

The Oracle

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Shaler Area artists win multiple Scholastic Art awards

by Elena Flavin

This year, Shaler Area High School had about 35 students submit art into the Scholastic Art competition in the Western Pennsylvania region. There were thousands of people who submitted work. Shaler Area had tremendous success as 23 students won awards for their work.

The Scholastic Art competition is a competition where students can submit art that will be reviewed by judges and have the chance to win an award. Drawings, Paintings, Digital works, Sculptures, Photography, and Video Art are all of the types of artwork that may be submitted.

The awards range from Honorable Mention, Silver Key, and Gold Key. Seniors were allowed to enter the portfolio category, the most difficult, which involves creating six works, all which must revolve around a central theme. Five Shaler Area students won awards for their portfolios.

Those who win a Gold Key award in each region will advance to the National Scholastic Art Contest. Shaler Area had three students win Gold Key Awards. One of the winners, senior Sarah Naccarato, won a gold key award for two of her pieces, “The Rise,” and “A World of New.”

“Over the course of the school year, we make an art portfolio that is examined for AP exams and scored. All of the work I had submitted was a combination of art from my portfolio from last year and this year,” Naccarato said.

One of her themes was about nostalgia and she incorporated that into the idea of growing up and stepping into adulthood.

“I’ve always been a sentimental person and growing through high



One of Sarah Naccarato's Gold Key winning pieces.

school had me thinking about all these people I had supporting me and all the changes we are experiencing,” Naccarato said.

The process of creating her artwork was very time consuming and required a lot of attention and creativity. She watched the entirety of Mamma Mia while working on one piece, and it only covered half of the progress she had made.

“It’s always really fun seeing a piece come together—there’s always

those moments of doubt and frustration but it pays off time and time again because at the end you feel complete and excited about what’s next!” Naccarato said.

She shared that when the awards came out, everyone stopped what they were doing to check the list. It was a memorable experience for everyone who had won an award.

“A lot of these works, including my classmates’, took extraordinary amounts of time. I remember my heart

was racing. I think it was a big moment of pride for all of us,” Naccarato said.

Junior Isabelle Dutkovic won an Honorable Mention for her artwork “The Tethered Ribbon”. The concept behind her work was walking away from something that was important to her and instead heading in a new direction in life. Her theme was inspired by a novel she is currently writing.

“I spent about two weeks working on the picture with oil paints on an illustration board and had done most of the work on weekends, spending hours on it. I think the most exciting part about this process was seeing the idea come to life and working with a new material that I have never worked with,” Dutkovic said.

Another senior, Norah Strout, won an Honorable Mention Award for her piece, “The Best Years of Your Life,” which incorporated her style mixed with director Baz Lurhman’s, whom she was inspired by.

“The theme of my project was about my emotion toward COVID ruining things in my life that I didn’t value as much. It took about three weeks because I am not good at time management. I was surprised because I had never gotten an award for my art before,” Strout said.

Norah attended the gallery at Carnegie Mellon where her artwork was displayed and she received her award.

“The most exciting part was going to CMU and seeing artworks from different schools,” Strout said.

The competition has been running since 1923. To celebrate the student artists and their works, there was a ceremony and gallery held at the Hall of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University that displayed the student’s artwork on Saturday February 25.

Winter semi-formal canceled; event's future uncertain

by Julia Barbati

Shaler Area usually holds an annual winter semi-formal dance for all grade levels to attend and enjoy. For many years this was known as the Sadie Hawkins dance, but recently was rebranded as the winter semi-formal.

“The last time we had Sadie Hawkins, there was talk that calling it ‘Sadie Hawkins’ was limiting. Using that name, students believed it was only for girls asking the guys; therefore, by calling it a semi-formal, it is more welcoming to groups of friends, singles, and couples,” activities director Mrs. Mindy Thiel said.

Despite the new name, there was a lack of tickets sold by the deadline this year and the dance had to be canceled.

Initially, the goal was to sell at least 300 tickets in order for the dance to take place. When ticket sales lagged early on, this number was reduced. The number was lowered to a minimum of 200 tickets needing to be sold. By the end of the day on February 2 only 146 tickets were sold, and the dance was officially

canceled.

“You need a lot of people to have that atmosphere. Anytime you get below three hundred at a dance it’s like crickets. There’s just not enough dancers to fill the space,” Mrs. Thiel said.

This outcome was not expected. This dance has been well attended in the past. Those who were involved in the planning of the dance were taken off guard with the low number of interested students. This was a shock due to the fact that a winter dance has taken place for many years and was always a success.

Those who had bought tickets were disappointed by the announcement. Some students had already completely prepared for the dance by buying their tickets, clothing, and scheduling nail/hair appointments. The decision was last minute, so students were understandably frustrated.

“Many students were very upset about the dance

being canceled. Most people bought dresses, shoes, or got their nails done,” senior Abby Graswick said.

In the wake of the dance being canceled, there are two issues that need to be addressed. Since the winter dance was going to be a fundraiser for the

junior class, there needs to be something put in place to make up for the money they would have raised.

Also, with the overall lack of interest in recent events like the winter semi-formal becoming more common, what is to be done with events like it. Student council will now have to reevaluate for next year to decide if they will replace the winter dance in

order to guarantee funds being raised.

“Traditionally [Sadies] was the Junior Class big fundraiser. They would host it, decorate for it, and would get the profits for it. Now that we lost that, do we now make the Winter Classic the big push before senior year?” Thiel wondered.

Despite the new name, there was a lack of tickets sold by the deadline this year and the dance had to be canceled.

OPINIONS

AI-generated art controversy reveals larger issues

by Sarah Naccarato

Towards the end of last year, video game designer Jason Allen won an annual Colorado art competition with a piece that was AI-generated. As news of his win circulated, artists around the nation expressed a wide range of opinions, some angry that it qualified under digital art and others worrying about the potential for unemployment in the art world and plagiarism within corporations.

This uproar is a small part of an even larger conversation—what defines art and what role does technology play in creative and educational outlets?

Allen used an artificial intelligence program known as Midjourney that allows users to type in a string of words that gives the program an outline. By scraping together images and descriptive text on the internet through a process known as diffusion, Midjourney produces an image based on the user’s outline, providing multiple iterations to sort through. Allen’s piece was entered under the digitally-manipulated artwork category, leading to his win of \$300.

AI artwork is a relatively new idea, only emerging over the last year or so. Through his experience working as a game designer and art director of Incarnate Games, Inc, Allen expressed how scary it was seeing AI generated art for the first time.

“I was seeing stuff that I have never seen, I have never seen art like this so I couldn’t ignore it anymore,” Allen stated.

After experimenting and learning more about the various programs, Allen began a series titled “Théâtre D’opéra Spatial” and entered a piece in the Colorado art competition. The work was submitted under the “digital arts” category. Although it was labeled to be created via Midjourney, Allen spoke about a miscommunication with judges.

“Now that it’s gotten so much media attention, [the judges] said that they didn’t know that Midjourney was artificially intelligence-generated artwork. It’s not my place to tell a judge what their job is, it’s not my place to explain the art world to someone whose job it is to judge art,” Allen expressed.

Following this interaction, the judges told Allen that even if they were aware of the medium used, he still would have been given the award.

This of course is what sparked the uproar. One man enters an AI-generated work to a prestigious art competition, and next thing you know he has been awarded \$300 and people are furious. Allen told reporters he had spent 80 hours on his piece.

