

SCHOOL

A Special Supplement to the Sullivan County Democrat

SCENE



A look
inside the
Sullivan
West
Central
School
District



SECTION 5,
DECEMBER 3, 2021
CALLICOON, NY

Elevating kids 'voice' as members of a true learning community

STORY AND PHOTO BY KATHY DALEY

As he ties up three and a half years at Sullivan West as Superintendent of Schools, Stephen Walker reflects on just what education should be about in 2021 and beyond.

"I'd like to see us hearing from students systematically and then acting," said Walker. "We have to exist in their world."

The schools chief – who will exit the District on Jan. 3 for the Croton-Harmon Union Free District – leaves behind a litany of student requests that came alive, according to Sullivan West High School Principal Mark Plescia.

"During our administrative meetings, Steve challenged us to think of new ways to create opportunity for student voice," Plescia said. "Because of his drive, student voice is something that will be ingrained here at Sullivan West Middle and High School."

Studies indicate that the more students are given choice, challenges and opportunities for collaboration, the greater is their motivation and the better they perform academically.

"Steve's shared vision of promoting student voice has led to many changes and additions in our school," said Elementary School Principal Rod McLaughlin, "changes that reflect student interest and that have a positive impact on our student body."

The school launched an Elementary Student Council in 2019 after kids asked for it. Now there are new clubs based on student



Superintendent of Schools Stephen Walker's tenure has spurred a growth in technology along with infrastructure wiring and wifi access, particularly in the past 18 months. He jump-started the use of social media to connect with students and parents, brought in the social emotional program RULER, introduced a new elementary school Spanish class, and oversaw a new gym floor installed.

interests including a video club run by JoAnn Mullally. Students are introduced to apps for movie making and production so that they can express their ideas in film.

Student voice was also instrumental in the transformation of the more than 25-year-old school library, now a high-tech media center, added McLaughlin. Elsewhere in the school, classroom teaching and learning opportunities are being updated and refocused with student input.

And teachers are looking for opportunities to share student work beyond the confines of the classroom. For example, a fourth grade student in Tara Brey's class entered a story in a contest on News-O-Matic, an educational resource for grades K through 8. The student won runner up status.

The shining light, student voice-wise, has to be the new wing in the high school building dedicated to just Middle School students and run by Principal Scott Haberli.

In past years, seventh and eighth graders entered the huge high school after leaving a cozy kid-sized elementary school and, said Superintendent Walker, they suffered from it.

"By their behavior and by their learning, they showed us that they were struggling," said Walker. "So we designed a program explicitly for where middle school kids are. Now, in the hallways and classrooms we see kids engaged, working together, noisy, and excited to learn."

School Scene

'A Look at Activities in the Sullivan West'

Published by
Catskill-Delaware Publications, Inc.

Publishers of the

**SULLIVAN COUNTY
Democrat**

(845) 887-5200

Callicoon, NY 12723

December 3, 2021 • Vol. CXXXI, No. 51

Proud Member of
NYPA
NEW YORK PRESS ASSOCIATION
*Serving the weekly
community newspapers of
New York State since 1853*

MEMBER
NNA
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
ASSOCIATION

Publisher: Fred W. Stabbert III
Managing Editor: Joseph Abraham
Editor: Matt Shortall
Sports Editor: Anthony Morgano
Editorial Assistants: Kathy Daley, Richard Ross, Jeanne Sager, Ed Townsend, Derek Kirk
Advertising Director: Liz Tucker
Assistant Advertising Director: Barbara Matos
Advertising Representative: Susan Panella
Production Manager: Petra Duffy
Business Manager: Susan Owens
Assistant Business Manager: Patricia Biedinger
Telemarketing Coordinator: Michelle Reynolds
Monticello Office Manager: Margaret Bruetsch
Classified Manager: Janet Will
Production Associates: Rosalie Mycka, Elizabeth Finnegan, Nyssa Calkin, Katey Dnistrian, Jessica Roda
Circulation Managers: Molly Seidl, Lillian Ferber
Circulation and Distribution: Anthony Bertholf, John Fischer, Phil Grisafe, Adam Roda



Thompson Sanitation

Waste Management and Recycling Services Since 1986

845-796-1032

KEEP IT LOCAL!

