

Press Clippings

4/30/18

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U46 taking applications for school board vacancy

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO



District U46 board member Traci O'Neal Ellis' school board seat is vacant following her resignation at an April school board meeting. The board is taking applications for her replacement. (Brian O'Mahoney / The Courier-News)

The [Elgin](#)-based District U46 school board is taking applications from people interested in filling the board's vacant seat.

Applicants have until 5 p.m. May 9 to turn in resumes and a one-page letter of interest with U46 Chief Legal Officer and school board secretary Miguel Rodriguez, according to a district news release. It can be done via email or dropped off at the district headquarters, 355 E. Chicago St. in Elgin.

In order to be eligible, the next board member must have lived within the district's boundaries for at least one year. They must also be 18 or older, a U.S. citizen, registered to vote, and filed a Statement of Economic Interest form with the Kane County Clerk's Office. District employees, officials currently serving public office elsewhere, and child sex offenders are ineligible for the school board seat.

Serving on the U46 school board is an unpaid position.

The next board member will replace Traci O'Neal Ellis, who resigned Monday to pursue a larger social justice role. She was serving her second four-year term at the time of her announcement, with her term ending in the spring of next year. Her replacement would finish the remaining year of the term. Along with her seat, three other U46 board member seats will be up for a vote in next April's elections.

Board president Donna Smith said at Monday's meeting they have 45 days from O'Neal Ellis' announcement to appoint someone to the vacancy.

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Elgin High graduate advocating for Dreamers, immigrant students at NIU

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Northern Illinois University senior Laura Vivaldo Cholula, a graduate of Elgin High School, recently received the 2018 Emerging Leader Award from the Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education.

For many young undocumented immigrants, months of uncertainty seem at an end with this week's order by a federal judge to open applications for the program protecting them from deportation and allowing them to work.

Known as Dreamers, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA students, have been on edge since the 2016 presidential campaign and President Donald Trump's repeated proclamations to kill the Obama-era program.

"I believe that as undocumented students we have to make our issues visible by sharing our stories and, like the many other students, I feel very vulnerable," said Laura Vivaldo Cholula, formerly of Elgin, a senior at Northern Illinois University. "I am scared and anxious for the future."

Cholula, 26, a Dreamer and a 2009 graduate of Elgin High School, recently received the 2018 Emerging Leader Award from the Illinois Latino Council on Higher Education for her advocacy efforts helping undocumented and Latino students.

The award recognizes a student in Illinois who has made significant contributions to the Latinx higher education community through service and leadership. It was presented at the council's Professional and Student Development Conference April 20 at Illinois State University.

"Without a doubt, Laura Cholula Vivaldo is a change agent," said Susana Das Neves, ILACHE conference chair, vice president of academic and professional development and a doctoral student at NIU. "She has paved the way for future NIU students to continue her quest for social justice and equality for all students."

Cholula is co-president of DREAM Action NIU, a student-run organization advocating for undocumented students and also serves on the NIU Center for Latino and Latin American Studies' Student Advisory Council. She has been a peer mentor for middle school and college students. She also conducted research for the NIU Latino Oral History Project helping document experiences of Chicago-area immigrants.

She won the NIU Deacon Davis Diversity Award in 2017.

A political science major minoring in Latin American studies, Cholula has been lobbying legislators in Springfield for funding of Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants and immigrant-friendly legislation. Among her goals is making NIU "more friendly for undocumented students," she said.

"At NIU, we have over 200 undocumented students," said Cholula adding, there are thousands more statewide.

Cholula now is applying to law schools so she is able advocate more efficiently for them after graduating from NIU next month.

"I'm very happy to be recognized and for the work that I have done in the community being appreciated," she said. "This award reaffirms that women of color are not just participating in student organizations but are the leaders. My leadership model aims to uplift students, so they can find within themselves the skills they need to be the next leaders on our campus and in the community."

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U-46 recognizes outstanding community volunteers

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Elgin Area School District U-46 school board member Sue Kerr, left, Thursday announces 2018 Volunteer of the Year award winners Phil Novello and Vanessa Castelan, both parents at Oakhill Elementary School in Streamwood.

Elgin Area School District U-46 officials Thursday recognized several community members who dedicated their time and energies to the district this school year during the 21st annual volunteer reception.

Oakhill Elementary School parents Vanessa Castelan and Phil Novello were named 2018 Volunteers of the Year.

Castelan volunteers on the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Universal Team at the Streamwood school and supports districtwide activities and committees,

including the 5 Essentials Parent Survey, dual language, family literacy and parent-teacher organization groups.