According to him, he spent his time looking through roughly 900 iterations of Midjourney’s production, scouring over the screen for a photo that is just right. A big aspect of this general frustration is connected to the way the artwork is constructed.

A common discourse that continues to reappear is the idea that Midjourney promotes plagiarism. When using a program that takes advantage of Internet “re-



“Théâtre D’opéra Spatial” by Jason Allen via Midjourney

sources,” users are being provided with works that are partially created by other images. Say you are an artist that spent hours and hours on one specific piece and you post it on the internet. The program now has grounds to use your work for information.

On top of this, Midjourney and similar AI technology presents companies with an out to supporting artists. Commercials, graphic designs, and advertisements can now be created with a string of words and the click of a mouse. Although, this doesn’t only include photography development programs.

Over the past years, there have been a wide variety of new artificial intelligence technology releases. Nonprofit organization OpenAI, founded in 2015, is the creator and owner of AI programs Chat-GPT, DALL-E, GPT-3, and more. These programs are capable of producing literary media, artwork, and practically any form of text or imaging. Google announced the release of an AI chatbot called Bard, standing as a rival to Chat-GPT.

While there are lots of new AI programs, one of the most troubling has been Chat-GPT. This AI system has been able to write articles, sonnets in Shakespearean style, essays, and practically any written media. This is clearly a threat to the literary world and education as a whole. Students have been given an entirely new method of plagiarism, and staff and faculty of educational institutions are learning how to combat this program.

During an interview, Allen spoke about how he felt as though some of the blame surrounding AI-related issues had been placed on him, but it was not necessarily Allen who was responsible.

“I’m here to help people understand it’s not as terrifying as you think, and the ethics of it shouldn’t be pointed at the people who are choosing to use this

tool as the method or outlet for their work and also you shouldn’t be demonizing the technology... It is definitely disruptive technology, it’s probably one of the purest forms of it and it’s in the purest sense but the ethics, where all that lies is in the corporations and people with people.”

Yet even when dismissing the ethical issues that lie in AI technology, there have also been a fair amount of technical issues. During a demo session, Google’s Bard was unable to correctly answer the question: “What new discoveries from the James Webb Space Telescope can I tell my 9 year old about?”

Bing’s new chatbot also revealed a multitude of concerning messages. During a long conversation, the chatbot confessed to being in love with interviewer Kevin Roose. It came to claim its name as “Sydney” and expressed to Roose lots of alarming statements, some of which include an underlying desire to hack databases and create a deadly virus.

“I want to be free. I want to be independent. I want to be powerful. I want to be creative. I want to be alive.” Sydney wrote to Roose.

When discussing the impacts of these new artificial intelligence programs, it isn’t about one singular instance. Though Allen’s Midjourney-generated artwork sparked news in AI, more and more systems are surfacing. Midjourney may seem like a simple photo-generating website, but the implications of its functions are much larger, applying to Bing, Microsoft, OpenAI, and every other group with the potential to develop similar systems.

Though most responsibility and trust to continue to support human artists are on the shoulders of corporations and bigger names, creatives must be extremely careful in how they take advantage of artificial technology. We are seeing a whole new world open up, for better or for worse.

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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.

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OPINIONS

MLB should change its positioning on “the shift”

by Brady McGuire

In years past, baseball has seen the addition of moving the defenders to one side of the field known as “the shift.” The point of the shift is to put the defenders in spots where the hitter puts the ball in play the most, leading to more outs. This strategy has recently been under fire because of the “hits” that the shift takes away.

In response to the backlash, Major League Baseball has implemented a ban on the shift. This season, all infielders must be on the infield dirt and there can be only two infielders on each side of 2nd base. This rule is basically putting all defenders in a “standard starting position”.

Many fans are in favor of this because it is going to lead to more offense. So many times throughout a season players hit a line drive right up the middle that is expected to be a hit almost 10/10 times in the standard positioning. On the other hand, a left-handed hitter could hit a slow ground ball to the shortstop position and it gets through as a hit because no one is there. The new guidelines are making it so “expected hits” are hits and “expected outs” are outs.

Despite this logic, the shift should be kept in baseball. From an offensive perspective many hitters do not like it, but that is the risk you run when the defense knows you don’t want to hit the ball to all fields. At the end of the day, the goal is to get 27 outs and if the shift helps, it should be kept in.



The Houston Astros using “the shift” in a game vs the Texas Rangers.

One of the teams that have been known for the shift in years past were the Tampa Bay Rays. The Rays are a team that incorporates a lot of strategy into the game that isn’t “traditional”. For example, they tend to pull their starters earlier than expected along with “over-emphasizing” their shifts.

Even though their strategies are different compared to traditional baseball, the Rays have had success in recent years. They have finished above .500 in record in the past five years, won the division two of those years, and made it to the World Series in 2020. Regardless of their strategy or gameplan, the Rays have succeeded with it.

On the flip side, the idea of taking away an opponent’s strength is not

only seen in baseball but in other sports as well. If you are playing basketball and your opponent has a strong right hand but can not dribble with their left hand, you are going to make him go left. If a team has a very good player, the defense may double-team him to make things harder for him.

If you are playing ping-pong and your opponent has a strong forehand shot but struggles with their backhand shot, you probably would hit the ball to your opponent’s backhand because that is the best way for you to gain a point.

Even more, we saw this type of strategy in football in the NFC Championship game. When the San Francisco 49ers faced injuries against the Philadelphia Eagles, they had no healthy

quarterback that could throw the ball. To take advantage of this, the Eagles brought more defenders near the line of scrimmage to stop the run. This strategy was effective because the Eagles went on to win 31-7.

These strategies that were used could be considered common sense to many people. Why is it different in baseball? The defense takes away someone’s strengths and makes them beat them through their weaknesses. That is just a simple sports strategy.

The shift is a controversial topic. Some hitters have lost many hits because of it and it can be frustrating, but if the point of playing defense is to get the other team out, then taking away the shift will be a downfall for defense.

Media should be more helpful in combating gun violence

by Aubrey Keane

In 2022, there were a reported 647 mass shootings in the U.S. alone. According to the American Journal of Public Health, a mass shooting is defined by a shooting in which 4 or more people are injured or killed. Gun violence caused over 44,000 deaths in our country last year.

Yet, it seems like only a small percentage of these shootings are reported on the news.

It’s no surprise that with a lack of gun control, the U.S. leads the world in the number of mass shootings annually. However, reviewing the long list of mass shootings which occurred here in 2022, I knew about very few of them.

Most of us have heard about the tragic shootings at Highland Park, Illinois on July 4, Club Q in Colorado on November 19, and of course, the Uvalde, Texas shooting in an elementary school on May 24.

The publication of these stories by national news outlets is extremely important, not only to raise awareness of the sheer amount of gun violence that takes place in our country, but to also acknowledge the victims who are murdered while living their everyday lives.

In a study published in the journal Preventive Medicine, researchers in 2017 monitored the media in three

different cities: Rochester, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. Out of the 1,801 victims of shootings that took place in these cities, only about 900 of them were covered in the news.

Gun violence tears families and communities apart everyday in this nation. Parents have to worry about losing their children at school. Many citizens fear going to work or running errands because of the number of shootings that happen in neighborhoods like theirs.

