

Student Director takes over musical

By Danika Dutel

Aydan McMahon, OHS senior, was presented with an unexpected opportunity. With the musical, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, just weeks away, she said it was a shock when **Connor Bush**, OHS speech and Debate teacher and musical director was quarantined. Overnight, Aydan took on the responsibility of student director.

Before Bush was quarantined, McMahon was assistant director, stage manager, lighting designer and light board operator. After graduation, McMahon plans to attend college and study English secondary education and become an English teacher.

Bush said If McMahon wasn't able to direct the show, it would have been behind and the cast would have been scrambling at the last minute to get everything together. The musical could have even been postponed or canceled, and this was just one more blow in an already pandemic-plagued performance.

Bush being quarantined wasn't the first setback the musical encountered. One of the first setbacks to the musical was that rehearsals started later than normal because everything was on hold due to the pandemic.

"The most difficult part was the uncertainty that COVID-19 brought with our show," McMahon said. "In September, we didn't even know if we were going to have a show. From late September to closing night, we had to worry about the possibility of cast or crew members getting quarantined. We had to make sure that despite all of these uncertainties people were doing their part, so that the show could run smoothly."

In addition to the delayed start of practice, other pandemic-related changes were needed. The play was selected in part because of the



Aydan McMahon, senior student director, works on blocking patterns, which is mapping out where the characters will move in the show, before a musical rehearsal.

small cast, which would allow for social distancing. Masks were also needed, and performing in masks made projecting while speaking and singing a challenge.

"We have to wear masks for the entire performance," Bush said. "This isn't like sports where they're allowed to take their masks off during their activity. We have to wear ours the entire time which really affects the acting since we lose so much facial expression."

Finally, the auditorium would usually be packed full and extra chairs would be brought in; however, this year, the cast performed to a maximum of only 36 people per performance.

Despite the challenge of having a student take over as director, Bush was pleased with the show's progress under McMahon.

"Aydan did a wonderful job while I was out. She diligently worked through the rehearsals and managed to get the show to where it needed to be. It would not be the show it was without her work," said Bush.

"She has also been my assistant director for the main stage shows the past two years as well as the One Act and Readers Theatre," Bush said. "She has developed the skills over the past four years that she has been able to utilize this year," Bush said.

McMahon said she had to keep an open-communication line with Bush. During Bulldog Block, they would use Google Meet to talk about the musical. He would give her the outlines of what he wanted for the scenes, and Aydan's job was to carry out his directives and make sure practices were running smoothly.

"He also filmed choreography videos for the cast to watch during

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Mental Health is important at OHS

By Lilly Malizzi

The year of 2020 will go down as a year to remember for many reasons, one being the COVID-19 pandemic and the stress that it caused. However, students of the Odessa R-7 School District have resources available to them, whether they are seated students or virtual students.

It is especially important for students to have access to counseling and other resources this year because students are more isolated than ever before and have a greater need for counseling services and support from the school, according to the OHS counseling staff and administration.

"To some degree, students had to feel distanced," **Ashley Ray**, OHS counselor, said, "because it (school) went away from our normal highly-social experience to a somewhat somber and isolating one."

Lori Drenon, OHS Outreach Worker, said since COVID-19 she has also seen the need for counseling go up.

Brad Briscoe, OHS principal, acknowledged that the role of the school sometimes goes beyond just academics, and it is important for the staff and students to be supported in all areas.

"One of the goals through the pandemic," Briscoe said, "has been to best support student learning and be a resource for all students."

Odessa High School has two counselors, Ray and **Amanda Twombly,** and Drenon, to serve students with their academic, career and personal/social needs.

It is especially important this

year for students to self-advocate and for parents to help their children connect with available resources if they are struggling, according to the counseling staff.

"Since the COVID-19 pandemic, it has made getting access to students more difficult because in the beginning, the school had students on limited travel," Ray said.

