

Press Clippings 02/07/20

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Elgin High School students, teachers create webinars on biodiversity

By: Dave Heun



Elgin High senior Julia Korzeniowski holds the 2017 Nature of Force award that the school's biodiversity team won from Chicago Wilderness for its outstanding educational program.

Years before Greta Thunberg brought the perils of our planet more clearly onto a global stage, a group of Elgin High School students was doing their part to create awareness and understanding of biodiversity.

For the past six years, these environmental science students and their teachers have organized a series of free webinars on how our living creatures great and small interact on our planet through what they call the National Biodiversity Teach In.

The interactive, one-hour webinars on the Zoom platform feature scientists, grassroots organizations and activists. One might consider this a high school student project simply for the benefit of high school students, but those involved want community members to link in and ask questions.

The webinars are scheduled at 8 a.m. through 6 p.m. each Friday in February, starting Feb. 7. You can find past webinars on the NBTI YouTube channel. Interested persons can listen to the webinars by registering through the nationalbiodiversityteachin.com website.

But what is biodiversity, you might ask?

"The webinars originally covered animals, hence the biodiversity name, but we have evolved with the times and realized that sometimes presenters must go in-depth on our planet and how changes on the planet put these animals in danger," said senior Ana Pascual, a member of the NBTI communications team. As such, webinars could cover everything from global water, clean energy, climate change, polar ecosystems and soil.



From left, students Jessica Nino, Lindsey Anderson and Jessica Thomas work with instructor Brittney Mallen in plotting marketing strategies for Elgin High School's biodiversity team.

It takes about three months for the three teachers and 68 students, set in different teams after securing presenters, working within NBTI to put together the webinars. If that work isn't enough, consider that NBTI promotes itself through a website team, a marketing team and a communications team.

"We can track how many people are watching when they register, and last year we had 25,000 participants, but it's been down compared to years prior," Pascual said. "Our goal is 50,000 viewers this year."

The students are "trying to bring about change in whatever way we can," Pascual said. "If out of all of our viewers, only one were to pay attention to what's happening to our planet, we would count it as a success." That's the sort of thing you will hear from students who are motivated by Thunberg and her cause.

"I would say that we are all very motivated and inspired by Greta Thunberg, but also by the amount of activists who have risen up these past few years and brought light to the current state our planet is in," Pascual added.

Clark, Wheaton Warrenville co-op take regional

By Chris Walker

Watching her Wheaton Warrenville co-op teammates successfully hit their routines before her gives Maura Clark all the confidence that she needs when working her bars routine.

But she still has to go out there and execute to get it done.

Clark certainly got it done on the uneven parallel bars during Thursday's Wheaton Warrenville South regional, edging DeKalb/Sycamore co-op's Madeline Kees, 9.475 to 9.45, which helped host Wheaton Warrenville co-op sneak past DeKalb/Sycamore co-op, 141.975 to 141.075.

Both teams advance to Monday's Glenbard South sectional, but Wheaton Warrenville co-op will head to Glen Ellyn as a regional champion.

"My bars have been a long time coming," Clark, a senior, said. "I'm glad I was able to do it when it mattered a lot more. It's mostly been a consistency issue for me. I think it helps when everyone is confident in our bars rotation and we keep the momentum going. In practice it seems like we're all pretty consistent, but in meets, not always."

Clark's 9.475 matched Glenbard West's Anna Diab for the top bars score among the teams feeding into Monday sectional.

In order to win on Thursday, Wheaton Warrenville co-op needed to go deep, using the scores of nine gymnasts to hold off DeKalb/Sycamore, which utilized just five all-arounders, including Kees, who won vault, beam and the all-around.

Kees edged Wheaton Warrenville co-op senior Jamie LaBue, 37 to 36.175 for the all-around title. LaBue won floor with a 9.425.

"We're just trying to focus on what we need to do and trying to do what we do in practice," LaBue said. "This being my last home meet got into my head a little bit and I thought about how I've been doing gymnastics for about 12 years and now only have two weeks left, but I let that thought go. I think we've all been working on consistency and improving our overall skills and it showed today."