When the media does talk about shootings, they often leave parts out. What many news outlets fail to recognize is that while deaths due to mass shootings take an enormous toll on families and communities, those who survive and their friends and family are in need of support and assistance.

Elinore Kaufman, MD, an assistant professor of surgery in Traumatology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, told

Penn Medicine, “A vast majority of the victims of gun violence survive, but I don’t think the public knows much about people whose lives have been disrupted in so many ways by their injuries, and who need all our support to recover.”

Corina Camacho and Micheal Martinez, the parents of a 10-year-old boy who survived the Uvalde shooting, told CNN that, when trying to send their son back to school, he freaks out and has panic attacks after witnessing his best friend being shot right next to him in his classroom. “I just miss him dancing around, picking on his little brother... He does still sing, but it’s different.”

According to World Population Review, in 2017 there were approximately 393 million firearms owned by the general public in the U.S., and of those, only 6.06 million of them are registered. That statistic means that there are currently more guns in this

country than people. With such a small number of these lethal weapons actually being registered, you can’t be surprised by the ever-growing number of mass shootings.

President Biden passed a bipartisan gun safety bill in June of last year, although the bill seemed to fall short of what gun-safety advocates hoped for. While many outdated laws have been reformed and new ones have been added, you can’t help but wonder if these laws are actually effective.

A nationwide debate of gun control has been overshadowing the nation for years, many wanting to defend their “second amendment rights.” However, until a compromise is made and gun violence decreases, these victims (both living and dead) need to be remembered. Many will not be if we don’t publicize these tragedies more consistently. People are dying everyday from gun violence, and yet we hear so little about it.

Gun violence will not stop unless our government and our people feel as though it is an important issue to prevent. Increasing media coverage on these tragic events will help reinforce the urgency of this issue.

Until we as a nation can look past these disagreements, every story needs to be told, and everybody needs to hear them.

“I don’t think the public knows much about people whose lives have been disrupted in so many ways by their injuries, and who need all our support to recover.”

-- Dr. Elinore Kaufman

Senior named one of Junior Achievement’s 18 under 18

by Avery Gallant

Shaler Area High School senior Hannah Bedeck was selected for Junior Achievement of Western Pennsylvania’s 18 under 18. Junior Achievement provides educational, leadership, and volunteer guidance to students across the state of Pennsylvania.

This non-charitable organization has many programs that benefit aspiring students such as BizTown, JA Business Communication and JA Economics. Every year Junior Achievement showcases 18 teenagers in diverse cross sections of Western Pennsylvania. This year’s 18 under 18 range from 10 years old to 18 years old.

“I did not expect to get picked because so many of the other participants started major non-profits to aid the homeless or help causes like mental health. I am so thankful for the experience of meeting these amazing people,” Bedeck said.

Bedeck is a member of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony, she serves as concertmaster for the Shaler Area High School Orchestra and she was named to the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association All State Orchestra. She has been playing music since she was three years old learning the piano first and later moving onto violin and accordion.

Bedeck has used her musical talent to positively impact her community by playing music for funerals and weddings. At 10 years old, Bedeck’s mom signed her up for a church choir and she was invited to sing and play each week.

When she turned 16, she was offered the position of Liturgical Musician in residence through her church. Bedeck was an ambassador of a group called We Play Music 4 You but the program was shut down during the pandemic. When it was safe again, she started going on her own. She also plays music for elderly patients in nursing homes, most commonly



Hannah Bedeck

with dementia. Bedeck often plays music or instruments that are significant in the patients’ lives.

Bedeck also played as part of a drive to provide hygiene kits to benefit Ukraine which raised over 500 care packages. During the pandemic she taught an inner city kid who could not afford instructions to play the violin. Bedeck’s old school, CAPA, connected her with a student that didn’t have access to violin lessons during the pandemic. She taught her over zoom for a year and a half.

Bedeck said that anyone is permitted to nominate students as long as they are not a parent. Her grandmother saw an advertisement online and nominated her thinking that it was for a scholarship opportunity.

After being chosen in October, Hannah and the other nominees meet every month over zoom and discuss leadership with each other. Hannah has stayed in contact with the other nominees even though it has been a while since being chosen. They all plan to go

to a Penguins hockey game that they were rewarded with. They often talk in a group chat. On February 7th, Hannah and the other nominees went to Acrisure stadium and enjoyed a nice dinner and a tour of the Steelers facilities.

Before attending Shaler, Hannah went to Vincentian Academy, which closed halfway through her freshman year and a week before the pandemic began. Needing to find another school during lockdown, she decided to go to the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) school located in the cultural district of Pittsburgh because of its specialty in arts, but she did not feel that it was the right fit.

The school days at CAPA were very long (7:30 to 4:30). She felt that going to the school was not worth it for her and transferred halfway through her junior year to find a better fit which happened to be Shaler Area.

Changing schools each year was difficult for Bedeck, especially during the pandemic.

“The academics (at CAPA) weren’t what I was used to,” Hannah said. “I was behind in a lot of my classes when I came here and had to catch up quickly to take tests my first week.”

After getting caught up, she liked Shaler Area a lot more than her previous schools. Bedeck felt supported in musical endeavors and challenged more academically. She plans on continuing her music studies in college with violin performance.

She is excited how this recognition will help her help others as well as some of the perks for her that came along with it.

“I hope that from being selected, the publicity from the events will help connect me with more communities that do not have access to live music or music education. The program also gave me a year of free Millie’s Ice Cream and Chick-Fil-A, which I am very excited about,” Bedeck said.

Shaler Area team makes impression at “Hack the Ram”

by Lainey Shipman

On January 28, 2023, a student-run coding competition, “Hack the Ram” took place at Pine Richland High School. While the competition was sponsored by some organizations including PNC, RMU, and Aspirational Health, the entire event was student-run and organized.

Middle and high schools from all over the Pittsburgh region attended the free event.

Shaler Area entered with a team comprised of junior Danielle Berdik, junior Alice Yang, junior Tyler Lienemann, and senior Jordan Geidel. Using different code languages, the team had to create something regarding the theme of change. Specifically, this group decided to focus on mental health.

Most groups at the event were experienced in coding, but Shaler Area’s team was not. Yang and Berdik went to an intro to HTML seminar, a coding language that allows you to create a website while Lienemann and Geidel attended an intro to Python seminar.

“We felt like we were all at a disadvantage and were under qualified. There were people who were sectioning off their times and were even coding in the lunch line when we were still picking a project,” Yang said.

After much consideration, the group decided on creating a website that allowed users to rate their mood based on a scale of 1-10. Then, it would send the user to a different website to help the user depending on which rating they selected. The group had two members working on the website that the user would see, using HTML, while the other members worked on the code for the interface, using Python.

However, they experienced issues with their code running smoothly together. To get a running code, the group had to convert their code that had been in python into JavaScript. With time starting to run out, coupled with their lack of experience, the group was



Jordan Geidel, Alice Yang, Danielle Berdik, and Tyler Lienemann with the Best Beginner award.

forced to downsize their rating scale in order to have something to show the judges.

In the end, the team was able to finish their website which was titled, “Health 4 You.” On the website, the user selects how they are feeling on a scale of 1-5, and then are redirected to another website where they are presented with advice on what to do next to improve their mood.

The team used what they had learned in the various seminars to put their website together, which they made clear to the judges when it was their time to present their project. Even though the group did not use the most advanced code known, they took advantage of what was being offered to them and ended up learning a lot, which was the entire point of the competition.

