

Seneca High School

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2019

Board of Education Corner

On Sunday, May 19, we said goodbye to the Class of 2019. We are proud of the accomplishments of this class and the contributions they have made to Seneca High School. I have no doubt that they will be a highly successful group of young women and men. During the ceremony, we heard from Class President Isaac Brockman, Notre Dame-bound Mark Mehochko, and Business Administration major Carissa Simon. These fine students offered their own particular wisdom to their fellow classmates as they prepare for the next phase of their lives. These three students are wonderful examples of the fine students that comprise the 2019 class as a whole.

As a board of education, we work with our administration and staff to provide our students with a challenging and meaningful educational program so that with the necessary effort applied, all students can find success in high school and obtain the building blocks for future achievement. The vast majority of jobs our graduates will seek will require some type of education after high school. Thus, the issue for many families is the various costs associated with post-high school training.

In 2013, the Seneca High School Board of Education authorized the creation of the Educational Foundation of Seneca High School. This foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, is independent of the Seneca High School Board of Education and is controlled by a board of directors comprised of seven SHS community members. While the purpose of the foundation may be thought of as an entity created to support the educational mission of Seneca High School, its primary function has been to secure and hold funds for the distribution of scholarships for Seneca High School graduates. The Future Educator Scholarship was the first such scholarship held and managed by the SHS Foundation. In addition to this scholarship, the foundation now holds and manages four additional independent scholarship funds, including the Larry Novotney Memorial Scholarship, the Career Technical Education Scholarship, the Seneca High School Staff Scholarships, and the William and Lois Steep Faithful-Community-Service Scholarship.

The scholarships administered by the SHS Educational Foundation provide financial support to several of our students as they continue their journey toward excellence after they graduate from Seneca High school. We are very grateful to all of the benefactors who contribute to the various scholarships. If any member of the community would like to contribute to an existing scholarship or perhaps create a new opportunity, please do not hesitate to contact Superintendent Jim Carlson at the school.

Go Irish!

Ron Frye, School Board President

From the Desk of SHS Superintendent, Dr. James Carlson

They say there are two kinds of people in life: those that see a half of a glass of water as half-empty and those who see it as half-full. The first individual displays pessimism, while the latter exhibits optimism. In late March of this year, I had the privilege of conversing with a man whose glass was not half-full, but was, rather, so full that it was overflowing the brim. That man was long-time Seneca High School Treasurer, Mr. Bill Steep.

I think back on my visit with Bill, and I now realize that I was seeing a man who was living out his final days. His mind was still sharp, and while soft and slow, his speech was lucid. His body was failing; however, neither discomfort nor fatigue could dampen his spirit. I heard not one word that could be remotely construed as negative. Joining me on the visit was his nephew and my friend, Mark. Our conversation turned, from time to time, to current events and the less-than-pleasant stories we see when we turn on the nightly news. Yet, Mr. Steep did not waver from his positivity. I so badly wanted to take out my phone and somehow record his words verbatim, but I didn't want to offend him. I cannot remember any exact quotes from that conversation, but I do remember the tenor of it, and I especially remember just how positive he was. At one point, we spoke about a recent media story in which kids had gotten into trouble. Bill's response was that kids aren't born bad and that all of them can change for the better.

Several times during our chat, he shared his belief that there is more good than bad in the world. He also spoke of being thankful and that we should appreciate what we have.

On Sunday, March 31, 2019, we lost Mr. Bill Steep, one of the truly good guys this world had to offer. Bill was 90 years old. History tends to classify people and the things of this world according to generations. There are some individuals, however, who span generations and transcend time because of the way they live life and the values they reflect. Bill Steep was one of those people.

Prior to his death, Mr. Steep generously established the William and Lois Steep Scholarship on the pillars of Faith, Community, and Service. Mr. Steep and his family donated \$100,000 to the Educational Foundation of Seneca High School for one 4-year scholarship to be awarded annually to a SHS senior class member. In creating the scholarship, his family wrote, "Bill and Lois Steep, lifelong residents of Seneca, Illinois, established this scholarship as an investment in the young people of Seneca High School through their pursuit of higher education. Although unable to fulfill aspirations of attending college themselves, they value higher education and established this scholarship to support future students' goals to fulfill their dreams."

