



May 2021

THE GROWLER

Odessa High School, Odessa, Missouri

Performing arts department adjust *OUE* students donate more than 1800 items to food drive

By Lilly Malizzi

Performing arts classes have made the transition to virtual competitions during the 2020-21 school year due to the pandemic and the resulting ban on large gatherings and limited student travel.

The virtual format allowed students to participate, while staying socially distanced and following all COVID-19 protocols. The virtual format was an adjustment for teachers and students and involved both positives and negatives.

Speech and Debate

OHS students competed in the Speech and Debate conference tournament February 8-13. The virtual platform was called Speechwire. Instead of presenting live, the contestants filmed their entries and submitted them to a website to be assigned to judges who watched and scored the performances.

"We still prepared basically the same," **Connor Bush**, Speech and Debate coach, said. "It was just different and less fun because you don't get the adrenaline feeling of performing live."

Due to this, Bush said the numbers were lower this year. He typically has around ten students who compete in each tournament in two or three events each, but this year, he only had three active members. However, he was impressed with those students for being "trouper" during the process as there were some drawbacks.

"There is a little bit of unfairness with recording beforehand," Bush said, "because students get as many takes as they need to be 'perfect' rather than just getting one chance live."

He also said fairness was not



Aydan McMahon, senior, won first place in districts in Radio Speaking with a news broadcast covering current events. McMahon advanced to the state tournament.

guaranteed, and they had to just trust that the judges were understanding and professional in their roles.

"The students weren't necessarily happy about the virtual aspect but still rose to the occasion to deliver great performances," Bush said.

Conference winners were **Aydan McMahon**, senior, first place in Original Oratory, for the second year in a row, and first place in Radio Speaking; **Darshan Dutel**, sophomore, second place in Radio Speaking; and **Sahrinity Gilmore**, senior, fifth place in Prose Reading.

Districts were held March 5-10. McMahon won first place in Original Oratory with her self-written speech, "The Price is Life", about the need for universal health care, specifically covering the injustices for diabetics. She also won first place in Radio Speaking with a news broadcast covering current events. McMahon advanced to the state tournament April 22-24.

Gilmore won fifth place in Prose Reading with "The Dark Road," based on true events and reflec-

tions of a former concentration camp guard. Dutel received honorable mention and was only one point away from advancing to the final round in Poetry Reading with "The Answer is D: None of the Above" about non binary individuals and their outlook on life.

Bush said McMahon stood out because she was constantly working to make her pieces better.

"It paid off," Bush said, "with a double conference championship and double district championship wins in Radio Speaking and Original Oratory. We are looking forward to a virtual state with her."

The students agreed that competing virtually was better than getting the season canceled, and Bush said the tournaments ran more smoothly in the virtual format than they typically do when held in person.

Choir

All-District Choir tryouts were January 27. Eight students auditioned virtually and all eight were chosen for one of the two groups. All-District Women's Honor Choir: **Paige Dillon, Karoline Kolie,**

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Norah Eaton (front) and Cambria Whitener, fourth graders at Odessa Upper Elementary, organize donations for the Souper Bowl for Caring Food Drive.

By Peyton Gross

Odessa Upper Elementary students participated in the Souper Bowl for Caring Food Drive and almost doubled the collections from the previous year. Students brought in more than 1800 items which were donated to the Odessa Community Service Center.

Classes competed against each other to see who could donate the most items and win an ice cream treat. Winners were **Robin Smith's** third grade class with 130 items collected; **Lori Jiron's** fourth grade class with 228 items collected; and **Julie Begemann's** fifth grade class with 225 items collected. All 21 classes participated, equalling approximately 325 students.

"I enjoyed seeing the kids getting excited," **Crissa Cockrum**, fifth grade teacher, said, "and their willingness to help others out."

Cockrum, who was in charge of the food drive, credited the success of the food drive to the students' high interest in collecting items. The principals also did a good job of announcing the leaders throughout the

contest. Teachers updated the results daily and leaders were announced to enhance the competition. Cockrum said she was pleased with how much the community supported the drive.

"It's about what is needed in the community," Cockrum said. "However, I think the kids get into the competition. It really gets them excited. Seeing them come together as a whole class, for a good cause, was enjoyable."

Students participated February 1 through February 5 and ended right before the Super Bowl. Students donated kid-friendly items like fruit cups, noodle cups, snack crackers, cookies and pudding cups.

Cockrum explained the process of donating and collecting for the food drive to the students before the kick off and also sent a letter/flyer to all parents. Bulldog Buddies, fifth grade Helpers, were on hand to sort and load the food.

