The News-Gazette

Thursday, November 19, 2026

HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL

Powered by Danville Area Community College

SERVICE PROJECT



CHAMPAIGN CENTRAL: Members of the National Honor Society took to University Avenue's sidewalks last Wednesday, creating colorful chalk art to honor military veterans during the school day. The 'Veterans Day Chalk Walk' is an annual tradition for Central's National Honor Society students.

The volunteer opportunity allows students to express gratitude to local service members and passersby in the Champaign community. Alongside the sidewalk art, the student organization hosted a weeklong poppy vending fundraiser. All proceeds from the campaign support Stop Soldier Suicide, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to providing mental-healthcare and suicide-prevention services to service members, veterans and their loved ones.

— Sophie Nixon-Gasyna



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YEAR 11 OF HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL: POWERED BY DACC

Meet the crew

This year's group includes a record 46 students from 44 schools (*visit news-gazette.com for our photo gallery*). We'll spotlight each correspondent in Top of the Morning on Wednesdays.

Academy: Nicolle Scifres
ALAH: Leighton Poulos
Arcola: Aymara Leal
Armstrong-Potomac: Myah Bartlow
Bement: Makenna Kindred
BHRA: Addie Kruse
Blue Ridge: Cheyanne Smith
Centennial: Kayla Boyd
Cerro Gordo: Jessa Cross
Champaign Central: Sophie Nixon-Gasyna
Chrisman: Morgan Simpson
Cissna Park: Ava Henrichs
Danville: Ashanti Conaway
DeLand-Weldon: Michael Rogers
Fisher: Emily Coulter
Georgetown-Ridge Farm: Liz Walls
Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley: Kasen DeFries
Heritage: Micah Sommer
Hoopeston Area: Hallie Allen
Iroquois West: Jordyn Meents
Judah Christian: Kelsi Drollinger, Xavier Russell
LeRoy: Adrienne Underhill, Jacey Hageman
Mahomet-Seymour: Abby Eden
Maroa-Forsyth: Riley Hackleman
Milford: Kami Muehling
Monticello: Rory Cooper
Mount Zion: Macie Veale
Oakland: Olivia VonLanken
Oakwood: Sidney Dunavan
Paxton-Buckley-Loda: Alex Jones
Rantoul: Jayla Allen
St. Joseph-Ogden: Alivia Learned
St. Thomas More: Quinn Miller
Salt Fork: Anna McCollum
Schlarman: Reagan Troglia
Shiloh: Ali Cash
Sullivan: Claire Kursell
Tuscola: Emma Spillman
Uni High: Krishna Jaswal
Unity: Grace Wherley
Urbana: Sophia Sheyko-Frailey
Villa Grove: Maya Garner
Watseka: Vanysah Hickman
Westville: Myla Mackiewicz



Provided

School tours

Carrying on a social-media tradition, each student will take over The News-Gazette's Snapchat account to go behind the scenes at their school (**above**: Bement homecoming).



Sullivan



At the annual Veterans Day program, organized by student council, the band and singers performed touching pieces, speakers gave insightful speeches, and student artwork/written works were recognized. Junior **Allyssa Prahl** received Best-In-Show and first place for her piece titled 'The Angel of Bataan,' winning $25. In the writing category, junior **River Polley** received first place for his work 'More Than One Man, a Legacy of Service,' honoring Moultrie County veteran **Glenn Bolin**.

— CLAIRE KURSELL





SCHLARMAN TREE TIME

School groups such as the Future Problem Solvers, student council and National Honor Society decorated trees for the Festival of Trees in Danville, delivering them last Wednesday for a festival that started Saturday. Pictured: **Noah Fowler**, **Je'Lanna Tall**, **Addison Forsyth**, **Irene Rangel**, **Reagan Troglia** and **ShaLayla Briggs**.

— Reagan Troglia

Leroy

Students recently took the stage to perform 'The Outsiders,' bringing the well-known story to life for the community. Many of the cast and crew loved performing this play because it was one of the books students read in eighth grade. Through acting, costumes and behind-the-scenes work, the cast and crew put together a performance for family members, friends and community members to enjoy.

