

HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL

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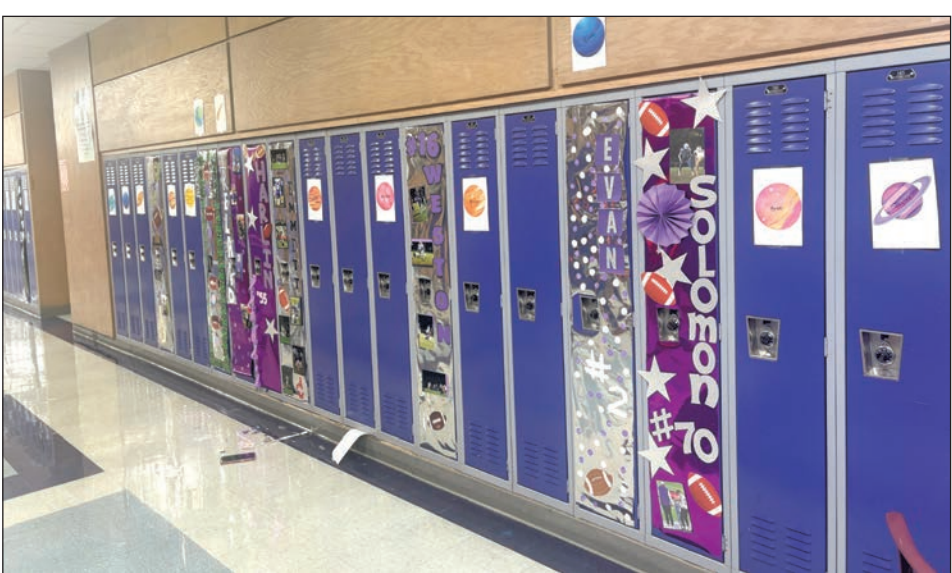


TRADING PLACES

At Oakwood, parents and students celebrate ‘Swap Day’

An exciting week leading into homecoming saw cheerleaders and student council decorate lockers (bottom left) for football players and other athletes to build support and motivation for Friday’s game. ‘Swap Day’ with parents (above) was a fun way to showcase both old and new traditions at Oakwood, letting parents walk in students’ shoes and see the generational changes at the high school. **Amy Brant** — leader of National Honor Society and a highly important staff member — took the Class of 2026, along with NHS members, to renovate the Marty McFarland concessions stand (bottom right). Saturday’s powderpuff football game showed just how competitive Oakwood’s student-athletes can be. To top it off, the Ironman volleyball game brought energy and laughter.

— Sophia Aquino



Inside: Homecoming and the games people play



Fisher



Judah Christian



Monticello



Urbana

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Meet the crew

 This year's group includes 43 students from 42 schools (visit news-gazette.com for our photo gallery). We spotlight each correspondent in Top of the Morning on Wednesdays.

- Academy High:** Evie Price
ALAH: London Dugan
Arcola: Addee Mulligan
Armstrong: Aubrey Self
Bement: Kiana Hunter
BHRA: Lahna Benjamin
Blue Ridge: Karly Warner
Centennial: Kennedy Borden
Cerro Gordo: Alexa Rodgers
Champaign Central: Adelaide Kota
Chrisman: Allison Baldwin
Cissna Park: Sophia Duis
Danville: Rylee Jack
DeLand-Weldon: Nathan Smith
Fisher: Kesiah Musick
Georgetown-Ridge Farm: Tiffany Taylor
Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley: Addison Farmer
Heritage: Rylan White
Hoopeston Area: Willamina Clayton
Iroquois West: Traeh Kissack
Judah Christian: Jack Dalbey
LeRoy: Molly Scheuer
Mahomet-Seymour: Abigail Eden
Maroa-Forsyth: Aubrey Stewart
Milford: Kami Muehling
Monticello: Mady Melton
Oakland: Sophie VonLanken
Oakwood: Sophia Aquino
Paxton-Buckley-Loda: Brayden Kief
Rantoul: Tamia Bell
St. Joseph-Ogden: Katie Ericksen
St. Thomas More: Duncan Oliveira
Salt Fork: Anna McCollum
Schlarman: Isabella Bogen
Shiloh: Ali Cash
Sullivan: Lillian Moxley, Danica Bell
Tuscola: Claire Leonard
Uni High: Simrah Khan
Unity: Claire Meharry
Urbana: Ruby Pittenger
Villa Grove: Eva Piercy
Westville: Olivia Troglia



