

# SCHOOL

A Special Supplement to the Sullivan County Democrat

# SCENE



A look at  
activities  
in the  
Homestead  
School



# Homestead School helps students grow

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY FRED STABBERT III

Learning helps you grow as a person. And growing is a learning process.

No one knows this better than the students, teachers, staff and administration of The Homestead School, which was founded in 1978 by Marsha and Peter Comstock and has been helping children “grow” for the past 45 years.

Today the school is run by the

“The seventh and eighth graders work in the greenhouse,” he said. “They learn how to work the soil. And we sometimes get to eat what we grow.”

And that is only the beginning of the innovative and hands-on experiences that the seventh through tenth graders are getting at the Hurleyville campus of The Homestead School.

“We have 3-D printers where students can take their digital design and create a product,”



Students have time to study between classes and review their work. Here they are joined by teacher Rob Woytowick.

Comstock's son, Jack and his wife, Nisha.

“I love to see students with their hands dirty, making trenches in the soil and putting seeds in which will soon turn into plants,” teacher Rob Woytowick said. “Sometimes it is the first time that a student will have a shovel in his or her hand. It is a true learning experience.”

And High School Director Jack Comstock couldn't agree more.

Comstock said.

And starting in seventh grade, students are tasked with starting a 6-year business project which includes helping to run the school store and starting their own business by creating a product or providing a service.

“We want them to learn about sustainability and social responsibility,” Comstock said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4H



Students learned about planting in an urban environment during this class.



The Homestead School's high school is located on Main Street, Hurleyville. The Director is Jack Comstock and the Assistant Director is Michelle Ahart-Bosland.

**On the Cover:** The Homestead School keeps its students engaged in a myriad of ways. Clockwise from upper left are Lula Miller, Adrien Banks, Abraham Beery and Ethan Wieder.



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2H

And when they are finished and the products are purchased off the shelf, the students donate one-third of their proceeds to a charity of their choice, a third gets put into an investment fund, and a third is paid out to the student.

"The investment fund will hopefully turn into a small community grant some day," Comstock noted.

Every morning the students get together for a student meeting, which "is really important," Comstock said.

"The students have a great deal of choice in the classes and electives they pursue, setting them up to gain experience in a variety of fields and to dive deep with their interests," he said.

The school, which also has a Pre-K-6 grade campus in Glen Spey, is continuing to expand and will add an eleventh grade next year and a twelfth grade in 2025.

The students also have access to SUNY Sullivan, which is located just minutes from the Hurleyville Campus.

"Starting in ninth grade they have dual enrollment status," Comstock said. "That means they have a student ID card, and can take a wide variety of courses," he said. "It's so exciting to see."

The school is based on the Montessori style of learning. A Montessori classroom places an emphasis on hands-on learning and developing real-world skills.

It emphasizes independence and it views children as naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a sufficiently supportive and well-pre-



pared learning environment.

"Last year every student was tasked with designing and building a stool or chair in our wood shop, and we celebrated the completion of the project with a game of musical chairs, each one unique," Comstock said. "Everybody gets an initial level of training in wood shop so that they can confidently and safely build and be ready to explore more advanced electives if they desire."

The students can also explore the digital media lab that has both PCs and Macs, which gives students exposure to both platforms, Woytowick said.

Currently, some students are working on making their own film complete with actors.

"It's a Sci-Fi adventure," Paul, a 10th grader, said.

In the class, students learn how to operate microphones, cameras and the tech side of the theater.

There is also a series of electronics electives where students get to

Above: In-depth discussion and group connections are a big part of what the Homestead School encourages.

At right: Student products are on display – and for sale – at the student store.



"Take It Apart, Fix It, and Build It."

And as Comstock and Assistant Director Michelle Ahart-Bosland walk the halls of the school they see students having conversations about classroom activities, reading books and going online to research a topic.

"There's a whole lot to choose from and our students get to learn from amazing adults with a whole lot of experience," Comstock said.

And that's how The Homestead School continues to grow.