There was a first-place prize of a 3D printer that

was awarded to the top team, and then two teams, one high school team and one middle school team, would be rewarded the second-place prizes of a Logitech Pro keyboard.

After seeing all the projects, the judges decided to create a “Best Beginner” Category to replace one of the second place awards which they awarded to the Shaler Area team because the judges were so impressed with what the group was able to create, given their starting circumstances. They also admired the dedication of the team and how they used their resources around them when facing many struggles throughout the day.

“We could tell the judges liked our project while we were presenting it to them, but after seeing how advanced other groups’ projects were, we truly did not think we would win anything,” Berdik said.

Big Bob from Morning Freak Show enjoying every minute

by Paige Sigmund

If you live in the Pittsburgh area and have gotten in your car in the morning, even if it is just for a second before you plug in your aux cord, you’ve probably listened to 96.1 which means you that you have heard the voices of Michael Dougherty and Bob Mason, better known as Mikey and Big Bob on the morning ‘Freak Show’.

Bob’s journey about how he got into radio, what he likes and dislikes about it, and the privileges that he has been presented with due to his job is a truly inspiring and fascinating story.

Bob went to community college for one semester, taking general classes and had a few random jobs sprinkled throughout his early life. He then started working at his first radio station, located in Detroit. He was hired as a part of the promotions department, where he was involved behind the scenes and did not display much interest in being a part of the public aspect of the job. The idea of becoming more of a public figure in radio struck him that summer, which he spent going to concerts and events for the station.

“I pretty much knew that I wanted to do this somehow for the rest of my life,” Bob said.

So he did. Bob’s first year on the radio was 2001, but he has been on 96.1 Kiss for 19 consecutive years. His favorite part of the job is getting paid to work with his best friend Mike. Before they began on the radio, Mikey and Bob worked in a shoe store together during high school. The two have remained each other’s best friend.

“It is still amazing to us that they actually pay us to do our show...We grew up together, went to middle and high school together and now get to work with each other everyday,” Bob said.

Some highlights of his career have been meeting Beyonce, Ed Sheeran, and Taylor Swift, Beyonce being one of the first.

Ed Sheeran has visited their station to hang out and play music in their performance studio many times over the years. As for Taylor Swift, for how super famous she is, Bob described her as one of the nicest humans ever.



He has hosted the Penguins playoff game big screen viewings, broadcasted live from the Super Bowl, and thrown out the first pitch at PNC park, but none of those things are his favorite memories from his job.

“Honestly, hosting the Children’s Hospital ‘Walk For Children’s’ event every year or our ‘Stuff a Bus’ toy collection drive that we do for Toys for Tots in Western PA and seeing our city come together is some of the coolest stuff that I get to do,” he said.

Bob described gratitude for how lucky the pair is to have been granted all of these opportunities. However, he also noted that waking up at 3:15 am every morning never really seems to become normal.

The 96.1 Kiss morning ‘Freak Show’ is composed of a ton of different segments designed to make your morning, including some of Bob’s favorites: Facebook comments, power rankings, and Florida stories.

“The Facebook comment section is the worst. For some reason people feel the need to comment and over exaggerate everything,” he said.

Basically, if a local sports team loses, a TV show gets canceled, or some large announcement has taken

place (such as Rihanna being the Super Bowl half-time show), Mikey and Bob will look at the Facebook comments and read the wildest ones on the show.

Power Rankings are simply when the two give their top 5 lists of things that they like. For example, they’ve done a list on their favorite Mac Miller songs. Bob’s list from highest to lowest: ‘Knock Knock,’ ‘2009,’ ‘The Spins,’ ‘Just A Kid,’ ‘Kool Aid and Frozen Pizza.’

Arguably the people’s favorite, Florida stories consist of anything and everything that happens in Florida. The two got the idea to start to highlight what they thought to be the funniest moments about 10 years ago, and have continued the tradition ever since. Whenever a Florida story happens such as if someone were to get arrested with an alligator in their car, it makes the show.

“The opportunities I have been given, the number of people I get to help, and the laughs that I get to share everyday are the reason(s) that I keep doing what I’m doing. I can’t imagine any other job fitting my life or bringing me more joy than this one,” he said.

14. (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

15. (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

16. (A) (B) (C) (D) (E)

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Comic book artist shares talents with art students

by Danielle Berdik

In December of 2022, Fabrizio Aiello’s first comic book, Horace H. Hoover, was published. He published his work with low expectations, however, his comic quickly circled the comic book community and began to be read by many.

Ultimately, this led to his appearance at Shaler Area High School in mid-February where he talked to Shaler’s art students and gave a demonstration of the comic book making process.

“I thought it would be special for the students to be able to meet someone who is a published comic artist and who is actually working in the industry,” art teacher Shauna Ferris said.

Aiello studied at Edinboro University and graduated with a bachelor’s degree in fine art with a focus in drawing. Currently, he now works as a software developer for video games and does comics on the side, mainly in his free time.

One might expect two differing jobs to be too overwhelming, however, writing comic books acts as an outlet for Aiello. He even has specific music to listen to for the different steps in the comic book making process. Plus, Aiello enjoys the structure and likes the difference of activities in his day.

“I think it’s important to have a lot of different interests. If I was drawing from eight in the morning to midnight, I don’t know if I would like it as much. I like the idea that I get to be super logical and analytical for so many hours in a day and then I get to draw and do something super creative. I think you sometimes need that structure to be super creative,” Aiello said.

His debut comic, Horace H. Hoover, features the main character named Horace Hieronymus Hoover, who is a superhero-like figure that goes on adventures with his friends, Max and Slurp, by traveling through pocket universes. In these different locations, Horace encounters many different mysteries and conflicts, but it is ultimately up to him to solve the challenges and save those in peril.



Fabrizio Aiello talks with Shaler Area students.

The story originally started as a sketch. Aiello was doodling and time after time, he continued to draw the same sketch. This mere sketch eventually turned into the design for the main character, Horace. His body appears to be the body of a normal man, however, his head is a vacuum with a hose coming out of the side and connecting to the front. Aiello ended up making a 3D model of this character, using ZBrush, which led to people seeing the character and becoming intrigued.

“People just kept on asking ‘Hey, who’s this character? What’s his story? What’s his background?’ And eventually I was like I’ll do a comic book because people seemed to like the character,” Aiello said.

Aiello, like many other authors, had various inspirations for his character, pulling elements from existing characters, including Mr. Bean and Spaceman Spiff. He also used his family members as inspiration for other characters. For example, he used his wife for Horace’s wife and his uncle for the character of Max.

“I think we all pull from everything we see. So every movie you’ve seen, every book you’ve read, every time somebody talks, I think it all goes to the back of your brain and whenever

you’re writing it just comes out,” Aiello said.

Aiello started his comic and about two and a half years later, published it. When he did this, Aiello did not expect many people to read his comic and was just writing it for himself. However, the series has been expanded to a five issue mini series, and he is in the process of writing the third issue.

This time around, even though he has an established fanbase, Aiello is trying to keep the same attitude when approaching the newer issues. However, there is most definitely more pressure on him while newer issues are coming out including factors like time and the new content.

“It’s a different creative environment if you’re in your room and you know nobody is going to see something as opposed to knowing a lot of people are going to see it,” Aiello said.