- Sullivan County's #1 Garbage & Recycle for Over 30 Years, Same Owner/Operator
- Competitive Pricing & Superior Service
- Servicing Local Communities throughout ALL of Sullivan County
- Keeping Jobs and Money in Sullivan County
- Residential Program... Roll-Offs... Commercial... Special Clean-Ups



www.thompsonsantiation.net

Don't Get Left On the Curb! Call Thompson Sanitation TODAY!

Droning on and ecstatic about it

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KATHY DALEY

Sullivan West junior Alex Montanez signed up for this year's elective that teaches about drones and quickly decided to buy his own through Amazon. Now, he's flying a drone, carefully, in his own yard.

What's a drone? "It's an unmanned aircraft that comes in all shapes and sizes," Montanez says. "You can make a living out of this. You get paid for using a drone to take pictures of real estate, you can get paid for racing."

Then there are the rules: "A lot of airspace restrictions. Nothing higher than 400 feet, no flying over (federal) prisons."

"It's a new class here, I discovered

something new," said Montanez.

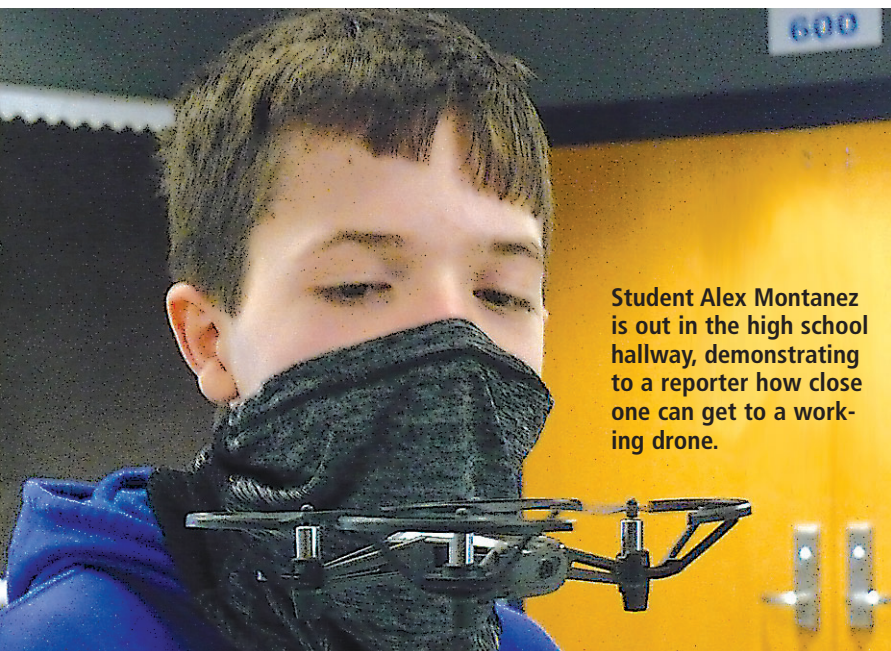
Teacher Katelyn Kelly has instructed Sullivan West students for 15 years. This year, she teaches Computer Science, Principles of Engineering, SAT Preparation in Math, and Design and Drawing for Production. And then there's Drone Piloting for Commercial Endeavors.

Drones are not anything new to Sullivan West High, she noted. Beginning in 2015, teacher Lionel Billard, now retired, included drones in his course on Robotics. But students specifically asked for a drone elective on its own and got it this September.

The course focuses on learning hands-on drone flight skills, exploring career opportunities involving drones and preparing for the FAA



Katelyn Kelly has taught math and science at Sullivan West for 15 years. A graduate of Liberty High and the BOCES construction program, she went on to SUNY Delhi to study architecture technology. Her mechanical engineering degree is from Clarkson University and her masters in education is from Mount St. Mary College.



Student Alex Montanez is out in the high school hallway, demonstrating to a reporter how close one can get to a working drone.

(Federal Aviation Administration) test to get one's drone license.

"The DEC is using drones to fly over forests to look for diseased trees," Kelly tells her students, "and to find lost hikers."

Drones are used, yes, in real estate, roof inspections and in wedding photography. Drones can now analyze which areas of a field need to be fertilized, targeting fertilizer rather than scattering it all over. There's a drone that can fertilize only specific plants.

