV at \$26,490.

– Examiner of Bartlett –

Instructional fees in U-46 likely waived once more

(This article also appeared in the Examiner of South Elgin/Examiner of Streamwood)

Feb. 22, 2023

By Seth Hancock

School District U-46 is proposing to waive instructional fees for the 2023- 2024 school year, the third straight year it would be done if approved by the board of education.

The fees were presented at the Feb. 13 meeting with a vote planned for the Monday, Feb. 27.

The fee schedule states: “Registration fees waived for one year only due to the impact of COVID.”

This is expected to be the final year of the fee waiver, according to Dale Burnidge, director of financial operations.

“We are recommending that we waive these fees, for just this year,” Burnidge said. “This will probably be the last year we will be able to do that because we have the ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to help cover those fees.”

Optional fees will remain the same including \$80 per sport for the middle school athletic participation fee as well as several at the high school level: Driver’s education behind the wheel (\$250), driver’s education textbook (\$13), lifeguard course fee (\$45.75), parking permit (\$100), athletic participation fee per sport (\$150), athletic fee for football/lacrosse (\$200) and basic yearbook (\$45). A customized high school yearbook is available, with price determined at each site.

High school athletic fees are capped at two per student athlete, four per family.

The board will also vote on an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Hanover Township. The IGA allows the township “use of or to continue to use certain schools during certain hours when the School District-facilities are not being used for School District purposes, but are available for community recreation services sponsored by the Township.”

There are five elementary schools listed which the township can use: **Bartlett, Hanover Countryside, Ontarioville, Sunnydale and Timber Trail.**

The township would use the facilities for an open gym program “that consists of recreational, educational, and social activities for the purpose of promoting youth development including, but not limited to, physical fitness classes, homework assistance, leadership training, sports programs, dance, arts, and crafts,” the IGA states.

– Daily Herald –

South Elgin ousted, Barrington advances at Class 4A Hampshire sectional

Feb. 21, 2023

By Dave Hess

South Elgin's magic carpet ride came to an abrupt end at Tuesday night's Class 4A Hampshire sectional.

Rockford Guilford, with stifling defense and unselfish offense and the ability to get layups, was able to compile a 59-38 win over the **Storm**.

Guilford (25-9) will face Barrington for the sectional title at 7 p.m. Thursday while the **Storm** ends the season at 16-17.

"Guilford is a very physical team, shares the ball well and are very well coached," said **South Elgin coach Dan Mandernack**. "They got a lot of layups and we had to settle for 3's. It was a roller-coaster ride type of season. It is nice to win back-to-back regionals. It was a good run. The girls left everything on the court."

The Vikings, with 24 baskets, had 19 layups, with 17 assists.

"This is a very unselfish team," said Guilford coach Mike Jamerson. "We did a great job on defense of mucking it up. We made them shoot a lot of 3s. We were disciplined and desperate. We talk about the two Ds all the time."

Guilford, holding a slim 11-10 lead after one quarter, broke the game open in the second quarter. Connecting on 7-of-10 from the field with 6 layups and 5 assists, the Vikings outscored the Storm 16-7 in the second quarter and held a 27-17 lead at intermission.

The Vikes seized control of the game to start the third quarter by scoring the first 8 points. Avery Green and Jhanel Coleman scored 4 points apiece during the run as Guilford led 35-17 with 4:33 left in the third quarter.

South Elgin's first basket of the half came on a 3-pointer by Chloe Kmiec to make the score 35-20.

Lindsay Knuth (4 assists) led the Vikes with 17 points. Avery Green, with 5 assists, added 14 and Coleman scored 12.

With four 3-pointers, Kmiec led the **Storm** with 14 points.

Barrington 55, Harlem 39:

Gwen Adler and Molly O' Riordan combined for 46 points as the Fillies rolled to a 16-point win.

Adler scored 26 with 12 rebounds while O'Riordan tallied 20 with 3 assists.

"We knew they (Harlem) were a great team and they upset two very good teams," said Adler. "We really pulled together."

Taelor Paulsen led the Huskies with 14 points.

– Examiner of South Elgin –

Storm top Sabres, Royals to win regional crown

(This article with photos also appeared in the Examiner of Bartlett)

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With eyes on her objective, South Elgin's Raina Yang driving to the Streamwood basket and an eventual score while being defended by the Sabres' Angelina Sagadraca, at left.
(Examiner photos by Bruce Leighty)



Prior to putting up a shot for the Storm, Zoie Lewis sights the hoop as Streamwood's Brianna Coffey worked to impede the scoring effort.



