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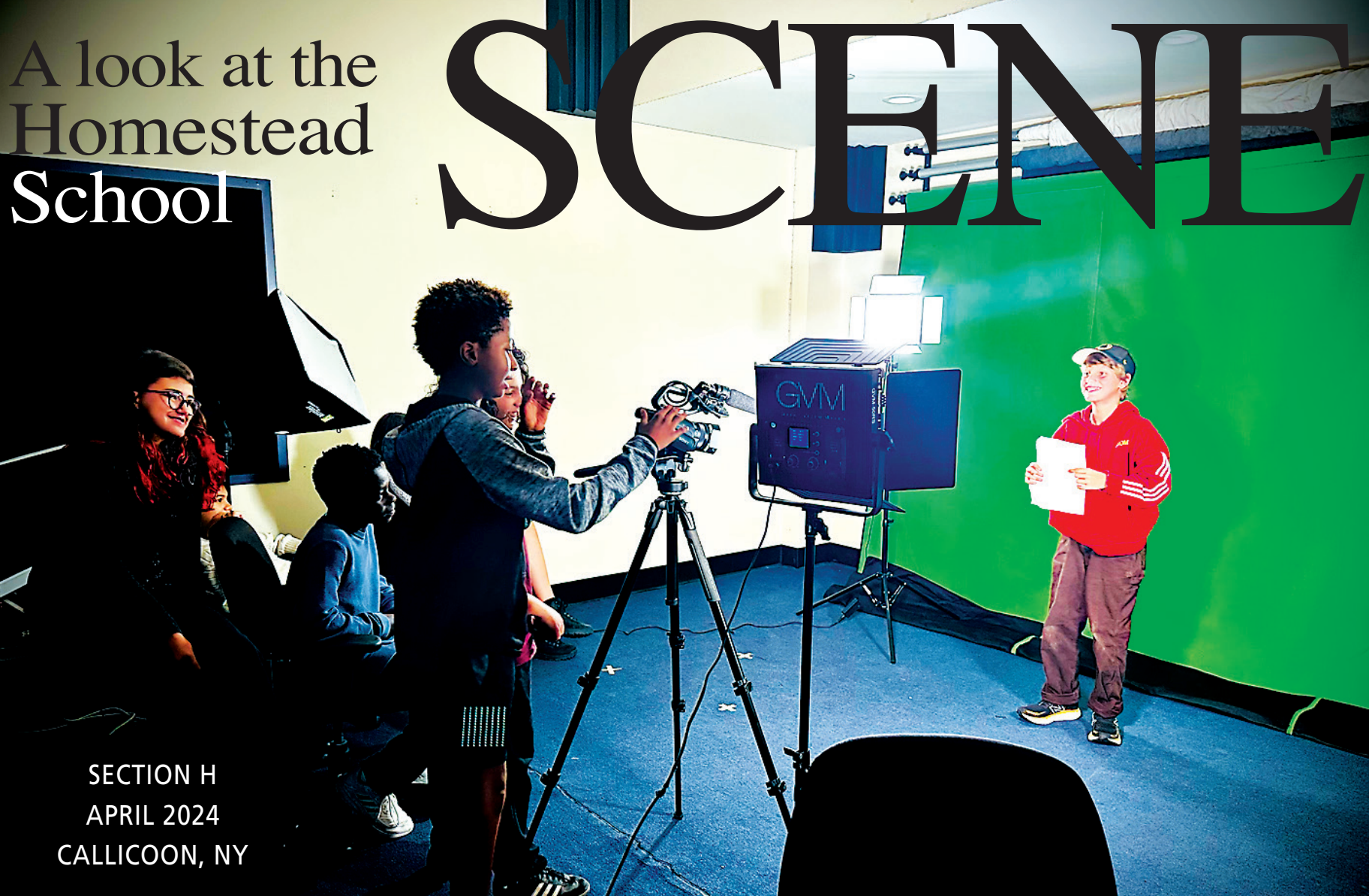


# SCHOOL

A Special Supplement to the Sullivan County Democrat

A look at the  
Homestead  
School

# SCENE



SECTION H  
APRIL 2024  
CALLICOON, NY



# Homestead School still making a difference after 45 years

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY FRED STABBERT III

Nestled in the forests of Glen Spey just off Hollow Rd. is The Homestead School, home to more than 200 students, grades pre-K through sixth grade.