Bill created the scholarship to recognize the students who demonstrate a commitment to their community by aspiring to pursue a future career that requires leadership and an active role in improving the lives of those around them. Many long-time residents of Seneca who knew Bill Steep much better than I did can attest to his greatness. For my part, I will never forget our last visit, when despite his vulnerability, he remained that same positive and caring man who served his family, his community, and his country. A life well lived is inspirational. Thank you for inspiring us all Mr. Bill Steep.

Message from CSBO Dan Stecken

The purpose of this section of the newsletter is to inform the Seneca Township High School District 160 taxpayers of our annual Abatement process. In early May, the Business Office at Seneca Township High School received the annual LaSalle and Grundy County Tax Extensions. In December of 2013, the taxing bodies reached an agreement with Exelon's LaSalle Station to set the valuation of the nuclear power plant for seven years. The levy years of the agreement were set from 2013 to 2019. Within this agreement, the taxable value of Exelon was decided, and a constant tax rate of \$1.79838 was set. As the taxable value of the station increases, Seneca Township High School District 160 must engage in a process of abatement to ensure the tax rate remains constant at the \$1.79838 value. When we request for our annual levy, we have to intentionally ask for more than \$1.79838 to make our aggregate fund request amounts larger than that number. When a district "asks for" more than a 5% increase in property taxes, we are required to advertise such in the newspaper. Even though we ask for these amounts, due to the contract, we will abate the rate back to \$1.79838 for all taxpayers. As one can see in the graphic below from our most recent end of the year audit, we have kept the past tax rates at that number and will again for the "Actual 2018 Rate." In the 2017 levy tax year, the LaSalle Station was valued at \$430 Million. In the 2018 levy tax year, the station value was at \$435 Million. Finally, in the 2019 levy tax year, the station will be valued at \$460 Million; however, as noted, the taxpayer's tax rate will still be \$1.79838.

From the Desk of SHS Principal, Marty Voiles

Happy Graduation Class of 2019

On Sunday, May 19, 2019, 109 senior students participated in the graduation ceremony of the Seneca High School Class of 2019. Isaac Brockman, Carissa Simon and Mark Mehochko welcomed all in attendance and delivered speeches summarizing their classmates' four years at SHS.

Board of Education President Mr. Ron Frye and Superintendent Dr. Jim Carlson distributed diplomas to all seniors. An estimated 78% percent of graduates from the class of 2019 will continue their education at community colleges, universities, or trade schools throughout the country. On behalf of the Board of Education, the Administration, and the Faculty and Staff, we wish the Class of 2019 the very best in all of their future endeavors!

Congratulations and Great Work!

At the conclusion of the 2018-2019 school year, Seneca High School will be saying thank you and goodbye to three special educators as they close their teaching and coaching careers. Mr. Don Brown (Social Studies), Mrs. Mechthild Ferguson (Math) and Mr. Kirk Houchin (Guidance Counselor) will be retiring from SHS and moving on to life after SHS as they complete a combined 89 years of service.

Mr. Don Brown: After graduating from Illinois State University in 1983, Mr. Brown became a mainstay and pillar of the SHS faculty. Mr. Brown is one of very few educators who spent his entire teaching/coaching career, that of 35 years, in one school district. While at SHS, Mr. Brown taught various classes in the Social Studies Department. Mr. Brown also coached a variety of sports during his tenure, most notably football and softball.

Mr. Kirk Houchin: After graduating from Illinois State University in 1982, Mr. Houchin accepted a teaching and coaching position at Mazon-Verona-Kinsman for the first five years of his career. Then Mr. Houchin joined the SHS staff and has spent the remaining 29 years of his career in the Land of the Irish. While at SHS, Mr. Houchin taught Spanish, World Geography, U.S. History, American Government, and Super Powers. He finished his career as an integral leader in our Student Services Department serving as guidance counselor. Mr. Houchin also served as the head coach for the varsity baseball team for 24 years.