Crowded rebound

Lexi Lopez working to control a rebound off the offensive boards for the Storm as teammate Zoie Lewis, left, was prepared to assist on Tuesday, Feb. 14, as South Elgin defeated Streamwood in the regional semifinal at South Elgin. For story and more photos, see page 8.

(Examiner photo by Bruce Leighty)

Feb. 22, 2023

By Seth Hancock

The **South Elgin girls basketball team** made **Storm** basketball history as the first boys or girls basketball team to win consecutive regional titles.

The No. 2 **Storm**, who hosted regional play, defeated No. 3 **Larkin** 47-43 in the title game on Thursday, Feb. 16. Seniors Raina Yang (19 points), Caitlyn Tolentino (13 points), Chloe Kmiec (nine points) and Zoie Lewis (six points, 10 rebounds, four steals) led the effort.

Storm coach Dan Mandernack, whose team is now 16-16 overall, said the team has made some strides in the second half of the season after a 6-10 start. That's in large part to the return of Kmiec and senior Ariana Lopez who were sidelined much of the year due to ankle injuries.

"We've been through so much adversity this year," Mandernack said. "We haven't had the whole group together often. We just kept saying keep grinding, keep grinding. They deserve this."

Kmiec broke her ankle right before the season and missed over half the year, but she's happy to be back contributing in her senior year.

"We're definitely peaking," Kmiec said. "It's working pretty well for us, and hopefully it continues and we can go as far as we can go, finish off strong."

The **Storm** defeated No. 8 **Streamwood** 62-32 in the semifinals on Tuesday, Feb. 14.

South Elgin didn't take the lower seeded visitors lightly as it jumped out to a 16-6 lead after one quarter and kept adding the rest of the night. "You can't take anyone lightly," Mandernack said.

"Everyone's 0-0, and you've got to come out. It was a team effort. Our press in the beginning was really good early, and Chloe hit a couple threes to get us going."

Yang scored 12 of her 14 points in the first half as the **Storm** built a 30-13 halftime lead, and Tolentino had 11 of her game-high 16 points in the second half. Kmiec added 13 points and Lewis 11 points.

South Elgin advances to the Hampshire Sectional to face Rockford Guilford in the semifinals.

– Examiner of Streamwood –

Sabres season ends with regional loss to Storm



Regional effort

Jamia Gatlin, in traffic, attempting to get off a jump shot for Streamwood over South Elgin's Lexi Lopez during the Sabres Tuesday, Feb. 14, regional semi-final contest at South Elgin. For story and more photos see page 8.
(Examiner photo by Bruce Leighty)



Jamia Gatlin seeking an open look at the basket for Streamwood as South Elgin defenders clogged the lane during the Storm's victory over the Sabres.



Streamwood's Ashley Harrison driving into the South Elgin zone while defended by the Storm's Lexi Lopez.



Streamwood's Jasmine Zuno taking a jumper from short range over the defense of the Storm's Kiara Andrewin. (Examiner photos by Bruce Leighty)

Feb. 22, 2023

By Seth Hancock

The **Streamwood girls basketball team** couldn't shake off a slow start as the No. 8 **Sabres** fell 62-32 to No. 2 regional host **South Elgin** in the semifinals on Tuesday, Feb. 14.

South Elgin came out and built a 16-6 lead and didn't look back taking a 30-13 advantage into halftime and 46-23 after three quarters.

"We didn't come out and play like we usually play," said **Streamwood coach Elizabeth Endriukaitis**. "We were scared right off the bat. We knew that they were going to come out and pressure hard, and we just came out scared."

Endriukaitis added: "We just made too many mistakes, too many turnovers, and that cost us. We know that we are capable of playing better, and we just didn't."

Junior Jamia Gatlin scored 14 points to lead **Streamwood**, and freshman Brianna Coffey added 11 points.

Streamwood ends the season 3-29 overall. The young squad loses only four seniors, one a starter, and gained experience for the future that Endriukaitis hopes will carry over next year.

“We have a lot of things in place from now until the start of the next season to get them ready,” Endriukaitis said. “We hope the girls can commit, and we hope that the younger girls saw that it takes a lot to be able to play at this level. Even though some of them had experience playing on travel teams, playing varsity basketball is different.”

The **Sabres** were 1-17 in the Upstate Eight Conference after two losses in the final week of the regular season, 57-24 at Glenbard South on Monday, Feb. 6 and 62-44 at **Larkin** on Wednesday, Feb. 8. **Streamwood** also dropped a 48-40 non conference game at Glenbard North on Thursday, Feb. 9.

Streamwood loses seniors Mary-Kate Gonzalez, Jasmine Zuno, Ashley Harrison and Karina Vidales.

“They’re definitely going to be missed, and I hope they always know that they always have a home when they come back and we’ll always welcome them with open arms,” Endriukaitis said.