Founded 45 years ago by Marsha and Peter Comstock, The Homestead School is now run by Peter's son, Jack, and his wife, Nisha Gupta.

The Montessi-based school focuses on humanitarian and sustainable education and has its elementary school in Glen Spey and recently opened its Collaborative

College High School on Main Street in Hurleyville.

"Next year we will have our first graduates at the high school," Nisha said. "We now have more than 250 students, ages 3 to 17, [at both campuses] who come from New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania."

There is 31 staff and the students are engaged in a multitude of learning experiences on any given day.

"We definitely educate for the whole child," Nisha said. "Our school prioritizes the Montessori philosophy and methodology as

CONTINUED ON 4H



Jim Sullivan's students learned the power of pulleys last week as he showed them how adding pulleys reduced the effort needed to lift a 20-lb. crate of books. First hand knowledge is important.



Students travel the world in their classrooms at Homestead, including studying about the Indus River, Mesopotamia and Egypt.



Students' artwork is on display in many classrooms.

## School Scene

*'A Look Inside The Homestead School'*

Published by  
*Catskill-Delaware Publications, Inc.*

Publishers of the

SULLIVAN COUNTY  
**Democrat**

(845) 887-5200

Callicoon, NY 12723

April 16, 2024 • Vol. CXXXIV, No. 90

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Learning math is always hands-on at the Homestead as teachers use building blocks and visual aids to help their students learn.

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CONTINUED FROM 2H

well as environmental stewardship and social justice.

“We approach teaching from the student-centered approach,” she said. “We focus the growth of our school on the students’ needs.”

As The Homestead expanded to Hurleyville, Nisha and Jack realized that siblings might end up at both campuses.

“We have shuttles between both campus,” Nisha explained, so parents don’t have to drive to each place to pick up their children.

The four vehicles are also used for field experiences, which is “a huge part of the Montessori philosophy – student driven field trips.”

The students in Glen Spey will also be nurturing a new garden as Peter started an ag project in the big field.

“We planted garlic seed to harvest and our goal is to go from there [with more plants],” Nisha said. “Our goal is to become a CSA – Community Supported Agriculture – project.

“We focus on nutrition at both campuses,” she said. “Students have the opportunity to see plants grow from seed to plants and we also focus on animal studies.”

And as The Homestead School and Collaborative College High School grow, so does their accomplishments.

“We recently had two students accepted in the Brown Summer Program and one in the Harvard Summer Program,” Nisha said. “And we recently hired a Director of Instruction.”

She said the new position will focus on how The Homestead is meeting the NYS educational standards while staying true to Montessori philosophy and Homestead’s mission and vision of education for peace.

“Students have the opportunity to express themselves [at The Homestead],” Nisha said.

“This gives them a real sense of belonging,” she continued. “This is their classroom and they invite you in.

“We are also so fortunate that every single teacher loves kids so much – I have so much admiration and gratitude for our staff,” she said. “They really want to help kids.”

And experience is abundant.

Linda Federick has been with The Homestead for 44 of its 45 years and taught every age group. She is now an Upper Elementary teacher.

And Mrs. Steimle has 35 years with the school.

“Ultimately, you can’t learn if you’re not relaxed,” Nisha said. “We give our students the comfort of belonging so they can develop academic skills and be empowered to pursue their passion.”



Fridays are a special day at the Homestead in Glen Spey, when students get to say hello to Nisha’s puppy, Oliver, who is a Mini Goldendoodle.





CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Homestead's CCHS now runs under the banner of Raptors, which was a mascot chosen by the students. They compete in track and field and cross country competitions.

## The CCHS School Mascot

BY JASPER LANTZ

A school mascot is an important part of almost every school, and for the Collaborative College High School (CCHS), it is no different.

Our school mascot was chosen because it represented intelligence, speed, and focus—and it also looks pretty cool. In my interview with track coach and business teacher Tim Larson, he explained how the school chose the mascot.