## School Scene

*'A look at activities in the Homestead School'*

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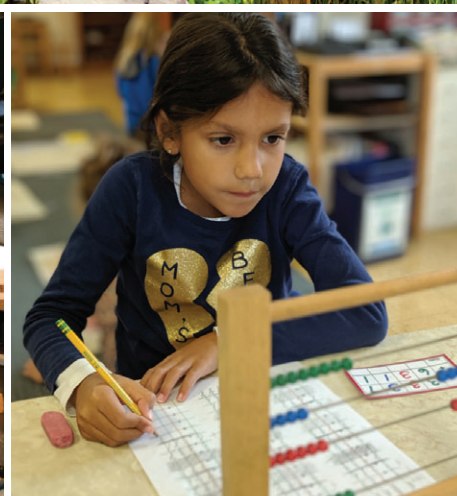
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# Meet our student reporter staff

The Homestead School and Sullivan County Democrat worked on this special School Scene edition for the past two months, mapping out ideas, writing stories and editing final copy. Homestead teacher Eva Bednar mobilized her Journalism Club, comprised of these students, to do the writing and you will see their stories on pages 10-15. Sullivan County Democrat Publisher Fred Stabbert III visited both campuses of

the Homestead School – in Glen Spey and Hurleyville – several times to find out more about the school as well as help the journalism club with this project.

The Democrat would like to especially thank our student reporters, Newspaper Advisor Eva Bednar and School Directors Nisha and Jack Comstock for all their support with this project.



Luna Grace Ditacchio



Mila Driessen



Quinn Schragger, Kai Schragger, Simone Davidson, and Ananda Mossman



Sophia Reinhardt



Emmett Schwalb



Caleb Wagner



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## A look at The Homestead School throughout the year



PHOTOS BY: LINDA COSS, EMMETT SCHWALB, ALISSA KRUM.

Clockwise from upper left:  
Mason Garozzo, Lev Lazarus, Ian Willis, and Wyatt Petracca enjoy a little relaxation at Big Vanilla.

Students design their own woven tapestry.

Students enjoy a dip in the stream to cool down on a hot day.

A spring discovery made by Alissa's class last year while identifying conifers on trail.

Upper Elementary students plant onions during the spring.

Lots of hands make light work while washing the sheep wool.

Students enjoy catching snowflakes in the winter.

Jaxon Sheridan works on connecting bolts in a practical life activity.

Boone Faires sets onions into the ground.



# Life of the Lower Elementary at the Homestead School

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CALEB WAGNER,  
AGE 9



The Lower Field, with gardens tilled by each class for the school's rainforest initiative, where gourds grown are hollowed out and painted as a fundraiser to preserve acres of rainforest.

The Homestead School is exciting because of the opportunities that the children get to do here. We have goats and sheep, big woods, tipis, school plays, and we tap our own trees for maple syrup. Students also learn a lot in their many lessons and specials. Here is a day in the life of some of the students in the Lower Elementary building.

8:15 Come to school on the bus or get dropped off by car at the hill. Walk through the tennis court and up our class' metal stairs (fun fact: they're called cheese grater stairs because they look like a cheese grater.)

8:20 Help to take the benches down from the tables in class

8:30 Talk and play with friends on the tennis court

8:45 If you come after this time you are LATE for school!

9:00 Snack on the tennis court with friends

9:30 Come to circle. Circle is a time in the classroom to share stories and things students bring in, like favorite books, or interesting objects, like an obsidian tooth.

Sometimes we practice mindfulness or learn a "sign of the day" in sign language

10:00 Lesson time a.k.a. learning time in subjects like math, geometry, grammar, biology, and geography

11:00 Lunch outside on the tennis court in the sunshine at 80 degrees



The Early Childhood building, where the Homestead School began in the home of Peter and Marsha Comstock.

11:30 Recess at Big Vanilla (Big Vanilla is where a huge ice glacier melted and left sand so the kids run down the extremely sandy, huge hill. It feels like you're going as fast as light and also looks like a canyon).

12:00 Reading time to get bigger vocabulary and read books like Because of Winn Dixie

1:00 Go to art class to work with fiber arts

and weave pouches

1:45 Learn to cook churros in Spanish class!

2:25 Help wipe tables and stack chairs

2:30 Every person packs their bag and belongings and lines up on the deck to wait for a teacher

2:35 Dismissal, and go outside to play on the upper field until we get called for dismissal

3:00 If you have an after-school club, go to your club meeting spot

The day is fun because of the opportunities and things children get to do. If you are interested in learning more go to <https://homesteadschool.com/>.

