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A look at activities  
in the Tri-Valley School District

# SCHOOL SCENE

A Special Supplement to the Sullivan County Democrat



SECTION T  
FEBRUARY 2022  
CALICOON, NY

# Cross country, Ag Ed, Music excellence: A good place to work

**W**ith Tri-Valley seeking a new superintendent of schools, the distinction of the District will go a long way towards attracting a schools chief, says interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Silver.

"The campus is beautiful, and the staff here really care about the kids," Silver said.

The cross-country running team were state champions this year. The agriculture education is first rate. And then there are the singers and musicians.

For the first time in Tri-Valley's history, four students were chosen to participate in the NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association) Conference All-State Mixed Chorus at one time. Performing at the December event were Samantha Morgan,

alto; Robert Denman, tenor; and Brandon Kaplan and David Allison, both bass.

Then the District was notified that the National Association for Music Education selected Morgan, Denman and Allison for its January 2022 event in San Diego. Covid forced a virtual All-National program that took place from Jan. 22 to Jan. 24.

"The music department is a big strength," said Silver.

Brochures seeking a school superintendent have been published, and the Board of Education planned for a Feb 10 community information forum at the high school.

Meanwhile, significant construction moves on.

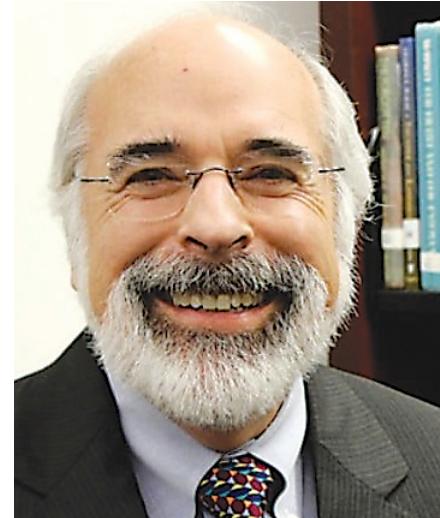
An "Innovation Lab" will be developed in the Secondary

School as a place for students to use software for applications like coding and 3-D printing. Also on the slate is a plan to offer a TV production class next school year.

The "cardio" room with treadmills and ellipticals at the Secondary School will relocate so that it will be adjacent to the upper gym. Students may have the option to use the cardio equipment during Physical Education classes. The weight room will see expansion.

Finally, the Family and Consumer Science space will experience renovation and expansion, with partial walls removed so that classroom space has direct access to the kitchen. New appliances and cabinets will be installed.

That experiential program is



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

**Interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Silver** hails the District for kids, teachers, music and more.

attractive to students.

"And some of the top kids sign up," said Dr. Silver. "They like the idea of doing 'hands on instead of minds on.'"

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**CONTRIBUTED PHOTO**  
A new class in Civics & Social Justice has attracted interest in high school kids this year. From left, students Brie Torrens, Shane Williams, Brandon Schultz (sitting), Vanya Khodakovski, teacher Matt Haynes, and student Anna Streimer.



# Empowering teens toward active citizenry and an improved world

BY KATHY DALEY

**N**ot everyone makes it to the official twitter page of the New York State Education Department. But a new course at Tri-Valley got the attention of the office in Albany.

"Students at Tri-Valley HS are forming an action plan on a community issue in their newly formed Civics and Social Justice class created to support the Seal of Civic Readiness," tweeted NYSED earlier this school year. "Local Assembly members and the Board of Education President volunteer to help the students."

The Seal of Civic Readiness encourages students to complete projects and participate in civic-related activities. The seal can count toward one of the required five Regents exams students must take to graduate. Tri-Valley was accepted as a pilot school for the NYS Civic Readiness program.

Tri-Valley High School student Anna Streimer talks about the new Civics and Social Justice class, which began in September: "Our class is about how to make a good impact on our community, about being aware of life around us socially and politically."

The course takes place daily from 2:03 p.m. to 2:46 p.m. Eleven students, all juniors and seniors, participate with teachers Matt Haynes and Tyler Eckhoff co-teaching.

