

A look at activities
in the Tri-Valley School District

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Superintendent Erin P. Long loves how family-oriented and close-knit the Tri-Valley School district is.

STORY AND PHOTO
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

In July of last year, Tri-Valley welcomed a new Superintendent who spent 20 years as an Elementary School Teacher in the Finger Lakes region and another 7 years as an Elementary Principal in a neighboring district.

Tri-Valley Superintendent Erin P. Long said she has always been inspired by her father, who is a retired superintendent himself, and after participating in a development program through Oswego, decided Superintendency was a role she wanted to move into.

Last year, Long began watching employment all around New York state for different levels of education, and with a background

'Doing' by listening

in rural schools she was looking into smaller districts of 1,000 kids or so.

"I saw Tri-Valley, did a little bit of research, and immediately loved the connection that the school has to the community. It's very family-oriented and close-knit. I really liked that, and so I wanted to give it a try," Long said with a smile.

Long moved with her recently retired husband from the Finger Lakes to Monticello, and dove right into the community.

"When you step into this role it can be really nerve-racking for everyone," she expressed. "The community is wondering who is coming in and what they're going to do. I've tried to be really focused on that and understand that I can't just come in and do, I have to learn first. So I set some goals for myself in this first year of just being a listener. To learn about Tri-Valley, Grahamsville, the community, getting to know the teachers and staff - what works for them and what their needs are."

Long has been active in keeping up-to-date on what's happening locally, attending community events, heading over to the schools in the morning to greet the kids as they get off the bus,

and just learning people's stories.

Along with being a school teacher for years, Long was also a sports coach, coaching basketball, volleyball, softball, and soccer for many years so she enjoys getting out to the sports games to watch the kids compete, and attends as many music and theatre performances as she can.

"Tri-Valley is such a gem. We have an excellent, thoughtful elective course catalog that helps our kids get involved, experience, and explore so many opportunities," she said. "Our students are pushed to grow and explore things they might not have had the chance to otherwise, and we have incredible committees that work hard to build a community school framework that provides resources to our students and their families in the district."

Stepping into the superintendent role at Tri-Valley after the pandemic, Long feels that in many ways the community seems to have grown even closer as a result of Covid. Teachers, staff, and administrators are even more committed to making things great for kids.

For Long, Tri-Valley is a well-rounded place, and she's excited to witness the district as it continues to flourish and grow.

School Scene

'A Look Inside the Tri-Valley Central School District'

Published by
Catskill-Delaware Publications, Inc.

Publishers of the
SULLIVAN COUNTY
Democrat

(845) 887-5200

Callicoon, NY 12723

February 10, 2022 • Vol. CXXXIII, No. 71

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Fundraising through basketball

BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

The Harlem Wizards are well known throughout the nation, and the world, for being a fun and quirky basketball team that focuses primarily on fundraising events for nonprofits and local schools. Since their start in 1962, the Harlem Wizards have been to nearly all 50 states, on ten tours in China, and have made it to dozens of countries from Italy to Belgium, Malaysia to Argentina, and more.

Now, they're coming to Tri-Valley.

The school will host the Harlem Wizards on February 26th for two games against Tri-Valley's faculty and staff. The Wizards are known for their fun-loving, comedic games focused on basketball tricks, alley oops, fancy dribbling, passing, shooting, and dunking rather than winning, and they love getting the crowd involved. They often bring kids out on the court as part of a comedy act or a fancy trick.

Tri-Valley's goal is to offer a family-friendly event at the school, while raising funds that will go back into organizations that benefit the youth of Tri-Valley such as CAST, which supports extracurricular activities at the school, and the Tri-Valley PTO.

According to Assistant Superintendent Debra Kelly, the event is



being funded through the American Rescue Plan grant, allowing the ticket prices to be reasonable for students and the community. Volunteers from the Town of Nevversink, the PTO, and CAST will also be lending a hand during the games, running concessions and taking tickets.

The games will be held at 1pm and 5pm with the doors opening 1 hour prior so people can get in, go to concessions, and get their seats. Tickets purchased in advance (on www.harlemwizards.com) are just \$12, and purchased at the door will be \$18. There will be some Harlem Wizards gear available to buy at the games, but even more exciting, parents who fill out a survey - information went home with student report cards for Secondary School and in student backpacks for the Elementary School - will be entered to win 4 free tickets AND some Wizards swag!

So don't wait, grab some tickets, cheer on Tri-Valley and watch as the Wizards do their magic.

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‘We’re not here just to teach classes’

BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

The Tri-Valley Teachers Association Cares committee has been around for close to 15 years, and it all started because teachers and staff members were seeing students who were in need of things like food, clothing, and school materials. So the question they all asked was, how can we help beyond the school day?

“Since then there’s been a lot of initiatives that have come forward,” said teacher Matt Haynes.

Initiatives like the Snack Pack program, Stuff the Bus, and holiday food drives - all aimed at helping struggling students, their families, and the community as a whole.