Far left: Students excitedly gathered to observe this turtle found during recess.

Left: The million cube, part of impressionistic Montessori lessons. A single unit can be compared to this cube to show the tremendous difference in size.



## Learning through doing

Maria Montessori, founder of Montessori school philosophy, said, "Hands are the instruments of knowledge." Humans learn through being hands-on, in touch with and active with, their environment.

At the Homestead School, the students are eager to be hands-on. If there's a need to move tables to help set up an event, hands shoot up in the air to volunteer and suddenly there's 12 hands at the ready. Students clean their own lunch tables after use, practice math fractions with physical pieces and materials, feed the goats and sheep,

turn sod for garden plots, hold chicks that have hatched in their own classrooms, build models of atoms and early human structures, and volunteer to mentor younger students.

The mission of Homestead School is to nurture self-motivated students whose love of learning carries into a lifetime of responsible and constructive contributions to their fellow human beings and the Earth.

Student-driven and experiential learning at Homestead establish a solid foundation in the core academic areas, and allow for

interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. Skills are developed at each age level through real life experiences. The youngest students (Early Childhood, ages 3-6) learn to button, zip, and tie clothing, while students in the Lower (age 6-9) and Upper (age 9-12) Elementary practice reading, and learn to share their knowledge through discussions and writing.

The following stories come from our "genius hour" in the Upper Elementary—where students choose an interest to further explore and make a final product from. Choices are student-selected and range

from cooking, to architecture and STEAM-themed building projects, to language acquisition.

These articles are from students who chose to focus on storytelling and journalism. All topics were brainstormed and chosen by the students, who were brimming with excitement to get out the door to record and share their surroundings, whether it was by highlighting the acres of nature they are fortunate to roam or highlighting the lives of their fellow students.

We hope you enjoy these windows into the life and creativity of our elementary students.

BY EVA BEDNAR, HOMESTEAD SCHOOL TEACHER AND NEWSPAPER ADVISOR

# Eyes of the kindergarteners at the Homestead School

BY SOPHIA REINHART, AGE 10

I interviewed kindergarteners at the Homestead School. In March, the kindergarteners were having their maple syrup party. The maple syrup party happens every year when the students tap the trees. They were drinking maple syrup and pouring it on vanilla ice cream.

The kindergarteners are learning to read, write, and spell out words. Some of the students' favorite subjects are math, writing, and art.

The kindergarteners said if it is a rainy day they like to play inside with the classroom toys. If it is sunny out they like to play games like tag. The kindergarteners are really social. They love to talk at lunch with their friends and go outside and play on the playground.

All of the kindergarteners I interviewed said that they love their teachers. A lot of the kindergarteners like to draw and do arts and crafts.

The kindergarteners are preparing to go to first grade. A lot of the kindergarteners love to paint and play with legos. Ann Steimle, Director of Health and Safety, has a room for the kindergarteners if they get hurt and if they feel sad. Students go to her if they get a rash or a cut. They can also play with legos there. The kindergarteners said that they love playing down on the lower playground. On the lower playground they play hide



Early childhood students enjoy maple syrup poured on ice cream, a Homestead tradition. The maple syrup buckets for harvesting sap are shown on the maple tree behind them.

and go seek and tag. The lower playground has a bunch of slides and has a climbing rope. At the end of the day the kindergarteners play on the lower playground and get walked to their car by some of the older students.

*The kindergarteners said that the Homestead is a place where they can feel safe and have friends who are nice and kind. This is the eyes of the kindergarteners at the Homestead School.*

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# Creativity Corner!

BY POLLY JUERGENS, AGE 10



Where creative minds think alike. Sometimes we get bored... but that's why we're here! We have a list of great arts and crafts for great creative minds!



## Today's craft: Popsicle Person

We will be making your own popsicle stick friend!

You will need:

Felt or paper

2 popsicle sticks

Glue (glue sticks will not work)

Markers (*thin type recommended*)



First hold one popsicle stick vertically and place your other popsicle stick horizontally on top. Once you have got it placed how you want it, add a dab of glue and stick the popsicle stick on. It should now look like a body and arms.

Next grab 2 pieces of felt or paper. Line them up on top of each other, making sure they are edge to edge. Check in with an adult to make sure they're okay to use. Cut the pieces into a shirt and pants and make sure they fit the body. Again get more glue and put it on the body. Do the same for the back and your popsicle friend will have clothes!