"We rarely teach from the front of the class," explained Haynes. "It is more a dialogue-driven class with projects, guest speakers and debates."

Student Brandon Schultz signed on fairly quickly.

"I wanted to get involved in this course because it seemed interesting," said Schultz, "and because I wanted to get involved in activism and do it respectfully."

Specifically, Brandon is working

on a project to make more available the prescription medicine, Narcan, that can save a life in an opioid overdose emergency.

Student Shane Williams shared his enthusiasm. "I love the environment of the class and with my favorite people teaching," he said. "I like it that I'm not getting shut down for what I'm thinking."

Adds classmate Brie Torrens: "This is a good learning experience, and close to what my Mom does." Her mother, Christy TerBush of Sullivan Renaissance, is active in the wider community. "This is a good course for people who can identify a problem but don't know how to fix it," Torrens said.

There are several projects throughout the year, noted teacher Eckhoff. "Now, students are analyzing and evaluating historical examples of activism."

The program has brought in some 15 community leaders

across the state, county, town and school to speak to students. The leaders may be used as resources once the students start their Capstone Projects, which are the substantial projects that will serve as senior theses.

Students will examine the community – state, county, town, and school – to identify local issues, conduct research, perform analysis, develop strategies and solutions, take informed action, communicate with others and reflect upon their experiences.

After designing and following through on an action plan, the course will end with a showcase presentation to the school community and other individuals.

"This class is teaching me a lot," said student Vanya Khodakovski. "I'm learning the importance of teamwork, the importance of rising and fighting for things that should change, and sharing opinions respectfully."

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# Homegrown teacher imparts love of learning about agriculture

STORY AND PHOTO BY KATHY DALEY

**L**ocal Kim Doyle began teaching elementary school agriculture this September after growing up in the Tri-Valley area and school district. Her degree is from SUNY Cobleskill with a major in agriculture business management and a minor in agriculture education. She is working towards a masters of teaching in Agriculture Education through Empire State College. This is her first job teaching.

Here, Doyle discusses her journey toward agriculture education ...

## Democrat: How did you get interested in Agriculture?

My interest in agriculture began in the classroom. While my family did have a small hobby farm with a large-scale garden as well as chickens and ducks, I fell in love with agriculture after taking my first sixth grade ag class here at Tri-

Valley.

Agriculture is much more than farming. What kept me fascinated was my experience with landscape design as well as poultry farming during my high school years, in conjunction with FFA (Future Farmers of America) and various ag classes.

Locally, my family is known by many, mainly because of my seven siblings and all of our involvement in the community.

## Democrat: What did FFA teach you?

I always tell people "I put my first FFA jacket on at six months old," and it's the truth. My oldest sister was a student of Tara Berescik-Burke during her first year of teaching, and I was a prop for her "People in Agriculture" FFA poster!

When I began sixth grade -- the first year that you can be an FFA member -- I immediately joined



Teacher Kim Doyle engages with first grader Maliya Shafarsky and a furry chicken prop as they go over the life and work of poultry in Doyle's agriculture class.

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the chapter and did everything I could. My involvement on a student level ended in 2019, after my second time running for National FFA Office.

During my junior year in high school, I served as our chapter president. During my senior year I served as the District 2 president, serving school districts from Albany down to Warwick Valley. During my freshman year of college I served as New York State Reporter, which required me to serve the entirety of the New York State FFA. Finally, I served as the 2018 and 2019 NYS National Officer Candidate. This allowed me the opportunity to run for National FFA Office.

FFA taught me almost everything I know about being an educator – how to lesson plan through writing workshops, how to speak publicly with confidence, how to be professional, and most importantly how to work and connect with others. I would not feel nearly as comfortable and prepared to be in the classroom had it not been for the years I spent wearing the blue corduroy jacket.

While I was in high school, I had

the opportunity to learn from (ag teachers) both Tara and Robert Hayes. Both influenced my choice to teach agriculture.

