

Press Clippings 04/29/2019

---The Daily Herald---04/29/2019

U-46 Educational Foundation invites donors to honor teachers

Submitted by Elgin Area School District U-46

In honor of Teacher Appreciation Week May 6-10, students, alumni, parents and community members are invited to recognize a special Elgin Area School District U-46 teacher, current or retiree, by making a donation to the U-46 Educational Foundation.

The foundation expands opportunities for U-46 students beyond what is possible with tax dollars.

Established more than a decade ago, the nonprofit 501(c)3 organization has supported districtwide events and programs, such as classroom sky shows at the U-46 Planetarium, heart rate monitors for physical education classes, and the annual TalentFest showcasing high school students.

Most recently, the foundation awarded eight "mini-grants" that allowed teachers to pursue innovative projects for their classrooms.

By honoring a teacher through a donation to the foundation during Teacher Appreciation Week, donors will help enhance, enrich and complement existing opportunities at all district schools. The donations also means districtwide recognition for teachers.

"Our teachers are the backbone of the great educational experiences we offer our students in U-46," said Foundation President E.C. "Bud" Wilson. "By honoring our teachers with a donation to the foundation, donors also will be supporting the important work that is done in classrooms across the district each day."

Teachers will be notified of all donations, and receive special recognition as well. Donors are encouraged to write a brief letter to accompany their donation, and with their approval, excerpts will be shared on the district's website and on social media channels during Teacher Appreciation Week.

For donations at the highest tier, \$100 or more, the foundation will arrange an in-class surprise so that the donor (or a proxy) can thank the teacher in person. Select surprises will be filmed and shared on the U-46 website and social media.

More information, including details on suggested donation levels and teacher recognition, can be found on the foundation website at www.u-46.org/foundation or by writing foundation@u-46.org.

---The Daily Herald---04/28/2019

Hilltop Elementary students donate \$1,000 to Food for Greater Elgin

Submitted by: Elgin Area School District U-46



Third-graders at Hilltop Elementary School in Elgin participated in the Kids for Kids Fund, which provides \$1,000 to give to a local community organization. After researching multiple charitable organizations in the Elgin area, the students decided to give the donation to Food for Greater Elgin.

Students from Hilltop Elementary School appeared before the Elgin City Council April 10 to present a check for \$1,000 to Food for Greater Elgin, a result of their involvement with an educational and philanthropic program.

About a dozen Hilltop third-graders participated in the Kids for Kids Fund, a program offered by an organization called The Giving Square. The program aims to nurture caring children and engages them as community builders who learn to recognize the needs of others.

The Kids for Kids Fund provides the participating school \$1,000 to allocate to a local community organization.

The Hilltop students quickly rolled up their sleeves, giving up most of their lunch and recess break for eight 45-minute weekly sessions to work on their project.

Students learned why giving is important and started building their leadership and organizational skills.

The Hilltop students also researched multiple charitable organizations in the Elgin area before deciding to donate the \$1,000 to Food for Greater Elgin.

Hilltop's principal, Dr. Kyle VonSchnase, said the students were excited for each week's lesson.

"This program really reached the heart of our students and allowed them time to invest in our community," Dr. VonSchnase said. "Students learned about our local organizations and how they improve the lives of local community members, including students."

Local community leaders Toya Randall and Velma Sept volunteered each week, guiding the lessons and facilitating discussions.

"Their passion and high level of commitment serve as a perfect example of how ordinary people can make an extraordinary impact," Dr. VonSchnase said. "Our students learned you can serve at any capacity -- with your time, talent or resources -- and that it is an essential element with developing a strong community bond."

The school's social worker, Madison Peppia, was instrumental in helping get the program underway at Hilltop and in applying the lessons as well, he said.

Among the third-graders who participated are Semi Elmazi, Aarush Bhagat, Marissa Marcum, Starr Wood, Aleeza Ali, Lilly Thornley, Elijah Thompson, Zachary Randall, Ish Makhansa, Fiona Pitlik, Audrey Romana and Julian Gonzalez.

Starr said she liked learning about how all the different organizations help the community, and Zachary said all the research into the challenges other people face made him grateful for the good things in his own life.

Both agreed the decision was hard, but they are glad the student group ultimately decided on Food for Greater Elgin, which is a regional, client-choice food pantry servicing more than 1,200 households monthly.