Next grab a thin marker or a pen and draw a nice face for your wooden friend! Don't rush or your face will be sloppy.

Use excess felt or paper to make hair for your popsicle friend! Make sure it fits the head. Find the right place to put it, add a dab of glue, and put it on. If you want to you can cut a back piece of hair and glue it on just like the front. Now your wooden buddy has a beautiful haircut!

Once all the glue dries your popsicle bud will begin to rise! You can give them a name now! Now you shouldn't be so bored.



# Getting our hands dirty

STORY AND PHOTOS BY  
EMMETT SCHWALB, AGE 11

At the Homestead school we have many outdoor activities, including having recess in an area called "The Deep Woods." There is also "Big V" aka "Big Vanilla" which is a large glacial sand deposit and that is another school-wide recess spot.

In the Deep Woods the students are able to explore, play, and look for creatures. Some even enjoy making structures big enough for them to fit in or, for the early childhood students, sometimes they make tiny ones for "fairies." The Deep Woods has a large amount of space with our cross country trail and a large water hole and stream which in the hotter days of the year children enjoy playing in with their classmates.

In the Deep Woods there is a large wooden stage. This stage was built by hand; the hard work was done by Peter Comstock, co-founder of the school. The Homestead classes enjoy putting on talent shows on the stage. Ms. Adrienne's class of 18 kids made a pre-organized America's Got Talent, modeled after the well-known NBC show.

At the school we have Native American-blessed tipis made out of canvas and large wood poles from Montana. The tipis housed lessons and they were built in 2020 as an effort to be more outdoors because of COVID 19. Now, in April of 2023, the canvas has started to rip and the poles were brought into the Deep Woods by the classes



for them to play in. The kids also named the structures. One was named "In the Pines" because of the location in the pine tree-filled forest.

The school's cross country trail is about a mile long and goes through the large evergreen forest and "Big V." The children run through the trail at least once a year on the school's fun run. The running after-school club takes the trail every Monday when they meet. And sometimes classes run the trail for fun when work is done.

"Big V" or "Big Vanilla" is another school-wide recess spot. The area is shaped like a large V hence the name. The area was formed during the last Ice Age when a large glacier made its way through the town of Glen Spey, New York. Much of the school's dirt is made of sand due to the glacier. Big V is where the most sand was dropped hence making the fun sand-filled hill. When it is snowing the kids sled down the steep hill, and they can also study erosion from all the rain.

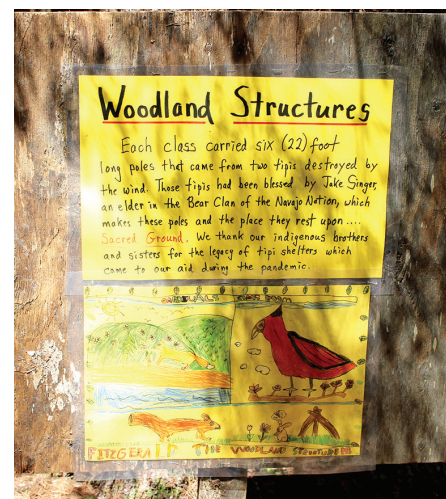
At this outdoor school students love to be in the sun and outside so much that Homestead invested in many pairs of snowshoes of all different sizes. When there is enough snow, classes will go up to the school's barn to pick out a pair of snowshoes. After, the classes trot around the campus in the snowshoes.

At our school a large clay deposit was found by Mr. Comstock. He



dug up the clay, and it took over a year to dig and sift all of the dirt out of the clay. The clay has been used for ceramic purposes in the art room with teacher Mrs. Coss, who began teaching the art program when Mrs. Comstock – the other co-founder of the school, artist, and founder of the Homestead's art program – retired. Mrs. Coss taught and worked with kids to make the clay into beautiful and artistic bowls and sculptures.

This year and hopefully in the coming years Homestead is having a garden. But not just any garden. This garden is to raise funds for the Amazon Rainforest, in an effort to stop deforestation and carbon outputs! The Upper Elementary class has also potted seeds that are now sprouting. These will be sold for Mother's Day in an effort to collect money for the annual fund, more of the school's outdoor projects, and to continue growing the newly built high school.



