

The Oracle

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High school plays host to former Japanese ambassador



Fujisaki with Shaler administrators, teachers, and students (Mitch Stivason)

by Emily Daquelente & Summerly Kelly

On March 19, Shaler Area High School had the privilege of hosting former Japanese ambassador to the United States, Ichiro Fujisaki. Shaler was given this opportunity because of its Japanese program.

The Shaler GATE program was contacted by The World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh and asked to host the former ambassador's visit. The World Affairs Council is a program that educates and provides the community with opportunities to learn about world cultures. The President of the Council, Dr. Steven Sokol moderated the event.

"They contacted Shaler because we have such a strong Japanese program which is fairly unusual for western Pennsylvania. I think we're the only school that offers AP Japanese," Mrs. Kate Elder, one of the GATE teachers said.

The former ambassador discussed the future of the Japanese economy and issues including environmental policy, the declining birthrate and gender equality in Japan.

He also discussed 3/11 which was the day a massive tsunami hit Tohoku, Japan killing 1,656 people. Fujisaki thanked the United States for responding without hesitation to aid in Japan's recovery which raised applause from the crowd.

"I think there was a really neat moment where he thanked the United States and the world but he said especially the United States for how they jumped in and were the leaders in disaster response. Then when we broke between classes he came into the audience and just chatted very casually with the students," Mrs. Christina Palladino, GATE teacher, said.

The presentation ended with a question and answer session. Questions were asked by Shaler high school students and those from Fox Chapel who were in attendance, as well as students from Hampton, Conneaut Area, Franklin Regional, Gateway, Elizabeth Forward, and Cornell High School, who were teleconferencing in on the event.

The former ambassador answered a number of different questions from each school and made sure

every question was answered. Through the entirety of the program Fujisaki made sure to explain the important position the United States has in regards to international policy.

"The US is the decisive country, it pulls the heaviest weight. What I do not think people understand here is that when you get to choose your presidents, diplomats, you are choosing the world leaders," Fujisaki said when asked by a student why other countries know the United States better than its citizens.

After talking to his Excellency one on one, Palladino explained that she was surprised by how much of a progressive thinker he was.

"He was really down to earth. Especially with Japan being a more traditional society and people of cultural beliefs, he seemed to be really forward thinking with women," Palladino said.

After the presentation ended the Japanese National Honors Society had the opportunity to speak with the former ambassador and to exchange gifts. One AP student, Holly Shearin, even got to give him a thank you letter written in Japanese.

"We gave him some parting gifts which is a tradition in Asian cultures...he seemed to be very thankful," Palladino said.

Fujisaki made a lasting impression on everyone involved.

"He was really funny, kind, and dignified. He seemed very willing and interested in talking to us [Japanese students]. He was supportive of us trying to speak in Japanese to him and was excited about students learning to communicate with others the best they could. He is obviously a big advocate of communication between cultures and surmounting language barriers," senior Lance Corbett said.

Everyone in attendance could agree that the experience of listening to the former ambassador provided them with a feeling of cultural enrichment.

"I think that was a really unique experience that most students would not have been able to have otherwise, so we were lucky that the world affairs council was able to bring him to us as a speaker," Elder said.

STEAM program to focus on cross-curricular content for students

by Anna Cunningham and Gabrielle Lazzaro

Shaler Area School District's new STEAM initiative is gaining force. STEAM, or Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics and Medicine, is a program designed to introduce students to careers in these in-demand fields.

The program coordinators, including Mr. Paul Stadelman, Miss Jade Leung, Mr. Brian Davis, Mr. Dennis Dudley, Miss Autumn Sprys, Mr. Paul Sorby, Mr. Jeffrey Frank, Mr. Chris Lisowski, Mr. Brad Susa, Mr. Joe Ussia, Mr. Craig Wells, and Dr. Tim Royall, aim to blend together all the components of STEAM in a cross-curricular program.

"Mr. Davis, Mr. Dudley, Miss Sprys, and I have been placed with the task of developing a STEAM based curriculum that our students could participate in," Mr. Paul Stadelman said. "It could be something outside of school like a STEAM summer camp that they're starting at the middle school for the younger kids. Or it could be something outside of the school day like a Saturday STEAM day. Or it could become a path or program that you enroll in while in school."

This program is still in the early stages of planning and finding funding, but the teachers already have a clear idea of what they want the program to achieve, regardless of what form the program takes.

"The idea is that all of our classes will have you learning real and practical things. The rigor, the difficulty, and the requirements of all levels of class should be increased because we want to turn out better students. It's to improve the education in the environment over which we have control," Mr. Brian Davis said.

The teachers hope to be able to improve the education of the students as a whole and get them focused on a STEAM based curriculum.

"The goal is that all classes would be connected with STEAM topics rather than going to classes that are all different always having to switch gears. You would learn about one focused unit," Stadelman said.

"Universally we need to up the education for all the classes and make this as practical as we can," Davis said. "We need to push students into doing certain classes. It's better for all of us and it's better for all of the students' career opportunities in the future."