— JACEY HAGEMAN, ADRIENNE UNDERHILL





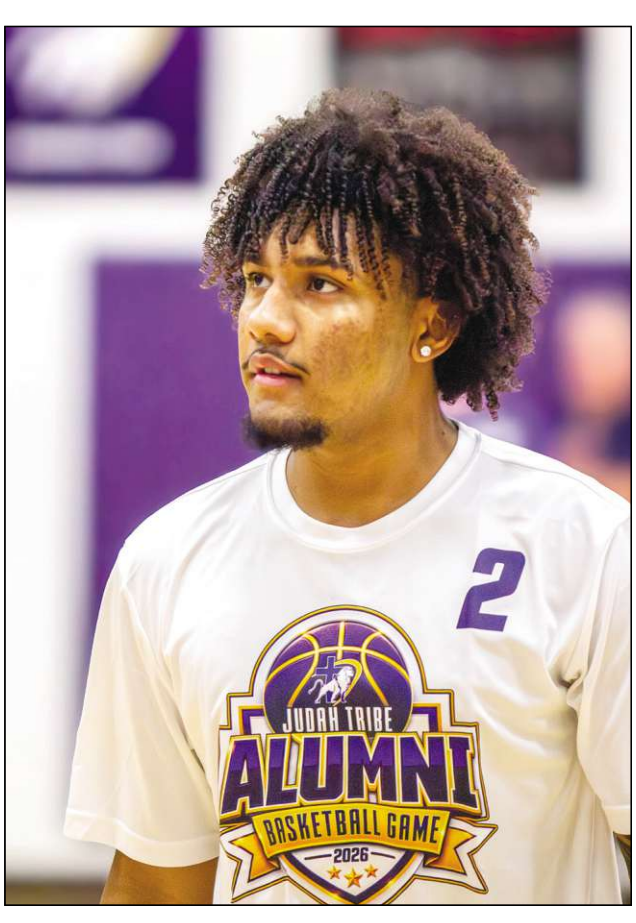
Urbana

Urbana Habitat for Humanity went on a weeklong trip to Mississippi, where they helped build houses by putting up drywall and insulation. The group also worked with an organization called Spring, an after-school program in the Tutwiler area, where they helped kids with homework and played games. Finally, the group learned more about the Civil Rights movement, visiting the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Sumner, Miss., and the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tenn. Through these experiences, students returned feeling gratitude and joy for the opportunity. Pictured: Senior **Vainqueur 'Winner' Nana** hanging drywall.



— SOPHIA SHEYKO FRAILEY





Judah Christian

On Nov. 7, Judah graduates from 2009 to 2025 came home for the annual alumni basketball game, which was was full of memories, fellowship and fun. This night was a great way to reconnect with old friends as well as introduce this year's basketball players. The alumni players finished off the night by praying for the high school, junior high and elementary boys' basketball teams, as well as some of the players from the elementary and junior high girls' teams.