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. The schedule:

- Friday** — LeRoy
Monday — St. Joseph-Ogden
Oct. 3 — Milford
Oct. 4 — Centennial
Oct. 6 — Schlarman
Oct. 8 — Armstrong
Oct. 9 — BHRA



Catching up with ...

Since High School Confidential's start in 2016, more than 340 students have served as News-Gazette correspondents. We catch up with our famous formers in each week's special section. Today: **Fiona Ely**

Fiona, our talented correspondent from Heritage in 2018-19, said it's "wonderful to hear that this segment is making it to Year 10. What a feat!" After graduating from Heritage in 2019, Fiona attended Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. "I initially majored in biological sciences but eventually switched into nursing," she said. "It was a wildly challenging time for everyone, but as a young adult navigating being away from home and entering health care in a post-COVID world, I was able to learn so much about myself and to learn how to tackle these anxieties head on." Fiona accepted a position at St. Louis Children's Hospital in the pediatric ICU, "where I continue to work," she said. "It has been such a privilege to learn and grow in this environment. I did not fully realize in high school what it was that I wanted to do with my life, but I can say that this is exactly where I am meant to be right now. I am eager to see what the next 10 years can bring!"



Provided



Arcola
Homecoming Week's theme was 'Board Games.' Seniors and sophomores took the win in powderpuff while juniors won the overall week.
— ADDEE MULLIGAN



IROQUOIS WEST SHOWING SUPPORT



The Iroquois West entrepreneurship class, led by teacher **Carrie Miller**, hosted a benefit bingo night last Wednesday, where all the funds went to senior **Kairi Rossi**'s medical care from an automobile accident in August. The entrepreneurs had help from other school organizations due to the event's large turnout, including teacher **Jennifer Nitsche**'s FCCLA chapter and **Nora Mann**'s Art Club. Local restaurants and businesses also donated refreshments, including Lucy's Kitchen and Monica's Pizza. The entrepreneurs hosted over 150 bingo players and racked up over \$2,000 to be donated to Kairi's care.
— Traeh Kissack



Back row, left to right, Clark Foss, Colton Piraino and Jack Hentz; and, front row, Aerabella Gordon, Alissa Johnson and Jessa Cross.

Danville
Last week, the high school's Channel 1 news team was recording an educational ALICE training video. In addition, Channel 1 has been working with the Danville Police Department's school resource officers **Brandon Williams** and **Danielle Lewallen**. With their help, Channel 1 re-enacted scenarios to demonstrate the safest ways to escape and de-escalate a school shooting event. The purpose of ALICE — Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate — is to inform and educate students and faculty on what to do in the case of such an emergency. The video will be played during daily announcements. It is also in preparation for ALICE training that will be conducted in the coming weeks, where DHS resource officers will simulate a school shooter being in the building to practice lockdown and securing classrooms.
— RYLEE JACK



Back row, left to right, Cooper Benson, Quintin Nevius and Hayden Rice; and, front row, Tatum McRae, Caydence Brown and Samantha Sterling.