STEAM is already taking place in Shaler, with programs such as the Westinghouse Introduction to Engineering presentation that took place in March. Students have responded positively to this.

"It's tough to envision because it's non-traditional. When things are non-traditional, there's some anxiety for participants and coordinators. You coordinate something and have anxiety about trying something very new and fresh and different, and if you're a student, there's the anxiety of trying something that could be really fantastic or something that's really not what you wanted to do. I think it could be exciting and it's kind of the new buzz," Stadelman said.

OPINIONS

New honor roll requirements better, but not enough

by Gabrielle Lazzaro

Students are expected to try their hardest in school and get the best grades they can. They are then rewarded for their work by earning a spot on the honor roll. Receiving the piece of paper saying one has made honor roll is supposed to act as motivation to keep up the good work and keep pushing to make it onto high or highest honor roll.

But when the majority of students in a home-room are earning honor roll each quarter, does it really feel like such an honor?

Shaler Area School District administrators have decided to set new requirements for students to make honor roll. Currently, 60 percent of Shaler students make the honor roll. Principal Dr. Tim Royall told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "That many kids getting honors devalued the actual honor."

The school board has approved new requirements for the honor roll system. Highest honor will be given to students with a GPA of 4.00 and above, high honor roll to those with GPAs from 3.99 to 3.75, and honor roll to those with GPAs from 3.74 to 3.50.

This system was adopted after parents complained about the original plan to award honor roll

The original plan of basing the honor roll off of class rank percentages is a better way to distinguish exceptional students because class rank reflects both grades and the difficulty of a student's courses.

only to students in the top 30 percent of each class. For example, highest honor roll would be awarded to the top 10 percent of each class. However, this plan was not approved by the school board.

What is the purpose of trying to change something if it isn't really improved? Yes, the honor roll minimum is higher, with 3.50 GPA needed instead of 3.00, but will this really fix the main issue of too many students earning honor roll?

Continuing to base honor roll off of GPA will not necessarily reduce the number of students earning the award since there is no limit to the amount of students earning a certain GPA. It is still possible that the majority of students will make honor roll, a problem that the administrators were trying to fix.

Another shortcoming of this new system is the lack of distinction between class difficulty level. It doesn't seem fair that there will continue to be nothing to distinguish between students who can earn a high enough GPA in honors or CP classes to make highest honor roll from students who earn highest honor roll because of their

grades in AP classes.

The original plan of basing the honor roll off of class rank percentages is a better way to distinguish exceptional students because class rank reflects both grades and the difficulty of a student's courses.

While I am satisfied that the school board raised honor roll requirements, I am disappointed that it caved so easily to pressure from parents. I understand that compromise is important, but it is equally important to have conviction in a decision.

Making honor roll will probably not be a deciding factor in college acceptance or denial, as I'm sure many parents are concerned. This concern prevented the school board from fully achieving its goal and honor roll will continue to be only a mediocre award.

Zoos should not be viewed as an entertainment option

by Justin Jockel

We've all been to zoos probably once or twice in our lives, walking with our cotton candy in one hand and stuffed panda bear in the other. But did you ever stop and think about the effect zoos have on the animals?

First, living in closed constraint in not good for the animals. Animals in captivity suffer from stress, boredom and confinement. Intergenerational bonds are broken when individuals get sold or traded to other zoos and no pen or even drive-through safari can compare to the freedom of the wild.

Also, removing individuals from the wild will further endanger the population because the remaining animals will be less genetically diverse and will have more difficulty finding mates.

Second, the federal Animal Welfare Act establishes only the most min-

(Zoos) force animals out of their natural habitat and place them in a confined, restricted environment.

imal standards for cage size, shelter, health care, ventilation, fencing, food and water.

For example, enclosures must provide "sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal postural and social adjustments with adequate freedom of movement. Inadequate space may be indicated by evidence of malnutrition, poor condition, debility, stress, or abnormal behavior patterns." Violations often result in a slap on the wrist and the exhibitor is given a deadline to correct the violation.

Even a long history of inadequate care and AWA violations will not free

the animals. By the minimal consequences this act holds, it is evident even our own government cares very little about the well being of animals.

The main problem with zoos is that they do not allow adequate space for animals and zoos, like any other business, want to make money.

Zoos do not receive a lot of government funding and so they are basically surviving off of money they receive from admission or from donations. This money goes towards food, habitat maintenance, and health care for the animals. Sadly, some zoos do not receive adequate funding and thus cannot give animals the proper care and support. By giving zoos your money, you are only supporting the continual mistreatment of these animals.

There are alternative options rather than going to the zoo to see animals.

If people want to see wild animals in real life, they can observe wildlife in the wild or visit a sanctuary.

For example, there is a sanctuary located in Pennsylvania called the Indraloka Animal Sanctuary in Mehoo-pany, PA. A true sanctuary does not buy, sell, or breed animals, but takes in unwanted exotic pets, surplus animals from zoos or injured wildlife that can no longer survive in the wild.