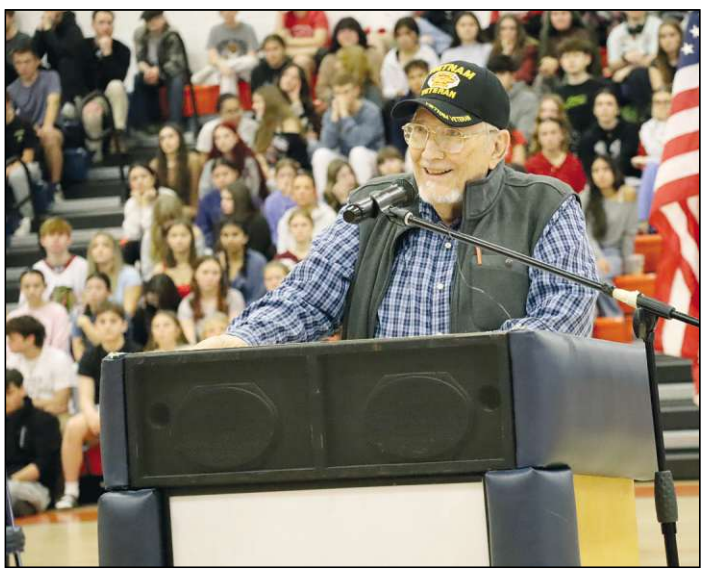
— KELSI DROLLINGER, XAVIER RUSSELL

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Mahomet-Seymour

The 28th annual Academic Awards ceremony recognized students' work from the previous year and awarded them for their academic success. This year, 394 students received an academic letter and were recognized. Additionally, student council hosted a Veterans Day assembly. Choirs and students from each school in the district participated. **Vincent Hock** was guest speaker. He served in the U.S. Army for 30 years and fought in the Vietnam War. 'You never know what life has in store for you. Always remember to treat the people you meet with respect and honor, because someday, they may save your life or help your family or help you take a better path in your life,' Hock said.

— ABBY EDEN







HERITAGE
LAUGHS AND LAYUPS

On Nov. 7, teachers and staff took on The Harlem Wizards in a basketball event to raise money for the Parent-Teacher Committee (PTC) and build school spirit. The Wizards, known for their flashy tricks, comedic play style and community building exercises, partner with local schools, parent-teacher organizations and nonprofits to host community events. Students described the game as 'fun, comedic and very interactive.'

— Micah Sommer



ALAH

On Veterans Day, the school hosted a program inviting those who served to enjoy a ceremony in their honor. Student **Javen Bates** was a flag-holder for the program and did an incredible job.

— LEIGHTON POULOS





Fisher

FFA put on a movie night. Before the movie started, officer **Alaina McCabe** talked about events happening within ag and FFA. Everyone participated in making a fun TikTok video to promote FFA and a candy salad for everyone to enjoy. Once it was time to start the movie, everyone got their blankets and got cozy to watch the classic 'E.T.' By the end of the night, everyone helped keep the school clean and picked up the space used to host.

— EMILY COULTER



Blue Ridge

Congratulations to the following students for being inducted into the Blue Ridge National Honor Society: **Jasper Schlieper**, **Thomas Vanderspool**, **Sam Matakis**, **Ava Franzen** and **Linnea Warsaw**!

— CHEYANNE SMITH



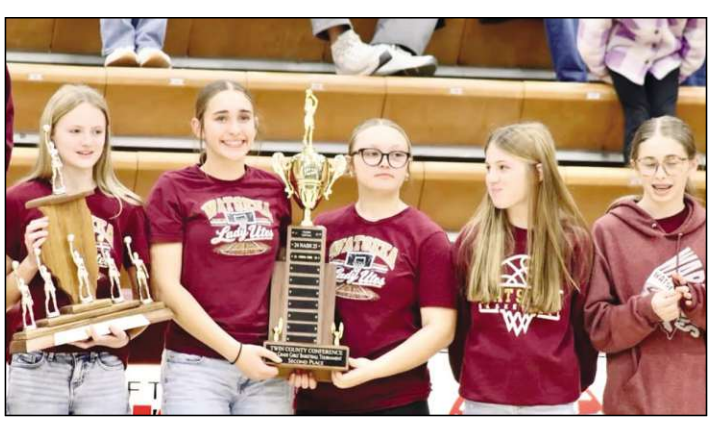




Watseka

The Academic Foundation hosted its yearly pride night — a way to raise money to put toward local schools. Anyone could bid on over 20 baskets at the silent auction and watch a preview of the girls' basketball team, boys' basketball team and cheerleaders. Students and parents were also able to pay a dollar per duck to participate in 'Chuck a Duck,' run by chair **Jeff Petersen**, where the winner collects a small cash prize. Honor Roll students were also recognized throughout the event by junior high Principal **Stephen Rigsby** and Superintendent **Kyle Nevills**.

— VANYSAH HICKMAN





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Arcola

Students served lunch, made beautiful artwork, and the community came together to celebrate the men and women who served the country, during a schoolwide Veterans Day assembly.

— AYMARA LEAL









St. Joseph-Ogden

Anatomy classes took a field trip to the Cadaver Lab on the University of Illinois campus. Students learned more about the human body with hands-on experiences and presentations. This unique opportunity was one they'll never forget.

— ALIVIA LEARNED



Rantoul

On Nov. 6, students performed at the fall play, 'Clue,' based off of the classic murder-mystery game.

