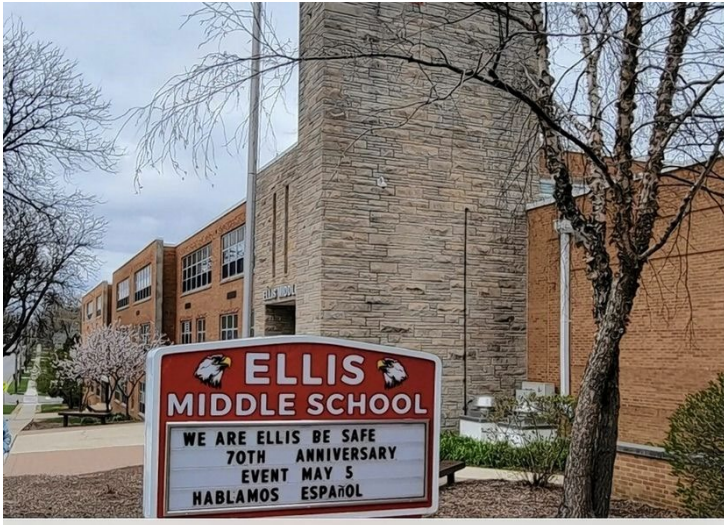


Press Clippings 5/13/2022

Daily Herald

Ellis School in Elgin celebrates its 70th anniversary with games, tours, tree planting --- 5/12/2022

By Jerry Turnquist



Opened during the 1951-52 school year, Ellis Middle School and its companion Larsen Middle School were the second and third junior highs in Elgin Area School District U-46, a district that would later have eight junior high schools. *Courtesy of Ellis Middle School*

Ellis Middle School in Elgin is 70 years old. To commemorate that milestone -- and the many changes through the years -- the staff of the Near East Side school planned an event dubbed "Celebrating Through the Decades."

"We wanted to help the students experience activities students might have done during the school's 70 years," said Holly Yee, a member of the anniversary committee and a 27-year veteran of the school.

To accommodate the celebration, the school restructured May 5 to allow for a longer period at the end of the day. This was the first all-school assembly in over two years, Yee added.



Ellis Middle School students and staff planted a white oak tree at Trillium Park in honor of the Elgin school's 70th Anniversary. - Courtesy of Ellis Middle School

A hula hoop contest, tug of war, jump rope, and musical chairs planned for outside had to be canceled because of the rain. There were, however, scooter races, relays and pie throwing at the assistant principal in the school gym. Music was provided by a DJ who was a former Ellis student. Students wore T-shirts displaying the school's 70th anniversary logo.

There was also an open house and building tours with pictures from old yearbooks on display. Some walked to nearby Trillium Park -- a park founded because of the influence of Ellis students and staff. Here a white oak tree was planted in honor of the school's 70th anniversary.

Opened during the 1951-52 school year, Ellis Middle School and its companion Larsen Middle School were the second and third junior highs in Elgin Area School District U-46, a district that would later have eight. These junior highs became middle schools in the 1980s, housing only seventh- and eighth-graders as the district moved to a four-year high school plan.



Students joined in a tug of war as part of the anniversary events at Ellis Middle School. - Courtesy of Ellis Middle School

More changes are likely in the future as the district is developing recommendations to move sixth-graders to the middle school.

"Over the years, as students come and go, the longevity of the staff has been the key factor for academic success and curriculum continuity across grade levels," said Holly Yee about teaching at Ellis. "Building positive relationships and providing lifelong skills with our students has been the foundation for our Ellis Eagles."

Crain's Chicago Business

This manufacturing company has no CEO: Three siblings have taken charge of Hoffer Plastics in South Elgin, a company founded in 1953 by their grandfather and later run by their father, who gave up the CEO title two years ago ---

5/9/2022

By H. Lee Murphy



Nick Allexon

From left: Charlotte Hoffer-Canning, Alex Hoffer, Gretchen Hoffer-Farb

Hoffer Plastics in South Elgin doesn't have a CEO. Instead, three siblings have taken charge of the company, which was founded in 1953 by their grandfather, Robert Hoffer, and later run by their father, William, who gave up the CEO title two years ago.