At least one study done by Georgia Mason, a zoologist at the University of Guelph in Canada, has shown that elephants kept in zoos do not live as long as elephants in the wild.

Zoos are not an appropriate option when seeking entertainment or enjoyment. They force animals out of their natural habitat and place them in a confined, restricted environment. There are more options out there when it comes to seeking entertainment that does not hurt animals in any way.

Social media sites becoming a destructive force

by Kayla Snyder

It would be a safe guess to say that more than half of our nation's teenage population has at least one social media account. Social media has consumed many people's lives and has almost become a daily routine in extreme cases. The fact is simple: social media has ruined our generation.

It's everywhere nowadays. More recently any public place such as schools, restaurants, and stores all have social media accounts in some way or another. It's featured in their promo flyers, "Follow us on Twitter!" and then followed by their own unique username for their preferred method of media.

When did social media take over our lives? Prior to social media, you would have to get up, go out, and find what you wanted in the stores, not look for what you wanted via their Twitter or Facebook account. The idea of social media has almost given us reasons to be lazy and unproductive.

While being on different social media websites can be helpful, it can destroy simple communications in other ways.

Some people have a "Social Media Routine". First they will start off with Twitter, scroll through that timeline, favorite, retweet, tweet, or direct message another mutual Twitter user and then continue to the next platform. Maybe after Twitter they will head on over to Instagram and then Tumblr and then Facebook and so on.

The goal of these companies is to keep us connected but are we really even communicating? A tweet can be seen by your followers, yes, but not everyone

engages in that conversation. It's simply destroying our communication. Essentially, you end up talking to yourself through a screen and that's a problem.

Social media addiction is a real thing. In no way do I foresee social media ever stepping back. In fact, it's only becoming bigger and better every day. If you are an addicted social media teen, put the phone or laptop down and find something productive to do.

The Oracle

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The Oracle is the official student newspaper of Shaler Area High School. Although it is published by the journalism classes, one does not have to be enrolled in a class to contribute.

Opinions expressed in **The Oracle** are those of the individual writers.

Letters to the Editor are encouraged and welcome. Any letter intended for publication must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request. Articles and letters may be mailed to the high school (ATTN: The Oracle) or emailed to oracle@sasd.k12.pa.us.

The Oracle reserves the right to condense or omit any letters or articles unfit for publication.

Titan of the Month: Mrs. Miksic

by Alexis Werner

Every student needs a faculty member in the school that has his/her back and can go to when all else fails. Mrs. Mary Lynn Miksic, Guidance office secretary, tries to provide a safe space for everyone in Shaler.

Ironically, even though she is one of the main people who works with college and scholarship applications, Miksic never attended college.

“When I was in high school girls didn’t go to college. In tenth grade we picked whether we wanted to be a nun, nurse, or secretary. Once I decided to be a secretary, I took classes to help in (that) field,” Miksic said.

Originally, she was a learning support teacher at Reserve Elementary. After 14 years she needed a change and wanted to use more of her secretarial skills. She has been working in the Guidance office for seven years and loves it.

Her job is to help students through processing their college applications, scholarships, and transcripts. Miksic also verifies Shaler Alumni’s graduate information and handles social security papers.

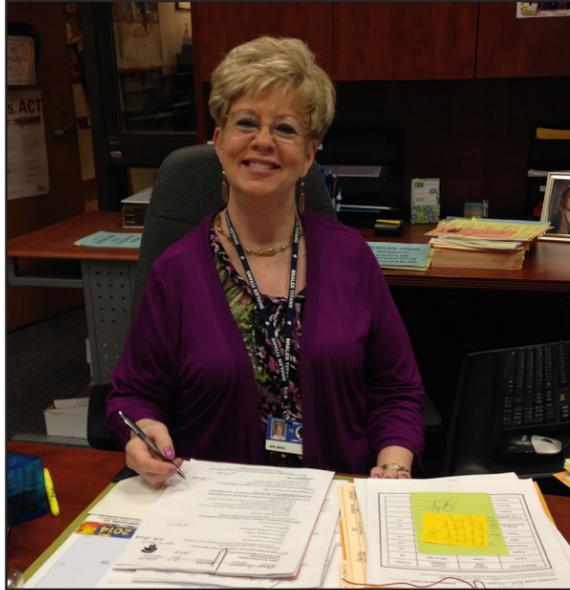
Though she juggles quite a few jobs, Miksic does it effortlessly. Every year Shaler students apply to 1,500 colleges and scholarships. These students receive close to \$3 million through scholarships and grants.

Guidance Counselor Mr. Mat Anselmino and other faculty in the high school understand how hard she works.

“Mrs. Miksic is an outstanding employee whose top priority is the students’ best interest. She will go out of her way to help [students],” Anselmino said.

Senior Sam Bartsch describes her as “the picture of class and poise.”

“[Miksic] shows nothing but kindness to everyone who walks through the Guidance Office doors,”



Mrs. Mary Lynn Miksic

Mrs. Mindy Thiel, activities director said.

She loves interacting with students, and she has advice for students that isn’t always taken.