There is plenty of room to explore at the Homestead School in Glen Spey. Students get to spend one hour a day outside, enjoying nature in all its seasonal glory. Above are several scenes from the campus, including a huge sign welcoming students to The Backwoods, a sign with nature notes on it and a pond of water where students can do some reflecting, or playing.

The Homestead School has many fun, exciting places for children to explore, play, build and more. The kids get 1 hour of recess each day (not including lunch) where they are out in the sun. Even when it's cold kids can snowshoe and still be outdoors. Here students go outside no matter the season, no matter the weather; we all just enjoy being outdoors at this beautiful blossoming school.

# Communicating cuties



PHOTO BY MILA DRIESSEN

The intrepid reporters of the Homestead School went to great lengths in writing their stories, including Luna Grace Ditacchio's interview with Ash.

WRITTEN BY LUNA GRACE DITACCHIO,  
AGE 11, AND MILA DRIESSEN, AGE 10

For ages humans thought that goats could not communicate in the human tongue, but with outstanding technology (our imaginations) we have reached into the minds of our very own goats January and Ash, and asked them a couple of questions, which they kindly answered. We asked the kids and adults of the Homestead School what they would want to ask the goats if they could talk.

## 1st Through 3rd Grade

First up we have Lev asking Ash, "Why do you eat grass instead of hamburgers?"

Ash: "Um, 'cause I can't eat anything else? I think it's because I'm a goat. Also, hamburgers give me indigestion."

From Mei: "Why do you poop little balls?"

January: "It's because there is a very long intestine where digestion is very slow, which

mainly consists of segmentation and peristalsis. The segmentation virtually squeezes out all of the water and nutrients, so that the excreted material is reduced in the form of small balls or pellets, weird right?"

Sarah asks both goats, "Are you friends with the sheep?"

January: "Yes, but when it comes to food there is no doubt in our minds as to who is getting food first."

Ash: (To January) "You could not be more right...she means us."

From Cy: "Can you talk?"

January: "Yes, us goats (and sheep) have our own language that humans can't understand, though we have agreed to speak to these reporters briefly in their own language."

## 4th Through 6th Grade

An anonymous questioner: "Why do you keep jumping up on the fence?"

Ash: "We just want to say hello. It gets quite dull after a while with

no one to talk to here except each other, and, let's be honest, don't you get bored of talking to the same animals (humans in your case) over and over again?"

Dash asks: "Do you have opposable thumbs?"

January: "No, we do not, we are goats. We have hooves, no thumbs. Humans and goats look very different. Goats also have rectangular pupils that allow them to see about 320 degrees around them!"

Another anonymous questioner, asking, "Do you like it when your hooves get clipped?"

Ash: "I will never get over the first time I saw those clippers. I was so scared. But at least I don't have super scraggly hooves. I like what it is afterwards, but I hate the process. So, I don't really know, a little bit of both?"

## Teachers

To round off our column we have the stewards of our school: the teachers!

First we have a teacher who wishes to remain anonymous

asking, "How's the grazing going?"

January: "It's going pretty great. We never go hungry...except when the Upper Elementary kids take too long finishing their lunch and we have to wait for ours."

We now have our newspaper advisor, Eva Bednar, asking, "What is your favorite time of day?"

Both goats: "FOOD TIME!"

From a lower elementary teacher: "How could the lower elementary kids help out more?"

Ash: "They could start by giving us mani-hoofies (for you humans it's mani-pedis) and lots of pets."

From upper elementary teacher, Linda Federick: "Do you think that you are being a bit mean to the sheep by shoving them aside to get the food first?"

Ash: "Personally I have no regrets. We get hungry, but it is kind of rude."

The truth comes out! Now before we end, we reporters have a question too: "How are you THIS cute?"

Both goats: "It just comes naturally."



PHOTO BY LUNA GRACE DITACCHIO

January the Goat enjoys a day in the sun at the Homestead School in Glen Spey.