That darn inanimate object known as the beam had a field day, victimizing both DeKalb/Sycamore co-op and Wheaton Warrenville co-op. Wheaton still outscored the Barbs, 34.15 to 33.4, getting a huge boost from freshmen Ava Archuletta and Ashley Huang. Both compete solely on beam and Archuletta took second and Huang delivered an 8.175, waiting patiently all evening to make an impact.

"Ava and Ashley had to wait the whole meet and they're both newcomers trying to keep up with the old veterans," Wheaton Warrenville co-op coach Maureen Kermend said. "It was tough to come back from the falls, but they stuck with it."

Junior Emily Burnham took third place in the all-around with a 35.325.

"I think we did well and there's never a meet where everything is perfect," she said. "We make mistakes every meet, but we never make the same mistake again in a meet. We powered through our mistakes and next meet we expect to do better."

Natalie Gillis, Sam Nepras, Julia Ripp and Kate Weber also added at least one score that contributed to the team total. That included an 8.75 on bars from Nepras and an 8.9 on floor from Gillis.

"I think every time we go out there we don't focus on individuals but bettering everyone," Gillis said. "There's more we can do to get better -- form, steps, landings -- I think we came out powerful tonight. We just need to keep it going."

U-46 co-op ended its team season, finishing in third place with a 130.425.

Sophomore Madi Aycock, a newcomer this season from Bartlett, led U-46 co-op. She automatically qualified for sectionals by taking fourth on beam and fourth on floor and earning an at-large qualifier in the all-around with a 34.475.

"It was pretty nerve-wracking," she said. "I just wanted to go out there and perform my best, but it gets you sometimes. I started on vault and bars, which are my best events, so that helps a lot because I'm not as nervous on them so I was more nervous at the end than the beginning."

Since it was the final regional for the Glenbard South sectional, unofficial cutoffs were known afterward, which determined that U-46 co-op freshman Zoe Lee will advance on beam after taking sixth place with an 8.45 and senior Gianna Murkowski's life as a high school gymnast will continue as she scored a 31.425 in the all-around.

U-46 elementary schools to host kindergarten registration nights

Submitted by: Elgin Area School District U-46

Elgin Area School District U-46 is encouraging parents and guardians whose children will begin kindergarten next fall to attend a registration event in February at their neighborhood school.

These registration events will allow parents to reserve a seat for their prospective kindergartner for the 2020-21 school year.

"We are excited to welcome the class of 2033 and their families," said Peggy Ondera, Director of Early Learners Program. "Kindergarten is a huge and exciting step for students, and we like to start building our relationship with our early scholars and their families as early as possible."

New this year, the parents of incoming kindergarten students will also be able to register any other students in their households upon the beginning of registration on Feb. 10.

Even if an older student attends a different school, registration can be handled at the incoming kindergarten student's home school. No fees will be collected at the registration events.

U-46 launched full-day kindergarten in 2016 for more than 2,500 students across 40 elementary schools and two early childhood centers.

The school district's full-day kindergarten program features the following elements:

- Flexible time and space for children to choose activities that are designed for them to work at their own pace without pressure.
- Opportunities for peer collaboration, allowing students to build teamwork skills, whether they are working on a puzzle or creating a work of art together.
- Respectful relationships between teachers and other learners. We teach and model collaboration among teachers and students and respect for inquiries and discussion.

U-46 is the second-largest district in the state, serving more than 38,000 in 57 schools and programs. The District offers an award-winning dual language program, universal testing for gifted education, a high school magnet academy program, a dual credit program with Elgin Community College, Advanced Placement classes and more. Last year, U-46 was one of 13 school districts in Illinois named one of the Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation.

To be eligible to enter kindergarten next fall, children must be 5 years old on or before Sept. 1, 2020. Parents should bring their child's birth certificate and two documents showing proof of local residency (street address and town) within U-46 boundaries. The events are designed to be drop-in opportunities, and parents should expect to spend about 30 minutes at the school.