“Take advantage of every opportunity that is given to you as well as extra help when offered,” Miksic said.

She makes that an attainable goal through her work.

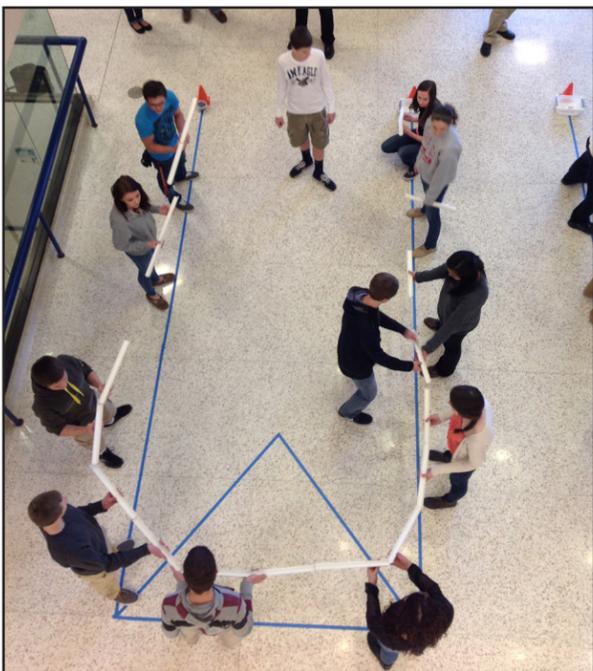
Though her job description is secretary, she feels that her main job is to give students a feeling of hope and love.

“Kids come from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances at home. I want them to feel safe, nurtured, and cared for. They should feel like they can say anything in confidence and we will follow up with them to help them the best we can,” Miksic said.

Engineers share N-Vision

by Anna Cunningham and Gabrielle Lazzaro

On Friday, March 14, about 30 students in grades 9-11 participated in an introduction to engineering program sponsored by the Westinghouse N-Vision program. A group of engineers from Westinghouse spent the day working with students, educating them on careers in engineering and leading hands-on activities. This program was part of the STEAM initiative taking place at Shaler Area.



Westinghouse engineers oversee students during the Marble Transport activity (Paul Stadelman)

The event was organized by Mr. Paul Stadelman and Mrs. Kate Elder. Stadelman is one of the teachers in charge of the STEAM initiative.

“I think having engineers come and talk about engineering and have the students see what they actually do was good for career exploration for a lot of the students that were there,” Stadelman said.

The students met with the engineers in the library at the start of the school day and started the day learning about different types of engineering and careers in engineering. They also did two hands on activities.

“It seemed like most of the students were engaged during [the program],” Stadelman said. “They got to learn a lot about the careers but they didn’t retain much information about the forms of energy. They did seem to get a lot out of getting to talk to engineers and they did have fun with the activities.”

One of the activities they did was called Marble Transport. The students were given tracks to hold and had to move a marble from one place to another. The activity taught teamwork and troubleshooting. The engineers would come up with problems that the students had to solve, such as what would happen if some of the track was taken away or some of the students taken out of the team.

“They had a limited amount of track and resources and had to transport the marbles in a U-shape. The marbles were never allowed to go backwards or stop and they had to work together as a team and plan it to make that happen,” Stadelman said.

During the other activity, the students were paired up and one was blindfolded. The blindfolded students had to put together a Lego car based on the directions of the other student.

“The activities we did were pretty cool and were all about teamwork,” Evan Jans, a junior, said. “The program helped me understand what engineers actually do and how broad the scale is.”

All of the students who participated showed genuine interest in engineering careers. They didn’t have to be in any specific course in order to participate.

“It was fun. It was cool learning about the things they do at Westinghouse. I think it’s interesting what they do there,” freshman Nick Dadowski said.

Students showcased at Science & Engineering Fair

by Emily Daqueleante

On March 28 many Shaler Area students in grades 6-12 participated in the Pittsburgh Regional Science and Engineering Fair at Heinz Field. The competition is based on research in the fields of mathematics, science, and engineering.

The participants are then judged on their research, how well they performed and how well they defended their experiment.

The Regional Science and Engineering Fair is one of the largest in the country, hosting about 1100 student projects. Two Shaler students received awards.

Sophomore Brett Fafata won a Sponsor Award for chemistry from Penn State University. His project evaluated the physical and thermal properties of a frozen aerogel mixture. Junior James Gualtieri won honorable mention in the senior division engineering/robotics for his project, a 3D printing orientation impact on strength.

Several other Shaler students participated doing projects that had a wide range of level of difficulty.

“I researched the effects of nutrient mixing on digestive efficiency and I used equipment that we had at school. Some of the other students tested the effects of acid rain on building erosion and the efficiency of windmill blades shaped like whale fins. Projects can be simple like which toothpaste works the best, or they can be really complex. For example, the person who won my category tested the effects of DHA and omega-3s on the formation of myelin sheath in cell ganglion,” senior Casey Kinol said.