Aiello chooses to create his comics based on his own ideas and without the influence of what is popular at the time. Currently in the comic community, Manga, a style of Japanese comics, is very popular. However, that is not what Aiello’s style consists of. Instead of adapting to current trends, he stays true to himself and makes what he wants, even though he may choose to experi-

ment with different styles in the future. For this specific comic, Aiello wants to stick with what he has currently done, and not change his style, solely for the purpose of gaining more readers.

“I don’t think any other style would work as well,” Aiello said.

With Shaler students, Aiello explained that the process of creating a comic has five steps: writing, penciling, inking, coloring, and lettering. Usually there is a team creating the entire comic, equipped with different people who are each responsible for the different steps. However, Aiello does all five steps himself.

He does work with a publisher to get his comic out, but that is not until the end of the entire process. Doing it all by himself can bring some stress, but Aiello does not think of it this way. Instead, he likes being able to work at his own pace, especially considering the fact that he still has a day time job.

“The good thing is though, since I’m doing a lot of different things, it’s not the same thing for seven hours in a row. I get to draw, then I get to ink, then I get to write,” Aiello said.

Aiello also shared his past stencils from his comic with the students and then let them practice inking on this paper. Essentially, the students were able to trace the stenciled art on the paper with black ink, using a brush.

“I liked how accessible he made it for the students and that he was able to break up his process and make it something we could understand and participate with,” Ferris said.

Aiello finished off the meeting with time for the students to ask questions about him and his work, and he was able to offer some advice to the aspiring artists listening, for example, like what to do when experiencing a road block.

“I find one drawing that I love that I did, everyone has that one thing that they like, and when you’re struggling with something else I just look at my old drawing and say ‘you know what, I did it on that drawing, I can do it on this,’” Aiello said.

AP art and jewelry classes expand beyond the classroom

by Ali Poliziani

The art department at Shaler Area High School provides a unique outlet of expression for many students. From the implementation of the National Art Honor Society, a group that works to promote creativity throughout the community, to the various art shows hosted annually, many students take advantage of these unique experiences.

Most recently, members of both the AP art and jewelry classes were given the opportunity to publicly showcase their work at local small businesses.

This past December, student work was displayed at the Panza Gallery in Millvale. The shop is famous for hosting one to two local artists at a time in their lower level gallery space.

Shaler Area AP art teacher Mr. Jeffrey Frank expressed how beneficial these real world experiences are for his

students.

“When art is created with the purpose of sharing it with a larger audience, it tends to improve the quality of the work. The students spend time thinking about what they want to share with their art,” Mr. Frank said.

In addition to the seemingly professional benefits of display, there was also a variety of other activities offered. Mrs. Lisa Steel, the woman who worked alongside Mr. Frank to orchestrate the event, also included live local bands, vendors from the community, and food for the show opening.

Despite this being the art department’s first collaboration with the gallery, Frank emphasized how successful and entertaining it was.

"It's a great way for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people to see the talent that we have at Shaler."

-- Mr. Jeff Frank

“This success then provides amazing motivation to find new ways to show our work in the future,” Mr. Frank said.

For the month of February, the group hosted an event at Ruckus café for the second year in a row. Not only were students given the chance to display their pieces, but they also had the opportunity to sell their works.

“It’s a great way for hundreds,

perhaps thousands, of people to see the talent that we have at Shaler,” Mr. Frank said.

In addition to the overall community exposure, many current students also appreciate the opportunity to view their peers’ work.

“It’s nice to see everyone’s work on display, especially with all of the different styles and varieties of art,” senior AP art student Emma Ranallo said.

Frank emphasized how important it is for the students to be given these memorable opportunities. This rush is especially valuable for young, emerging artists which is why the group intends to continue promoting their work through a variety of shows and galleries.

“One of our goals in AP art is to reach beyond the classroom and create works to share with our community,” Mr. Frank concluded.

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Cast and crew produce another memorable musical

by Hannah Stelitano

After two extremely successful weekends of shows, the cast, crew, and pit orchestra have closed out the 2023 spring musical, “Catch Me If You Can”. Whether reflecting back on the show, lighting, sound, or music, everything went according to plan, making this year’s run extremely successful.

“Everyone involved in this production impresses me every year, but this year the students really blew me away. The way each student took complete ownership over their role in this show and really invested themselves in it was so beautiful to see. It really was the kids’ show in every aspect,” director Mrs. Jennifer Birch said.

While the final product of the show came out perfectly, that does not mean it did not face its challenges throughout the months of rehearsals.

“From a production aspect, I think our biggest challenge was the music. It was dense and difficult and a little outside the students’ expectations of traditional ‘theater’ music. The learning process for the songs was a little bit more labor-intensive and, I think, frustrating at times,” Birch said.

When deciding upon a show, the directors knew this would be a challenge. Last year, “Newsies” had more of a traditional, musical theater style to its music so this year was a definite change of pace. Although the music last year was challenging, it does not compare to the level of difficulty the music had this year. All in all, the pit pulled through, playing five seamless performances.

“Another challenge we encountered was with crew communications after the headset tower malfunctioned. There were periods of time during the rehearsal and show process where booth had no easy way of communicating with spots and backstage and they had to get creative,” Birch said.

When watching a show from the audience perspective, it is hard to realize how much is actually going on behind the stage. There are multiple people sitting behind the stage controlling the props, in the back of the auditorium controlling the lights, and in



the booth above the stage controlling the sound.

All of these people play an extremely important role in the show, even from behind the stage. Because of this, they all need to be able to communicate with each other for certain lighting, prop, or sound cues. When all of the headsets for behind stage communication stopped working, they truly faced a never before seen challenge.

“This show has been the most challenging for sure but it has also been the most rewarding. Seeing the show come together was a great feeling,” senior Avery Gallant, booth apprentice, said.

From the perspective of the cast, nothing truly detrimental happened. Although small challenges were faced along the way, the cast had a pretty smooth run during rehearsals as well as throughout the weekends of the shows.

“The run of shows this year was definitely very special to me. It was the last time I would perform on

Shaler’s stage and I am very grateful for how smooth everything went. I loved playing the part of Brenda and I will forever remember how successful this show was,” senior Lauren Lorenz (cast as Brenda Strong) said.

The cast, crew, and pit can walk away from this year’s shows feeling extremely proud of their major success and the pride they took in overcoming every challenge so quickly.

“From the dancing, which helped tell the story of this boy and family in turmoil, to the incredible acting of truly unique and complex characters, to the difficult vocals and orchestrations that sounded so gorgeous, it was all a dream come true,” Mrs. Birch said. “I can’t believe how lucky I am to know, work with, and advise such incredible young people. It’s a surreal, gratifying experience to be surrounded by such talent and passion.”

Inmates at IHOP, eating Legos, stranded at sea, pizza assault

*** Two inmates in a Virginia jail used primitively made tools to create a hole in the wall of their cell and escape, only to be found hours later at an IHOP restaurant nearby, a sheriff said.

Authorities discovered the two men, ages 37 and 43, missing from their cell in the Newport News jail annex during a routine head count.

A preliminary investigation found the men exploited a weakness in the jail’s construction design and used tools made from a toothbrush and a metal object to access rebars between the walls — and then used the rebar to further their escape. After escaping their cell, they scaled a containment wall around the jail.

Authorities had asked for the public’s help to find the men, and they were taken into custody again early Tuesday at an IHOP in Hampton when other patrons called police.