At the events, school staff will help families fill out five forms, which can also be downloaded and filled out ahead of time in English or Spanish:

- Proof of local U-46 residency and custody form;
- Race and ethnicity form;
- Home language survey;
- Language and educational background form;
- Health services: pre-admission health form.

By encouraging families to register incoming kindergarten students now, the elementary schools will be better able to keep families up-to-date on relevant information. Families will also have more time to schedule screenings as needed through the Family Welcome Center.

For more information about documentation of local residency, visit the Kindergarten Registration webpage at www.u-46.org. This page can help families identify their home school, or they can call U-46's Registration Department at 847-888-5000, ext. 5715, or ext. 5016 (for Spanish).

Additionally, information is available on the website about what is needed for families new to U-46 versus families who are already part of the U-46 system.

Families who are new to U-46 can complete the online kindergarten application from home prior to kindergarten registration nights. U-46 still asks new families to attend the kindergarten registration night at their home school to present their child's birth certificate and proof of U-46 residency. Completing the online kindergarten application in advance will save families and staff time during the registration night.

Current U-46 families with an incoming kindergarten student can preregister online before or at the registration event. They will need their Infinite Campus Parent Portal username and password to log on. Those who register online beforehand should bring their online application number, along with all required paperwork, to kindergarten registration at their home school. Parents will also have the opportunity to register their entire household for the upcoming school year.

Online registration is required for families who have an incoming kindergarten student currently enrolled in a U-46 preschool. They should bring all required paperwork to the kindergarten registration at their home elementary school.

Each elementary school is hosting a kindergarten registration event.

- Monday, Feb. 10: 4 to 6 p.m. at Century Oaks and Clinton; 4 to 7 p.m. Coleman and Hilltop; and 5 to 7 p.m. at Hawk Hollow and Prairieview
- Tuesday, Feb. 11: 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at Washington; 4 to 6 p.m. at Garfield, Lincoln and Wayne; 4 to 7 p.m. at Laurel Hill and Lords Park; and 5 to 7 p.m. at Fox Meadow and Liberty
- Wednesday, Feb. 12: 3:30 to 6 p.m. at Sycamore Trails and Timber Trails; 4 to 6 p.m. at Centennial, Channing, Heritage, McKinley and Nature Ridge; 4 to 7 p.m. at Ronald D. O'Neal and Sunnydale; 5 to 7 p.m. at Huff; and 5 to 8 p.m. at Hanover Countryside, Parkwood
- Thursday, Feb. 13: 3 to 5 p.m. at Willard; 3 to 5:30 p.m. at Harriet Gifford; 3:30 to 6 p.m. at Glenbrook; 4 to 6 p.m. at Creekside, Lowrie, Otter Creek and Ridge Circle; 4 to 7 p.m. at Bartlett, Highland and Oakhill; 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Horizon; and 5 to 7 p.m. at Hillcrest, Ontarioville and Spring Trail.

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St. Mary cancels classes after too many out sick

Students to work from home using e-learning

By: Rafael Guerrero

St. Mary Catholic School in Elgin canceled all classes Thursday and Friday after more than 20% of its students and four staff members were out with flu-like symptoms earlier in the week.

The elementary school has just 122 students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

“I realize this might be an extreme inconvenience for many, but we cannot continue to operate with more than 20% of our student body out sick, and that number increasing,” Principal Jason Hunt wrote to families in a letter issued Wednesday.

“By remaining home for the next two school days and the following weekend, we hope to give everyone a chance to get over their sickness while at the same time preventing further spreading of the viruses that are going around,” he said.

Penny Wiegert, spokeswoman for the Diocese of Rockford, said St. Mary students will be doing schoolwork from home thanks to e-learning programs available online. Many schools are now using e-learning as a means of providing class content on days when inclement weather or an emergency situation forces a school closure.