For students who have a love for science, things like this give them a chance to find out what they are capable of and can get them recognized by colleges and established scientists.

“Competitions like this are important because they provide an opportunity for students who enjoy science to get some recognition for their hard work and creativity. It takes a lot of work to come up with an idea that has not been done before, create a workable protocol to test your idea, collect data, and then make sense of all the data,” Mr. David DiPasquale, GATE teacher, said.

It is a learning experience but students also enjoy the competition and working through their experiments. Since it is up to the student to decide what type of project he/she wants to do, he/she would normally choose something that he/she is curious about. Therefore as they go through the project students are learning and teaching the material to themselves, and in the end have to teach to others what they have learned.

“It is basically a solving exercise; the experiment changes as students think their way through flaws in their experimental designs,” DiPasquale said.

Competition teaches students responsibility and prepares them for a career in the real world.

“The process teaches responsibility because the research is all independent. It is up to the student to make this a priority and get his or her project done. Even though we might not be curing cancer, we teach how it can be rewarding to accomplish something independently,” Kinol said.

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Drama class offers unique learning opportunities

by Kayla Snyder

Its classroom is a stage and the atmosphere is unlike any other. Drama class offers a unique perspective on what it is like to be on stage, it also offers life-changing skills that many adults use today.

The class is taught by Ms. Kristen Susany who has a lot of theatre experience, which makes her the perfect candidate to teach this course.

"She did theatre for most of her time in college and she has directed many plays. She knows what she is talking about when it comes to theatre," senior Adam Kirasic said.

Comparing the elective to any other available at the high school is almost impossible. Due to the fact that the class is taught on a stage as opposed to in a classroom, it creates a different type of atmosphere. In the first five minutes, the students warm up by releasing any stress that may have entered before class started, which is usually not done in other classes.

"We do drama class in the auditorium, so it's a different environment than what students are in the majority of the time. Each day we start of class with breathing exercises; the whole purpose is relaxation, which is not typical of any other class. We work as one group a lot. It's a very friendly environment," senior Jess Dorow said.

In addition to the breathing exercises, Susany also has the students engage in different games to help the acting process and to create a fun atmosphere.



Drama class (Kayla Snyder)

"The games are really great because they actually help with acting. A lot of people figure it's not going to help you out but it really does. Doing skits, getting into character, learning so much, it's all great," freshman Dan Bittner said.

Taking the course almost makes your outside world problems go away for a small fraction of the time.

"It's a class where you can go, and every other class goes away for those 42 minutes. You can take stuff that is happening in real life and put it in that class or you can throw it away. You can create a character and become a whole new you. Everything else doesn't matter. You can invest in what you're doing at that time," Susany said.

The class itself is structured on how to become a

better performer. Inside the class to reach that goal, the students learn techniques such as the Stanislavski method, sensory acting, improvisational skills and many more.

"We've learned the Stanislavski method which really helps to prepare and relax before they get on stage. I've learned a lot on improvisation and what to do in case something bad happens, which is helpful because it happens a lot," Bittner said.

Opposed to traditional courses, Drama is a class based off performance and not necessarily on paper. The class itself is not tied down to books and paper doesn't happen when taking the course. Other evaluations such as skits, scripts and performances are what ultimately shape the final grade for students.

"We took one quiz at the very beginning on basic stage vocabulary, but other than that we are not graded on bookwork or quizzes. Our final grade for drama class includes a small performance our class puts together as a whole," sophomore Dillon Brown said.

The class is for students who are interested in pursuing a career in theatre or students who just want to take a different type of class and have fun.

"Drama class is an elective open to everyone, you should take the class next year because it will definitely have a positive effect on your high school experience," Brown said. "I firmly believe that it is a class that can offer students much more than what the course paper says or what they personally believe. It is a class composed of fun, open, and caring people and this class will be 100% worth the effort."

Careers on the rise for those interested in animal sciences

by Ethan Griffin

Many of us enjoy going to the zoo to view wildlife and experience all the fun and excitement, but have you ever thought about all the time and work that goes into taking care of all the animals?

If so, you might want to consider a career in Zoology and Animal Science and Studies. This is a career that could give you the chance to be close to wildlife and observe animal behaviors in their habitat. This job would give you a number of opportunities and places to work, from living in the wild with animals to studying animals at the zoo.

This is a career that is on the rise due to recent public interest and is expected to have jobs increase by 10 percent by 2018, according to a study in 2009 put out by Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is a job that interests many young people. Shaler Area High School senior Shannon Good has been working at the Pittsburgh Zoo for three years and is the Visitor Services Information Specialist; a job she says is kind of like the Zoo's secretary and is very involved with the public.

"I've learned how to work with the public and make people happy. I've also learned determination is something to acquire if you want your dream job," Good said.

Though Good doesn't get to directly work with the animals, because she is not 18 years old yet, she says she still gets to work and interact with the Zoologists



and Zoo keepers and gain experience from them. She knows that getting a job in this field may be hard but feels working at the zoo now is a great way to gain experience and get her foot in the door for something that could help

land her a job in animal studies in the future.