Because student travel was limited to allow for contact tracing and because approximately 20 percent of students were using the virtual platform, the counseling staff had to look for alternate ways to communicate with students.

At the beginning of the school year, students reported directly to their first hour classes instead of going to the cafeteria, the library or meeting up with their friends for walks in the hallways. Travel between passing periods was also limited to one-way, and Bulldog Block travel was not allowed until the second quarter of school.

Finally, students had to eat lunch in their classrooms or designated areas to allow for social distancing. All were necessary changes due to the pandemic, but according to Ray, this could have had a negative impact on some students.

"I think some of the best stress-relief for students is talking to and laughing with their friends," **Kris Poisal**, OHS English teacher, said, "but some of that is just missing this year because of masks and social distancing."

Ray said as a result of the extra stress that the pandemic could be causing students, she wants students to feel welcome

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THE GROWLER

Evan Pingel joins OHS staff

By Emily Deaton

Evan Pingel, OHS history teacher, joined the teaching and coaching staff this year. His student-centered approach, innovative ideas, and virtual education skills are appreciated by his colleagues.

He was looking for jobs in the area because his wife, **Cailey Dowell**, graduated from OHS in 2012, and thought the school would be a good fit.

However, he didn't always want to be a teacher and said he decided on a career path his sophomore year of college.

Previously, he thought about being a lawyer but decided it wasn't for him. When he took some teaching classes his sophomore year and discovered he enjoyed being in the classroom environment, his decision was made.

Pingel chose to teach history because it was always his favorite subject in school, and he enjoyed researching history and listening to his grandpa's stories about war.

"My grandpa enlisted in the Army Air Corps in World War II," Pingel said. "He trained B17 crews and was a pilot. He then flew combat missions for the Air Force in Korea."

Pingel began teaching and coaching at Lewis and Clark Middle School in Jefferson City, where he taught sixth grade and coached seventh and eighth grade football and also assisted with the high school team.

Pingel graduated in 2009 from Herculaneum High School, which is in Jefferson County. He was on the football and golf teams and enjoyed bowling with his friends. He was a member of Student Council and was the president of his class his sophomore, junior and senior years. He was also a member of Spanish Club. Using the A+ Program, he attended Meramec Community College in St. Louis and earned his associate's degree.

Pingel went to Southeast Missouri State and earned a bachelor of science in secondary education and a minor in history. Next, he attended William Woods University to complete his master's degree in secondary administration.

He is currently finishing a spe-

cialist degree in school leadership and policy analysis at the University of Missouri. After teaching, he plans to work as an athletic director or possibly seek a building-level administrative position. Eventually, he would like to work in district-wide administration. However, one drawback he mentioned is not being able to coach anymore.

For now, he said he is going to focus on helping his students be successful and learn to the best of their abilities.

"Some of the challenges are making sure that you're getting the information to every student how they need it,"Pingel said. "Students have different learning needs, for example, hands-on students and visual learners."

Terry Stever, OHS History Department Head, said Pingel is good with not only technology, but with the students as well.

"He brings enthusiasm and new ideas to OHS," Stever said. "I love Mr. Pingel's positive attitude and willingness to help in any way he can and how he cares so much about the students here at OHS."

"Mr. Pingel is a team player," **Brad Briscoe**, OHS principal, said. "He is engaging with student learning in the classroom and is willing to go the extra mile to serve the students of OHS. He is truly here to serve and educate students, while making them better human beings."

Briscoe said Pingel has helped further the virtual education knowledge of the Social Studies Department because of his experience with the virtual learning platform and Google Classroom.

"He brings innovative ideas from his previous district to best serve the students of OHS," Briscoe said. "Mr. Pingel has been a great addition to OHS."

Mark Thomas, OHS head football coach, said Pingel has been a good addition to the coaching staff as well. Pingel coaches the wide receivers on offense and the corners on defense. He calls the offensive plays for the JV team, and during varsity games, he is in the press box and helps Thomas with calling offensive plays.