— JAYLA ALLEN







SALT FORK
HEARTS OF SERVICE

On Veterans Day, students were busy serving current and retired veterans in the community. National Honor Society members set up, took down and served food at the high school's annual Veterans Day breakfast. The fifth-grade and high school chorus performed patriotic songs for the attendees and presented a poem displaying their gratitude. Throughout the day, FFA was also hard at work being 'Leaf Bandits' for veterans. Members raked leaves, picked up debris, and placed flags in the yards of these local heroes. Pictured: National Honor Society members; **Ryker Williams** raking a veteran's yard; **Nehemiah Reffett** with a local veteran who was grateful to have help with his yard; and the chorus performing for veterans and their families.

— Anna McCollum











Uni High

StudProd brought laughter, drama and mystery to the North Attic. StudProd, short for Student Productions, is a show written, directed, organized and performed entirely by students. This year's theme was the 'manosphere' with the show titled 'Studosphere.' The two-hour-long show sold out completely on Friday night.

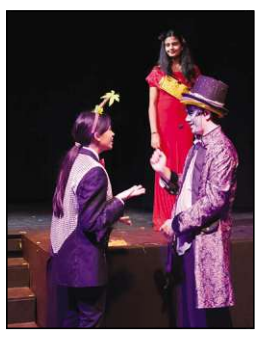
This year's production featured six mini-shows: 'Miss Universe,' 'The Conspiracy,' 'Fine Dining,' 'Three Blind Mice,' 'Uni the Musical' and 'Miniature Tanks.' Each mini-show featured a different plot and a variety of fun characters. From a mystery about a strange text message to a political satire, this year's StudProd was filled with creative student scriptwriting and clever humor.

The artistic directors and show organizers were **Harmony Lehman** and **Miranda Isaacs**. This year's mini-show directors were **Lucas Tosi**, **Finn Niesen-Davis**, Lehman, **Jemina Feng**, Miranda Isaacs and **Sophie La Nave**. The mini-shows were written by Isaacs, Tosi, **Andy Pate**, Lehman and Lily **Rowell**.

Photos by **Ruijing Tang**.

— KRISHNA JASWAL









St. Thomas More



Juniors and seniors attended the LOGOS retreat. Students turned their phones in on Thursday and did not get them back until Saturday. Senior leaders gave testimonies as students learned more about each other — and themselves — in what was an eye-opening experience enjoyed by all.

— QUINN MILLER



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Chrisman

The theme at this year's Junior Carnival was 'Western,' with amazing decorations. The Class of 2027 solicited donations for baskets, raised money and supported local businesses. The volleyball tournament involved all the high school classes and their parents. Each grade had its own team — and each grade's parents had their team, too — and there was a teacher team, as well. The seniors won the tournament. On Saturday, there was a dinner — provided by parents of the Class of 2028 as a prom fundraiser for the junior class — a variety show and a dance. The Junior Carnival court: freshmen **Jusdon Gore** and **Adreauna**, sophomores **Bentley Alexander** and **Brynna Drenning**, juniors **Grant Wells** and **Addi Miller**, and seniors **Chance Chaney** and **Gabby Nolen**. Last year's winners **Remi Laughhead** and **Ben Tyler** crowned Miller and Wells.

— MORGAN SIMPSON



MONTICELLO SHOWTIME

Last week, the MHS thespians put on their production of 'Somebody Else's Play' by **Micheal Soetaert**. The 30-person cast included a strange array of characters, like an owl-groomer, a singing cowboy, a Brooklyn plumber and even a gorilla. The owl groomer, played by junior **Payton Spainhour**, said: 'I think this show had a rough start, but I really like how it came together. I think once people actually started getting serious about lines and their acting, that it really started to get good.' Senior **Cal McClearin** played one of the two leads and said, 'I hope that people (enjoyed) the show a lot and appreciate all the work that (we) put in over the last month. While bringing the whole thing together was definitely fun, it was also quite stressful at times, and I hope that we put on something that (made) the stress worth it.' Photos by **Noah Hettinger**.