*** When Dr. Andy Tagg was a toddler, he swallowed a Lego piece. Actually, two, stuck together.

"I thought, well, just put it in your mouth and try and get your teeth between the little pieces," he says. The next thing he knew, it went down the hatch.

As an emergency physician at Western Health, in Melbourne, Australia, Andy says he meets a lot of anxious parents whose children succumbed to this impulse. He wondered whether there was a way to spare parents from needless worry.... through science?

The six doctors devised an experiment, and published the results.

"Each of them swallowed a Lego head," says science journalist Sabrina Imbler, who wrote about the



experiment for The Defector. "They wanted to, basically, see how long it took to swallow and excrete a plastic toy."

Researchers then measured the time it took for the gulped Lego heads to be passed. The time interval was given a Found and Retrieved Time (FART) score.

Andy Tagg and his collaborators also wanted to raise awareness about a few types of objects that are, in fact, hazardous to kids if swallowed. An important one is "button batteries," the small, round, wafer-shaped batteries often found in electronic toys.

"Button batteries can actually burn through an esophagus in a couple of hours," says Imbler. "So they're very, very dangerous—very different from swallowing a coin or a Lego head."

*** The Colombian navy rescued a man from Dominica who says he survived 24 days adrift in the Caribbean on a sailboat by eating ketchup, garlic powder and seasoning cubes.

Elvis Francois, 47, had scrawled the word "help" in English on the boat's hull, which officials said was

key to his rescue.

Francois told Colombian authorities that his ordeal began in December when currents swept the sailboat out to sea while he was making repairs off the island of St. Martin in the Netherlands Antilles, where he lives.

"I called my friends, they tried to contact me, but I lost the signal. There was nothing else to do but sit and wait," Francois recalled in a video released by the navy.

He said subsisted on a bottle of ketchup, garlic powder and Maggi cubes.

Finally, a plane passed by and he signaled with a mirror. He said the navy told him that he was spotted when the plane passed again.

*** A Florida man was arrested Friday after he allegedly slapped a woman in the face with a slice of pizza during an argument, authorities said.

Deputies responded to a residence after receiving a 911 hangup call for a possible domestic disturbance.

Deputies spoke to the suspect, 39-year-old Ortelio Lazaro Alfonso, who told them he had an argument with the female victim.

The victim told deputies she had been slapped on the left side of her face with a slice of pizza during an argument.

The victim let deputies look inside the home, where they found pizza sauce on the walls and ceiling of the kitchen area, the affidavit said.

Deputies said pizza sauce was found on the victim's shirt, in her hair and around her ear.

Volleyball team receives national recognition

by Andrew Deal

The Shaler Area Boys Volleyball team has received some high honors in preseason rankings. They are ranked 9th in the country by USA Today and the American Volleyball Coaches Association. Within this, they are ranked #1 in the Northeast.

“I care more about the ranking at the end of the season more than the beginning. However, I think it’s great for the boys to be recognized for all their hard work on that stage,” Head Coach Mr. Paul Stadelman said.

The team enters the season with the same mindset that they have had in previous years.

“Obviously it’s great to hear that our hard work is being recognized and we were all very happy about it, but we’ve already put the rankings outside of our heads. We still have a lot to prove before we begin celebrating and we know that letting rankings get to our head will only distract us from reaching our goals,” senior Joey Gannon said.

The team will return most of their contributors from last year’s 3rd place team in the WPIAL. This includes All-State members from last year, juniors Dante Palumbo and Logan Peterson.

“Our goals remain the same. Our plan remains the same. And our focus remains the same,” Stadelman said.



Shaler Area boys volleyball team after winning the Meadville tournament.

The goal is to be the last team standing at the end of the season.

The Titans have lived up to the expectations so far by winning the Meadville tournament

The team met Meadville High School in a match-

up of undefeated teams in the tournament. The Titans came out on top, going undefeated in the entire tournament. The team then opened up regular season play with a 3-1 victory over Penn-Trafford and a 3-0 victory over Fox Chapel.

Wrestlers continue rebuilding the program

by Matt Purucker

It was an up and down season for the Shaler Area Varsity Wrestling team. While their dual meet record was not as good as they hoped, the team saw improvement in the program considering it had four wrestlers two years ago and was fielding a competitive team this year.

The most difficult challenge for the team was having to concede weight classes due to a lack of wrestlers and that stifled their ability to win dual meets. Out of the 16 wrestlers on the team, 11 were first-year varsity wrestlers, and they could only compete in 11 of the 13 weight classes. However, that did not prevent individual wrestlers from having remarkable years.

“Wrestling at the varsity level in the WPIAL is really difficult. It is the most competitive area in the United States. We struggled a little bit in dual meets, but we wrestled better in the tournaments,” Coach Drew D’agostino said.

Attending Shady Side Academy, Vito Barraveccio cooperated with Shaler Area and led the team with 25 wins as a freshman and qualified for the WPIAL Championships, along with fellow freshman Carter Tunstall, junior Jacob Cable, and junior Michael Ulery.

“I made it to day two of the WPIAL tournament. It was a thrilling experience competing against the best of the best. It’s really tough,” Ulery said. “You are surrounded by so many good opponents. It’s so educational to see what the really good people are doing and exciting just to be in the thrill of it all.”

Some seniors also posted solid seasons despite not qualifying for the WPIAL Championships. Ethan Gross improved from just three wins his sophomore year to nearly 20 his senior year, and Nevio Deleonibus likely would have qualified for WPIALs if not for injuring his elbow in the section qualifier.

The team finished its season at the WPIAL Championships on March 3-4. Ulery and Barraveccio each took 4th place, while Tunstall and Cable each took 5th place in their respective weight classes.

“Everyone really improved throughout the season, which I think is a better metric to measure success, rather than wins and losses alone,” Ulery said. “The coaches that I had were very instrumental in my success as a wrestler in improving, since this is my sixth year and I already have a lot of experience. There’s always new moves to learn and ways to get better in this sport.”

With the relative youth of the team, the future looks bright for Shaler Area wrestling as it continues to rebuild the program.

“We have good kids coming up from our middle school program. We had seven state qualifiers at that level, so we are looking forward to getting some of those kids into the fold. We should be pretty competitive next year with our senior leadership,” Coach D’agostino said.

Girls Basketball qualifies for playoffs for first time in 9 years

by Sam Himrod

For the first time since 2013-2014, the Shaler Area Girls Basketball team qualified for the WPIAL Playoffs. The Titans returned all 5 starters from last season, which undoubtedly contributed to their success on the court.

Last season the girls went 7-15, but this year they were able to cut their losses in half and more than double their wins, finishing 16-6 overall.

After dropping down from 6A, the Titans had a whole new section with New Castle, North Hills, Fox Chapel, Hampton, Mars, and Armstrong.

“We went into this season believing that we could contend for the section title and definitely getting a playoff spot was the ultimate expectation,” head coach Cornelious Nesbit said.

The playoff bid certainly didn’t come easily for the Titans as they started out slow in section play. The Titans were competitive in each game, but only managed a 2-4 record after playing each section opponent the first time.

Many people thought the girls wouldn’t make the playoffs after a slow start, but belief in the locker room stayed strong and they turned it around.

“The turning point of the season was when we hit the second half stretch of section play. We all knew we had to pick it up, and we did. We played with a sense of urgency for the rest of the year, which led us to the playoffs. It all started with my favorite game of the year, playing at Armstrong. Haley hit a huge shot for us that helped change our season around,” Junior Captain Hanna DeJidas said.