In the 2022-2023 school year, the school decided to come up with a mascot. A group of students got together in an elective to design and come up with ideas. Some of these were the goat, the honey bee, and the one that ultimately became the winner – the raptor. Students, parents, and staff voted on which one they should use, and ultimately, in a close vote, the raptor won.

But why was it chosen? One reason could be that raptors are very fast birds, and so far the CCHS track team is our biggest and most successful sports team. The most visible integration of the logo in the school so far has been in our track

team, so it makes sense that raptors were chosen to represent CCHS.

Another reason is that a raptor is more traditional for a school. Stronger and cooler animals are more often used, and it would be a bit lame if our mascot was a goat or a honey bee.

Since the mascot is still fairly new, it hasn't been entirely integrated into the school, besides the track team. This year all of the homerooms have been named after different raptors, such as the Falcons, the Kestrels, and the Owls (although for whatever reason the Owl homeroom prefers to be known as the Ostriches).

Unfortunately, the mascot doesn't have an official design yet. In the elective that originally came up with the idea, there wasn't enough time to design one. So the school has decided to have another elective later this year, that will hopefully design a memorable and unique official mascot.

The school hopes to put the logo on merchandise, signs, and other things in the future, to make the Raptor our completely official CCHS mascot.

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# My Homestead to CCHS Journey

BY NATALIE WESTERGREEN

I am an eleventh-grade student at Homestead CCHS in Hurleyville, New York. I have attended this Montessori-based high school since the ninth grade and have greatly enjoyed my experience.

However, this was not the beginning of my Montessori experience. My journey as a Montessori student began in second grade at the Homestead's elementary school campus in Glen Spey, New York.

which, at the time I attended, was still located at the Glen Spey campus but is now on the same campus as the senior high – we were given new autonomy, letting us gradually be able to become more independent and self-reliant students.

With our own self-directed projects that tied into the given curriculum, we were able to explore academic freedom. My time spent in the Junior High was when I learned how to become a successful student, with guidance from my teachers on how to stay organized and keep on top of school work.

Given the perfect amount of support and independence with new, more challenging classes, I was able to figure out quickly what academic methods led to my success.

Our classes still consisted of learning by doing, lessons outside, and time to debate and converse about a topic with teachers and peers; my love of learning continued to grow.

As a high school junior, I am taking both demanding college-level classes and CCHS courses. Even with this busy schedule, I still find myself fascinated by topics we learn about and am compelled to come to school and learn every day.

I think, in part, this can be attributed to my foundation at the Homestead School, instilling in me the unwavering love of learning I continue to possess.

This interest in learning has been proved time and time again; an example of the education and teachers' influence creating this love is obvious in one of my favorite classes.

As a young child, I did not enjoy math, and I thought I was bad at it. However, this all changed when introduced to my seventh-grade math class. Quickly, I realized I was not bad at it at all, but rather, I just hadn't tried to find the interest in it.

Now, I enjoy finding a love of the absoluteness of an equation and the

thrill of solving a problem correctly. My opinion on math changed so drastically and so quickly after this one class that the next year, I chose an accelerated math track, completing both eighth and ninth-grade math in one year. This love of math has only grown since then.

I continue to take as many math classes as I can, hoping to take college-level Calculus next semester.

My fascination with my other favorite subject, science, was also discovered at a young age at the Homestead school.

As sixth-grade students, we had a class on human biology. This was when I realized my interest in the human body – how it works and functions. I realized that I wanted to learn more about this subject and that I had a significant interest in science in general.

This interest has only grown. As a student at CCHS, I am able to take classes based on this interest, and I'm now enrolled in Principles of Bio I at SUNY Sullivan. This class, although challenging, lets me explore a more specific Biology education, allowing me to pursue what interests me, as well as take classes that relate to what I want my future career to be.

Which, in my case, is a doctor. Therefore, I am focusing my courses with a concentration in science, biology, and math.

Overall, I think that Homestead has not only shaped the student I have become and am still becoming, but it has also significantly influenced the person I have become as a whole.

Through my education at Homestead, I have truly found the joy of education, and it has made me a student who undoubtedly loves to learn, as well as the incredible opportunities to choose classes that interest me and experience college material and lectures with the support of the high school teachers.

The Homestead gave me the fundamental skills to succeed in an academic setting and in life. Both this love of learning and the organizational skills leading to academic success I possess are due to the strong foundation that the Homestead School has built in me, fundamentally making me the person I am today, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.