"We usually donate to the Odessa Community Service Center," Cockrum said. "Mr. Hol will come and ask if we are doing a food drive or not, and he suggests items of need for our

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Melinda Armstrong, OHS SPED teacher, adjusts to teaching high school

By Danika Dutel

Melinda Armstrong, Special Education teacher, hopes for a lengthy career at OHS. She plans to get her master's degree and would like to become a Special Education Director if everything falls into place.

Armstrong took an interest in Special Education because her son has a disability, and she wanted to be the best person for him, while also learning how to help others with disabilities.

"I chose to become a teacher because I like watching students grow and learn," Armstrong said, "while I also help expand their education and how to face challenges that we're experiencing."

Armstrong knew she wanted to teach shortly after she graduated high school; however, she put getting her degree on hold to raise a family. During this time, she served as a paraprofessional in Oak Grove for 15 years beginning when she was 19. When her children were in school, she attended UCM for three semesters and then finished her bachelor's degree online through Grand Canyon University, Arizona.

Brad Briscoe, OHS principal, said Armstrong is a great addition to OHS. He said she was interviewed over Zoom due to COVID-19, and he was impressed with her content and legal knowledge. He said it "really set her apart" from some of the other candidates even though she did not have high school experience.

"We were able to give her an opportunity, and she has done a great job with it," Briscoe said.

Briscoe also said Armstrong brings a new perspective and is a great communicator with the kids, parents and teachers.

"She's a hard worker and a team player," Briscoe said. "A lot of times when someone comes in new to a district, there's a transition period, and she just hit the ground running. She's been a valuable part of our team since she's got here."



Melinda Armstrong, OHS Special Education teacher, her husband, Jim, and their three children live in Oak Grove. She said she was glad to get a job closer to home and enjoys OHS.

Armstrong is in her sixth year of teaching. She taught fifth grade for five years at Pleasant Hill before coming to Odessa. She said she wanted to teach in Odessa because she liked the size of the community and how close and involved everyone was. She admires the school spirit and atmosphere of OHS and likes how the students are positive and willing to work. She also wanted to work closer to her home in Oak Grove. She said she would also like to retire from the district in around 20 years.

"I like this age because it's up to them what kind of grades they want to have," Armstrong said.

Armstrong said she enjoys teaching math classes like geometry and algebra because she enjoyed learning them as a student. However, like most of the teachers, Armstrong said it's been a struggle teaching this year. Her main challenge is getting students to do the virtual work, but she enjoys the challenges because it helps everyone grow. She likes helping all students and making connections with them.

"I usually talk to them about what activities they're in, like sports, drama, choir, etc.," Armstrong said.

In a typical year, Armstrong said she would go and watch students' performances and athletic events, but due to the

pandemic and restrictions on spectators, she hasn't gotten much opportunity this year. She hopes next year will be back to normal, and events will be open to the public. Most of all, she said she just wants to see the students excel.

Armstrong joked and said her kids didn't give her too much trouble for teaching at their "rival" school. Her son is friends with some students in Odessa, and her daughter dances with some of the Odessa girls as well. "I went to Oak Grove for high school," Armstrong said. "We were big rivals back then too, but now that I'm here, it's really not that big of a deal."

Armstrong and her husband, **Jim**, have three children. **Brody**, 18, is a freshman in college, plays baseball and is studying biology. **Haiden**, 17, is a junior in high school and is involved in multiple sports and activities. **Lily**, 13, is in the eighth grade. She dances competitively and made the varsity cheerleading squad.



Staff spotlight

This month's featured reporter is **Peyton Gross**, OHS sophomore. She enjoys Journalism I because she loves writing, learning new skills and appreciates the small class size because she has time to get most of her work finished in class.

Even though she enjoys writing and thought about becoming a journalist for a while, she is leaning toward becoming a psychologist. She is looking forward to taking a psychology class next year and majoring in psychology in college.

She said she loves watching shows about serial killers and other thrillers, and she wants to know what they think and why they do what they do.

"One of my favorite shows is Hannibal," Gross said. "It is a show based on the movie, *The Silence of the Lambs*."

Gross is 15 years old and is the second of four children. She has an older brother, **Gavin**, who is 18; a younger brother, **Gable**, who is 13; and a younger sister, **Presleigh**, who is 11. Her parents, **Kirk** and **Heather**, are both educators.

Heather Gross is assistant superintendent of student services at Excelsior Springs. She has been an educator for 24 years. She has taught elementary music, been a middle and high school choir director, served as an elementary and middle school assistant principal and was a middle school principal.