"Everyone I work with is very helpful and extremely nice. All the staff has one heck of a work ethic," Good said.

This is a job that can be difficult at times but can be very rewarding and fulfilling. It can have great rewards involving breakthroughs in studying animals and their habitats and the chance to learn something new every day.

Some post secondary schooling is required for a job as a Zoologist. First you would want to earn your Bachelor's Degree in Zoology and you could even go as far as getting your graduate degree in Zoology. These degrees will definitely help you secure a job working, studying, and interacting with wildlife.

Though going to school and getting a degree in animal studies will be very helpful in getting you a job in this field, there are some skills that you may need to pick up on that you might not be directly taught and can only be learned from hands on experience with animals and there environments .

"There is constantly something going on and always something new to learn, never a dull moment" Good said.

Data Jam challenges students to explore data

by Margaret Potter

Pittsburgh DataWorks, a non-profit organization, was formed to establish Pittsburgh as a leader in the dynamic and exponentially growing field of big data. The organization has three goals: to offer education about big data to future generations, to promote Pittsburgh as a leader in big data education, and to advance the growth of big data in the community.

What is big data? According to the Pittsburgh DataWorks website:

"Big data is changing the way we live, work, and play. New technologies, skills, ways of thinking, and processes will be needed to gather, share and analyze the staggering amounts of data available as everything from electric meters to cars, smart phones to cats, dogs and cattle become digitally connected in today's always on, always connected world"

In other words, big data is using information available to the public through modern technology and using it to predict behaviors of civilization.

The career of a data scientist is not a well known field. But this field currently shows huge job growth potential for the future and offers a good salary.

"There are approximately 150,000 jobs emerging in this field, with about 40,000 college graduates to fill them." GATE teacher Mrs. Christina Pallidino said.

In an effort to spread education about big data and a statistical science field as a future career, Pittsburgh DataWorks is having their first "Data Jam" between four schools: Shaler, Bethel Park, Sewickley, and the Ellis School. This competition is available to students in grades nine through twelve. Between five to seven students will form a team, and each team will pick a local topic. Each team will then collect data available to the public through technology and see patterns and trends that exist throughout the population.

"Students come up with a local issue that they can potentially offer a solution for." GATE teacher, Mrs. Kathleen Elder said.

For example, one of Shaler's teams has picked the topic of whether crime rates go up on weekends that there are concerts. The team will use data that they have collected to detect patterns and trends of crime rates.

Each team will present their scenario and solution via Google hangout to a panel of local professionals in this field.

On April 22nd, there will be a banquet held by Pittsburgh DataWorks that will present the winning teams with various prizes.

Japanese students take part in speech contest

by Emily Matthews

On March 7, 19 Shaler students from Japanese class levels two through five participated in the annual Japanese Speech Contest at the University of Pittsburgh. This was the largest number of students that Shaler has sent to the speech contest in the past ten years.

"I know that the speech contest has been going on for about ten years, and during that entire time Shaler's been an active participant. Shimizu Sensei is the one who had started it all those years ago. I know we were also one of the first participants in the contest," Japanese teacher Mr. Steven Balsomico said.

Every year students are given a topic to write a speech on and to present in front of a panel of judges. Students in Japanese level two are always required to give a self-introduction while the topic for levels three through five changes each year. This year, students were to give a speech on their hometown and compete against eight other schools.

"It is a great way to kind of push your own Japanese level because the speeches are usually fairly difficult. It really gives students something to work towards – try to improve their own ability," Balsomico said.

The students' hard work and dedication to learning the language

showed in the results of the speech contest. In the advanced plus level, senior Holly Shearin came in first place, senior Christine Chirdon in second and senior Lance Corbett in third, and junior Kevin Kachur came in second place in the intermediate level.

"I like giving the speech. I think it shows you if your hard work has paid off or not," Shearin said.

The speech contest proved to be a great experience for everyone who attended. Along with practicing and improving their Japanese language skills, students also had the opportunity to observe and take part in Japanese cultural activities.

"This year they had kendo specialists come, so they had five guys from Pitt Kendo Club come and you got to see them perform," Shearin said. "They have a taiko group come, which is Japanese drums, and CMU and Pitt have other different organizations to introduce you to different Japanese cultural things like Manga."

Shaler plans on continuing this rewarding experience in the future.

"Personally, I enjoy meeting other teachers of Japanese and being able to talk with them because here at Shaler it's kind of just me, but also being able to see students get more involved with the language and the culture. I think that's always a really awesome experience for me," Balsomico said.

Seeds of Hope seeks to soothe veterans' journeys

by Sara Gaskill

Seeds of Hope is an organization that provides necessities for veterans across the nation. Within the few years that it has been together, it has helped spread awareness and this year, with an organization called "Project Journey", it hopes to do the same thing but with a different approach. Project Journey will focus on building a serenity garden within two transitional housing to help put veteran women back on their feet.

The goal during the first year was to provide fresh food by planting victory gardens. Victory gardens were used during World War II to help stop food shortages for soldiers in war. Alexis Werner came up with this idea, due to her stepfather's transition home after serving in Afghanistan.