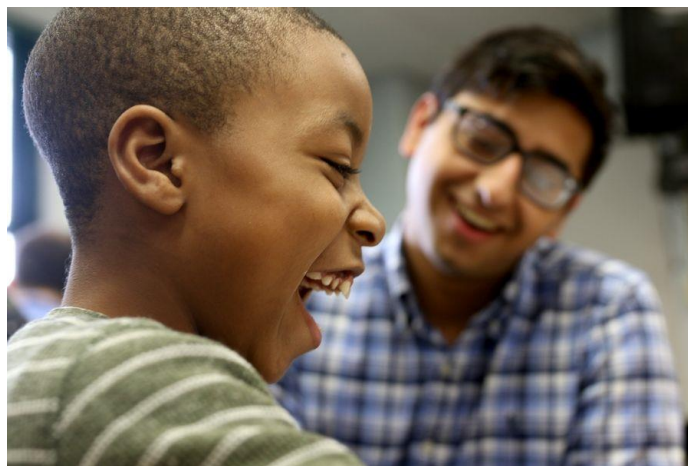
Shoppers can select meat, fresh produce, dairy, deli, and shelf-stable items during their visits.

It serves residents of Elgin, South Elgin, East Dundee and West Dundee.

---The Daily Herald---04/27/2019

U-46 recognizes volunteers for service to students

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



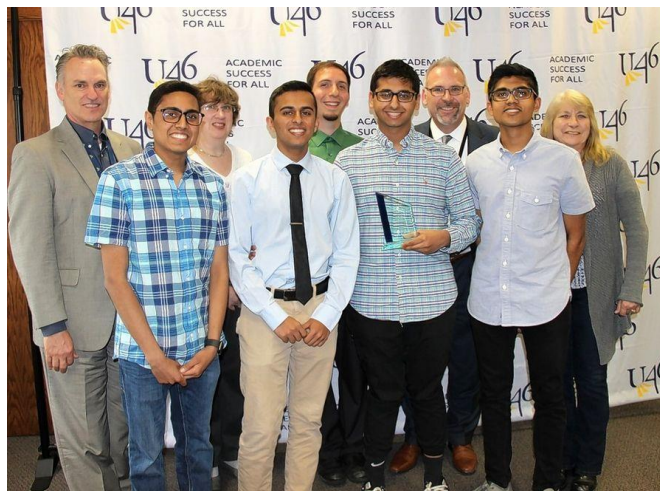
Bartlett High School senior Rohan Shah celebrates a successful math result with second-grader Daichi Daniels at Spring Trail School in Carol Stream. Shah and four other Bartlett High students were named Elgin Area School District U-46's 2019 Volunteers of the Year for creating Mentors For Tomorrow -- an after-school mentoring program for elementary and middle school students.



Kindergartner RJ Owen, left, entertains Bartlett High junior Sareena Shah with his paper airplane story at Spring Trail Elementary School in Carol Stream. Shah and four other Bartlett High School students were recognized Thursday for their Mentors For Tomorrow after-school mentoring program for elementary and middle school students.



Bartlett High School student Rushi Patel, right, works with first-grader Brianna San Martin on math problems at Spring Trail Elementary School in Carol Stream. Patel is part of the Mentors For Tomorrow after-school mentoring program for elementary and middle school students. The group's founding members have been named U-46's 2019 Volunteers of the Year.



Bartlett High School students, from left, Rushi Patel, Aayush Patel, Rohan Shah and Harsh Chheda, and Sareena Shah, not pictured, founding members of the Mentors For Tomorrow after-school mentoring group, have been named Elgin Area School District U-46's 2019 Volunteers of the Year.



From left, Carmein Blasucci, Janet Knupp and Harriet Kunesh, who volunteer at Ontarioville Elementary School in Hanover Park, received Elgin Area School District U-46's 2019 Helping Hands Award Thursday.

Five Bartlett High School students have been named Elgin Area School District U-46's 2019 Volunteers of the Year.

The district recognized several volunteers who donated their time and talents during its annual Volunteer Reception Thursday.

Students Rohan Shah, Rushi Patel, Harsh Chheda, Aayush Patel and Sareena Shah -- founding members of the Mentors For Tomorrow after-school program for elementary and middle school students -- earned the recognition for offering homework help, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) projects and enriching activities at Spring Trail Elementary School in Carol Stream, and Sycamore Trails Elementary School and Eastview Middle School, both in Bartlett.

Shah, 17, the group's president, started the program to instill a love for learning in younger students and give back to the district. People who have role models are more involved in their education, said Shah, a senior who hopes to pursue a career in medicine.

Shah and some of his peers in Bartlett High's Science, Engineering and Technology Academy began visiting the after-school SAFE program at Spring Trail in 2016 during their freshman year.