Charlotte Hoffer-Canning, 44, is chief culture officer. Her brother, Alex Hoffer, 40, is chief operating officer. Their sister, Gretchen Hoffer-Farb, 47, is chief financial officer.

With 363 employees, all non-union, working at a sprawling 365,000-square-foot plant, Hoffer is a custom injection molder which makes myriad plastic pieces, from closures for milk jugs to flexible pouches for baby food. Annual sales last year were \$95 million. The company got through the COVID-19 pandemic without laying off any workers and without taking Payroll Protection Program funds from the federal government. Excerpts from an interview with Hoffer-Canning follow.

Crain's: What's a chief culture officer?

Hoffer-Canning: I manage human resources, among other things, and recruitment has come to be a big part of that. To find workers and keep workers—never easy in manufacturing—we've focused on a family-oriented culture that features things like integrity, trust and service. We genuinely treat everybody here as family. My door is open always to all employees, and we aren't here to talk just about what is happening in this building. We can be a sounding board on what is happening in their lives at home, too.

I know as many people as possible here by their names. I'm constantly walking the floor during the day to inspect equipment and, at the same time, check on our people. My father and grandfather taught us that it was important to be on the floor to get the pulse of our operations and our culture. In the last couple of years, workers are showing up with a lot of stress and anxiety, and we can see that and give them counseling. Frictions still crop up, but we arrange meetings with supervisors early on to head off real trouble.

I imagine your biggest challenge is finding workers.

We were facing recruitment headwinds since before the pandemic. With low unemployment rates and declining birthrates and a shrinking workforce, it's been a challenge. I've made a point of visiting local high schools to get to our future workers early and have noticed some serious misconceptions.

We are finding that 17-year-olds view manufacturing as something their grandfathers did. Manufacturing they assume is dark and dirty. I was horrified at what I heard. Our modern plant is automated and bright and clean. For recruiting, we had to create a whole new image for manufacturing: It's highly automated and very technical and pays well.

The city of Elgin was once home to Elgin National Watch, the biggest watchmaker in the world and an industrial beacon in a town dominated by manufacturing. But that history has been lost.

Even older people here don't remember. We brought out **guidance counselors from the local school district** recently and they were surprised. They mentioned that a lot of their kids were computer gamers and assumed that their skills couldn't translate to a factory. Quite the contrary, we pointed out that the manual dexterity and critical thinking and attention to detail that gamers have is just what we can use here.

Then we showed these counselors our compensation statements: We start people here at \$16 an hour, and with paid vacation and benefits and bonuses, total compensation can run to \$52,000. And the opportunity for advancement, even for those without a college degree, is great. With pay and benefits, the average manufacturing worker today in America earns \$92,000 a year.

But that hasn't been the perception, even in Elgin, where schools have redefined career paths for their students as focused on four-year college programs. College isn't for everybody, we remind people. And for those who fall short, too many fall back on jobs in fast food and hospitality, where pay is low.

How urgent is your need for workers?

We have 30 to 40 open positions right now, which is very high for us. We had a big increase in retirements during the pandemic, and also more people deciding they wanted to do something else, so our turnover rose to 15% to 20% annualized over the past two years. Our workforce is aging, which is why we need to focus on young people.

There's a new phenomenon among employers like you in which workers get hired and then simply don't show up, right?

It's true. People have an interview appointment or a first day of work and then don't appear, with no phone call or email of explanation. When we hire somebody today, we figure there is a 30% chance we're being ghosted. Maybe people have gotten other offers or jobs elsewhere or whatever. We never know, because they mysteriously stop communicating with us. We try to follow up and find out what went wrong, but they won't even cooperate with that.