"What's not cool about it?" she says with a grin. "It comes down to new possibilities. There's so much potential. It's fun, hands-on, challenging. It's pushing the limit of

technology."

The full-year elective course is open to ninth through 12th graders. Students study drones in fourth period every day from 9:54 a.m. to 10:36 a.m. They spend three days in classwork, one day learning on computers about flight simulation, and one day they go to the cafeteria and spend their 42 minute flying drone session.

For example, "They learn to fly in squares, to exercise in landing," said Kelly.

"I love teaching this," said Kelly, noting that the curriculum used is called Skyop. "This is fun. And there's a very big drone field out there."

CALLICOON SUPPLY INC.



For all your Hardware
and Building
Supplies ...

Open 7 Days
a Week
M-F 7-4:30
Sat 7-12
Sun 8-12



online@callicoonsupply.com

Rte 17B • Callicoon, NY
845-887-4804



83357



Joseph Herbert Proprietor

5065 State Rte 52, PO Box 441, Jeffersonville, NY 12748 • 845-482-4460 • fax 845-482-5516

CLEAN USED CARS & TRUCKS
FULL REPAIR & SERVICE
NYS INSPECTION STATION

97739



How about we check under *your* hood?

Prostate and testicular cancer. Heart and urologic problems. Arthritis and orthopedic concerns. There are lots of men's health issues Garnet Health physicians can help you with, from diagnosis to treatment. But first you have to see us. **Schedule your annual physical with a Garnet Health doctor today. Call 845-333-7575.**


Garnet Health.
garnethealth.org

It's not just 'cows and plows' in new FFA Chapter

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATHY DALEY

High School senior Jake Nystrom has his future mostly planned, and it involves the family farm off North Branch Road in Jeffersonville.

"As an adult, I'll still have the farm," said Nystrom, mentioning that another endeavor, Buck Brook

Alpacas in Roscoe, is also part of his family.

"I'm raising 14 alpacas myself now," said Nystrom, who was a 4-H member for years. "There are so many ag kids interested now in raising animals."

Jake has another responsibility. He's president of the newly minted

Sullivan West chapter of the National FFA, formerly called Future Farmers of America.

"The FFA is a premier leadership organization in schools," explained Sullivan West teacher Paddy McCarthy, whose two courses – National Resources and Agri-Science – permitted the FFA to accept Sul-

livan West as a member.

President Jimmy Carter was a member of the FFA in Plains, Georgia. Singer Taylor Swift belonged to the FFA as a teen in Tennessee.

In effect, an FFA chapter is the student organizational arm of a school agricultural education program. Having begun in the 1930s,

the FFA now welcomes students who aspire not only to become farmers but also teachers, doctors, scientists, horticulturists and more.

For Sullivan West, the FFA connection began officially last May but is in high gear now with 41 kids participating. Meetings take

place once a week during lunch period on Wednesdays or Thursdays and then later in the day from

2:30-4:30 p.m.

"It's difficult to get all the FFA students together at the same time," said McCarthy. "Many have varying schedules, some play sports, some can't stay after school. I try to have multiple meeting times to accommodate as many as possible."

During lunchtime meetings, "we hear from committees, ask for ideas and input, and vote on various items," McCarthy said.

Then in afternoon meetings, students might work on the Ag bulletin board or their monthly FFA bulletin. They also work on their Supervised Agriculture Experience (SAE) record books, keeping tabs on the required agricultural experience each student must have during sophomore, junior and senior years.

"Because of the overlap between FFA and Agriculture Education," explained McCarthy, "there's a connection between (for example) learning about small engines in Agriscience class, and then using that information to compete in an Ag Mechanics contest for the FFA."

Ag-related activities began last spring when students tapped the sap rising in maple trees and then carried the sap out. Later on, beekeeper/teacher McCarthy brought in honeycombs and taught students to extract the honey.

Left to right: Juniors at Sullivan West High, twins Elizabeth, left, and Nicole Reeves, proudly display the school's Future Farmers of America emblem.

A large bird feeder crafted by student Jesse Hall will offer a reliable, plentiful source of food for birds in the winter outside the high school. Here, students Will Chellis, left, and Jake Nystrom show off the handiwork.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

In Bethel, the beef farm owned by John Rossal, where he sells JR's Farm Fresh Beef. Rossal is the grandfather of twins Elizabeth and Nicole Reeves, members of the FFA.