“(St. Mary janitors) are doing cleaning, disinfecting just to be on the abundance of caution,” Wiegert said.

Illness-related absences have not been an issue for **School District U-46**, spokeswoman Mary Fergus said. The district monitors daily attendance and keeps track illnesses causing absences.

School District 301 Superintendent Todd Stirn said absences in his schools due to flu-like symptoms are under the 10% threshold needed to report to the Kane County Health Department.

The district is following the Illinois Department of Public Health’s “three C’s” rule to combat the spread of illness: clean, cover and contain, Stirn said. Students are urged to wash their hands regularly, to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing and to stay home when sick in order to prevent the spread of germs, he said.

A closure similar to the one at St. Mary was reported Tuesday at St. Barnabas School in Chicago’s Beverly neighborhood.

More than 25% of the students at the elementary school were home sick Monday as were a number of employees, officials said.

Aurora’s Illinois Math and Science Academy was closed Jan. 27 and 28 when about 14% of its 637 students and 24% of its 55 staff members were out sick. North Riverside’s Komarek Elementary School was closed from Jan. 28 to 31 for the same reason.

The 2019-20 flu season has been a harsh one, with the number of cases far higher than last year, reports show.

More than 900 lab tests for the flu in Chicago came back positive between the end of September and the end of January, compared with 240 for the same time period last year, according to the Chicago Department of Public Health. Because not everyone gets tested, the actual number of cases is likely much higher, officials said.

Officials: School bomb threat ruled hoax

By: Rafael Guerrero

A bomb threat to Clinton Elementary School in South Elgin posted on social media Wednesday evening unfounded, School District U-46 and South Elgin police said.

A student at the school has been identified as the person behind the message, Deputy Chief Mike Doty said. Because the student is a minor, no other information can be released, he said.

“It was unsubstantiated, not credible at any point,” Doty said. The student told authorities it was intended as a prank, he said.

U-46 CEO Tony Sanders released a statement on his social media pages Wednesday night to notify the public the threat was verified as a hoax.

“I just updated Clinton staff with this message: South Elgin police working in collaboration with U-46 has determined the threat posted to social media was a prank,” he wrote in a tweet. “Consequences in line with the district student code of conduct will be applied to the identified student.”

Police responded to the threat at 9:12 p.m. Wednesday after a resident reported seeing it on social media. Doty said the message originated on Snapchat and later turned up on a U-46-related Facebook page.

A search of the 770 E. Mill St. school was conducted for several hours Wednesday night into Thursday morning, Doty said.

“Our officers did a full check into the building,” he said. “There was nothing suspicious found in the school.”

A message sent out to Clinton families and staff said classes would proceed as normal Thursday.

Doty reminded students of any ages of the repercussions of threatening a school even as a prank, such as potential criminal charges. He added investigations into phony incidents require removing officers, firefighters and other responders from other emergencies.

SPORTS

---Daily Herald---02/07/2020

Larkin heads into Elgin rematch playing better basketball

By: Jerry Fitzpatrick



Patrick Kunzer/pkunzer@dailyherald.com Glenbard East's Joe Hamilton, left, closes in on Larkin's Fernando Perez Jr. in varsity boys basketball Tuesday night in Elgin.

No area boys basketball team owns a more deceiving record than Larkin.

The Royals enter Friday's rematch against rival Elgin with a 5-17 record, but coach Deryn Carter's young team is rounding into form now that the roster as originally conceived has come together.

Some losses were inevitable this season for a team undergoing a youth movement. The Royals feature four sophomores and a freshman in prominent roles. However, of the seven players atop the current Larkin rotation, four missed most of the first semester.

Senior leader Jashon Johnson-Neals missed 10 games with a broken hand. Talented sophomore Fernando Perez Jr. missed two games with a sprained ankle. A second sprain limited him in four other games. Two players were academically ineligible until January.

Larkin is 4-3 since the roster reached full availability. That includes a 57-55 win over Glenbard East (16-7) and Saturday's 67-59 overtime loss at Schaumburg (20-4), which leads the Mid-Suburban League West.