Students at CCHS learn a lot about where their food comes from as well as how to grow it and how to cook it.

As a young child coming from a public school education, I found this new way of learning extremely fun and rewarding. It was completely different from what I was used to – the Homestead gave us the opportunities to learn outside the classroom with hands-on experiences and life experiences. I gained a love of learning, which to this day has not faded.

As I transitioned to Junior High –





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# Disability Awareness Day at CCHS

BY EMILY ARIAS

On November 20th, 2023, Collaborative College High School (CCHS) students were visited by representatives of the Center for Discovery and given the chance to get an idea of what it was like to live with the disabilities of the people the Center works with every day.

“We like to expose people to lots of social issues that are affecting the world today,” said one of CCHS’s teachers, Kelly Adams, speaking before the presentation.

Students were informed about how autism affects different people and the importance of tolerance and respect for everyone. Speaking on this topic, the Center for Discovery’s Johanna Lantz said, “If someone is hand flapping, why change that?”

We also learned about the history of disability awareness in Hurleyville. For example, the Rail Trail, the iconic walking trail in Hurleyville, used to be inaccessible not only to those with disabilities but even those who didn’t have

them.

It was full of gravel and sometimes underwater. Now, the trail is completely turned around—it’s accessible to all and a staple of Hurleyville’s community. “Whether you walked with a walker, whether you had a wheelchair, you could utilize the rail trail and get out in nature,” said Hurleyville Sentinel Editor John Conway.

A representative from The ARC - Sullivan-Orange Counties,, Brandon Rubik, also visited students. The ARC helps people who require assistance with specific needs or with their every need by teaching them.

Six to eight people live together in a house, and staff help teach them the necessary skills to do what they want and live where they like in the future. Residents can attend day programs when they want to get out of the house and do something.

There’s also programs where staff can come to the person’s home if they don’t want to live with others and staff will help teach them various things, or take them to activities such as watching movies



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Students at the Homestead’s CCHS were given a myriad of challenging tasks to perform during Disability Awareness Day, including how to redesign a catapult game. This adaptive technology is used at The Center for Discovery.



To give students a real feel of living with a sensory deficiency, students wore a VR headset that simulated several sensory challenges.

at a theater when their families can’t take them.

There’s even programs where staff help residents to get jobs and develop the skills necessary to keep them.

One of several Days of Service CCHS students participate in throughout the school year, this service day included a lot of challenges. Students were challenged with various tasks that gave us an idea of what it was like to live with a disability.

These tasks included drawing blindfolded, wearing noise canceling headphones and guessing what the other person was whispering, writing in braille, practicing lip-reading, picking up pennies with one hand without the usage of their nails, opening a container with one hand, and practicing with a communication tablet.

Various types of communication tablets were used, but it was only a sliver of the real diversity of this

technology.

Advanced speech therapist Maria Landon also stopped in and taught the students about communication devices.

Assistive technology can help with difficulty speaking, typing, writing, remembering, pointing, seeing hearing, learning, moving, etc. The Center for Discovery even offers custom made assistive devices.

Even things as specific as paint bottle fillers or automated sandwich cutters are an option at the center. Using this technology was a challenge for a lot of the students, who before their visit thought these things didn’t sound difficult.

Students were challenged to redesign a catapult game, one type of adaptive technology used at the center. They worked in small groups to come up with innovative designs that would be quieter than the current catapults.

It was a fun time, but it was also educational, and gave some real insight to the students at CCHS.





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# Our School Store

BY AGNES PORTER

The School Store at Collaborative College High School (CCHS) is a recent development designed to give student “employees” retail experience and the students at school a way to buy supplies and food if they forget something.

It originally started as an elective offered to eighth graders and above by Tim Larson, who teaches Entrepreneurship and Business classes at CCHS.

We began in September with only three students and quickly launched into planning for the inner workings and presentation



of the School Store. In October, we began to sell things that we anticipated students would need, for example school supplies and food.

Some of our original products included mechanical pencil graphite, erasers, pencils, ramen, seltzer, and protein bars. Soon, we expanded our product offerings to appeal to wider audiences and provide more options.