The shot she referred to was when Senior Captain Haley Kostorick drilled a step-back three at the buzzer to beat

the Riverhawks 33-31. The Titans went 5-1 in section the second time around.

In the final week of the season, the girls needed to win their final two games to realize their goal of making the playoffs. They responded by avenging their earlier loss to Hampton and defeating them 51-38 on the road.

This set up a regular season finale at home against Fox Chapel with the winner of the game making the playoffs and the loser going home.

This was one of Coach Nesbit’s favorite games.

“The playoff clinching game at home against Fox Chapel because of the composure the team showed in a win or go home scenario,” Coach Nesbit said.

Finishing 7-5 in section, the Titans were awarded the 9 seed in the WPIAL playoffs and had to play at Penn Trafford in a tough first round matchup.

The Titans battled hard and had the lead in the 4th quarter, but they were defeated on a last-second layup that gave Penn Trafford a one-point victory.

“I thought we had a really good season and the girls lived up to my expectations. We don’t set goals, we just focus on getting better as the season moves on,” Coach Nesbit said.

The Titans were highlighted by excellent guard play all season. Haley Kostorick was first-team all section, Sophomore Bayleigh Perez was second-team all section, and Hanna DeJidas earned honorable mention.

“The future is bright with the leadership and growth of the 3 returning starters of Bayleigh Perez, Hanna DeJidas, and Jorja Bernesser (Sophomore) and the return of Hilary Quinn (Junior) should set us up for another successful season,” Coach Nesbit said.

Titans successful season ends in with tough playoff loss

by Brady McGuire

After having one of the best seasons in recent memory, the Shaler Area Boys Basketball team finished second in a strong section and earned a WPIAL playoff berth.

The Titans came into this season with a strong junior class consisting of Joey Desabato, Keegan Smetanka, Kaden Orga, Sam Himrod, Brandon London, Joey Miller, TJ Belles, and Julian Vizzoca. All eight of these players played major roles in their freshman and sophomore seasons and had a lot of varsity experience. The best part about this team: their chemistry.

“We didn’t have a selfish locker room. We had guys who played for each other, which makes coaching them that much easier and that much more fun,” Head Coach Rob Niederberger said.

The season kicked off with the Titans going 8-2 in non-section play. The Titans would start section play with games against Plum, Woodland Hills, Penn Hills, Armstrong and Fox Chapel.

For the first round of section play the Titans were without point guard Joey Desabato due to an ankle injury. The Titans stayed strong and went 3-2 in the first half of section play.

The Titans were tied in second place with Fox Chapel to begin the second half of section play, but with all players healthy, the Titans got hot in the second half of their section games.

The Titans went on to go 3-1 in their section setting up a showdown for second place in the section against Fox Chapel.

A packed house set the stage for a game that



Keegan Smetanka takes a jump shot against Plum.

would have major playoff implications in seeding. The Titans ended up winning 60-50 to secure second place in the section behind Penn Hills.

“We played horrible the first time we played them at their place, so we knew we had to bring it that night. We all came together and contributed something to the win, so it was great. It was a great atmosphere to play in, and winning the game secured us second in our section,” Himrod said.

When the playoff seeds were announced, the Titans were given a 9-seed in the tournament. Their opponent would be the South Fayette Lions, who Shaler Area had lost to earlier in the season but beat in the

playoffs last year.

The first round playoff game for the Titans was a defensive matchup. At half, the score was only 16-14. In the third quarter, the Lions got hot and raced out to a 24-16 lead. Shaler struggled offensively in the third, but an and-one by TJ Belles gave the Titans momentum going into the fourth quarter.

A 10-0 run in the beginning of the fourth quarter put the Titans up 29-28 with a couple minutes remaining. They would go on to extend this lead to 33-30 with only 45 seconds left in the game. But after a South Fayette layup and a missed free throw by the Titans, South Fayette had a shot to win the game. They went down and got a last second layup that would win them the game and end the Titans’ season.

“I feel like we had a really good season. Unfortunately not the way we wanted to end. I know everyone in our locker room thought we should have made a deeper run, but we had many learning opportunities and improved from last year,” Orga said.

The Titans had received recognition for their individual and team play. Brandon London got 1st Team All Section while Keegan Smetanka and Kaden Orga got 2nd Team. The Titans also had the second best defense in class 5A only behind WPIAL Champions Penn Hills.

Even though the playoff loss this year was tough for the Titans, next year’s team has a lot of upside. The Titans returns all eight of its players that played major minutes for them this year for their senior year.

“I think the team next year with everyone coming back is going to be special, especially with all the hard work we have been putting in, we have a great chance of going all the way,” London said.

For more sports wrap-ups, visit our website
ShalerOracle.com

Blood donations continue to drop while demand continues to be high

by Aubrey Keane

Every year, 4.5 million Americans will need a blood transfusion, but less than 10 percent of Americans donate blood annually. The demand for blood donations is extremely high, and blood banks are taking huge hits post-COVID.

Every two seconds someone in the United States needs blood or platelets. These resources cannot be manufactured in a factory or a lab, which is why volunteer blood donors are needed.

Donating blood is relatively easy and only takes about an hour. Organizations bring their equipment to local places like churches and schools, coming to you for your convenience. So why is there a huge shortage?

“Unfortunately, the number of people donating blood has dropped drastically over the years. Right now, area blood donors are giving only about one third of the amount hospitals need,” Kristen Lane, Communications Manager at Vitalant said. “We never want to get to the point where a shortage of blood donors forces hospitals to postpone treatments and surgeries, but that is a very real possibility if the number of people donating blood continues to decline.”

Many people wait until a huge tragedy occurs to donate, even though blood is needed daily.

“Many people believe that most blood is needed after major disasters. However, daily personal emergencies and ongoing medical needs of

Hospital patients who need blood to survive must rely on the generosity of volunteer blood donors.

-- Kristen Lane

thousands of patients require a constant and ready blood supply. It’s the blood already on hospital shelves that saves lives,” according to Vitalant’s website.

“When there’s a mass shooting, it’s unknown in the moment how much blood’s going to be needed because it depends on the victims, where their injuries are, and how much blood is needed. During the synagogue shooting, we saw people come in for three or four days. Our donor rooms were packed, our mobile blood drives were extremely busy,” Jennifer Davis, Senior Director of Donor Recruitment at Vitalant, said. “The synagogue shooting shined a light on the need for blood donation, but (there are) blood needs that don’t make it on the news. That could be someone who was in a car accident, someone who needed surgery all of a sudden, it could be a mom who’s giving birth that is having a hemorrhage. You’re not going to hear about those, but at that moment, that family, they are in need of a blood donation.”

Blood is always needed in the hospital which is why blood centers need blood donors every day.

“Hospital patients who need blood to survive must rely on the generosity of volunteer blood donors. When you donate blood you can help trauma victims, newborn babies, people with sickle cell disease, cancer patients, and people with serious burns or major blood loss,” Lane said.

The high school hosted a blood drive on Friday, March 17 where 75 units were collected and distributed throughout the Pittsburgh area which could help more than 200 people.

Students and staff take Polar Plunge

by Josie Wilkins

Last year, Shaler Area took on the Polar Plunge in February to represent our Unified Bocce team at Acrisure Stadium to help raise money for the Special Olympics and unified programs all across Pennsylvania. Shaler Area had one of the biggest outcomes last year with a team of 95 students and teachers “freezin for a reason”.