# The power of friendship

BY QUINN SHRAGGER, AGE 10,  
KAI SHRAGGER, AGE 12,  
SIMONE DAVIDSON, AGE 10, AND  
ANANDA MOSSMAN, AGE 11

**W**e reporters of the Upper Elementary believe that the friends that people make at Homestead are the most important thing in the world, and the friends you meet here will stand by you forever. So four of our reporters—Kai Schragger, Quinn Schragger, Simone Davidson, and Ananda Mossman—went out to interview the good friends of the Lower Elementary, Early Childhood, and Upper Elementary, to find out The Power Of Friendship.

Kiran, Nova, and Edie have been friends altogether for 3 years, but Kiran and Edie met 3 years before Nova came, and gladly welcomed her into the group. Kiran and Edie are 8 years old, and Nova is 9. Their favorite spot to play at the Homestead School is Big V—or “Big Vanilla,” a large sandy hill on campus. When they are there, they play gaga ball (a popular game involving tagging with a ball) or play “wolf.” All of these friends are in the Lower Elementary in Ms. Lorraine’s class. When reporter Quinn Schragger asked what these friends had in common, Kiran quoted, “I don’t know. We’re all smart!” Another thing they realized they had in common was that they are all good at math.

Emelia and Morgan are both in the Early Childhood building, which is for students ages 3-6. They both share the favorite color of rainbow-gold. When they grow up, Morgan said that she wants to be a teacher, and Emelia, a “superkitty.” They met on the first day of kindergarten, and have been friends ever since. When asked why they were friends, Emelia stated, “Because we love each other.” At recess, the most



PHOTO BY LINDA COSS

Whether they are working together on a school project or enjoying the sunshine on a spring day, students at the Homestead School make friendships that will last a lifetime.

entertaining game for them is hide & seek. Emelia also said, “One day I asked her to play and she said yes, and then we celebrated.”

Bryce and Eleanor are very good friends. Bryce is 8 years old, and Eleanor is 7 years old. Bryce’s favorite color is blue, and Eleanor’s is purple. They love reading and writing. Eleanor also loves summer. She doesn’t like winter because, as she put it, “too

cold to go swimming.” Bryce likes winter best because that’s when his birthday is. People say, “Opposites attract.”

Both of them are in second grade, and when asked what the best part of the school year was, Bryce replied, “I roasted marshmallows for the first time.” Eleanor went with, “We went to the aquarium!” Their favorite places to play are Big V, and Pete’s Park. During recess, they enjoy playing Powers

(We are not sure what that is, but we are working on finding out.) Bryce’s favorite animal is a komodo dragon, and Eleanor’s is a peacock. Their favorite thing that they did in Art Class this year was weaving.

Beatrix and Mariana, each 11 years old, are excellent friends, and have been friends for a year and a half. Something they have in common is they both like Jordans and Nike shoes. Their favorite spot to hang out is the Upper Field. Beatrix is in 5th grade, and Mariana is in 6th grade, yet they have no problem being good friends. Mariana appreciates Bee’s humor and outfit styles. Bee likes how funny Mari is, and how honest she can be. Mariana’s favorite color happens to be blue, whilst Bee’s is yellow. Mariana says, “It’s giving Ukraine vibes.”

Ayla and Maggie are best friends. They are in the Upper Elementary. They met last year in the 4th grade. They both like jokes, and don’t like the word “shut up.” Their favorite spots for recess are the Upper Field, and the Deep Woods. Ayla thinks that kindness and sharing are keys to being a good friend. Maggie thinks that good friends give hugs and humor. Good recess activities for Maggie and Ayla are playing tag or talking about life. Ayla lives in Pennsylvania, and Maggie lives in Monticello. But the distance doesn’t stop them from being good friends. Maggie likes to go to Ayla’s house for many reasons, one being she adores Ayla’s mother’s pizza.

As you can see from the outcome of these interviews, friends can be mature and youthful, old and new, it doesn’t matter as long as they “love each other,” as Emelia said.

We hope you make a new friend!

Sincerely, Kai Schragger, Quinn Schragger, Simone Davidson and Ananda Mossman, and the friends of the Homestead School



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Rolling V drivers are responsible for the safe and reliable transportation of more than 7,000 school children annually. School is back in session, so please remember to drive carefully – it could be your child, a loved one or a neighbor on a bus nearby!

To learn more about our commitment to providing safe transportation for the children in our community, visit [rolling.com/parent-portal](https://rolling.com/parent-portal)

**To join our winning team, visit [rolling.com/recruitment](https://rolling.com/recruitment)**