She is a member of the Citizens' Advisory Council's Family and Community Engagement Committee and helped organize a spring networking event for PTO and boosters members to exchange fundraising ideas and share strategies for increasing parent/volunteer participation in schools.

Novello, also a strong supporter of PBIS and dual language programs and co-chair of FACE, helped organize a breakfast for real estate agents. He also helps at U-46 events and the Eagle Eyes: Parents in Action work group formed to strengthen the school environment and sense of safety.

"Vanessa and Phil work tirelessly to support the district's goal of increasing our families' understanding and involvement in their child's learning by helping keep district events, programs and initiatives energized, organized and successful," U-46 CEO Tony Sanders said.

Parent Cynthia Hernandez, president of the parent-teacher group at Huff Elementary in Elgin, received the "Helping Hands" award, created last year to recognize volunteerism at the school level.

Hernandez has helped get teachers and parents involved in school events and seminars and to support students. She is a graduate of the district's Hispanic Parent Leadership Institute and a CAC member. She also developed the Parents in Education outreach program piloted at Huff.

Nominees included: Mike Aluquin for helping the Bartlett High School boys basketball program during games and practices; Robert Cox for helping the after-school chorus group and guitar club at Lords Park Elementary in Elgin; Tim Frazier for chaperoning students at Willard Elementary in South Elgin to visual, hearing and dental screenings; Marie Frey for helping with academic interventions and enrichment at Willard Elementary in South Elgin; Shannon Ries for reading and helping with math and providing one-on-one or small-group assistance to students at Garfield Elementary in Elgin; George Rodman for playing and talking with preschool students at Illinois Park Early Learning Center; and the "Garfield Elementary Patrols," including Maria Martinez, Valeria Monica, Araceli Quiroz and Isabel Santoyo, who set up traffic cones and help students cross the street at two busy intersections near the school.

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High school programs join welding students with jobs in demand

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY



Elgin High School senior Joshua Garcia works with an arc welder recently in the school's newly renovated welding lab. Elgin High's welding program recently earned accreditation from the American Welding Society, making it one of just a few such schools in the nation.

Welding labs at Elgin and Hampshire high schools now are certified testing facilities -- the first in the Midwest and among only three high schools in the country to be accredited.

Both programs are sanctioned by the American Welding Society, allowing students and community members to obtain professional certification meeting industry standards. Courses will be taught by AWS-certified instructors at the high schools.

"There is a huge demand for manufacturing grade, entry-level welders in this area," said Nick Moran, certified welding instructor at Elgin High and technical specialist for Kane County. He will train teachers at both high schools this summer to become certified welding instructors.

"We are kind of ideally poised to serve the industry," he added.

Moran said Elgin is the hub of a "golden corridor" of manufacturing industries producing metals, plastics, pharmaceuticals and food.

Jobs for welders, solderers, cutters and brazers are in high demand and expected to grow 6 percent from 2016 to 2026, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Elgin High houses welding courses that will be available to students from all five U-46 high schools and neighboring districts starting this fall as part of the Regional Career Pathways initiative.

Through the partnership, students from U-46, Algonquin-based Community Unit District 300, Burlington-Central Unit District 301 and St. Charles Unit District 303 can participate in career and technical education programs not offered at their high schools.

Work to renovate Elgin High's welding lab, which had not been updated in about 20 years, was completed in February. It has 14 new welding booths where students train on industrial-quality equipment to stay current with the latest welding and cutting technology. Upgrades were funded through state and federal funds -- \$203,000 for equipment, \$66,000 for supplies and \$85,000 for construction.

Hampshire High has housed District 300's welding technology career pathway program for 10 years in partnership with Elgin Community College, allowing students to earn college credit. The district had to make a few safety upgrades, such as installing kill switches and a larger ventilation system, to comply with AWS requirements.

The accreditation process, which began last April, culminated with an on-site evaluation by AWS auditors in February. They examined the labs' structure, resources, test process and material storage compared to industry standards, officials said.

"We are real excited about it," said Vincent Serritella, Hampshire High industrial technology teacher. "It is going to be a good opportunity for students and welders in the community, as well."

This fall, students enrolled in the welding program will take three courses based on AWS curriculum -- Fundamentals of Welding, Welding Technology I and Welding Technology II. Classes will run five days a week all year. After completing the courses, students can test and earn AWS certification.

Community members could pay a nominal fee for testing at these facilities, but that cost has not been determined. For students, the fee will be part of the program cost, officials said.