Occasionally, we offer seasonal products like hot chocolate and boba tea.

The Store has gone through many changes over the past year and we're still advancing in efficiency to make it better and better.

I am one of the original three students who started the School Store, and all of us still work there. When we decided we were stable enough to add more students to the staff, Tim helped conduct job interviews.

Two more students were hired for the job. We helped them with training, to learn conduct, and to master technical workings to manage the store.

Since we have classes during

In order to have a good supply of goods, students must sometimes work on producing their products, as they two students work in the kitchen, making chocolate cupcakes.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS  
The School Store at CCHS provides students the ability to learn about retail, supply and demand. Here a student 'employee' and teacher Tim Larson man the counter on a recent day.

the day, we only operate during lunchtime for about twenty minutes. One person works the shift, usually with Tim for supervision, and sometimes an extra staff member if it's busy that day.

Recording purchases in our POS system (point of sale), handling money and exchanging change are some of the duties of the staff running the store that day.

Additionally, unlocking and setting up the store at the beginning

of your shift and closing up are routine tasks. Every employee gets a shift per day, except for Fridays when we are closed. The person that doesn't get a shift for that week takes one the next week or assists a friend during a busy day.

They may also cover shifts if someone is busy or absent. I really enjoyed being a part of the School Store's development and working there because it gives me legitimate job experience in retail and I love working with my friends and Tim.

## Clubs at CCHS

BY FREDDIE LI

Collaborative College High School (CCHS) offers a variety of clubs for students to discover new interests. These clubs can be divided into two categories: student-led and teacher-led. The teacher-led clubs have their curriculum designed by the teacher for the students to experience.

On the other hand, in the student-led clubs, students must design the whole curriculum and then propose this to school administration for support and approval. Students then run the club with a teacher available

to supervise.

According to seventh grade student Luna Ditacchio, who runs an archery club, “Running a club is fun. You feel like you have a certain sense of responsibility. You're in control of your own life.”

Some of the other student run clubs have included; Comic Book, Cosmetology, Cooking, Animation, Film Editing, and Anime.

Some of the clubs offered by CCHS instructors have included: Improv, Drama production, Costume Design, Fiber Arts, Science Experiment, Woodshop and School of Rock.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Students at the Homestead's Collaborative College High School have a variety of clubs to join, including Drama production and Improv.

Clubs at CCHS are a good way for students and teachers to offer and explore their unique talents and interests.



# Integrated Curriculum at CCHS

In school these days, people are starting to see how cool it is to learn lots of stuff at once. One way we're doing this at CCHS is with a class that mixes ELA, history, science, and more all together.

It's like getting a big picture of everything, and it helps us understand how things are connected. This class is called Integrated Curriculum. It's basically a class with a variety of different subjects combined to support the idea of each unit's overall topic.

At the start of this class, there's a "bell ringer." It's a fun puzzle or question that gets us thinking right away. It's pretty short, but it gets our brains ready for learning.

For example, we might see a really old picture from history, like soldiers from the Civil War, and then we get asked to write what we think it means. This helps us think about what it was like back then and also to practice our writing and summarizing skills.

As we keep going in the class, we see how all the different subjects fit together. Integrated Curriculum

is about learning how things are connected in the real world.

We see how history, science, and writing all have something to do with each other. This helps us understand things better and get ready for assignments where we need to work with different ideas.

When we learned about the Industrial Revolution, we read about it in our history block, and talked about how it changed things in our ELA block. It's as if we are putting together a puzzle.

We also get to do interesting projects that last a long time. For example, we might work on a project about climate change where we use science to research it, write persuasive essays in the ELA block, and learn about past environmental policies in our history block.

This kind of class is awesome because it's not just about one thing. It's about putting lots of things together and learning in a fun way. It helps us think better, be creative, and be ready for whatever comes next in the world.

## ABOUT THIS SECTION:

This special Homestead School Scene edition was created, in large part, by the students of CCHS. The six stories from pages 5 - 11 were written by the students and the photos were provided as well.



Field trips help students learn more about subjects as they learn from experts in the field and get to see and touch things first hand. Here several CCHS Homestead students enjoy a trip to the Lackawanna Coal Mine Museum in Scranton, PA.

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