Thomas said that prior to com-



Evan Pingel, OHS history teacher, and wife, Cailey, enjoy a tropical honeymoon in BoraBora.

ing to Odessa, most of Pingel's experience was coaching on the defensive side of the ball.

"We needed an assistant coach who could give us more help with the offense," Thomas said. "Evan had to not only learn our offense system, but also learn what information I needed from him during games. It is not an easy job because he has to watch the other team's defense and provide me information I need to call the next play. It has to be done fast."

Thomas said Pingel is not only intelligent and a fast-learner, but he takes his responsibilities seriously and is willing to spend the extra time needed to improve.

"Pingle always has a positive attitude, joking around with the players," **Garrett Bayless**, OHS junior said. "He seems to really care about teaching us and being our coach. He doesn't lean more towards either."

Pingel said he likes how welcoming the people of Odessa are. He describes the atmosphere and culture of OHS as kind and welcoming and said it has a positive feel despite the subdued circumstances brought about by the pandemic.

When he is not spending time teaching and coaching, Pingel enjoys being with his family. Pingel and his wife will have their second anniversary on New Year's Eve. He and his wife hope to have children in the future. He said family is very important to him.

Staff spotlight

This month's featured reporter is **Emily Deaton**, OHS sophomore. She is taking Journalism I because she wants to build more friendships, focus more on writing and let the people of Odessa know what is going on in the schools.

Emily's favorite part of journalism is being able to be social and still get her work done on time. She is excited to get along with and work with all five of her classmates and **Kris Poisal**, teacher. She enjoys being pushed to be more outgoing by interviewing staff members and students for her articles.

Emily, 15, is the second oldest of four children. Her older sister, **Hailey**, is 19 and graduated from OHS in 2020. Her younger brother, **Tyler**, is 14 and a freshman at OHS. Her youngest sister, **Lilly**, is 12 and is in sixth grade at OMS. Her parents, **John** and **Deanna Deaton**, moved to Missouri from West Virginia when they were 18 and 20 years old.

Emily spends most of her time at color guard practice, hanging out with her friends and her boyfriend, **Pierce**, and playing with her dog, **Finn**. She loves painting whatever pops into her head because it is relaxing. She enjoys using water colors, acrylic paints and oil paints. Landscape painting is her favorite because she likes painting places that she would like to visit, such as the mountains. She also enjoys spending time with her friends and family.

Recently, Emily said she has been focusing on her grades, so she decided not to return for winter guard; however, she plans to join the track team this upcoming season. She participated in track her eighth-grade year and decided to take a break after she fractured her ankle during PE class her freshman year.

In addition to extra-curricular items, Emily enjoys science and writing. She especially enjoys taking Chemistry, Biology, English II and Journalism I. She likes conducting experiments in science classes and taking her own creative liberties when writing. Writing gives her the ability to express her-



Emily Deaton

self, and journalism has given her the chance to show how passionate she is about writing.

During childhood, she dreamed of being a gymnast or a veterinarian, because she was very flexible and loved to help animals. She watched a lot of television as well. Her favorite shows were Drake & Josh and iCarly. She says these television shows influenced her personality and the choices she made when she was younger.

Emily's favorite season is summer because she loves going camping, boating at Truman Lake, tubing, swimming and hanging out with her friends and family while getting a tan or burnt--either way, she joked.

Emily's friends describe her as relatable, kind, compassionate

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THE GROWLER

OHS fine arts programs are affected by pandemic

By Taelor Horne

The ongoing pandemic has played a role in shaping how Odessa High School's fine arts programs look during the 2020-21 school year. Major changes, from curriculum revisions to changes in procedures. have allowed the band. choir, art and drama teachers to continue to teach and work with students while keeping everyone as safe as possible.

Adaptations include introducing Google Classroom into every day, readjusting semester curriculum to cover what is most important, making supplies available to students, creating custom-made masks and instrument covers, changing performances, accommodating for a lack of competitions and canceled trips.