Ag kids are now building a bird feeder to hang outside their classroom. And with a 3-D printer in the classroom, they are creating tiny Holstein cow holiday ornaments for sale. Funds will go towards their FFA chapter.

Come spring, they will travel to SUNY Cobleskill – McCarthy's alma mater – for an Ag Science class.

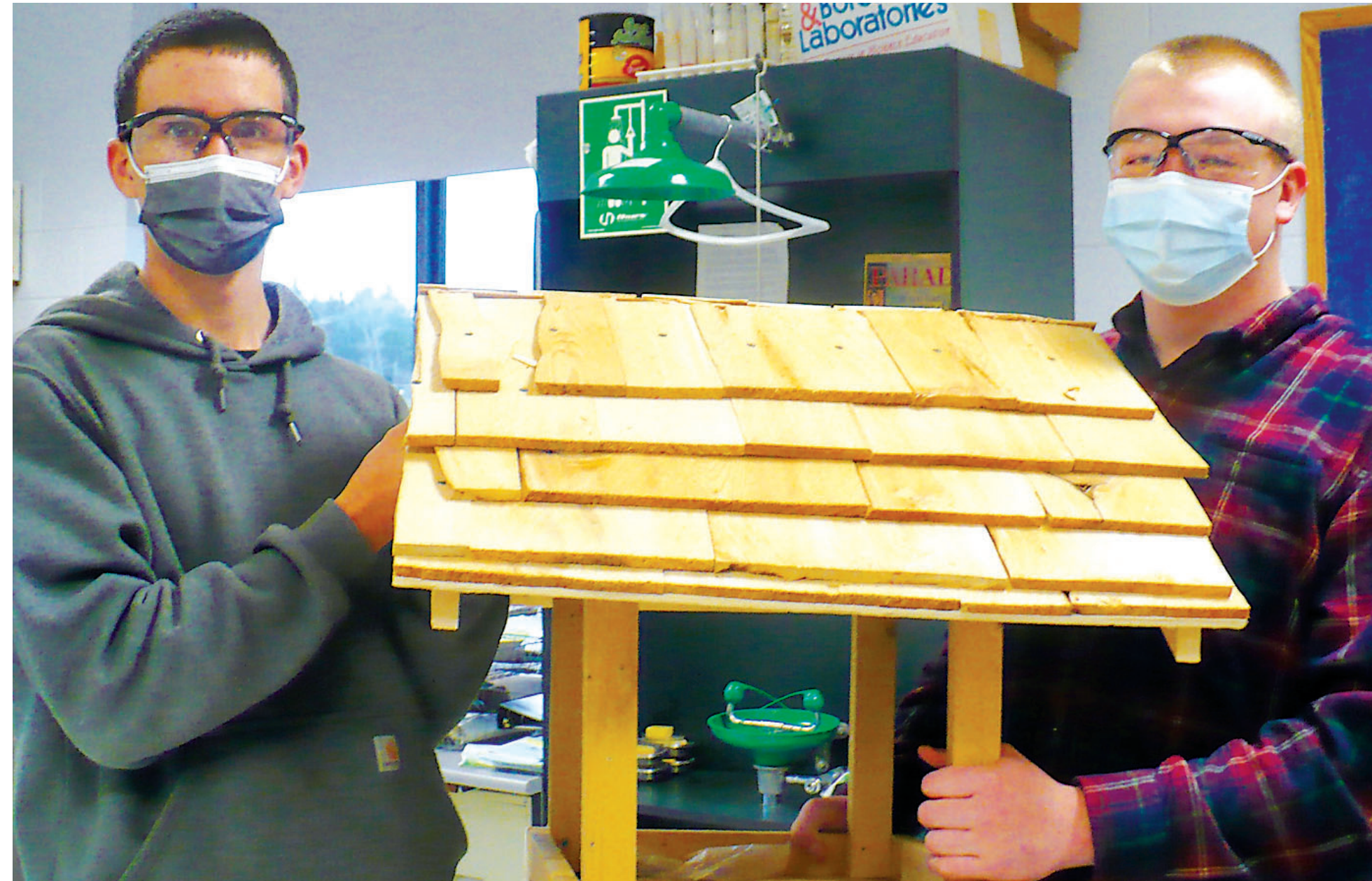
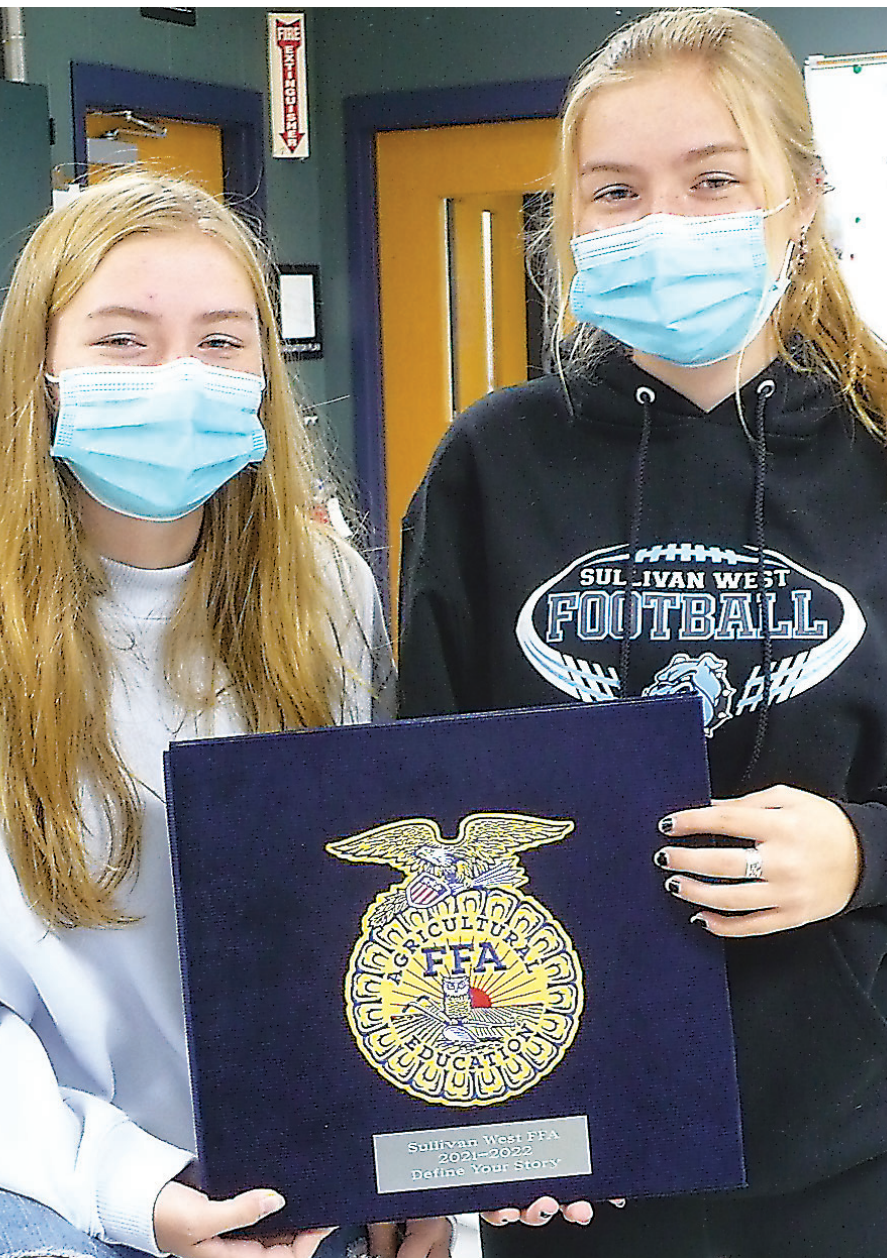
"I really want to do more with farming and learning about it, hands on," said FFA member Elizabeth Reeves. She and her twin, Nicole, are juniors at the school and live in Narrowsburg. Their grandfather, Jon Rossal, owns a farm in Bethel where he raises and sells his JR's Farm Fresh Beef.

"Someday I want to go to a National FFA meeting," said Nicole. "This is not an after-school tech club but a huge national thing."

