



DANBURY DIGEST

District News & Highlights Spring 2015



What's Inside:

- DHS grad heads to MIT
- Danbury students recognized as inventors
- Girls' basketball coach inducted into FCIAC Hall of Fame

Superintendent's Message

Dear Danbury Staff, Parents and Supporters,

As the end of the school year approaches, we can look back and say with certainty that this was a record year for accomplishments. The AIS magnet school was named Connecticut "Elementary School of the Year" and Shelter Rock School earned state recognition as a "success story." The Westside Middle School Academy with its Global Studies and STEM programs opened its doors with much anticipation and excitement to 400 district students. And, the first cohort of 100 students just enrolled in a new program at Danbury High School that will allow students to earn an Associate Degree together with their high school diploma.

Two students headed to this year's national Spelling Bee and 35 students headed to the Connecticut Invention Convention. Another student advanced in an "International Peace Poster" contest while another won a state award for a fire prevention poster. DHS engineering students took first place in a regional Rube Goldberg contest and the Robotics team headed to California to compete in the world championships.

As we approach the final days of the school year, we are reminded that every ending brings a new beginning. As the fifth-grade students leave elementary school behind, they have much to greet them as the district continues to incorporate a hands-on and technology-based learning in the three middle schools. As the eighth-grade students move up to the high school, they will be presented with a multitude of opportunities that will shape their future – from earning a college degree to becoming prepared for a job in the medical field to learning about robotics and engineering.

And our seniors, who will walk across the football field one last time, will leave us to begin a bright future. Many will go on to college or on to careers for which they have prepared at DHS. We are proud of what they have already accomplished and confident that they will continue their journey of success.

We wish everyone a happy and safe summer and look forward to seeing everyone in the fall.
Dr. Sal Pascarella

First cohort for Associate Degree at DHS set to start this fall

Following an overwhelming response to a new program being launched at Danbury High School in the 2015-16 school year, 100 incoming freshmen were selected in a lottery as the first cohort to participate in the Early College Opportunity (ECO). These students will work toward an Associate Degree simultaneously with their high school diploma. The degree program is offered by Naugatuck Valley Community College at the high school as part of the curriculum. Students begin accelerating their high school requirements so that by sophomore or junior year

they can incorporate college-level courses. They can expect to complete the A.S. in four, five or six years. Savings Bank of Danbury has agreed to provide funding for a Summer Experience for the students. This will include a program orientation, introductions to mentors, team-building activities, introduction to the corporate partner NewOak Capital LLC, an info session with NVCC and baseline academic testing. The district is also seeking additional corporate sponsorship to provide additional funding for the

program and internship opportunities. Principal of the DHS Freshman Academy Dan Donovan, who is orchestrating the program, said that nearly 150 students applied for the program and there is currently a waitlist for spots that become available. DHS and the Danbury Public Schools have long worked to offer a variety of opportunities so that students leave the high school prepared for the workforce or to continue their education. The school offers a healthcare program, a culinary arts (cont'd. on page 4)

DHS Honors student chooses MIT



DHS senior Sameena Shaffeeullah had her pick of schools to attend in the fall. But as she ahead toward her future as a computer engineering major at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she also looks back on the journey that got her there. A once shy and quiet girl, Sameena has blossomed into a confident young woman. Her father Rocky Shaffeeullah credits the Danbury Public Schools with encouraging his daughter to face challenges, ask for help and remain determined. Sameena said as a student at Pembroke Elementary

School she was encouraged to come out of her shell and accepted some leadership roles. She also joined the Summit program, which provides expanded educational opportunities for gifted and talented students in grades four and five and at the middle schools. “I’ve always been interested in engineering,” Sameena said, and because the Summit program is very math and science focused, it helped further cultivate that interest. Then at Broadview Middle School. she joined

“Mathletes,” an after-school program that competes regionally in math problem solving. “These problems force you to use different elements of mathematics, meaning you would use logic and problem solving with algebra and geometry. I like putting those many aspects together, and I enjoyed the challenge,” she said. At DHS Sameena again sought out challenges – from Honors and Advanced Placement courses to an *(contd. on page 5)*

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Danbury students recognized at Connecticut Invention Convention

Fourteen students in the Danbury Public Schools received recognition for their inventions at the 32nd annual Connecticut Invention Convention held at the University of Connecticut on May 2. Some 38 Danbury students headed to the CIC after being selected from the more than 400 inventions at a districtwide Invention Convention held March 18-19 at Western Connecticut State University. More than 130 Connecticut

schools and 10,000 young inventors participate every year. This year 950 inventor-students from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York entered their inventions at the final event in Storrs. CIC gave out 180 awards; 50 specials awards were presented by sponsoring companies. Two Danbury students received Special Awards. The Invention Convention is part of the science

curriculum. For three weeks students engage in coming up with ideas and putting them into motion. One of the crucial learning curves for students is to figure out how to solve problems with their inventions and tweak them to perfection. The invention convention fosters interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics learning for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. **For a list of Danbury recognized investors see p. 6.**