Kirk Gross is a health teacher and wrestling coach at the OHS, so Gross sees him often. He has been teaching for 22 years and has taught in Ozark, Herculaneum, Branson, Oak Grove and Odessa. He has taught health, PE, social studies, geography, government and career explorations. He has coached wrestling, football, track and soccer.

Gross enjoys being in the same building as her dad because when he has free time at school and she needs him to run an errand, she can usually talk him into it.

When they are not at school,



Peyton Gross

her family enjoys spending time together. Their favorite tradition is traveling to their cabin in Ellington. They usually stay for a few days and spend time with their grandparents.

"It's always fun to see my grandparents because we don't see them very often," Gross said. "That's why we are always so excited to go."

They enjoy relaxing around Logan Creek and spending quality time together playing board games, card games and having some "intense" Nerf Gun fights.

"Dad and Gavin cut wood, and we have campfires every night," Gross said. "It is so remote that we even have to haul in water for drinking and cooking."

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Connor Bush, OHS drama teacher, performs in play

By Emily Deaton

Connor Bush, OHS drama teacher, was recently on stage delivering lines and dancing; however, he wasn't helping direct student actors in a school play or musical at OHS, he was rehearsing for his role in *Something Rotten!* at The White Theatre. The theatre is located in the Jewish Community Center in Overland Park, Kansas.

Bush was cast in the ensemble, which he said was his favorite role to play because it included so much singing and dancing. He said he loves performing and was glad to be exposed to some new techniques and technology that he can use for his OHS productions.

"I enjoy getting out there, dancing and singing, having a great time and being able to entertain the audience," Bush said.

The musical is about two brothers who set out to write the world's first musical. Bush called it "a hilarious mash-up of sixteenth-century Shakespeare and twenty-first century Broadway."

Bush auditioned for the musical in December after seeing the opportunity on Facebook and checking out their website. He submitted a video audition of him singing and dancing as he couldn't make the in-person auditions because he was directing the OHS musical. Bush sang bars from "The New World", an opening number in *Songs for a New World*. He also performed a dance that he choreographed as well as a tap dance piece.

"When you audition," Bush said, "the artistic team places everyone where they think they'll do their best, instead of everyone individually auditioning for specific parts."

He said he doesn't usually get to perform during the school year, so he was happy for the opportunity. Rehearsals started January 3, and they finished the show February 7.

"It was a fast process," Bush said, "but I enjoyed working on



Connor Bush, OHS drama teacher (front with black mask), was recently on stage performing in *Something Rotten!* at The White Theatre in Overland Park, Kansas.

this show and hope to revisit it in the future."

A modification of the show included filming the show and then editing it together from multiple camera angles. There wasn't a live audience; however, the show could be purchased and streamed on devices, so viewers could watch from home. Bush said his family and friends enjoyed being able to watch the musical with him and not having to worry about being in public.

Bush said he was cast in the perfect part because he could enjoy all of the dancing and singing in the ensemble, without the pressure of having a lead role and needing to memorize a lot of lines while teaching and directing at OHS. "I was excited because, due to covid, it was a really small cast," Bush said. "I felt really ac-

complished that I was in a select group of people."

Bush recommends trying out for a musical. He said when he tried out, he only knew one other person. Now, he has a groupchat with some of the other cast members, and they're all keeping in touch. They were able to build friendships while rehearsing, attending the viewing party, walking the red carpet and watching the musical together.

"They're so much fun, and you get to meet new people who enjoy the same things," Bush said.

Bush became interested in theater during school. In high school, he choreographed and directed some of the middle school productions to gain experience. After graduation, Bush went to UCM and majored in theater.

Annual band concert modified due to pandemic

By Taelor Horne

Last year, the annual spring concert and pie auction went off without a hitch in early March before COVID-19 hit just two days later causing school closures; however, this year, the event had to be modified to take place during the continued pandemic.

The concert on March 16 was recorded and integrated into a live basket auction run through the Oldham Auctions' website. Videos of the recorded music were played within the auctioned lots. Pictures and descriptions of the baskets, themed businesses in and around Odessa, were put up two weeks before the concert.

"We want our band to be a reflection of our community because we are all tied together," **Derek Twombly**, OHS band director, said about the theme of the baskets. "In a tight-knit community like Odessa, it is important that we have each other's backs."

The event is important to the Band of Distinction program because the proceeds go to the Odessa Band Boosters to make needed purchases such as band equipment, meals for competitions, band support staff and band scholarships. The scholarships aid students who want to participate in band but cannot afford the cost.