Cerro Gordo
Congratulations to this year's homecoming court, as chosen by vote: freshmen attendants **Aerabella Gordon** and **Clark Foss**; sophomore attendants **Alissa Johnson** and **Colton Piraino**; junior attendants **Jack Hentz** and **Jessa Cross**; and senior attendants **Caydence Brown**, **Cooper Benson**, **Hayden Rice**, **Samantha Sterling**, **Tatum McRae** and **Quintin Nevius**.
— ALEXA RODGERS

YEAR 10 OF HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL: POWERED BY DACC



Sullivan

Student council went to Camp New Hope to help clean it up for Saturday's Fall Festival (right). FFA also hosted its section horse judging at the Bushue quarterhorse farm (above). Family, Career and Community Leaders of America was honored with an FFA Heroes award. Finally, students are preparing for Homecoming Week and the most anticipated football game of the year against ALAH. Classes this week worked on their homecoming floats.

— LILY MOXLEY AND DANICA BELL



CHAMPAIGN CENTRAL DRESSING THE PART

Last Wednesday, Central's National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) Club sold green ribbon pins in honor of National Suicide Prevention Month. The club, aligned with the Champaign chapter of the society, aims to spread awareness and minimize stigmatization around mental health. The green ribbon symbolizes support for people struggling with mental illness. Right: Members of NAMI spend their lunch period selling ribbons to students to promote mental health (left to right): **Ava Ucherek** and **Joanne Bross**. Above: Staff and teachers showed off their matching Central Maroons jerseys — and their school spirit — as part of 'FriYAY' (Fridays are embellished with fun activities and events). The jerseys sported the year Central was founded.

— Adelaide Kota



Oakland

It's Homecoming Week. One activity saw two boys from each class doing a girl's makeup in 'The Makeup War' from behind without the girl looking. Pictured, left to right: freshmen **Alivia Kral** and **Riley Bonowitz**; sophomores **Rainah Robinson** and **Kristin Lang**; juniors **Madison Warner** and **Arianna Buhrmester**; and seniors **Gracie Baah** and **Sophie VonLanken**.

— SOPHIE VONLANKEN



Bement

As part of a continued collaboration with Cerro Gordo, the high school band is preparing for Thursday's bonfire. To be in line with Cerro Gordo's theme, the band has been practicing three Disney classics.

— KIANA HUNTER



Gibson City-Melvin-Sibley

Earlier this month, GCMHS celebrated one of the most fun-filled and exciting weeks of the year: homecoming. The student council team, led by adviser **Tom Stone**, coordinated the activities, including powderpuff football, powderpuff volleyball, float-building and class hall decorating. Results for powderpuff football: 1) juniors, 2) seniors, 3) sophomores and 4) freshmen. Results for powderpuff volleyball: 1) juniors, 2) freshmen, 3) seniors and 4) sophomores. The Falcons beat LeRoy 21-2 in the football game. Finally, the homecoming dance on Saturday night capped the week, **Jacob Chase** and **Reagan Miller** crowned king and queen.

— ADDISON FARMER

ALAH

The cheer team welcomed three new members to its roster in preparation for basketball season: **Samantha Fowler**, **Makayla Hays** and **Emily Aikman**. The cheerleaders are also hosting a yard-deco rating contest, and on Oct. 2, one community member will win a 2025-26 season sports pass for showing their Knight pride. This week, in preparation for homecoming, students have a variety of activities planned to celebrate the football game. Classes are all decorating their hallways and building floats to support the 480 Knights against ACGB on Oct. 3. Photos courtesy **Jamie McDonald**.

— LONDON DUGAN



Georgetown-Ridge Farm

The Thundernuffs performed their new show 'Rock On,' which included songs like 'Paint It Black' by the Rolling Stones and 'Smoke On The Water' by Deep Purple. The band also played 'APT' by Rosé and Bruno Mars, a song they played while performing alongside the Marching Illini during their trip to a Band Day at Memorial Stadium.

— TIFFANY TAYLOR



Urbana

Friday's Homecoming Pep Assembly pepped up the student section for that night's football game against Central. The cheer team wowwed the crowd with its performance, while student council brought entertainment with their tug-of-war game.

— RUBY PITTENGER



At news-gazette.com

GALLERY: Photo Editor Robin Scholz was on hand for Urbana's homecoming parade.