"We've planted victory gardens that have grown over 1500 pounds of produce within the past three years. This has become a national project spreading to eight Fisher houses across the country," Alexis Werner, leader of the organization said.

After this, Seeds of Hope members created a children's book. It was written by Roman Benty to spread awareness to those in the younger grades. The children's book talks about nutrition, veteran appreciation, and volunteering.

"I read the Seeds of Hope children's book to three of the five Shaler primary schools. It focuses on the importance of eating healthy, veteran appreciation, and how community service changes the world," Werner said. "When I finished reading the book I asked what the class had learned and one third grade girl looked at me with the sincerest eyes and said, 'I learned the difference one person can make in the lives of so many others.' I almost cried I was so proud. These are some of the instances that solidify why I do what I do."

Within the next year, the organization had begun to work on "Our Way Home", a documentary made by students that focuses on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and poverty. It shows the homecoming stories of nine veterans from World War II to present day. The group is hoping to release this documentary by this May.

Seeds of Hope will be working with Project Journey to build serenity gardens in their Millvale and East Liberty transitional housing locations. A serenity garden is supposed to bring peace and alter the thought process.

"The serenity garden will be a place for meetings between these veteran women trying to transition back into real life and their mentors. Something they would meet about is creating resumes or tips and tricks of going to a job interview," Werner said.

If you want to get involved in helping these heroes, they will be kicking off the season at the end of April. See Alexis Werner for details.



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SPORTS

Baseball team battles weather and opponents

by Cam Bildhauer

The Shaler Area baseball team hopes to make a run for the state playoffs this season. Last season ended in a 2-1 loss to Plum when a few calls went the wrong way.

“We were unable to overcome the playoff loss to Plum, but it left us very hungry,” head coach Brian Junker said.

The Titans are playing with 10 seniors this year who have experience and can lead the young talent on the team. Jimmy Hughes, Matt Carter, Justin Defide, and Joe Spalick were voted senior captains by the players. The junior captain is Jake Potock and sophomore captain is Sam Ireland

“This year we have very high expectations, we want to win and we will win,” Defide said. “Returning all 9 starting players from last year’s playoff team is big.”

The weather has been a huge issue for Shaler sports, especially the baseball team. The team’s first two games were cancelled due to unplayable weather conditions.

“We were still able to work out in the gym, but there is only so much you can practice inside,” Carter said.

The team was eager to begin playing games and prove themselves.

“We have some players going to great schools to play college ball. We have amazing team chemistry and have been playing together for a long time,” Defide said. “This is our last time playing together and we want to win and go as far as we can.”

The Titans had their first game on March 27 at home against Fox Chapel. They suffered a 5-4 loss in

a nail biter against the Foxes but got themselves a win on March 29 at Mt. Lebanon 8-6. Carter got his first win of his senior year.

“Getting my first win gives me a sense of relief because finally all my hard work is starting to pay off. I just have my eyes on the prize of winning a WPIAL championship and will win and succeed,” Carter said. “We will stop at nothing to meet our goals.”

On March 31 Shaler took on one of its biggest rivals, North Hills in a game that was supposed to be at North Hills, but was moved to Matulevic Field. The Titans took an 8-4 win to improve to 2-1 on the year. Junior Gavin Cannon got his first win as a Titan, throwing six shutout innings out of the bullpen.

“It was nice to be able to come out and help the team,” Cannon said. “I’m a little sore after throwing



Senior Justin Defide at the plate against Penn Hills (Bildhauer)

so many innings, but some ice and running the next day heals it up.”

The Titans then played the Plum Mustangs at home two days later. Potock pitched a complete game, striking out seven people in the 4-3 win. Carter went 1-3 at the plate with a double off the wall and a walk. On April 5, the Titans took on section rival, Taylor Alderdice. Carter got the start and struck out 13 batters through 5 innings. Cannon finished the last 2 innings out of the bullpen to give Shaler an 8-2 win.

“The only team we play against is ourselves. We can’t control or worry about who we play against,” Junker said. “The only things we can control are our attitude and energy and that’s what we try to do each day. If we do that daily we will have a lot of wins.”

Come support the Titans on Monday April 21, as they take on rival North Allegheny at home.

Lady Titans trying to live up to high pre-season ranking



Junior Haley Dengler runs to first base (Shaler Journal)

by Justin Jockel

There are high expectations for the Lady Titans’ softball team, as the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette has ranked them No. 3 in preseason. Given this predicted ranking, the team is ready to go and to have a strong season.

“We were ready to go right out of the gate. We are a strong team with a great work ethic,” Head Coach Skip Palmer said.

Shaler currently sits at 5-2 overall

with a 4-2 conference record with its wins coming against Hampton, Fox Chapel, Butler, North Allegheny, and Pine Richland.

“I see everyone meshing very well. Everyone is close friends and there is not separation between us,” Senior Michaela Golden said.

The games Shaler has lost have only been decided by one run,

which shows how the team’s chemistry is keeping them in ballgames.