New principal appointed to Danbury elementary school

Leonard “Lenny” Cerlich, Jr. will take over July 1 as principal of Stadley Rough Elementary School, where he is currently the interim principal. Cerlich joined the district as an elementary school teacher in 1993, later moving to Middle School Reading teaching, and then to a variety of administrative leadership roles in the district. “Lenny has worked very hard to get to know the staff, students and community at Stadley Rough School, and his passion for students and learning is evident in everything that he does there,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “We have great confidence that Lenny is the right person to lead Stadley Rough in the days, months and years to come.” Cerlich earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Western Connecticut State University and a sixth-year degree in educational leadership from Southern Connecticut State University. He is also a graduate of the Urban School Leaders Fellowship program.

Danbury elementary students get hands dirty helping with community garden

“Are you ready to start planting?” asked Dr. Beth Morrison of Western Connecticut State University.

“Yeah!!” was the response from 30 second-grade students at the Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies who gathered outside their school on May 11 in plentiful sunshine to work as tiny farmers.

The students started seedlings to be transferred to the university’s new perma-garden. When Morrison gave the signal, the students charged to get their biodegradable pots and their seeds and got right to work.

The garden is being overseen, in part, by Roots & Shoots, a youth-led community action and learning program of the Jane Goodall Institute. AIS has a R&S garden, in which they have already planted radishes, squashes, lettuces and herbs.

The university has an R&S chapter on campus and on Monday, three WCSU students, including Michelle Bisette, president-elect of the WCSU chapter, were there to help the students plant their seeds.

The AIS students planted seeds for basil, cilantro and nasturtium. Morrison said one of the goals of the perma-garden is to reach out to others in the community and said it’s an excellent opportunity for students to learn the importance of farming and perma-gardens. Until they are ready to be transferred, the students can monitor the progress of their seedlings as they soak up sun from the windows of their media center. In June, the students are planning to bring their sprouted seeds to the WCSU Midtown campus and transfer them to the perma-garden.



AIS students pack dirt into biodegradable planters.



Seeds to grow basil, cilantro and nasturtium went into the dirt.

DHS girls’ basketball coach to be inducted into FCIAC Hall of Fame

Winning is nice, but it isn’t everything to Danbury High School girls’ basketball coach Jackie DiNardo. When her girls give it their all and play their best, that’s what really counts for DiNardo.

After coaching the team for 28 seasons, DiNardo has recorded more than 460 career-wins and recently led her team to its first undefeated season. She has successfully led the team to FCIAC tournament 23 of 28 seasons and the state tournament 27 of 28 seasons. The Hatters won the FCIAC Tournament in 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14, becoming one of three teams to win a triple championship.

On June 16, DiNardo will be inducted into the Fairfield County Interscholastic Athletic Conference Hall of Fame at the FCIAC annual recognition banquet in Norwalk. DiNardo is the administrator of the district’s REACH and Endeavor programs, an alternative program for

for at-risk students.

“I look at this as not many coaches coach for 25-plus years, and not in the same school,” she said. “My pride is DHS. I’ve been asked to go other places, but I couldn’t leave the blue and orange. It’s a passion.”

Her coaching success is attributable to her high expectations, both on and off the court. The girls’ team boasts the highest GPA of all the district teams with a 3.8. DiNardo coaches 30 players: 10 each on the varsity, junior varsity and freshman teams.

No stranger herself to winning, DiNardo played at the University of Texas and earned recognition as an All-American player. She also played for the U.S. on the Pan Am Team for Pat Summitt where the team won three gold medals and one silver. In 2005, DiNardo was inducted into the Texas Hall of Fame and into the Connecticut Basketball Hall of Fame in 2012.

After the past few record seasons,

DiNardo said this year was one of transition and rebuilding after losing four starters to graduation and injuries. But with DiNardo’s guidance, the team rallied this year with a respectable 10-10 season and qualified for the state tournament.

“Girls that never had that major role – that was my team this year,” DiNardo said. That’s when good coaching is really important. This year’s team wasn’t used to starting and they dug deep to keep up.

“When I’m coaching, I’m coaching loud, making my presence known,” DiNardo said. “I push them hard to be the best they can be. I hate to lose, but if we lose to a better team, that’s ok. My expectations are high. They have to play their best and be good role models. This year’s team members are going to be tomorrow’s CEOs, mayors, business leaders because I taught them not to quit – that’s coaching.”