"Band should be for everybody," **Grant Fischer**, OMS band director, said, "not just the people who can afford to be in it."

Profits were down from previous years. Last year's event raised more than \$6000. This year, over 20 baskets were auctioned, earning around \$1800. The baskets, provided by the families of OMS and OHS band students, were created from items from Odessa and the surrounding areas. One of the baskets was vehicle-themed and included car-cleaning products and a free alignment, oil change and tire rotation. Another bas-

ket was baking-themed and included baking utensils, measuring cups and baking mixes.

The concert was recorded a week before the event. OMS sixth, seventh and eighth grade bands recorded their pieces in the OHS auditorium. The OMS Jazz Band recorded at the middle school. The OHS BOD and Jazz Band recorded in the band room. However, the final result did not come easy. Rehearsals were a challenge because of the OHS hybrid schedule which split up the students alphabetically and prevented all members from being present at once.

"Rehearsal was during band class, but it was a little bit difficult because the whole band was not there at the same time until the concert," **Xavier Doney**, sophomore percussionist, said.

However, recording the concert prevented it from being canceled, helped keep participants safe, and allowed for as many takes as needed to ensure the best music for the concert.

Some disadvantages to the recorded concert/auction combo included the extensive steps needed to set up the online basket auction, sorting out payments and pick-ups after the concert and not having a live audience.

"I love being able to perform what I've worked so hard on in person," **Paige Dillon**, junior woodwind member, said, "because it creates a connection between the artists and the audience that a recording can't create."

Twombly and Fischer hope for a normal, in-seat concert next year. They thought the basket idea worked well this year though, and Twombly believes it could get integrated into future concerts because baskets provide options for people who have food allergies or are dieting and were sold for a wide-range of prices.



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McQuerry book fair adapts for pandemic

By Avery Slusher

McQuerry Elementary students were recently asked to “shop with their eyes” instead of their hands at the Bulldog Scholastic Book Fair. Students said it was difficult to not touch or open the books, but this and other pandemic protocols were necessary for the book fair to take place.

Book fair profits of approximately \$9000 for the 2020-21 school year will be used to purchase books to enhance classroom libraries and to improve the guided-reading room, a resource room used by teachers to keep sets of books for small group reading. Over 400 books were sold in this book fair alone, earning around \$3500.

The book fair was held February 23 through March 4 in the cafeteria. **Beth Wagner**, McQuerry literacy interventionist, was in charge of the event, making it her 44th book fair. Wagner has been running approximately three book fairs per year at McQuerry for the past 15 years.

“Over 15 years, we have sold between \$120,000 to \$150,000 in books,” Wagner said. “Even better, we have put somewhere between 13,500 to 15,000 books in our students’ hands and homes.”

Wagner was recognized for her longstanding success with the McQuerry book fairs in 2015 when she was awarded the Scholastic Book Fair Certificate of Appreciation for outstanding performance as a book fair chairperson.

A drawing was also held on March 4 for a shopping spree giveaway. Tickets were awarded for book purchases. **Pam Smith**, second grade teacher, won the \$75 shopping prize, and she bought picture books and chapter books for her classroom.

A Spirit Week was held along with the book fair to help generate excitement among the students. February 23 was student

preview day. Spirit day topics included the following: favorite Bulldog sweatshirt, favorite Bulldog hat, favorite class shirt, favorite striped shirt to celebrate Dr. Seuss-Read Across America, favorite crazy socks and favorite hat.

In the past, classes of students were able to shop together and look through books when making their choices. Parents were also able to attend and make purchases. However, this year, shopping looked a little different.

Students could shop at the book fair during the last hour of the school days from 2 to 3 p.m. Up to ten students at a time were able to shop in 15 minute shifts and make their selections. Students had to stand on marks on the floor to follow social distancing regulations, and if they wanted more details on the books, they could go to the Scholastic website to read summaries or look at the book fair flyer they received. However, they were not able to touch any of the items. If they saw a book they wanted, they would ask a teacher to get it for them.

The students either had to bring money in a plastic bag or have money in an E-Wallet, a digital wallet which allows for online payments. Parents could also shop for items online.

“I wish I had more time to look around and be able to pick books up,” **Brody Slusher**, second-grader, said.

Both Slusher and **Adley McCarthy**, second-graders, said that not touching the books was incredibly hard for them because they wanted to flip through the books, but they were just happy the book fair went on as usual and was not canceled.