St. Joseph-Ogden

Two students were awarded Athlete of the Week in The News-Gazette: **Kodey McKinney** for football and **Zach Harper** for soccer. **Lori Hovel**, beloved office staff member, took it into her hands to place their photos on the cafeteria bulletin board.



— KATIE ERICKSEN



LeRoy

The junior high softball team ended its season at Champion Fields, finishing third at the IESA state tournament. **Addi Cooley** had two inside-the-park home runs in a 5-1 loss to Central A&M, finishing the season 22-4.

— MOLLY SCHEUER



TUSCOLA GROUP EFFORTS

On Sept. 16, the varsity Scholastic Bowl team played against the Tuscola Rotary Club at Joe's Pizza (bottom right). The team included **Dane Manning**, **Reeder Manning**, **Braxton Moody**, **Kalen Shinn** and **Claire Leonard**. The day before, **Brad Hurtig** (above) visited the high school to share his message of always finding a way. Hurtig, who lost both hands in a work accident, invited six volunteers on stage to pick up a water bottle without using their hands. The challenge demonstrated what he had to go through in high school and showed that you can always find a way to accomplish your goals. Bottom left: **Ryker Gough** and **Kaedan Chenoweth** participating in the challenge.

— Claire Leonard



Maroa-Forsyth

Football celebrated Pink Night for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The game included festivities such as a cancer walk where survivors were recognized on the field, and by players and cheerleaders wearing pink on their uniforms. The Trojans won on the special night to improve to 4-0. Senior **Dathan Lidy** was also recognized at the game for his acceptance into the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra, where he was named to the position of principal horn. Photos courtesy Lidy.

— AUBREY STEWART

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Academy High

The rock band has been a part of the school almost as long as Academy High has existed. Led by **Mike Ingram**, the band lets students of any ability perform their favorite songs. It's always incredibly popular, but this semester, it's the largest it's been, with 12 students across all grade levels participating (almost a third of the entire school). Practice has begun, and this year's set list includes songs by Nirvana and My Chemical Romance. Pictured, left to right: **Breanna Patten** and **Maxwell Milling**.

— EVIE PRICE



Mahomet-Seymour

The theme for last week's homecoming was "Under the Sea." The parade took place last Wednesday, with the junior float winning first place in the competition between classes. The juniors also won the hallway competition. Pictured: juniors **Kaitlyn Young**, **Alleigha Nelson**, **Andrew Kassem** (in the bulldog costume) and **Silas Campion**.

— ABBY EDEN



UNITY HELPING HANDS

The volleyball team, coached by **Alexis Thomas**, **Lauren Hamilton** and new head coach **Leah Luchinski**, participated in a service project through Lowe's under the organization Sleep in Heavenly Peace. The team woke up bright and early to build 80 beds, alongside other volunteers, for kids in the Champaign-Urbana area. Teammates got experience with different tools to perform a variety of tasks such as sanding, cutting and staining wood. Afterward, they enjoyed pizza, courtesy of Lowe's, and team-bonding time. Pictured: (left to right) **Lauren Stratton**, **Maya Rawdin** and **Luchinski**.

— CLAIRE MEHARRY



Monticello

Students showcased their school spirit by taking part in daily homecoming activities coordinated by student council. During homeroom on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, boys from all grade levels competed in thrilling games of volleyball on the football field. The sophomore boys won their semifinal match Monday, which allowed them to advance to and win their championship match Wednesday. Additionally, four games of powderpuff were hosted on Wednesday night. The participating girls were organized into teams based on grade level. The junior girls were declared champions after wins against the freshman and senior teams. Pictured: **Addison Finet**, **Sadie Walsh**, **Grace Johnson**, **Olivia Gerdes** and **Ashley Stiverson**. Photos courtesy **Shelby Smith** and **Gerdes**.

