



Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

First Female Black Astronaut is Out of This World



Quinn Biolsi and Dakarai Lacey display the rockets they created to celebrate astronaut Mae Jemison.

When kindergartners in Melissa Maliniak's class hear that the first Black, female astronaut, Mae Jemison, was told it would impossible for her to go into space, the children are shocked and upset. When they hear that she did it anyway, they celebrate.

"I think it's called bravery," says five-year-old Finn Lyons. "When someone says you can't do something, but you do it anyway."

During Black History Month, Somers students have been learning about important contributions of Black Americans. The life of Mae Jemison was one of the kindergartners' favorite stories. After listening to *Mae Among the Stars* by Roda Ahmed, the children were surprised to learn that in 1992 Jemison was the first Black, female astronaut. They were inspired by Mae's persistence to go after her dream despite others telling her that it was impossible.

"No one who looked like her went into space before," says a student.

"She didn't listen to the people who told her that she couldn't do it because she was different than other astronauts," adds another kindergartner.

"The children are always upset when they hear that people were wrongly treated because they look different," says Maliniak. "We talk year-round in kindergarten about our similarities and differences and how our differences should be respected. I tie Black History Month in directly with that."

After discussing Mae Jemison's story, Maliniak's class had a conversation about what they can do and say to support others and themselves. They talked about how they can do hard things.

Other famous Black Americans the kindergartners studied include musician Duke Ellington and inventors Madame C.J. Walker (hair products) and Lonnie Johnson, the creator of the first Super Soaker water gun.

Seeing Red in the Middle School



Middle school seventh graders Fiona Sledzik and Allison Lusthaus join mascot Peanut in wearing red to Stomp Out Bullying.

Walking the halls of Somers Middle School on a recent Wednesday and Thursday, you wouldn't be blamed for 'seeing red'. There was a lot of red.

"We are wearing red today to show people that bullying isn't ok," says seventh-grader Fiona Sledzik. "We are starting conversations about speaking up and standing up for each other when people say things that aren't kind."

Fiona is a member of the No Place for Hate Club, the club that organized Stomp Out Bullying Day.

"It can be hard to stand up to someone you don't know and tell them to stop saying mean things" says club member Allison Lusthaus. "You can also make a change when you have conversations among your friends and set an example."

School psychologist Dr. Samantha Morrison and counselor Stephanie Kurchack are the club advisors. In preparation for Stomp Out Bullying Day, they asked the kids to take a minute and think about a situation where they have seen or heard about someone being bullied.

"Being mistreated or bullied never feels good," says Dr. Morrison, "And we can each take a role and become an upstander when we see bullying occur."

Every school in the Somers Central School District has been recognized as a No Place for Hate school, a designation from the Anti-Defamation League. The No Place for Hate initiative is part of the district's commitment to a more equitable and inclusive climate.

Members of the middle school No Place for Hate Club attended a virtual field trip run by the Human Rights Institute, and learned what it means to be an upstander, a bystander, and how to stop micro-aggressions.

“A microaggression is a subtle act of hostility toward a certain group,” says Allison. “For example, saying something like ‘you don’t look Jewish’ or ‘you’re really good at basketball for a white guy’.

During the workshop, the students learned to identify microaggressions, reflected on their own experiences with them, and discussed ways to counteract microaggressions on an individual and societal level. Their goal is to bring those lessons back to Somers Middle School and help foster a kinder, more inclusive school community.

Seshadri Named CocaCola Regional Finalist



Nitin Seshadri Chosen for Next Level in Prestigious Scholarship Program

Somers High School senior Nitin Seshadri has been named a Regional Finalist for the Coca-Cola Scholars Program, moving to final round, which would include a \$20,000 college scholarship.

“Nitin was recently named our Salutatorian for the Class of 2021,” says Mark Bayer, principal of Somers High School. “He is an excellent student who has not only excelled in all of his studies, but also puts his talents to use in a variety of volunteer opportunities. Nitin has received numerous awards for his outstanding achievement and dedication to his studies and is very well-deserving of this honor.”

“Somers High School and the community have been a great source of inspiration for me,” says Seshadri. “Interacting with people at SHS and being a part of the Tusker Times school newspaper, the cross-country and track teams, and National and Math Honor Societies has helped me better understand how to

serve my community.”

A volunteer at Somers Library, the Somers Library Foundation, and the Indian Council for Child Welfare, Seshadri was among 1,609 Semifinalists who were selected from over 99,000 initial applicants. He is now one of just 250 students who have moved to the final selection phase, regional interviews. After these interviews are conducted in late February, 150 of the Regional Finalists will be designated as Coca-Cola Scholars in March and will each receive a \$20,000 scholarship and participate in the Coca-Cola Scholars Leadership Development Institute.

“Being recognized as a regional finalist validates my efforts throughout high school to serve those in my community and beyond,” says Seshadri. “It motivates me to do even more.”