The program later expanded to Sycamore Trails, and to Eastview this school year. It now involves 32 Bartlett High student mentors -- freshmen through seniors -- who visit the schools in smaller groups for two hours weekly, engaging students in hands-on activities, providing tutoring in math and other subjects, and being positive role models. Group members have served an estimated 80 to 100 students overall.

The program's success has spurred the group to try and replicate it at other U-46 schools.

"Rohan, Rushi, Harsh, Aayush and Sareena have not only started a program that impacts students in several schools but they have created a blueprint for their peers to extend this initiative throughout the district," U-46 CEO Tony Sanders said. "We know that students can play a major role in inspiring their peers toward academic success."

The district also presented its third annual Helping Hands Award recognizing volunteerism at the school level. Harriet Kunesh, Carmein Blasucci and Janet Knupp, who volunteer at Ontarioville Elementary School in Hanover Park, were selected for the 2019 Helping Hands Award from among 13 nominees.

Kunesh, Blasucci and Knupp, members of Poplar Creek Church in Bartlett, have worked on Thanksgiving food drives for at-risk families, organized a Christmas Mart to support families in need, donated playground equipment and presented gift cards to dedicated teachers. They participated in the school's annual school supplies collection, helped distribute food and snacks to students, and distributed homegrown vegetables to Ontarioville families.

Knupp also mentored a group of boys, while Blasucci and Kunesh have been mentoring a group of sixth-grade girls through a local Girl Scout troop.

Members of the Citizens' Advisory Council, the U-46 Educational Foundation Board, the African American and Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils, and the School Safety Advisory Task Force were among the volunteer groups recognized for consistently supporting student learning, academic success, and family engagement.

---The Courier-News---04/28/2019

Student mentoring group, Bartlett church members recognized

By: Rafael Guerrero



School District U46 CEO Tony Sanders, right, awards the Volunteers of the Year award to Bartlett High School students Aayush Patel, second from right; Rohan Shah, middle; Harsh Chheda, second from left; and Rushi Patel, left. The group won for its Mentors of Tomorrow program.

Bartlett church members who do volunteer work and help provide food at an elementary school and Bartlett High School students who mentor younger students were honored Thursday for their contributions to School District U46.

Mentors of Tomorrow, started three years ago by Bartlett High students Rohan Shah, Rushi Patel, Harsh Chheda, Aayush Patel and Sareena Shah, received U46's 2019 Volunteers of the Year award for their program's reach into multiple schools and communities.

The teens volunteer at after-school programs at three schools in the Bartlett area, providing homework assistance, mentoring, activities and promoting STEM learning, officials said.

This year, they expanded the program from two schools to three and recruited 30 new teen volunteers. Shah said talks are underway to launch a Mentors of Tomorrow group in at least one other U46 high school.

“It makes me excited to see where the program can go now that it’s on the map and now that people know about it,” said Shah, who is graduating this year. “I’m excited to see where our future leaders will take it, where it will be in 10 years.”

Harriet Kunesh, Carmein Blasucci and Janet Knapp won the district’s Helping Hands Award for their efforts at Hanover Park’s Ontarioville Elementary School, where they have volunteered for eight years. The three are members of Bartlett’s Poplar Creek Church.

Knapp helps mentor boys at Ontarioville Elementary School while Kunesh and Blasucci work with sixth-grade girls in a local Girl Scout troop.

They were also praised for helping distribute food and snacks to Ontarioville students, giving families homegrown vegetables and overseeing food drives for at-risk families.

“These are families that are struggling,” said Knapp. “You know parents are working a couple of jobs, and yet their kids are at school every day. We thought this is the type of school we want to work with.”

One of the award winners, Aayush Patel, praised both the winners and the award nominees.

“Hearing of the stuff they started — the fundraisers, the food drives — it was awesome to hear, very inspiring,” said Patel, a senior.

Some of the other nominees from the Elgin area were:

- A group of class of 1960 Elgin High School graduates who have spent years organizing and managing the school’s extensive archives. Their work took greater notice this school year when Elgin celebrated its 150th anniversary.
- College student Guadalupe Acosta, who volunteers every Friday with her former second-grade teacher Teresita Thompson at Hillcrest Elementary School in Elgin.
- George Rodman, who volunteers multiple afternoons a week with at-risk students and students suffering from trauma at the Illinois Park Early Learning Center in Elgin.
- Dawn Curran, the parent-teacher organization treasurer at Eastview Middle School in Bartlett. She developed a mini-grant program that provided four \$200 awards to teachers to purchase supplies.