High School junior Will Chellis also relishes his time in Ag courses and the FFA.

"I spend a lot of time on farms," said Chellis, son of Jeffersonville mayor Bill Chellis. "My grandfather and my uncle own farms here. I've always loved taking care of animals. It gives you responsibility. It's better than sitting behind a desk all day."

"This class," Chellis said with a grin, "is my saving grace."



Students dig into the fun of learning Spanish

STORY AND PHOTO
BY KATHY DALEY

Estupendo! Maravilloso! Terrific! Marvelous! That's how Spanish teacher Manoella Taunton responds to her first year at Sullivan West Elementary.

"I absolutely love it," said Taunton. "I love teaching a new language."

This year, the elementary school unveiled a new program to introduce students to the Spanish language. All 300 kids from third grade to sixth grade are learning from Taunton once for 40 minutes during each six-day cycle.

"The goal is not to speak Spanish but for them to get familiar with the language and culture, to be proficient enough to express themselves," she said. "The goal is to have fun, to be excited to come here."

"We play games and do artwork related to the particular lesson we're on," said Taunton, "like the

days of the week (in Spanish), or a lesson on emotions, or the joke of the day. I do gestures, we play games, they get up and speak."

Recently, she taught a lesson on the family unit, asking the students "como es tu familia?" That is, "what is your family like?"

In Spanish now, "they are asking and answering in complete sentences," she said. "They are so excited and eager to learn."

Taunton pointed out that exposure to new languages from a young age helps students become more aware and respectful of cultures different from their own. Even more important is that research shows that young children who learn a second language actually do better in their main language.

The District wanted to begin introducing students early on to a language other than English, the teacher said, so that students would be more prepared for learn-



Manoella Taunton teaches Spanish language, culture and arts to third to sixth graders.

ing a foreign language in the older grades. A New York State high school diploma requires a course in a language other than English.

Taunton works closely with the elementary school's music and art teachers, Mary Taylor and Natalie Sauer respectively. Learning about the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo from Taunton, students then connected with Sauer as they created a self portrait using Kahlo's style.

Mary Taylor has collaborated with Taunton on planning a fourth grade winter concert that includes

an Argentinian folk song entitled "Mi Chacra," which means "My Farm."

"Mary asked me to go over the pronunciation of the words to the song and their meaning," said Taunton.

As Taunton spoke to students about Latino farmers in Mexico and Argentina, the teacher delighted in the children's quick connection to their own lives.

"I have a chicken!" one student declared. Another shouted out "I have a horse!"

SULLIVAN 180

Building a Healthy Community, One Degree at a Time.

Sullivan 180 would like to thank Sullivan West's Healthier Generation Advisors for their hard work on the *Empowering a Healthier Generation* program and continued dedication to promote health and wellness among students, staff, parents and their communities!

Kayla O'Dell - Elementary

Rachel Van Tuyl - Middle/High School



To Learn More About *Empowering a Healthier Generation*, check out www.Sullivan180.org
(845) 295-2680 | info@sullivan180.org



Henri Marin-Leon
2019 Sullivan Renaissance
Intern for Jeffersonville

Sullivan Renaissance offers opportunities for volunteers of all ages. If you need community service for school, church group, honor society, scouts or 4-H, time spent with Sullivan Renaissance may help you fulfill your requirements.

Sullivan Renaissance also offers paid summer internships and college scholarships.

SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY. GROW WITH US!



Learn More SullivanRenaissance.org

Follow us on [f](#) [i](#) [y](#) Call 845-295-2445



Cindy Humleker, left, instructional coach at the elementary school, Assistant Principal Kevin Carbone and technology teacher JoAnn Mullally cheer with delight for the newly-renovated school library.

‘New’ library serves as hub of learning at Elementary School

STORY AND PHOTO
BY KATHY DALEY

A cheery face-lift to the Sullivan West Elementary School’s library may have Covid to thank.

During the pandemic when students were not in school, the school’s maintenance workers began to pull out all the stops to create a welcoming, colorful space for students to read quietly, or listen to their teacher or the school librarian, or to work on projects and presentations.

“The students love coming here now,” said Cindy Humleker, elementary school instructional coach.

The school library, across the way from the main office, was vintage 1994. Bookshelves eight feet high were not inviting for young children, and 18 desktop computers were clunky and took up a ton of space.