"We thought we had a roster where if everything went well, we could compete for a conference championship," Carter said. "I think the last three weeks shows that was probably true. We knew we were going to take some early lumps. We just didn't know it would last so long because we had to piece our roster together.

"It's exciting for sure. Once some goals kind of go away because of your record, you're aiming to be as good as you can be by the end of the year. Right now we're playing better basketball than we have all season. We just have to keep going."

The west-siders aim for a regular-season sweep of visiting Elgin (5-17, 1-11). Larkin won the first Upstate Eight Conference meeting 66-45 on Jan. 10. Johnson-Neals led the way with 16 points and 7 rebounds. The 6-foot forward leads the Royals with 15.3 ppg, followed by sophomore point guard Damari Wheeler-Thomas (13.8) and Perez (12.6).

They face an Elgin team that has played since mid-January without leading scorer Xavier Bonds, no longer with the team due to disciplinary reasons, according to first-year coach Todd Allen. Bonds was the Maroons' leading scorer (14.6 ppg) and second-leading rebounder (6.7 rpg).

Elgin has lost seven straight since a 21-point win against West Chicago on Jan. 3, but Allen sees signs of improvement. The Maroons scored 70 points for the first time since November in last week's 83-74 loss to East Aurora.

"I think we're starting to come together," the Elgin coach said. "Through all the stuff we've been through, they've come every day and given their all. We're proud of that. We still have a long way to go, but we're proud of their effort."

The Maroons must cut down on turnovers in the second meeting. They committed 15 turnovers in the middle two quarters of the first game against Larkin. The Royals turned the ball over 12 times total.

"We turned it over four or five times in the first six or seven possessions of the second half," Allen said. "That gave them layups and momentum. We have to take care of the ball. We know they're going to pressure us. We just have to execute."

Larkin has won three straight games against Elgin and 18 of the last 19. The Maroons lead the all-time series 80-58.

Filling it up: Fox Valley area scoring leader Taaj Davis of Aurora Christian has been efficient.

The 6-foot-1 senior point guard averages 27.6 points per game. He shoots 52.6% from 2-point range (141 of 268) and 35.3% from 3-point range (42 of 119).

Davis gets to the free-throw line. The 75% shooter averages 8.4 attempts per game and makes 6.3. He also grabs 5.9 rebounds per game and contributes more assists per game (4.5) than turnovers (3.5).

Elite company: Huntley senior Uchenna Egekeze snared his 500th career rebound in Tuesday's 63-45 Fox Valley Conference win at McHenry.

It was the second milestone in less than a month for the three-year varsity performer. He surpassed 1,000 career points on Jan. 15 and now has 1,113.

Teammate Ryan Sroka is on track to earn the same double distinction. Also in his third varsity season, Sroka enters Friday's game at Jacobs with 478 career rebounds. The 6-foot-5 senior should reach 500 rebounds against Dundee-Crown on Feb. 18 if he maintains his pace of 6.8 rpg. He eclipsed 1,000 career points on Jan. 20.

Cary-Grove's Frank Jakubicek is already a member of the 1,000-500 club. The 6-foot-9 senior scored his 1,000th career point on Jan. 28. He enters Friday's game at Crystal Lake Central with 578 career rebounds.

One of the area's leading rebounders over the past two seasons has been St. Charles North center Conor Linke. The 6-foot-9 senior grabbed 278 rebounds last year (8.7 avg). The future Bradley Brave enters Friday's home game against Lake Park averaging 9.7 rpg.

Take two: Huntley senior Uchenna Egekeze averages 14.8 points and 7.2 rebounds. That is not far off the pace set by his older brother, Amanze, when he was named captain of the 2013-14 Daily Herald All-Area Team.

Amanze Egekeze averaged 17.8 points and 7.7 rebounds as a high school senior. He went on to play collegiately at Belmont and now plays professionally in Greece.