“All of you here today have found the extra time in your busy schedules to help in a variety of important ways,” U46 school board President Donna Smith said. “Most

importantly, you've all brought a positive attitude and a spirit of generosity that resonates across our large district."

Remembering a Marine

Application filed to salute corporal who died in combat with honorary street designation

By: Gloria Casas

Marine Cpl. Alex Martinez spent his childhood on South Melrose Avenue In Elgin. He moved away in January 2009 to fulfill his lifelong dream of joining the U.S. Marine Corps.

Three years later, Martinez died in combat. A Gold Star now hangs in the front window of Martinez's former home, an American flag and a small memorial in the front yard.

Some would like to see a larger recognition — an honorary street designation along a portion of South Melrose Avenue.

"Cpl. Martinez is someone the city of Elgin should be extremely proud to call an Elgin native," said Anthony Ortiz, who helped Martinez's family start the process for the designation.

"The honorary street name should be a no-brainer and should be accepted without delay," Ortiz said Wednesday at the Elgin City Council meeting. "We need to honor Alex as he honored us in the most heroic way possible."

Martinez died on April 5, 2012, in Helmand province of Afghanistan during combat operations. He was Elgin's first and only fatality in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Ortiz, who recently ran as a city council candidate, approached Martinez's family with the idea of seeking an honorary street designation. It's something Martinez's mother, Socorro, has wanted for some time, Ortiz said.

Ortiz filled out the application and learned he needed the signatures of at least two-thirds of the people who own property along the street proposed for the designation and a letter of support from a council member.

He and Martinez's stepfather, Jim Bethke, collected the required signatures from property owners as well as signatures of support from nearby homeowners. He presented the application Wednesday to the city council.

If approved, the street name would remain the same but a second sign would be placed at the intersection of South Melrose Avenue and Erie Street near his family's home.

"We ran into no one who said no," Ortiz said, of gathering signatures for the application. He also obtained signatures from city council members and South West Area Neighbors homeowners.

Ortiz said he wanted to do something for his fellow Marine because they grew in the same neighborhood. He went to Abbott **Middle School and Larkin High School** with Martinez, where they knew each other but didn't stay in touch.

Yet, their paths did cross indirectly after high school.

Martinez joined the Marines in January 2009. Ortiz joined in September of the same year. They went to the same boot camp, and "we bumped into each other once or twice" through the years, Ortiz said.

Both were deployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom.

"It was weird how we ended up in the same exact town in Afghanistan," said Ortiz, who was assigned to an infantry battalion. Martinez was in an engineer battalion, whose job was helping ground forces by removing obstacles like Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). The two were assigned to different camps in the same city, he said.

Ortiz and his battalion arrived in September 2010 and returned stateside in April 2011. Martinez's battalion had a six-month turnaround so he was deployed back to Afghanistan later that year, Ortiz said. He learned of Martinez's death through a friend of a friend while on deployment.

Martinez "never got into trouble. He was a good, quiet kid," said Bethke, speaking at his family's home this week.

Bethke created a memorial for the first anniversary of his stepson's death. A flag pole with an American flag and a Marine Corp. flag sit on the front lawn. A gold-painted cement statute of a pair of combat boots and an inverted rifle is next to it. "I have to plant the flowers so it looks good," he said.

Inside the home, there are mementos of Martinez, including an oil painting of Martinez in uniform that someone gave his mother and a quilt on the couch with photos of him at different ages.

A street designation is something the family would be able to see every day and know that people will remember him, Bethke said. It's something his mom wants to see, he said.

Ortiz met with city staff to discuss the application, and hopes the request goes before the city council by early- or mid-May. He's already received positive feedback from city council members, including Councilman Corey Dixon, who wrote a letter of support.

"I think it's really cool," Ortiz said. "It should have been done in 2012. I don't know why they waited for seven years for someone from outside to do it. It should've been done internally."

The procedure is straightforward. City officials passed an ordinance 20 years ago allowing honorary street names. In addition to the application, there's also a \$40 application fee and a \$110 fee for the sign and installation. The application is forwarded to the City of Elgin Image Commission and Neighborhood Services Committee for review and recommendation to the city council for approval.

The designation lasts for five years then needs to be renewed, Ortiz said. “We’ll be back to make sure it’s always there,” he said.



The South Melrose Avenue home in Elgin where Cpl. Alex Martinez grew up has an American flag and a memorial for the fallen Marine, who was killed in combat in 2012.