— MADY MELTON



Fisher

For Homecoming Week, there was a parade with floats made by each class (won by the sophomores), class games (won by the juniors), a community pep rally and a district pep rally (won by the seniors). The Bunnies won the homecoming football game 53-0. During the parade and community pep rally, **Kelly Friedlein** was honored as grand marshal. In May, she is retiring after a proud 25 years. When asked what the best piece of advice she'd like to share is, she said, "Many of my students over the years have told me that they don't read, but I say, 'You just haven't found the right book yet.' Also during the community pep rally, homecoming king (**Silas Dabney**) and queen (**Lily Detweiler**) were announced.

— KESIAH MUSICK



YEAR 10 OF HIGH SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL: POWERED BY DACC



BHRA

Students now have the opportunity to join a new STEM club. The idea was sparked by sophomore **Roman Baptiste**, who wanted to share his passion for science with classmates. Baptiste realized the excitement of science and mathematics isn't always fully experienced in a traditional classroom setting, so he proposed creating a STEM club where students could explore these subjects in a more fun and engaging way. With the guidance of **Kaylee Leigh**, the school's biology and anatomy teacher, the STEM club is off to a strong start with a great amount of student interest and involvement. Pictured: **Lia Garcia, Katherine Frattick, Madix Davis, Dj Hayes, Baptiste, Briana Harper and Ava Garcia.**

— LAHNA BENJAMIN



CENTENNIAL TEAMWORK AT ITS FINEST

The girls' swim and dive team, led by coaches **Courtney Louret** and **Mike Lehmann**, hosted its annual Charger Invite on Saturday as 13 teams from central and northern Illinois competed, bringing a packed fan section. The first-year girls' flag football team also held its first home game and took a victory.

— Kennedy Borden



Milford

Senior Night kicked off the football season on Sept. 3 against St. Thomas More, Milford/Cissna Park rallying 28-8 for its first win in five years against the Sabres. **Mario Martinez** and **Dierks Neukomm** had two touchdowns, and **Lucas Summers** tied for the second-most tackles in MCP history with 22. The six seniors — **Ben King, Coy Lucht, Neukomm, Jream Renteria, Tyler Rutledge** and **Jaden Souders** — have done a phenomenal job representing the program.

— KAMI MUEHLING



Schlarman

Last week, student council decorated the high school for Hispanic Heritage Month! Students also planned things like lotteria — a Hispanic bingo game — and partnered with the lunch ladies on having a Hispanic appreciation meal. Pictured: student council board members **Addison Forsyth** and **Reagan Troglia** and their decorations.

— IZZY BOGEN



Hoopeston Area

The Marching Cornjerkers kicked off the season with their first competition on Sept. 13, competing in Class 1A at the Sage City marching band competition in Monticello. They performed their show of 20s boy band songs called "Frosted Tips Greatest Hits" and took home the second-place trophy. The band, including flags, has 44 students and is under the direction of **Sophie Small** (director), **Libby Hart** (guard director) and drum majors **Olive Clayton** (junior) and **Kaedyn Goodrum** (senior). Pictured: seniors (back row from left) **Willamina Clayton, Reagan Fink, Alex Catete, Melina Vogel, Shay Layden, Silas Yates** and **Kaedyn Goodrum**; and (front row) **Abbie Davis, Lillie Elliot** and **Caia Brotherton**.

— WILLAMINA CLAYTON

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Judah Christian

High schoolers celebrated Homecoming Spirit Week leading up to the homecoming dance with a mix of competition, rivalry and dedication. The week concluded with an afternoon filled with relay races and games. Students competed all week for the sought-after Spirit Stick, which was ultimately awarded to the senior class after a fierce competition with the juniors. The school also took the time to celebrate junior high English teacher **Elizabeth Dietz** as she prepares to welcome her baby girl, due Oct. 6. Although she will be on maternity leave for this school year, she remains heavily involved by bringing meals for the teachers, editing documents and mentoring her colleagues. The school expressed its gratitude with an outpouring of gifts, including diapers, baby books and clothes. Most important, she was surrounded by prayer and support from her Judah family.

— JACK DALBEY



DeLand-Weldon

In Advanced Foods taught by **Tiffany Taylor**, students had to find all the hazards in this kitchen to learn about kitchen safety then make up a story for what happened.