Snack Pack

The Snack Pack program fills a hunger gap by providing healthy, easy to prepare food directly to kids in regular backpacks so they don’t feel like they stick out.

“Some kids don’t mind carrying the Snack Pack home along with their own backpack, but some kids feel nervous and don’t want to be noticed,” said Teacher Kimberly Patete. “We’re conscious of how delicate this can be for our students and families.”

Some students come forward on their own to be added to the Snack Pack program, sometimes the family contacts the school, and sometimes teachers or staff identify a student who may be struggling. Paperwork is sent home and then a backpack gets filled.

“We as an association, our members often adopt bags,” explained Haynes. “Sometimes as an individual, sometimes as a department.”

Adopting a backpack isn’t the only way you can contribute either, people can donate food, donate money - in which an assigned shopper then goes out to buy food and clothing - or you can donate time to helping pack the bags.

“Through the Snack Pack Program we do holiday food drives as

well, so we’re able to provide these families with an entire Thanksgiving or Christmas meal,” said Patete.

People from the community come and donate turkeys, money, their time, and much more. The Rolling V Bus Corp even partnered with the TVTA this year and donated a thousand dollars worth of Thanksgiving food.

“With their help we were able to provide meals for every single Snack Pack family and that rolled over into our winter distribution as well,” added Patete.

According to Patete there was a year where nearly 50 families were on the Snack Pack program. This year there are about 25.

A ‘Competition Night’ is held every March at the school with food drives for each grade level, where students get a point for every item that they bring in, which also goes to the Snack Pack program.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

A student reads comfortably in the library during the dinner and a story event.

Below: Students stand proudly with food donated and points earned at Competition Night.

Anything that isn’t able to be used for the backpacks is donated to the local food pantry in town.

“The amount of food that is collected is incredible,” said Teacher Debra Swett. “The kids not only get points, but they understand that they’re helping out fellow students and their families.”

Stuff the Bus

Stuff the Bus started about 10 years ago at the Homecoming Football game in order to get food for the Snack Pack Thanksgiving meals. Before the game, letters were sent out asking for food donations, and there were so many donations they got stuffed into a school bus.

“It’s now become a tradition at the Homecoming games,” said Patete, “and we do it as part of our Halloween Trunk or Treats as well.”

The entry into Trunk or Treat is a food item. According to Swett, Stuff the Bus and Competition Night covers much of what goes into the snack packs for the year.

First Book

TVTA also partners with an organization called First Book, a non-profit social enterprise that provides new books, learning materi-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Students and families browse tables of brand new books during last year’s Trunk or Treat.

Below: Stuff the Bus started about 10 years ago and is now a school tradition.



als, and other essentials to children in need. First Book obtains new books donated by book publishers and through monetary donations from people and companies that support the program.

“Often there are left over books on the shelves at large retail stores that they need to move out to make way for newer titles, and the publishers don’t want to buy them back, so they get donated to First Book,” explained Haynes. “We essentially pay for shipping, but it’s amazing because we can

give brand new reading books to the kids frequently throughout the year.”

This last year instead of giving out candy at the school’s Halloween Trunk or Treat, they gave out books. Rows of tables were put out in the parking lot filled with stacks of brand new chapter and picture books for every age.

They also hosted a ‘Give the Gift of Reading’ event before the holidays for grades five through twelve. Books were set up inside the school library so that kids could come in, pick out a book, wrap it with gift wrap, and have a gift to give to someone during the holiday season.

In March, the Association puts on a dinner and a story event, where families of students Pre-K through sixth are invited to come in, have dinner, pick out a book, and read with their parents for a while.

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A plan for the future

BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

Tri-Valley Secondary School Special Education teacher Tanya Huggler, is excited to take on a new role this year as a Work Based Learning Coordinator. "I've been wanting to do this for years," expressed Huggler, "but it was just a matter of timing and getting everything ready, and now that I have the support of the administration as well as my Work Based Learning certification, we can get it going."

Work-based learning is authentic learning experiences that enable students to explore their abilities, interests, and career goals while at the same time applying their academic and technical knowledge, and skills, in a real-world context. In collaboration with community partners, the experiences would be planned and supervised by Huggler, which would include shadowing and internships.

A few years ago, Huggler created a student-based enterprise - a coffee cafe in the classroom. Students run the cafe as baristas, also making homemade brownies and granola bars, and soup on Wednesdays. It was originally only open to staff, but this year the cafe has expanded to seniors and honor society students. Everything that the kids earn at the cafe goes towards trips to learn different careers.

The cafe and her years as a Life Skills teacher was a kind of head start for Huggler in wanting to bring work-based learning to the school.

"We sometimes have kids that when they graduate, have no idea what they want to do, they don't have a true plan for their future, so this has been in my mind for a long time. I don't know what made the administration decide to say yes, but I'm so glad that they did, because I really feel this program

"We sometimes have kids that when they graduate, have no idea what they want to do, they don't have a true plan..."