Seshadri is waiting to hear from schools to which he has applied and plans to pursue a career in the medical field as a physician.

A joint effort of Coca-Cola bottlers across the country and The Coca-Cola Company, the Coca-Cola Scholars Program is the largest corporate-sponsored, achievement-based scholarship program in the United States. With the addition of the 2021 class, the **Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation** will have provided more than 6,450 Coke Scholars nationwide with over \$75 million in scholarships over the course of 33 years.

Kindness Snowman Challenge for St. Jude's



The student government at Somers Intermediate School hosted a kindness snowman decorating contest as a fundraiser for St. Jude's Children's hospital. Each class designed a snowman that included messages of kindness from one child to another child or adult in the building. The classes were judged on their unique and creative ideas based on the theme of kindness. Pictured left to right the winners in each grade are: Mrs. Dulyk's 3rd grade class, a tie between Ms. Monteleone/Mrs. Brelesky's and Mrs. Mojica's 4th grade classes, and Mrs. Mallon/Mrs. Finklestein's 5th grade class.

Blanch Serves Up Leadership Series



Superintendent Ray Blanch hosts a virtual school leadership series with a cooking theme from his office in Somers.

Just as there are ingredients that make a dish delicious, there are elements that help school leaders manage challenges successfully. Putnam | Northern Westchester BOCES has launched a new series, Virtual Leadership Connections, Conversations and Cooking, during which participants from all levels of school leadership share insights on a range of issues, while also discussing (and in some cases preparing) a special featured dish. Somers own Superintendent, Dr. Raymond H. Blanch is the host of the series.

Each of the virtual discussions covers a specific topic of interest to school leaders, and each will feature a number of special guest presenters and cooks.

“The combination of audience members is powerful,” says Dr. Blanch. “The cooking and conversation demonstrate that while we may approach things in a different way, our colleagues across the region are highly competent in taking the ingredients that life may give them to create something inspirational.”

For the first session, North Salem Superintendent Dr. Ken Freeston and North Salem Middle and High School Principal Vince DiGrandi were featured guests. Also, retired Croton-Harmon Superintendent Dr. Edward Fuhrman was a surprise sponsor, dropping in to share insights from decades of leadership. Not surprisingly, issues around COVID-19 took center stage, with attendees discussing ways they have met many of the pandemic’s challenges, as well as some of the difficult issues with which they continue to grapple.

The unique virtual leadership offering was proposed and sponsored by PNW BOCES’ Administrators Regional Crisis Team (ARCT).

“Our ultimate goal is to create a forum to ‘break bread’ together and further strengthen the bonds of camaraderie and collegiality among leaders at all levels in our region and beyond,” says Assistant Superintendent Dr. Lynn Allen, co-facilitator of the ARCT.

Cooking in real time during the session isn’t required, but participants are invited to share their culinary skills on-screen, if they choose. With the December 16 session falling on Chanukkah, the featured dish was latkes. Other topics in the series include ESTEAM, a variation on STEM programs that includes arts and empathy, created by Yorktown Superintendent Dr. Ron Hattar, and Baking Equity Into School Culture.

Officer Connects Despite Distance



The breakfast spread prepared for Primrose School Resource Officer, Brian Pavletich.

School Resource Officer Brian Pavletich is standing in a classroom at Primrose Elementary School, laughing with the kids.

“That’s your laser taser,” shouts a student, pointing at the officer’s belt.
“Ok,” says Pavletich. “That’s it’s new name.”

Officer Brian, as the kids call him, is finding new ways to connect with students, given the social distancing rules in school.

“It is important for kids to understand what police officers do,” says Pavletich. “I want them to know I’m here to protect them.”

In years past, Pavletich arranged for the Westchester County Police canine unit to bring in dogs for assemblies, flew in a police helicopter for the kids to tour, and he went into every classroom to read a book aloud. This year he is finding other ways to develop relationships with kids, including reading to classes over Zoom so he can visit with each classroom as well as the students at home. On Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, the Primrose front office showed Pavletich their gratitude with a big breakfast.

"He's incredible," says Katie Winter, Primrose principal. "You can also find him on the playground most days connecting with kids. He finds ways even in this tough environment."

One big event Pavletich is hoping to repeat this year is the helicopter visit, since the kids can be outside and remain socially distanced.

PTSA Driver Safety Program



On February 23rd, the Somers High School Parent Teacher Student Association hosted a Driver Safety Program for sophomores and juniors as they become new drivers. Somers Town Justice, Michael McDermott and a New York State Trooper provided the students with an invaluable opportunity to learn from their powerful experiences and insights. Jacy Good from Hang Up and Drive shared her story of suffering severe brain injuries after a major car accident at the hands of a distracted driver. Students and a parent must attend in order to obtain a senior parking space.



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