Performing Arts adapt to virtual competition

VIRTUAL from page 1

Sydney Stevens and Kaela Uhrlaub. All district choir: **Olivia Hawk, Kyle Quarles, Teagan Sumy and McKinley Tate**.

Students selected music, worked on their solos individually at home and made audio recordings to send to the judges. Three anonymous judges reviewed the work. Students were able to do as many takes as needed to get the songs as perfect as possible; however, they were responsible for choosing their best work.

Harry Hamblin, choir director, said he listened to each of the solos, however, he did not provide coaching to students on their recordings to preserve fairness.

“Just like at in-person auditions, they got one shot at the song, and that was it,” Hamblin said. “So, I wouldn’t have asked anyone to re-record their solos unless something major had gone wrong.”

All-State Choir virtual auditions were March 13. Students who were selected for All-District Choir were eligible to try out. Sumy and Tate, seniors, were the only students who competed, but neither was selected.

OUE Bulldog Buddies are happy to help community

FOOD from page 1
community.”

Larry Hol, retired McQuerry principal, is a volunteer for the Odessa Community Service Cen-

Gross enjoys spending time with friends and family

GROSS from page 2

When she is not spending time with her family, Gross enjoys hanging out with her best friend, **Aubrey Murry**, sophomore. They enjoy watching *Miraculous Tales of Ladybug and Cat Noir*. For Halloween, Gross and Murry dressed up as characters from the show. Murry was Ladybug, and Gross was Cat Noir.

Gross also enjoys sports. She said she grew up in a family where sports were important. Her parents were athletes, and her siblings are athletes as well. Her older brother, **Gavin Gross**,

Sumy said that it was one of the most difficult things she has ever done, and it was not like anything she had experienced before. The virtual format made it harder to prepare. She said the sight reading portion was particularly troublesome because she had to look at a sight reading piece and repeat it to the judge 20 seconds later. However, Sumy said she will never forget her audition as it was unique due to the pandemic.

“I was actually in my car at work,” Sumy said. “There was only one person who looked like they were in a choir room. It will be something that I will always remember.”

Choir recently submitted videos for the District Solo & Small Ensemble Festival. Winners were **Darshan Dutel, Dallas Mays, Matt Steiner, Ellisah Uhrlaub and Ethan Unruh**, Bronze ratings; **Alyssa Bullock, Arianna Clemons, Paige Dillion, Eryn Hargety**, Hawk, Quarles and Kaela Uhrlaub, Silver ratings; **Emma Gutierrez, Reagan Medlock, Alexa Muenstermann, Kyley Shackles, Stryder Sumy** and Tate, Gold ratings.

Students recorded songs in the choir room and signed up for

ter. **Levi Neel** and **Makenna Bass**, Bulldog Buddies, said they enjoyed helping with the Souper Bowl for Caring Food Drive.

“Something I enjoyed most

just won his third state wrestling title. She loves volleyball and plays several different positions, but her two favorites are outside and libero. She wants to continue to play volleyball in the future and is open to attending college in many states. When she is not playing sports, she is supporting the OHS wrestling team as one of the managers.

While school and sports take up a lot of Gross’s time, she tries to find time for herself. She said reading and drawing are an escape for her. She loves to read and draw while listening to

slots during the school day. The planning was made more difficult by the hybrid schedule as some students needed to come to the school on a virtual Monday.

Students had to wear individual face shields, so the judges could see their mouths. Because the shields don’t provide as much protection, only one student could be in the choir room at a time with Hamblin and **Ruth Ann Dillon**, accompanist.

Students had to present a copy of the music to the judges for authentication purposes. **Darshan Dutel**, sophomore, said it was awkward with the face shields.

The MSHSAA Large Ensemble Festival was in April, finishing out the competitive season. Chamber Choir recorded songs during sixth hour to submit on April 1. Chamber Choir joined with Concert Choir to record their songs. Choirs will receive ratings on their performances.

Dutel said it is his first year in choir, and it is a more challenging environment than a normal choir year due to the pandemic. Masks muffle the voices and the hybrid schedule limits practicing together. However, he is glad he tried choir and plans to continue taking choir classes next year.

about it was probably helping other people,” Neel said.

“It made me feel really good to help people in need and who are hungry,” Bass said.

music. She enjoys a wide-variety of music but likes all of **Taylor Swift’s** music best.

She said going to Florida is on her bucket list because she has always wanted to go there but has never had the chance. She also has not been able to travel for a while because of the pandemic.

The pandemic affected her dog, Hawkeye, but in a good way. The family got to spend way more time with the Mini Australian Shepherd during 2020, but Peyton is still looking forward to getting back to normal soon.