— Rory Cooper









Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley



Last Wednesday, the school hosted its annual Veterans Day ceremony to honor the men and women who have served and sacrificed to protect our country. The ceremony included presentations recognizing each branch of the United States armed forces, a brief history of Veterans Day, and musical performances honoring those who have served. Three high school students — **Jason Christensen**, **Kate McCall** and **Reed Tompkins** — also spoke during the ceremony, helping recognize the importance of honoring our nation's veterans.

Thursday's annual National Honor Society induction ceremony welcomed new members. NHS is a nationwide organization that recognizes students for their achievements in scholarship, leadership, service and character. This year's senior inductees included **Bryce Adkins**, **Kolbie Eichelberger**, **Ava Fehr**, **Avery Hyatt**, Tompkins and **Kelsey Whitehouse**. Junior inductees were **Christian Brown**, **Bailey Bunting**, **Adlee Darnell**, **Makaila Evans** and **Jillian Rosendahl**. The ceremony celebrated the students' accomplishments and their commitment to upholding the values of the organization.

— KASEN DEFRIES





Unity

Students packed Thanksgiving food-drive boxes as part of an annual project that is one of many community service traditions of the school's student council. Members placed food-drive donation boxes in businesses throughout the community to raise funds for the food drive. Proceeds assisted members in purchasing supplies for an upcoming Thanksgiving meal for over 100 families in the school district.

— GRACE WHERLEY

Cerro Gordo

On Oct. 28, FCCLA members **Aubrianna Long**, **Miley Dye**, **Alexis**, **Ellis**, **Makenna Liming**, **Khloie Waterhouse**, **Arabella Gordon**, **Lane Bolson** and **Sabrina Sterling** attended the all-day Fall Leadership Conference at Eastern Illinois University. Students heard from **Eddie Slowikoski**, who led them in team-building, taking on leadership roles, and taking control of their lives to be the best version of themselves. Members had the opportunity to bond with one another while also meeting and connecting with students from other schools who shared similar interests and goals. These students enjoyed their time at the conference and walked away with new perspectives, stronger leadership skills, and lasting memories.

— JESSA CROSS







Paxton-Buckley-Loda

Junior high and high school students joined community members at last week's Veterans Day assembly. The PBL band performed and traveled to the elementary school and Accolade Healthcare's locations in Paxton. **Timothy Hess**, a former Marine, was the main director of the Veterans Day ceremony. The Paxton and Loda American Legions presented the colors of the flags. During the ceremony, Hess presented the flag of each branch of the military and the honor table, which was set for one in remembrance of those who did not make it home.

— ALEX JONES



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Armstrong

On Nov. 9, the school hosted its monthly assembly to celebrate the students who went above and beyond in October. The STEM Student of the Month was awarded to **Grady Medlen**, and the freshman class won a pizza party for having the highest attendance rate. Students who reached 200 minutes or more on IXL received recognition and a snack. From the IXL group, two students from each grade were randomly selected to get either a Trojans T-shirt or hoodie. At the Veterans Day assembly last Wednesday, **Dylan Mollet**'s Cold War class held flags for each branch of the military while **Gage Foster** read a speech to the student body. The ATHS choir sang the national anthem, followed by the band playing 'This Is My Country.' To finish the assembly, boys' basketball coach **Caleb Gossett** told his story while also teaching good lessons to the students and staff. Finally, for 'Thankful Thursday,' student council left staff and faculty candy on their desks with notes attached to them.

— MYAH BARTLOW







DANVILLE CHARACTER COUNTS





At the annual National Honor Society induction night, new members were welcomed into the organization. The ceremony recognized students for their dedication of scholarship, leadership, service and character. NHS President **Samantha Wagner** helped lead the evening, while Principal **Jacob Bretz** shared remarks with student inductees. Athletic director **Megan Mattingly** served as the speaker, describing the importance of leadership, dedication and giving back. Photos courtesy **Ashanti Conaway**, **Kali Bacys** and **Ava Foster**.