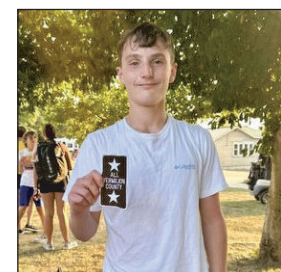
— NATHAN SMITH



Armstrong

The cross-country team had its county meet at Hubbard Trail. Pictured: **Samuel Lanter**, and **Addyson Tholl** and **Kayla Wernick**. The volleyball team went to Danville Area Community College to get pictures for Media Day ahead of its county volleyball tournament. FFA had their back-to-school BBQ with 9 square set up and a bingo game going on.

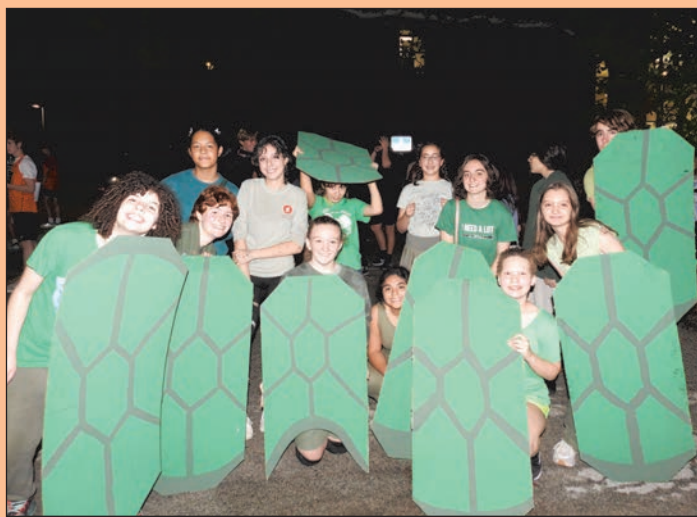
— AUBREY SELF



UNI HIGH DOING THEIR PART

Last Saturday, the Spring Initiative and Habitat for Humanity club Sprabitat held its annual costume dodgeball tournament. The event raised money for the Fuller Center for Housing affiliate in Clarksdale, Miss., where Uni Sprabitat members travel for a week every year to build homes. Student costumes included characters from "High School Musical," "The Simpsons" and "Wreck-It Ralph," as well as turtle and mustard-themed garb. "People get really pumped up, wear costumes, have a lot of team spirit, so it's great," says Sprabitat sponsor **Ben Leff**. "Events like this are part of the effort to give (the Fuller Center for Housing) financial support."

— Simrah Khan



Paxton-Buckley-Loda

On Sept. 13, the PBL Panther Regiment competed at the Monticello marching band competition. Their 2025 show is titled "Sirens" featuring "Aquarium" by Camille Saint-Saëns, "The Wellerman," and "I Just Died in Your Arms Tonight" by the Cutting Crew. Drum majors **Brayden Kief** and **Savannah Jones** led the band onto the field and were joined by color guard leaders **Alexandria Sadlek** and **Hailey Birchall** among others. Competing in Class 1A, the Panthers placed third and also earned Best Percussion.

Drumline section leader **Kenneth Williams**, a senior who plays the tenor drums, said: "Initially, I thought it was really awesome winning the award in our very first competition of the season. It serves as a huge morale boost for our section for the coming season. Overall takeaways from this competition are



positive and surreal. Our band wasn't used to winning anything at one point. Winning something on our very first attempt is like night and day compared to the past. I'm very proud of this award and my section and hope to keep winning

going forward."

Band directors **Joshua** and **Dayna Breen** were proud of the group's efforts. Said Breen: "I was pleasantly surprised, it's always wonderful to walk away with some hardware and to have that available for the

public to see, as well as the kids to see that their hard work ended up in a piece that will be with us until the end of time."

Next performance: Sept. 27 at Eastern Illinois University.