"I don't think there is much we enjoy about these changes." Derek Twombly, OHS band director, said, "but it's not about enjoying the changes. It's more about doing what is right and trying to save lives."

Marching Band

Marching band competitions were canceled this year, and the atmosphere of Friday night football games was subdued, in part, by the lack of marching band performances. Band members were not allowed to march during half-time performances to allow for social distancing.

The band size also changed because many students chose to go virtual and also from students being on quarantine. Band teachers were anticipating around 110 marching band members and ended up with 78.

"When you don't have a balanced band, having an effective rehearsal and effectively teaching students how to play within an ensemble becomes very difficult when students are gone for two weeks." Twombly said.

Lack of routine has been a hurdle for the band to overcome as well. However, Twombly said the further along in the year that he gets, the easier it is to plan out the

next move. He has been creating a new routine and adapting to all of the stipulations and requirements.

"I believe the transition to second semester will go well." Twombly said."Now that we have a semester of experience and we all understand the expectations for each other, things will go well."

"I have learned even more the importance of flexibility and being able to improvise." Grant Fischer. OHS assistant band director, said, "and that at the end of the day, my students will be willing to do what they have to do to make the music happen."

Fischer said there are some positives to be taken away from the changes, and he believes it may be beneficial to continue splitting the students into smaller groups to give them specific attention. Twombly said they are currently using Google Classroom to complete their play tests and doing surveys. He thinks they'll continue that method when school resumes to normal.

Choir

The choirs have undergone a lot of change this year too. Singing indoors without a face mask has been shown in scientific studies to transmit the virus, according to the University of Colorado Boulder in a September 17, 2020 post of the CU Boulder Today. So, creative thought and time went into making sure everyone could stay safe while continuing to sing.

Harry Hamblin, OHS choir teacher, said he looked around over the summer and found singing masks, but they cost more than \$30 each. Since he wanted his students to have two each, one to wash and one to wear, the price was out of range. However, he found a free pattern on YouTube, and bought the materials to make them with the choir activities budget.

"Doing it this way, it cost about \$5 per mask," Hamblin said. "My mom, Ruth Ann Dillon, and I pinned the patterns and cut them all out over Labor Day weekend. We packaged them with the elastic and beads and other things

necessary to assemble them, and then gave them out to choir parent volunteers as well as some friends of mine who sew."

Dillon, Connie Lee, Kathy Gaines, Jacque Henning, Julie Burch. Amelia Divine-Tweedy. Sara Corder and Susan Seals all volunteered their time, expertise, and sewing machines to get them finished in a week. Each of the 120 masks took between 20-40 minutes to assemble, depending on the skill level of the person sewing.

The interior structure of the masks are held away from the mouth while still covering the mouth and nose while singing. In addition to wearing masks, choir members keep six feet apart, which Hamblin said has made hearing one another more difficult. However, Hamblin said being distanced during singing has made his performers listen more. He believes it has been beneficial to his choirs because they really have to listen to those around them.

"We have all learned how to do so much more because we've had to," Hamblin said. "It may not be a fun process, but it's necessary, so we get it done.

The choir also faced another challenge before the transition into hybrid learning. A choir concert was scheduled for December 7, but Hamblin decided to hold the concert online to keep everyone safe. His initial plan was to record the music the week before the concert. However, when the news came out that OHS would be transitioning into hybrid learning, the music had to be recorded weeks ahead of time and in a matter of only three days.

"I am still so very proud of what the students have done so far this year," Hamblin said.

Art Class

Finally, the art classes at OHS have faced their own difficulties as well. Andrea Birdsong. art teacher, said during pandemic protocols, being a project-based course makes it difficult to ensure that students have the materials See **ARTS**, page 4

OMS expands sports to seventh grade

By Peyton Gross

Odessa Middle School expanded its sports offerings to include seventh-graders into the current football, basketball and volleyball programs and added a seventh and eighth grade cross country team as well. This will impact students and programs for the 2020-21 school year and beyond.