— Ashanti Conaway





Georgetown-Ridge Farm

A busy week filled with recognition, appreciation and school pride:

➜ New members were welcomed at the National Honor Society induction ceremony, where students who have demonstrated scholarship, leadership, service and character were celebrated. (Pictured: **Paitan Haase**, **Madeline Nevels**, **Jordyn Brooks**, **Hailey Buyno**, **Annika Fraser-Soule**, **Addisen Ellis**, **Dane Hemker**, **Anthony Lee**, **Alayna Nale**, **Cheyenne Orr** and **Love Wright**)

➜ At a Veterans Day assembly, several former G-RF students returned to share experiences and speak about their military service. Guest speaker **David Hughes** (pictured) discussed the challenges many veterans face after returning home, including living with PTSD and adjusting to life after serving. He shared how service dogs can provide support, comfort and assistance to veterans as they navigate everyday life. It was a meaningful reminder to appreciate those who have served and recognize the importance of supporting them long after their service is over. Pictured: (from left) **James Cody**, **Brad Russell**, **Kevin Thomas** and **Austin Riza**.

— LIZ WALLS

Oakland

A Veterans Day program was planned by the senior civics class and history teacher **Kevin Fleckenstein**. Veterans in attendance were served a breakfast made by FCCLA members. The band and chorus then performed and veterans watched a video made by students.

— OLIVIA VONLANKEN

Bement

At the annual Veterans Day assembly, local veterans were thanked by students and their community. Two students received a plaque for winning best Veterans Day essay: **Livia Mackey** (junior) and **Emmeline Flach** (eighth grade). Additionally, three high school students were recognized for their enlistment into the U.S. military (from left): **Livia Mackey** (National Guard), **Anthony Carver** (National Guard) and **Trevor Cogdill** (Marine Corps).

— MAKENNA KINDRED



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Milford

On Nov. 14-15, the Milford theater department performed 'Radium Girls' for the community — a true story about girls in the 1920s working at a paint factory being tricked about their paint being good for their skin. The company was lied to, and the girls became ill due to the poisonous paint. The performance was phenomenal — a job well done by all the students who participated. Pictured (back to front, from left) **Molly Coffey**, **Nolan Garcia**, **Cyrus Laffoon**, **Xavi Cintora**, **Garrett Koester**, **Braydon Kissack**, **Taylor Handy**, **Noah Brittenham**, **Lennon Carter**, **Channing Harris**, **Jack Mann**, **Clara Runner**, **Eliana Salinas**, **Hannah Borgers**, **Ida Smigiel**, **Juan Santoyo**, **Samuel Mann**, **Courtney Schriner**, **Morgan Lambert**, **Linde Lazet**, **Charity Garcia**, **Aleigha Rudisill**, **Kara Harwood**, **Anna Mann** and **Lilly Carter**.

— KAMI MUEHLING



CENTENNIAL TAKING THE STAGE

The Centennial Drama Chargers are putting in so much work with their musical 'HadesTown,' which will take place Friday through Sunday at the school's auditorium. Leading roles will be played by **Nico Percoco**, **Lexie Mongwa**, **Rubye Landry**, **Victor Elli** and **Alexa Lake**.

— Kayla Boyd









Iroquois West



On Nov. 10, the high school hosted a Veterans Day assembly. People from the Onarga and Gilman Legion Auxiliary, as well as local veterans, were introduced, and students watched a proper folding of the flag ceremony. **Andew Talbert**, **Paige Miller**, **Bryce Rogers**, **Jay Sharma** and **Kenzie Keller** are students who participated in Girls State and Boys State last summer. They spoke about their experiences and encouraged students to attend.

— JORDYN MEENTS

Mt. Zion

The a cappella mixed ensemble group sang the national anthem for the Mt. Zion Chamber of Commerce's annual Veterans Day breakfast on Nov. 11. The ensemble sings for many events around the community and at school sporting events, including the annual Community Prayer Breakfast and Christmas luncheon. They also sing in concerts and shows.

— MACIE VEALE







DeLand-Weldon

Students, staff and community members celebrated Veterans Day at the school's annual assembly.