— BRAYDEN KIEF

Cissna Park

To kick off the annual Yearbook Week, **Josie Neukomm** and **Sophia Duis** passed out donuts on Monday. Activities occurred throughout the week, including dress-up days like "Dress Like a Teacher," "Comfy Day" and "Jersey Day." To end Yearbook Week, the yearbook staff hosted games for all the students to participate in. Pictured: **Ava Henrichs** and **Mady Marcott** on "Jersey Day" and **Lauryn Hamrick** dressed as her favorite teacher, **Tom Zielke**.

— SOPHIA DUIS



Westville

Ahead of Eighth Grade Night on Sept. 5, eighth graders arrived at the high school to practice marching and performing with the band. That evening, they ate pizza and snacks, then marched with the high school band. The eighth grade chorus members also performed the national anthem with the high school chorus.

— OLIVIA TROGLI



Salt Fork

At last Wednesday's annual Games Day – a well-loved tradition during Homecoming Week – students from all four grades participated in a variety of games sporting their class color and chanting along with the cheerleaders. From dodgeball, musical chairs, scooter races and more, there were many opportunities for the students to score points for their class. Although it was back and forth, the junior class (pictured) took the win. Also pictured: seniors coaching the boys' volleyball game; **Henry Rivers** (left) and **Devin Ehler** (right) during the scooter race; and **Kate Wochner** (left) and **Natalie Lamb** (right) preparing for the three-legged race.



— ANNA MCCOLLUM



RANTOUL PICTURE PERFECT

Paige Kesler, Rielee Allison, Kyrra Evans and Tobi Horn are members of the Mural Club. They've been working on a beautiful mural in the east wing of the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Department. The murals improve hallways with bright colors and attractive designs, creating a welcoming environment for students and teachers.

— Tamia Bell



Heritage

FFA hosted its annual Kickoff Cookout to begin the year. Students enjoyed hot dogs, chips, cookies and Twinkies provided by FFA. After lunch, students participated in outdoor games such as cornhole, spikeball, tug of war and egg toss, won by senior **Faith Latham** and junior **Brooklyn Powell** (pictured). Pictured (left to right): Heritage FFA officers (back) **Kaden White, Joshua Stierwalt, Rylan White** and **Dylan Kirschner**; and (front) **Reaghan Stierwalt** and **Peyton Curry-Varner**.

— RYLAN WHITE



Blue Ridge

Due to a new track being built, the football field is not quite ready for Friday Night Lights. In an effort to get more crowd exposure before their first competition, the Blue Ridge Marching Knights attended the football game at Unity Christian on Sept. 5. They supported their team by watching from the sidelines, and performed a great halftime show. Pictured (courtesy **Payton Hesier**): **Gavin Ozee, Kaylyn Eliason, Kelly Weiss, R.J. Coffey, Kin-dle Johnson, Sophia Mitchell, Gideon Craft, Brooklyn Hardesty** and **Crystal Chambers**.

— KARLY WARNER



St. Thomas More

The Family Calling Ceremony kicked off the new school year. Every freshman or transfer student is assigned to one of four families that they will be in until they graduate. House activities took place following the ceremony, including: get-to-know-you games; Mindfulness Mondays, where each house does a reflection; and a Eucharistic procession around the school to each house.

— DUNCAN OLIVEIRA



Villa Grove

Spanish Club held its first meeting of the year at lunch, serving Mexican horchata and hibiscus juice made by sponsor **Elizabeth Nieto** – grandmother. The officers – treasurer **Cameron McGaughey**, President **Jackson Gilles**, secretary **Kendrick Roy** and Vice President **Ella Schweighart** – discussed committees to get students involved and plans for the school year. The committees included piñata making, story time, the Costa Rica trip and fundraising. Next week, they will be selling pulseras (Spanish for bracelets) for the Pulsera Project. The pulseras were made by people from Spanish-speaking countries, specifically Nicaragua and Guatemala. Proceeds will be given back to those who made the pulseras.

— EVA PIERCY