“We work very well as a team and everyone is working really hard to be at their best,” Senior Emily Matthews said.

Matthews is thrilled to see how all their time and energy pays off in the end.

“I am excited to see how all of our hard work and time in practices pay off in our games,” Matthews said.

Palmer is hoping the time the girls have put in will lead to a section title.

“Making the playoffs and winning the section are probably two of the top things I want to see this team accomplish,” Palmer said.

Golden feels very confident the team will be able to capture the top spot in the section and do well in playoffs.

“I expect us to get that banner up on Hilltop Field and win the section,” Golden said.

Last year, the Lady titans advanced to the playoffs after achieving a 13-6 record. Shaler defeated Woodland Hills in the first round 11-0. Shaler was unable to overcome Hempfield in the second round and was eliminated. Even though getting back to the playoffs is important to the team, Golden says it is not all about the wins.

“I want us to become close and I do want us to win, but that is not my main priority, although it may be the coaches, I just

want us to have a good time,” Golden said.

Palmer says winning isn’t the only goal, but rather to see the girl’s improvement throughout the course of the season.

“I expect them to get better every day, and they are. We are very young and I think the more you play the more confident you will be,” Palmer said.



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SPORTS

Tennis season off to rough start

by Justin Jockel

The boys' Tennis team's season has not gone the way the team has hoped. All of its regular season games have been losses except for one. Despite the rough start, the team is still confident it can play better in the second half.

"The boys are a really good group of students, players, and people. I am excited to see what the season brings," head coach Chuck Mura said.

The season so far has not brought good outcomes for Shaler as its only win came against Ambridge. This win may seem not so important to some people, but assistant coach Brian Duermeyer says it was a step in the right direction.

"It was an important win because we lost a handful of matches previously and Ambridge was a team of similar skill and experience. The boys played hard and were rewarded in that match," Duermeyer said.

Shaler hasn't been as lucky in other matches, but Duermeyer says he is proud of the team's dedication.

"The team has remained positive despite the challenging schedule. No team enjoys losing, but Coach Mura and I realize that we have faced some very experienced and talented teams so far," Duermeyer said.

Duermeyer says playing higher skilled teams are paying off against teams who are not as experienced.

"There are winnable matches remaining on our schedule and the difficult matches we have played have prepared us



Evan Conti gets ready to serve (Justin Jockel)

for them," Duermeyer said.

Sophomore Sean Funfar is expecting better performance from the team in the second half of the season.

"We want to improve and get better so we can win more matches," Funfar said.

In order to win those matches, the team can't be laid back on the court.

"We must be aggressive on the court and not be laid back, that will be one thing that will hurt us, which will prevent us from winning matches," Senior Brian Jockel said.

Being aggressive is not only the key to winning, but motivation is also a key factor in producing a winning formula.

"We must encourage each other on and make the best out of every match if we plan on winning a lot of matches," Funfar said.

Two players the coaches have high hopes for are Seniors Evan Conti and Brian Jockel, the team's No. 1 and No. 2 starters.

"Jockel and Conti are our leaders and we will rely on them to set a good example for other players," Mura said.

Even though Shaler wants to win, Mura revealed the true purpose of the tennis program is more than that.

"The players will gain skills and experience that they can use for the rest of their lives. The purpose of the program is to encourage a spirit of teamwork, competition, and fair play, while still representing the team and the district well," Mura said.

Volleyball team hopes hard work pays off

by Cam Bildhauer

The boys' volleyball team finished last season on a bad note. They ended up tied for last in the section, but have high expectations to be on top of the section this year as the majority of the starters are back. The Titans are playing with 5 seniors this year looking to end their high school career on a good note. These seniors include: Sam Maske-wicz, Steve Jordan, Max Reno, Jake Shrecengost, and Justin Landry.

"Our players participated in a lot of off season workouts, winter leagues, and there is also a new sense of senior urgency so our expectations our set very high for this season," head coach Paul Stadelman said.

Shaler had its first match at home on March 24 against Deer Lakes. It got the win in three straight sets.

"Before every match I like to identify players on the other team and how we can exploit weakness and prepare for strengths," Reno said. "I like to relay this to my teammates as well."

Shaler will try to make a playoff run this year, but they know that there needs to be improvement if they want to go far.

"Moving forward we just need to focus on section matches and win small victories. The matches are not won right away," Reno said. "We have to play every point like it's our last, because before we know it, it could be."

Chemistry is a key component that a volleyball team must have, but the seniors are not worried about communication at all. It's more of the skills that need to improve.

"We need to individually improve on certain skills. Nobody is perfect and it takes six to win," Jordan said. "Our attitude also needs to improve as a whole, and having a crowd in the stands wouldn't hurt."

Senior night will take place on Monday, May 5 at the High School against Baldwin.

"It's a bittersweet feeling knowing this is my last season as a Titan," Jordan said. "I will always rep the blue and white."

"We have to play every point like it's our last, because before we know it, it could be."

-- Senior Max Reno



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