Middle school student awarded for energy research

Westside Middle School Academy eighth-grade student Christopher Hwang was recognized on May 19 by the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering for his outstanding research "UV-C Lighting as a Supplemental Method of Preservation in Refrigerators to Reduce Energy Consumption." His project won the CT Science and Engineering Fair's Middle School Urban School Challenge. Chris was recognized with a citation from Gov. Dannel Malloy and Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty. The school received a plaque and \$500.

In March, the WSMSA took first place in three categories at the fair in March held at Quinnipiac University: The Urban School Challenge (middle school); Physical Sciences (seventh grade); and Environmental Science (middle school). The annual science and engineering fair is open to seventh- through twelfth-grade students. An important objective of the program is to attract students to careers in science and engineering while developing skills essential to critical thinking. Students are encouraged to pursue independent work using proper research methods.

College Acceptances

Soon-to-be DHS graduates are headed to great places. Here are some of the schools that our graduates will be attending in the fall:

Boston University

Brigham Young University

Carnegie Melon University

George Washington University

Penn State

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Rochester Institute of Technology

DHS freshmen set for Associate Degree program (con'td from p. 1)



program, an ROTC program, in addition to Robotics, AP courses and Honors classes. On June 5, the district's superintendent, Dr. Sal Pascarella, Donovan and other administrators will attend "CT-ECO Program Statewide Convening" at Gateway Community College in New Haven to participate in workshops and learn more about successful ECO models in other states. Danbury High School is the second high school in Connecticut to offer ECO. This program is part of a growing nationwide trend modeled after the first

program in Brooklyn, N.Y., at IBM's acclaimed P-TECH (Pathways in Technology Early College High School). This school's first cohort is now nearing graduation. The first program in Connecticut, Norwalk Early College Academy (NECA) began in fall 2014 as a partnership between IBM, Norwalk Public Schools and Norwalk Community College. Danbury is one of three three partnerships in the state slated to begin this fall; schools in Windham and New London are also beginning programs. Danbury is partnered with

NewOak Capital LLC, serving as the lead industry partner, Danbury Public Schools and NVCC. Pitney Bowes has agreed to provide mentors for the program. The district will hire a part-time coordinator to oversee the program, which has been fully supported by the district's Board of Education. Additional funding for the program is provided by the state Board of Regents, which operates the state universities and community colleges system.

Danbury Board of Education
63 Beaver Brook Road
Danbury, CT 06810

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DHS senior heads to MIT (from p. 2)

afterschool robotics program. Some of her AP courses include computer science, physics, statistics, English language and psychology. Despite a heavy workload, Sameena has maintained a consistent 4.3 GPA. She is also taking Honors Robotics at the high school and as a result is also a member of the afterschool program that creates VEX robots for competition.

"There aren't many schools in Connecticut with a VEX robotics team," Sameena said. She added that her teachers and advisers are a big part of the success of these project. "Mr. Savoyski (robotics teacher and

adviser) stays at school until 11 if he has to. He is always willing to stay." Sameena has also enjoyed being part of the school's chapter of the Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program. Last year, her DHS CPEP team took "Best in State" after designing an application for a contest sponsored by Verizon. The medical app is currently under development. This year, the CPEP team took first place in a regional Rube Goldberg machine contest. "Danbury does an amazing job," said Sameena's father. "Because of the opportunities offered to her, she is good with

challenge and not afraid to fail."

Sameena said the biggest asset of DHS is its size. "It's so big and there are so many programs. There is something for everyone: math, robotics, poetry, debate teams," she said. "Other areas don't offer these opportunities because they don't have the people to join all those clubs. In Danbury there are teachers who put the time in and sometimes they aren't getting paid to stay after for the clubs, but they are very dedicated."

2015 Connecticut Invention Convention Recognized Inventors/Award Winners

G. Edward Bell	Westside Middle School Academy
Jake DeFonce	Westside Middle
Santiago Delgado	Westside Middle - also received Early College Experience UCONN award
Lorenzo DeLuca	Westside Middle – also received Lincoln Financial Foundation Presidential award
Sabrina Figueiredo	Shelter Rock School
Aaliyah Frank	Great Plain School
Jennifer Grant	Westside Middle
Carmen Jacobs	Pembroke Elementary School
Lasyapriya Josyula	Westside Middle
Ben Laham	Westside Middle
Christopher Reda	Westside Middle
Toriana Roe	Stadley Rough School
Jason Schmidt	Pembroke
Khushi Sukhodia	Westside Middle