— MICHAEL ROGERS



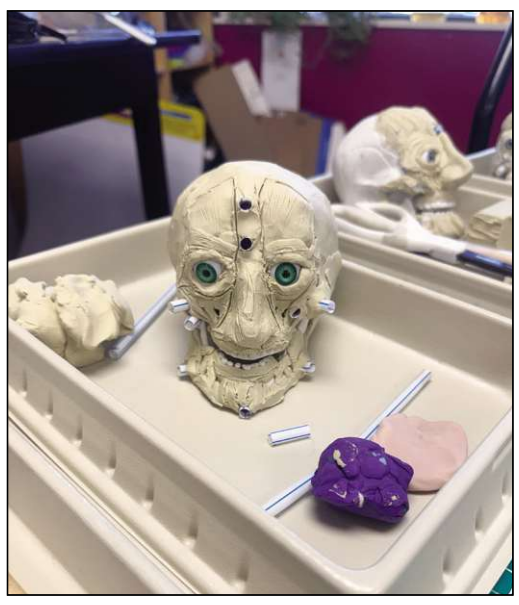
Hoopeston Area

Senior **Madox Klaber** shared her heartfelt essay on what Veterans Day means to her during the school's annual Veterans Day program. Madox reflected on how she and her family celebrate and honor veterans, sharing a special tribute to her grandfather, **Jim Klaber**, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps. She spoke about how much it means to her grandfather to be able to sit among fellow veterans, watch the ceremony and celebrate those who have served alongside him.

— HALLIE ALLEN

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Academy High

Students in a forensics course taught by **Natasha Capell** are working on a facial-reconstruction project. They are rebuilding a face by using Halloween skull decorations, facial muscle reference charts and lots of clay.

— NICOLLE SCIFRES





TUSCOLA
SNOW MUCH TALENT

The drama department put on the fall production of 'Frozen Jr.' It was a show for all ages — and sold out all four nights! A lot of hard work and dedication was put in by director **Johanna Steffens**, music director **Hannah Church** and students who put in many hours the last few months to make the show shine bright like snow. Boasting the largest cast and crew in a while, the show will definitely be one to remember.

— Emma Spillman





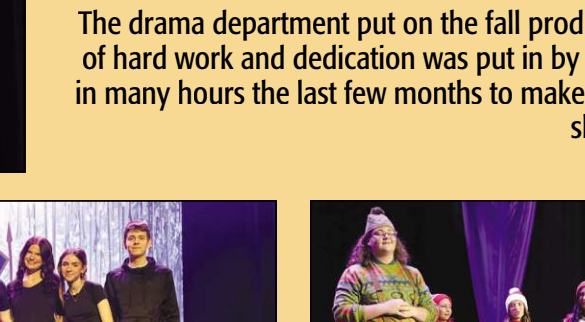


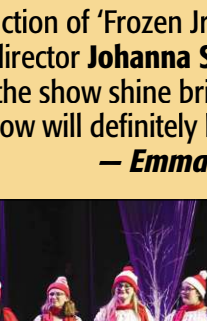


Oakwood

Drama Club had a successful production of John Cariani's 'Almost, Maine.' In the past four years, the club has grown from eight members to 30 students on cast and crew. A lot of effort and adaptability from every student involved went into this production on a shorter schedule than ever. This is the first time the club has tried a full show for a fall semester since **Tyler Petersen** became director.

— SIDNEY DUNAVAN









Cissna Park

Scenes from last Wednesday's Veterans Day assembly: Superintendent **Tim Simpson** stands as the U.S. Army official song plays. He served in the Army before coming to the school. High school science teacher **Mikaela Ebert** stands during the U.S. Air Force official song. She served 14 years in the Air Force. **Amelia Hodel** filled in to run the elementary music program; and **Tara Krumwiede** performs taps during the assembly.

— AVA HENRICHS











BHRA

This year, instead of taking time off for the holiday, BHRA invited several veterans to be interviewed at a Veterans Day assembly. Students gave their full undivided attention to **Gerry Arnholt** (Korean War Army veteran), **Earl Brooks** (Vietnam Marine veteran), **Frank Hoskins** (Desert Storm-era Illinois Army National Guard veteran), **Zach Hagley** (post-9/11 Marine) and **Chase Whorrall** (Army) as they each answered questions and told stories about their time serving. **Jonah Mockbee** performed taps, then students and staff had a moment of silence. Thanks to **Jennifer Guminski** and **Stephanie Tidwell** for organizing the assembly.

— ADDIE KRUSE