Kendra Malizzi, OMS principal, and Chris Doering, past OMS assistant principal, collected data for three years from schools in the conference regarding their seventh grade sports programs and found most offered programs. They felt this put Odessa's students at a disadvantage and proposed to district administrators and the Board of Education that seventh grade programs be added to help grow interest and raise their competitive level.

"Our number of eighth-grade participants had been dropping," Malizzi said, "and we kept advocating for this addition to our sports programs. We wanted to provide an extra year of school sports for our athletes."

Malizzi said she and Doering also wanted the players to have an extra year of school sports before moving on to the high school programs because their research revealed that they were only one of a couple of schools in the conference without a seventh-grade program.

"This year was the year our persistence paid off for student athletes," Malizzi said. "I am so glad we are able to offer all sports to seventh and eighth-graders and be competitive with our neighboring schools."

"We needed to hook the group of athletes earlier," Doering said, "and in my mind, adding seventh-graders into the mix was the key."

Doering said Dr. Jon Oetinger, superintendent of schools, supported the idea of expanding the middle school sports program.

"We brought the proposal to the school board,"Doering said,"and the board was fantastic in the adoption process. It will take some time to see the benefits at the high school level, but keeping larger core groups



Carter Kleoppel, seventhgrader, was able to play football this year.

together will bring more success to all moving forward."

High school coaches are also pleased that the idea of expanding OMS sports has become a reality and are hoping to see benefits to the high school programs in the future.

"By participating in an organized program at a younger age, they will have the foundational skills they need for the high school level," Ashley Ray, OHS counselor and volleyball coach, said.

Ray also said that as a program, the earlier everyone is able to focus on the higher-level skills, the more successful everyone will be. She said it is a great opportunity for athletes to gain in competitive sports.

Gable Gross, eighth-grade football player, said that having seventh-graders on the team this year was helpful because they had more players to choose from.

"There were many subs and backups for the team," Gross said. "Playing with older kids will help get the seventh-graders prepared for high school. They are also playing with bigger kids, so they are getting more experience at a younger age."

Wyatt Lockhart, seventh-grade football player, said it was exciting and fun to be a part of the middle school football team.

"The coaches made practicing great, and I learned a lot about football," Lockhart said. "Since I was able to play this year, I will be better at football."

THE GROWLER

OUE holds traveling book fair

By Avery Slusher

Odessa Upper Elementary held a traveling book fair November 17-20 after Leslie Roepe, librarian, and Glenda Weber, OUE reading specialist, discussed how to have a book fair while following pandemic protocols.

Roepe said she didn't want to cancel the event and said the students were thrilled with the changes, and they had no complaints. The book fair brought in over \$4000, and half will go to the library as "Scholastic dollars" allowing for the purchase of additional books.

"Due to Covid, we wanted to figure out how to still have the book fair and follow the protocols," Roepe said.

The carts containing the books were set up in the hallways outside of each grade-level "neighborhood," and students were able to buy books immediately from the carts. Whereas, in the past, the books were displayed in the library, and students and other customers could visit throughout the day to make

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and get help with any problems

they might be experiencing; how-

ever, procedures are different this

year due to the pandemic protocols.

codes posted around the building to

generate an appointment, or they

can email the counselors to set up

an appointment if they don't have

a smartphone. Students are then

called to the office by appointment

to allow for social distancing. Vir-

tual students are able to schedule

virtual meetings with any of the

Students may scan one of the QR

purchases. However, this was not possible due to social distancing protocols.

Emery LaBoube, fifth-grader, said that the book fair would normally be crowded, but going grade to grade gave everyone a chance to look at all the options and make their purchases.

The traveling book fair was liked so much, Roepe said she has decided to continue doing it this way in the future.

LaBoube and Rilvnn Hibler, third-grader, both agreed that doing the book fair this way was a great idea.