School kids weighed in what a “new library” should look like. They wanted comfortable seating, open space and more technology.

“The design was driven by kids,” said Humleker.

First, the maintenance department took the bookshelves and cut each in half, spiffing them up and painting them. The old computers were exchanged for 32 laptops,

which, when not in use, fit comfortably away.

Floors were redone and walls were painted periwinkle blue. New furniture arrived in mid-October and included “oodles,” which are brightly colored stools that can be stacked for height and easily moved.

The piece de resistance in the library might be two hand-made four-by-four white board tables for children to write down their ideas on projects or plans. In effect, the maintenance department took long oak tables and cut them in half, and then applied pieces of white shower-board from Home Depot, creating a flat surface on which ideas can be written and erased.

Now, said Assistant Principal Kevin Carbone, “We have spaces for kids to be quietly reading, presenting or listening.”

Teachers lead their classes there for exciting learning. And school librarian Kathy Hector runs library sessions in which each grade level enjoys learning time with her once during every 6-week cycle.

The reaction has been joyous. The school did a survey of student response and the library was hailed as terrific: a place to think, create, share and grow. Says technology teacher Joanne Mullally: “The kids say it’s awesome.”

BETHEL WOODS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Explore
THE ‘60s

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIPS

BRINGING CREATIVE EDUCATION TO
YOUR SCHOOL, HOME, OR LEARNING POD.



Museum Field Trips

Available for grades K-12

During Explore the ‘60s, students become familiar with the lessons of the decade and discover themes of individual expression, social consciousness, cultural engagement, empowerment, and inspiration, and how we remain influenced by these things today.

EACH FIELD TRIP INCLUDES:

- A Teacher Planning Consultation
- Customized Pre and Post Virtual Visit Activities
- Resources for Continued Exploration and Learning

95380

To Learn More About Education Opportunities,
Please Visit BethelWoodsCenter.org

When students need a turnaround from Covid-caused behavior

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY KATHY DALEY

Sullivan West is not alone in experiencing students disoriented by school routines, or who are frustrated, withdrawn or acting out.

Kids are back in school full-time now. But many of them haven't gotten their land legs back after more than a year of Covid-caused obstruction. Enter Sullivan West Elementary School's squad of caring professionals.

School counselor Maureen Casey-Bryant and social workers Kayla O'Dell and Virginia Kassay are on the front lines of untangling the problems.

For instance, the youngest students, pre-kindergartners and kindergartners, were only four and five years old when schools shut down in March 2020. Then, during the school year of September 2020 through June 2021, many but not all children returned to school for four days a week. Some learned by remote.

Classes were small, then, to allow for social distancing. Education was often interrupted by shut-downs when someone tested Covid-positive.

Now, those students are six and seven years old, in classrooms of 20 kids. For some of the them, it's overwhelming.

"And students' social-emotional wellbeing impacts academics,"

social worker Kassay stressed.

Kids in emotional trouble can refuse to go to school or may exhibit excessive attention-seeking behavior in class. They might wind up pushing and shoving

other students or seeking out negative situations that they then get involved in – such as two students arguing, and Student Three gets right into the middle of it.

Then there are kids still suffer-

ing from issues at home: a parent or relative who got sick or died, a parent losing a job, not enough food in the house. Rural poverty does exist in Sullivan West's 250 square miles. Many kids do not



School social workers Kayla O'Dell, left, and Virginia Kassay, right, join school counselor Maureen Casey-Bryant on the frontlines of helping students get back on track post-COVID.



Family Dentistry

Dr. Robert Haray, D.D.S.
Damascus Dental Center
1731 Cochection Turnpike
Damascus, PA
570.224.6700

47213

Become
a Foster
Parent
Today!



Learn more at
Berkshirefarm.org/foster
1-844-427-5747

90940



School social worker Kayla O'Dell won this Celebration Cart – full of toys, games and more – for teachers to borrow.

own appropriate winter clothing. Hunger at home is an issue.

“For some kids, school is their safe space against the hardships and trauma that life brings,” Kassay said.

How do the school caretakers respond? First, they have started a Care Cupboard with free winter coats, school supplies and personal care items.