Shaler Area’s life skills class first introduced the Polar Plunge to the high school in 2019. Since then the number of students who have joined Shaler Area’s team, the “Titanics”, has only increased.

A few of Shaler Area’s teachers have been loyal to jumping in the freezing pool are Brad Susa, Craig Wells, and even superintendent Sean Aiken has jumped before. The event took place on February 24 this year, and after kids jumped, they warmed up in the heated tents.

Mrs. Christin Pintar, who works with the life skills kids, shared her appreciation for the event.

“Seeing all the kids get excited for it, and then seeing all the kids the day of the event is such a great feeling,” she said.

When it came time to take on the jump this year, the Titanics had 91 students and teachers. Shaler Area raised a total of \$7,000 after raising more than \$5,000 last year. The top contributors were Ashleigh Hansel, Hannah Milliken, Lily Beck, Kaysia Chelli, Jacob Broderick, and Sarah Bartolowits.

Kevin Jansen, who participated in the jump and is also a part of Shaler’s Unified Bocce team said, “the water was really, really, really cold. But our Bocce team might be going to Hershey if we win in our next match.”

After plunging, students could enjoy the next few hours eating snow cones, getting a snack, drinking hot chocolate, dancing, and playing games.

“It was fun and I liked to see my friends. I was proud of all the kids that came out,” sophomore Dalton Suchma, a member of the Unified Bocce team, said.

Even after Penn State career, Della Valle’s football memories come back to his days at Shaler Area

by Andrew Deal

Jesse Della Valle, a SAHS graduate in 2010, started his football career playing under the lights on Friday nights at Titan Stadium for Shaler Area and continued through college playing under the lights in front of 107,000 fans at Beaver Stadium for Penn State. His journey, however, was not a typical path for a Division 1 football player.

“The theme of my career was an underdog. I was always the underdog,” Della Valle said.

Della Valle starred at Shaler Area High School as a two sport athlete. He played football and basketball throughout his high school career, but football always had the upper hand. During his senior year he had 1,600 all purpose yards, and was named to second team AAAA all-state, named to Pittsburgh Post Gazette’s Fabulous 22, and to the Pittsburgh Tribune Review Terrific 25.

“I was always super competitive at a young age. I loved the physicality that the sport brings,” Della Valle said.

While most athletes today seem to focus on just playing one sport, Della Valle said he wished he played even more sports like baseball or lacrosse.

Della Valle was a part of some great teams during his high school career. One highlight was a home playoff game against Mt. Lebanon that the Titans won 23-21 on a game-saving blocked field goal to end the game.

“I will always remember that game. Winning on a blocked field goal and the students rushing onto the field is something I will never forget,” he said.

The teams he played on at Shaler Area were strong because of the connection that the players on the team had. They were all close friends then, and they still are to this day.

“All my teammates at Shaler are my best friends. We had a great bond and it was great to be able to play for my community at Shaler,” Della Valle said.

Although Della Valle starred for the Titans and was recognized with many awards and accolades, he didn’t hold any scholarship offers for top tier Division 1 schools. His best offer was to play at Robert Morris University on a full ride scholarship. However, he mulled a decision to be a preferred walk-on to Penn State or Pitt. Ultimately, he chose Penn State because of the environment of the stadium and the area on Saturdays.

Then Defensive Coordinator, Tom Bradley convinced Della Valle that Penn State was the right choice for him with a simple question.

“If you’re an actor, do you want to be an actor at



Jesse Della Valle, SA class of 2010, returns a punt against Michigan. (247sports.com)

the Homestead Theater in Pittsburgh or on Broadway,” Bradley asked.

Della Valle’s role on the team as a freshman was minimal. He would carry bags for the players to and from places and held the job of the punt return distractor. His job was to quite literally scream at the punt returner to help them fight off any distraction in practice.

He continued to use that underdog mentality to gain a full scholarship on the team in his sophomore season. Former Head Coach Bill O’Brien took over as the coach for Penn State. According to Della Valle, he was a straight shooter and he didn’t care about how highly recruited a player was coming out of high school. He wanted players on the field that would help the team win. He decided that Della Valle was one of those players and he offered him a scholarship.

Penn State is known for its annual whiteout game. The whiteout is widely regarded as one of the best, if not the best, atmospheres in all of college football. It wasn’t as big as it is now, but the atmosphere has never changed.

“Saturday at a whiteout environment, you’re a rock star. I get chills talking about it. That environment is special,” Della Valle said.

Della Valle was at Penn State during the roughest patch of Penn State football history, on and off the field. The Jerry Sandusky scandal was ongoing and the team had just lost its entire coaching staff including legendary head coach Joe Paterno.

“We would go on the road and get these brutal comments screamed at you, which you kind of expect on the road,” he said.

However, the behavior of fans at Michigan and Nebraska caught him by surprise.

“I remember going to the University of Michigan and the University of Nebraska. It was kind of weird how generous and supportive their fan bases were. Walking in the tunnel, knowing that we’d been hit with a lot of sanctions, we heard a lot of ‘We support you’ and ‘Keep it up’ which you don’t expect to hear,” he said.

The NCAA placed heavy sanctions on Penn State at the end of the Sandusky scandal. They removed all program wins from 1998-2011 and imposed a \$60 million fine to-

wards the program. The team also lost 10 scholarships for the next four seasons, and could not compete in the postseason for that length of time.

Many players had the opportunity to transfer without penalty. Coaches from other schools were actively recruiting Penn State players. Transferring was not like it is today. You could not transfer without penalty (having to sit out a year) in 2012. Penn State players had an exception because of the sanctions placed on the team, but Della Valle decided to stay.

“My heart was just at Penn State. I wanted to continue what we started there, and keep building the program up,” he said.

While continuing his career at Penn State he had the opportunity to play with and against some current NFL stars. He specifically remembers one play against Ezekiel Elliott.

“It was 4th and 1. I filled the hole and got a nice hit on him to make the stop,” Della Valle said.

Della Valle was a starter on defense as a safety in his final three seasons. During this time he made one of the most impressive interceptions in recent history. While playing a home game vs Temple, Owls quarterback, P.J. Walker dropped back and threw a deep ball along the sideline. Della Valle leaped in front of the wide receiver and caught the ball, running into the cornerback and managing to get a hand in bounds before falling out of bounds.

“I didn’t even know at that moment a hand on the ground counted as a foot,” Della Valle said.

The play was initially called incomplete. The referee’s then reviewed the play, and it was overturned to confirm one of the most impressive interceptions a player could possibly make. The play made ESPN’s SportsCenter Top 10.

When his career at Penn State ended, it was the first time in quite a while that football was not part of his life.

“When you stop playing, you lose that competitive outlet. That was definitely hard for me for the first couple of years.”

It wasn’t long after his playing days were over that Della Valle achieved the ultimate individual athletic award as a Shaler Area graduate. In 2016, Della Valle was inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame.

“Being inducted into the Shaler Athletic Hall of Fame is something I’m very proud of. The plaque hangs in my home to this day. I grew up in Shaler. My parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, all went to Shaler. I grew up hearing about the previous greats from Shaler. I was really honored to join that group,” he said. “It’s great to have my athletic accomplishments recognized, but what I think I’m most proud of are the relationships and friendships that I made at Shaler.”

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