## Democrat: This year so far, what have children learned in K-1 Ag Ed?

Starting with kindergarten, we began the year learning about the life-cycle of butterflies and woolly bears, then began learning about basic agricultural knowledge: apple processing and apple production, dairy processing and production etc. Now we are creating animal-based interactive books.

My first graders are focusing on agriculture across the U.S. and the world. They have learned about food webs and production, product specialization and making healthy food choices. They get excited for each unit and love to find ways to relate what we learn back to their own lives.

When we began creating our first book about chickens, students were ecstatic. They were excited to color and glue, but also to do something interactive. I always get excited when they are and I love the pride they have in their own work.



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# Keyboarding and computers: Third graders take to typing

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY KATHY DALEY

**K**ids definitely love to explore, says elementary school technology teacher Cerissa Giglio, and three of her students echo those sentiments. Take third grader Hope Harb.

"Computers are so much fun!" she said.

Along with classmates William Conjura and Adeline McArdle, the students explained the ins and outs of their fascinating class in Technology with Mrs. Giglio.

"Our teacher took apart an old computer and we looked into it," said William.

The kids got all excited.

"She showed us the ram!" said Adeline. RAM is the short-term memory that temporarily "remembers" everything currently running on a device.

"She showed us the CPU!" said Hope. That's the Central Processing Unit, the main chip in a computer responsible for carrying out tasks.

They studied the motherboard, which is the main circuit board inside a computer that con-



Above: Technology for the youngest students is important because it helps prepare kids for the digital future, says Tri-Valley Elementary School teacher Cerissa Giglio.

At left: Third graders William Conjura, Hope Harb and Adeline McArdle and others in their grade are learning computer technology from the inner workings of a computer to gaining typing skills.

nects the different parts of the computer together.

"We made our own paper computers, gluing on apps," added William.

In class, they learn not only about software and hardware, but how to work the keyboard, how to type. Even though most children text and use their digital devices to communicate, they need typing skills for college and for most professions.

The students were excited about learning to change the background, that is, the "wallpaper" that appears behind the icons on the desktop, and the profile. William pointed out that his user profile depicts a Yankee ballplayer hitting a home run.

"They are learning about software and hardware, but having fun, too," agreed teacher Giglio.

Giglio has taught K-3 technology at Tri-Valley since 2018. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Education from The College of Saint Rose and an MS-Ed in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Leadership from the American College of Education.

"It's also important that students be able to adapt – technology is always changing," said Giglio. "There's always something new. If they have a good building block, they will be able to adapt."

The students are delighted that they can experience computer class every four days.

"I love computers," said Adeline. "I think it's a great way to learn typing. It's important to learn how to use a computer."

"It's not the hardest thing in the world," William reflected, "but it's not that easy."

# Teacher opens up a world of caretaking, cake baking and more

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY KATHY DALEY

In her first year of teaching, Julia Gonzalez has already made a big hit, with her Betty White cake, her cooking competition and, oh yes, the upcoming faux baby doll for the kids to take home.

"It's a 'RealCare Baby,'" said Gonzalez, who began teaching Family and Consumer Science at



In the Family and Consumer Science kitchen are from left to right: teacher Julia Gonzalez and students Abi Smith, Yaileen Rodriguez and Brook Mulholland.

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the high school in September.

"Each student has to take 'the baby' home for a weekend and care for it," she noted. "The baby cries to be held or cries because it needs its diaper changed or cries because it's hungry. It teaches the kids what it's like."

Family and Consumer Sciences, previously known as home economics, is a discipline comprised of five subjects: child development and parenting, consumerism and home economic decisions, interiors and housing, fashion design and clothing, and foods & nutrition.

"This is my favorite class," said student Brook Mulholland. "It's a cool place."

FCS instructors teach life skills that relate directly to the real world. And cooking and baking are part of the syllabus.

A bit hit in that department was the Betty White cake, a student-created vanilla two-layered, eight-inch-high cake decorated with flowers and vines to honor the famous actress who died in

December.