"It gave everybody a chance to buy books but stay distanced because of Covid," LaBoube mentioned.

One change that needed to be made was what students could purchase at the traveling book fair. Fewer items were offered than previous years due to space, which meant toys, pens, pencils and other non-book items were cut. Also, only

students were allowed to purchase



Julie Crawford, third-grade teacher, and Makayla Cole, fifth-grader, shop at the OUE traveling book fair.

items this year, as the event was closed to family and community members.

"My favorite part of the book fair was getting to read my book right away," Hibler said.

LaBoube said she is a big fan of reading and was happy students were still able to participate in the book fair even during the pandemic.

Student director takes charge

DIRECTOR from page 1 rehearsals, so they could learn that as well," McMahon said. "I don't know too much about dancing or choreography in general, so we were very lucky and grateful to have that."

McMahon said she was anxious that something would happen, and she wouldn't know what to do, but Harry Hamblin, OHS choir director; was there to help out when needed.

"Aydan has done a phenomenal job as assistant director this year," Hamblin said."She kept rehearsals running smoothly and efficiently, which is not always an easy thing to do. I'm grateful for her help in running those rehearsals because I don't have a lot of experience with stage acting. Aydan made a very stressful moment for me a lot less stressful because she knows what she's doing. I'm so grateful for her expertise."

McMahon said she learned how to be more flexible and to not doubt herself so much. She appreciated all of the help she received and said she learned it is okay to ask for help when needed.

"I ended up learning that I know more than I think, and that I can think on my feet if I need to," Mc-Mahon said.

Darshan Dutel. sophomore cast member, said McMahon worked well under pressure.

"She got things done in a way without stressing out the cast." Dutel said. "She made it seem like nothing ever changed."

Donovan Aardema Faigh, senior cast member, said he liked that Avdan was direct and respectful. while still making sure everything was getting done.

"They (the cast and crew) treated me well with love and appreciation," McMahon said. "We got through all of the work that we needed to. despite some obstacles."

Bush and the cast considered the show a success. Bush said he chose McMahon to direct in his absence because she has been involved in the plays and musicals for the past four years.

Fine arts at OHS have to adapt to pandemic

ARTS from page 3 complete work while out of class. She also had to revise her curriculum to fit the hybrid schedule. Birdsong mentioned that she has learned through this process that she is a creative problem solver, which has been important during the pandemic.

"I had to determine what I really wanted and needed students to know to be successful and get the most out of their coursework. That was what was most important to me," Birdsong said.

Birdsong, who also sponsors the National Art Honor Society at OHS, said she is disappointed the students are missing out on field trip opportunities due to the pandemic. NAHS would have gone on at least one trip by this point in the school year. Her Graphic Design class also had a trip planned for spring of 2020 that was canceled.

Another struggle all of the fine arts teachers mentioned was the lack of student participation virtually.

"It's really important to keep breathing...to not take it personally when participation is lacking despite your best efforts to push as much information and opportunities out there for students to participate and remain on track with their in-class peers,"Birdsong said.

Teachers all agreed that with students going in and out of quarantine as well as now being in a hybrid model, virtual participation is key to remaining caught up in classes.



DEATON from page 2 the day or early hours of the and understanding. She is down-to-earth, but she isn't afraid to say what she thinks. Emily also said she seeks adventure and considers herself a risk-taker, and when she falls she always gets back up.

Emily loves to explore and plan new adventures. She is a night owl and said she does her best in the late hours of

Live Well Clinics 816-249-1521 660-239-9005 660-463-0234 Lexington 660-251-6440 800-273-TALK (8255)



Students have mental health resources at OHS **Mental Health Services** Compass Health/Odessa

816-633-5921 Jessie Johnson, LPC/Blue Springs 816-653-2297

Buckner

Carrollton

Concordia

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

night. She claims it is more

calming and quiet when no one else is around to bother

her when she is deep in her

thoughts. She admitted to

working on her newspaper stories late at night to meet

deadlines.