Casey-Bryant works in groups with students on social skills such as sharing, listening and following directions, how to take turns, how to get a teacher's attention appropriately such as raising one's hand.

Social worker Kayla O'Dell has connected with Sullivan 180 to fund healthy programs in the school. That non-profit's goal is to improve the health and well-being of residents with a goal of turning the county's poor health ranking by 180 degrees.

O'Dell's grant work with Sullivan 180 has expanded the elementary school's outdoor learning classroom from one to two, the latter featuring arena-type seating. A new outdoor “sensory path” in blacktop features uplifting messages on a chain link fence such as I AM BRAVE or I HAVE TALENT.

The school's fishing pole lending program is a big hit. What with the many streams and rivers in the Sullivan West area, and with some families unable to buy fishing poles, catching fish together is a great boon for connection and mental health.

Then there's the Celebration Cart, won by O'Dell through Sullivan 180. The shopping cart features toys, games and more, and teachers can book the cart for their classes.

“The kids are super-excited,” said O'Dell.

Two new secretaries sign on at Elementary School

BY KATHY DALEY

Sullivan West Elementary School welcomed two new Main Office secretaries this school year.

“I love it here,” said Alexcia Hokirk, a Livingston Manor native who worked as secretary and transportation coordinator at Sullivan County BOCES before signing on at Sullivan West. “The students

are like little grown ups – funny, polite and friendly.”

Her cohort is Caitlin Mullally, who graduated from Sullivan West High School in 2009. Later, she worked as a substitute in Sullivan West schools. She plans on teaching and is completing her education coursework on-line in the evenings.

“I love it here,” Mullally said. “It feels like home.”



Caitlin Mullally

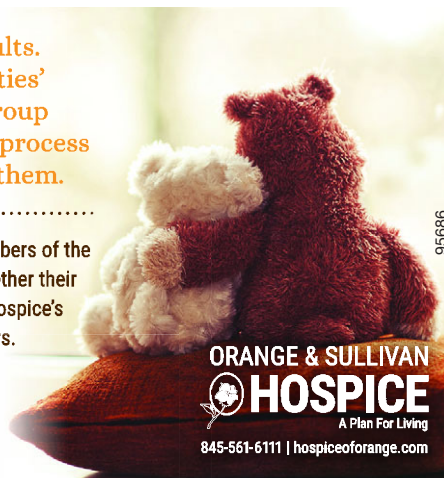


Alexcia Hokirk

Children grieve differently than adults. Hospice of Orange & Sullivan Counties' Thriving Families virtual support group allows all members of the family to process loss in the way that's healthiest for them.

Our bereavement services are available to all members of the Orange and Sullivan community, regardless of whether their loved one benefited from hospice care. See how hospice's compassion continues beyond a patient's final days.

 **Thriving Families: Building Resilience**
A Virtual Family Grief Program



ORANGE & SULLIVAN HOSPICE
A Plan For Living
845-561-6111 | hospiceoforange.com



THE WIZARD SCHOOL
Learning is Magic

Welcome to Our Forest School

We offer:

- Preschool for ages 3-6
- Caregiver&Child Classes for ages 2-9
- Afterschool Enrichment for ages 5-9
- Weekend and Summer Camps

Visit Us @

www.thewizardschool.net

132 Hospital Rd. Callicoon, NY 12723



SUNY SULLIVAN

Discover why we are the #1 Ranked Community College in New York / 2021!*

Tour our eco-friendly campus • Learn about our championship athletics program



+400 acre scenic campus & trail network • organic farm • diverse & inclusive student body



Over 40+ academic programs including Media Arts, Graphic Design, Theater & Nursing

Get the full college experience

We've got residence halls & eco-friendly townhouses

- ✓ We will walk you through application, financial aid, and registration.
- ✓ Instant Acceptance with Valid High School Transcript!
- ✓ Receive a two-year Presidential Scholars award with a 90+ high school average.
- ✓ Didn't finish High School? We can help with that too!

We can help you find your fit –
contact an Enrollment Specialist today!

Visit sunysullivan.edu

admissions@sunysullivan.edu

toll-free: 800-577-5243

*Ranked #1 Community College in New York State for 2020-21, and #14 of all New York State institutions of higher education by Intelligient.com, based on flexibility, faculty, course strength, cost, and reputation.