"I always wanted to be a teacher," reflected Gonzalez, speaking in the kitchen. She earned her degree from SUNY Oneonta, one of only a few colleges in New York State to offer Family and Consumer Science.

A 2018 graduate of Monticello High School, Gonzalez enjoyed her own role model: "In high school I had Ericka Vorstadt as my Family and Consumer Science teacher. She was very welcoming, she had a passion for everything. She showed me how each day and every person was different."

"I love teaching here," added Gonzalez. "Knowing that I'm making a difference in the lives of students means the world to me. And the staff here is amazing. Multiple teachers have gone out of their way to help me and check in on me."

Now Gonzalez has her own students gathering in her room every chance they get. She is delighted: "I get to hang out with them. I love it."



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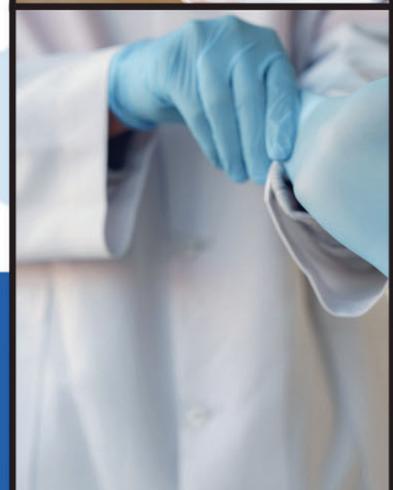
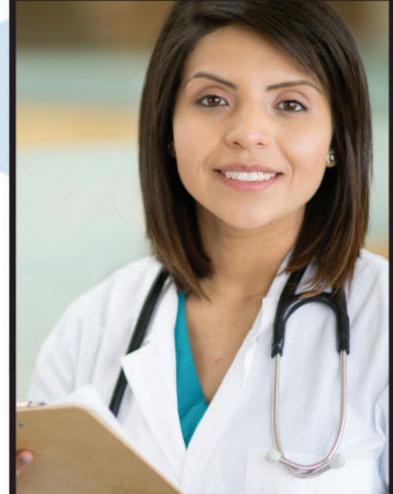
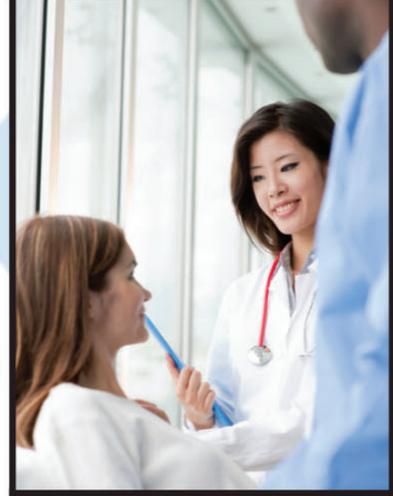
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KATHY DALEY | DEMOCRAT

## Java Making at Tri-Valley Central

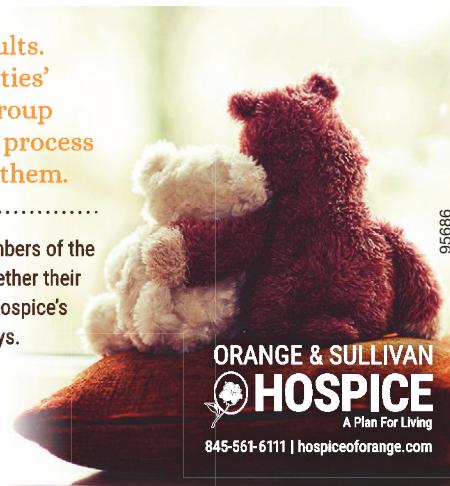
Special Education teacher Tanya Huggler, at right, and student Ashley Sagerfarr brew up some coffee at Tri-Valley Central School. Celebrating its sixth year in operation is the Barista Bears Coffee Cafe, an in-school project that offers coffee, tea and hot chocolate along with brownies and other delights to adults in the school. The very popular program teaches work skills and people skills that include good communication, manners, eye contact and so on. The cafe is named for the word that means a coffee brewer and for the Tri-Valley black bear mascot.