- Tanya Huggler

could reach so many students."

According to Huggler, students can go to Sullivan County BOCES for their vocational programs, but, they don't cover all of the trades. With the work-based learning program, each student can be guided towards specific pathways and experiences with the goal of setting them up for success after high school.

"There are students who want to be lawyers, but have never even walked into a law office, so I can set them up with experiences like shadowing a lawyer for a day," said Huggler, "or having a virtual

conference with a lawyer to understand what they do."

The program will start with in-house internships first - in the cafeteria, buildings and grounds, with the custodians - to get students focused on something in the district. Once stu-

dents are 16 or 17, they can then move into internships in the community.

"I've been working with trying to get community partners, like Catskill Vet, Jeff Bank, Bold Gold Media," Huggler stated. "Work-based learning is more than just shadowing, that's just the introduction. This is getting them immersed in the job, whether it's mechanics or something else."

Huggler's hope for the future is that maybe not every student but most seniors are preparing things like their resume, a cover letter,

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Students prepare brownie batter to bake.

Contributed photo

and working on interview skills. Her passion for work-based learning can be seen when she talks about her own children and the path she sees them each on.

"There are going to be students who are college bound and students who aren't. It's fine either way. There are a lot of trades out there that don't require four or six years at college, that make a lot of money, and require skill that not everyone has. I don't want to close doors on that. Work-based learning

can reach, and support more, the kids that are heading towards that."

Huggler is excited to offer first-hand opportunities for students to learn about unfamiliar career options, while providing realistic experiences to assist them in making informed decisions about their education options and career goals, while also growing economic opportunity by creating local jobs and building community.

"We have so much to offer here at Tri-Valley it's exciting."



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A game changer

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

Not quite complete, but pretty close, are the new cardio and weight rooms at the Tri-Valley High School.

The stage inside the gymnasium that was once used as the old theater has been converted into a cardio room with 26 ellipticals, treadmills, and stationary bikes.

"The idea to convert this stage to a cardio room came about probably 12 or 13 years ago," said Tri-Valley Athletic Director Jason Closs as he pulled open the curtains that separate the stage from the gymnasium.

To the front of the room are treadmills and bikes, with ellipticals in back and an open space to the right with mirrors and a ballet bar for a dance club or dance class. On the far side of the cardio room is a hand bike for anyone with a disability, and the chair of the bike can easily slide out to allow wheelchair access.

According to Closs, the renovation of the space and the brand new equipment came through a Capital Improvement Program, and several grants.

"Our Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Debra Kelly and Finances and Resources Assistant Superintendent Bob Whitaker handled most of

that and were incredibly supportive. It's nice to have both the Board of Education and the Administration be on board that this is going to improve not only our student's health, quality of life, and fitness but also our staff, and eventually our community members," he stated.

Closs said that some of the long-range goals are to get kids to be more active beyond just Phys Ed and sports throughout the day without losing any academic time.

"The great thing about this space is that a teacher can have something going on in the gymnasium and also have something happening in the cardio room, while being able to keep an eye on both."

Along with a new cardio room, is the newly improved weight room downstairs. Originally serving as both the cardio room and the weight room, the space has been renovated to double the strength



Athletic Director Jason Closs stands in the gymnasium with the new cardio room behind.

training area.

According to Closs, the High School Principal David Pulley and Director of Buildings and Grounds, Jesse Belle, were pivotal people in getting the weight room to where it is.

To the left are machines to hit every body part - a full body circuit - while the area to the right has free weights and equipment meant for more functional strength training.

"Currently we have an elective Get Fit class, taught by John Rusin, that uses the weight room," said Closs. "General Phys Ed classes

will end up here part of the year along with the Athletic teams, and eventually there will be times for staff throughout the day as well. We also plan to have Adult Ed in here, giving the community an opportunity to use this room too."

For Closs, he hopes the weight room is going to be a game changer for sports teams and athletes, as well as a helpful tool for graduating students that are going off to college or joining a gym that they feel comfortable and confident, and can be skilled movers wherever they go.



Phys Ed teacher John Rusin's Get Fit class students work out on the full body machines.

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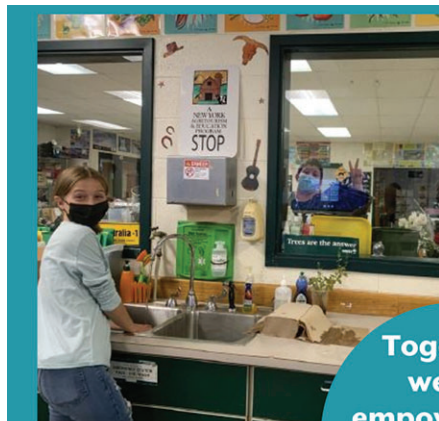
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