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This year, High School art teacher Chris McAssey is focused on animation and digital illustration, offering new skills to students and preparing them for the future. Here, with McAssey, is an example of a cartoon that has been made to look close to human.

# Combining art and technology in one high school classroom

STORY AND PHOTO BY KATHY DALEY

**P**eople have been making art for a long time.

For example, as early as 38,000 B.C., cave dwellers painted images on their "walls" using ashes, soil and animal fat.

In truth, "Paint tubes were also a 'technology' when they were invented," points out Tri-Valley Secondary School art teacher Chris McAssey.

So the fact that McAssey is not teaching how to paint with oils or sketch with chalk this year doesn't faze him. The technology he's teaching is just another tool for making art.

This year, the high school decided to offer Studio Art students a half-year of "traditional art," that is, painting in oils, watercolor and so on, taught by art teacher Samantha Hayes; and a half year completely in digital art. McAssey signed on for the latter.

"I've always been fascinated by computers," said McAssey. "And part of my goal is to prepare my students for what awaits them after high school."

So, in his class, he's teaching two things at once: "First, the technology of it, how to use software and how to use computers (kids are accustomed to tablets and phones but not necessarily to computers), and then, I'm teaching them

to create art WITH technology."

His students, for instance, are learning to use a pressure sensitive stylus for drawing on their computer screen. They are introduced to software like Adobe Illustrator, as application for creating drawings, illustrations, and artwork. And Adobe Photoshop, a software used for editing photographs, compositing digital art, animating and graphic design.

The class is now working on taking a cartoon character and making it look almost human, a recreation that looks like flesh and bone.

"It's kind of creepy but it's fun," said McAssey.

The art room is also equipped with a 3D printer, so he is introducing 3D design into his class.

"Art is a gradual process and the kids learn a little bit at a time, developing skills throughout the course," he said.

Several of his alumni have gone on to careers in the arts: fashion design, architecture, game design.

McAssey says that it's not unusual for today's high school student to wake up to her or his own success, reflecting in the art room that "I'm getting this. I really know what I'm doing now."

# Excelling in and out of the classroom



PHOTOS BY ANTHONY MORGANO | DEMOCRAT

Above, Adam Furman led for most of the Class D Boys State Championship race. While he finished second overall, the team won the Class D Boys State title.

At left, Andrew Cox starts off the game by winning the jump ball in a non-league matchup against Livingston Manor.

## School Scene

*'A Look at Activities in the Tri-Valley Central School'*

Published by  
*Catskill-Delaware Publications, Inc.*

Publishers of the

**DEMOCRAT**

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February 11, 2022 • Vol. CXXXI, No. 71



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# Teacher aide lobbies for pre-kindergartners' baby bikes

BY KATHY DALEY

**S**andy Ehrets knows quite well that pre-kindergarten children need physical activity along with learning.

"They need to get their motors running, they need to exercise, they have to learn to share," said Ehrets.

Ehrets is a pre-kindergarten teacher aide at Tri-Valley Elementary School, and she took matters into her own hands.

"In October (2020) I sent out a questionnaire for a grant to buy (riding) hot wheels," said Ehrets.

The New York State United Teachers – the teacher and teacher aide union – offered grants



Big students helped out the pre-kindergartners by assembling the hot wheels and building a shed to store the new active toys.

At left: Teacher aide Sandy Ehrets took it upon herself to successfully lobby for riding hot wheels for pre-kindergarten students.

through its Retirement Council. Ehrets got letters from Assistant Superintendent Debra Kelley, along with Tri-Valley's curriculum coordinator, union representative and others.

The answer came back. "Yes" to the hot wheels and helmets.

"We bought the bikes and the

high school Technology Class put them together," said a delighted Ehrets. "The tech woodshop group made a woodshed to store the hot wheels."

In October 2021, the bikes and helmets arrived. Reaction?

"The kids just love them," said Ahrets.



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