Mechthild Ferguson: Mrs. Ferguson came to Seneca High School after beginning her teaching career at Waltham Middle School as a math teacher. Mrs. Ferguson joined the SHS faculty during the 2001-2002 school year and has taught various courses offered in the Math Department. Mrs. Ferguson also served as an advisor for National Honor Society, WYSE team coach, and she coached both boys' and girls' cross-country and track for many years.

On behalf of the entire Seneca High School family, we wish Mr. Brown, Mr. Houchin, and Mrs. Ferguson a happy and healthy retirement.

From the Desk of Activities Director, Steve Haines

Good Byes are ALWAYS DIFFICULT in the LAND of the IRISH

To the Class of 2019:

As Athletic Director, I would like to thank our senior athletes for what they have done to continue the pride we have in the "Land of the Irish." What they have done for SHS and Irish Pride goes beyond wins and losses. Yes, the Class of 2019 should have great pride in its successes these past four years: conference champions, an Elite 8 appearance, and state champion are memories they will have, and there is hardware to show for these accomplishments, but it's their support of one another that will be the lasting impression I have of this class-- whether it was their spirit in the stands at football and basketball games; or picking up a teammate after a tackle; or helping a teammate off the mat after a match. And let's not forget the dedication it takes in sports, which leads, for example, to the complete exhaustion a runner feels after completing a cross country course. These traits of teamwork and dedication will definitely help these athletes in life, perhaps in raising a family or in a career. Yes, it takes a lot of time and sacrifice to participate on an athletic team. When they were all little guys and gals, they may have come to watch an athletic event at Seneca HS, but these future athletes had no idea of the hot summer days, weight rooms, long practices, and extra time it would someday take to achieve success at this level. So to those of SHS athletes who chose to put on the uniform and represent the Land of the Irish to the best of their ability, I am grateful, and we thank them all very much!

Message from SRO, Ken Sangston

I remember when I first sat down with Dr. Carlson in June 2018, before I became the School Resource Officer. We talked about goals, and he spoke of a positive school culture and the priority of everyone's safety here at SHS. Students who feel safe in school are more engaged in class, obtain academic achievement, and fewer behavior issues. Likewise, educators are better able to focus on academics. I believe we have achieved many of the goals that Dr. Carlson and I discussed, and I will continue to do my part to surpass these standards and reach even higher ones as the Seneca High School Resource Officer.

In the last newsletter, I reported several educational accomplishments that I initiated or to which I contributed in the first semester. In this newsletter, I would like to address an issue that has affected school districts across the nation, including Seneca High School. It is the epidemic of teen vaping and the use of e-cigarettes. Vaping with the use of an e-cigarette was developed as a smoking cessation device to aid in helping smokers quit. Soon, the

industry added pleasantly flavored liquid pods of nicotine, and the marketing to youth had begun. Until recently, the industry and how it contributes to teen addiction have gone unchallenged; however, Illinois' governor recently signed into law "Tobacco 21," which will go into effect on July 1, 2019. There have also been restrictions placed on the way flavored vaping liquids are sold and how the companies use social media as a way to target advertisements for their products to young people. In the future, I believe you will see more restrictions on the national level that regulate this industry. The FDA recently placed the teen vaping epidemic as one of its top priorities. The most concerning factor about the rise of vaping is that people who would never have smoked otherwise, especially youth, are taking up the habit and becoming addicted. Flavored nicotine pods are addictive and can lead to other addictive behaviors, including drug use. To quote an article I recently read, "Vaping is breeding a whole new generation of addiction." We take a pro-active approach to vaping on the Seneca High School campus. Students who are in possession of vaping devices could face school and athletic consequences, in addition to violating village ordinances. Repeat offenders have been issued citations this year. If your teen is vaping and using e-cigarettes, don't write it off as a safe or a risk-free habit. It is not harmless, and it could lead to the use of other addictive substances, as well. Let's not forget that it is against the law for any minor to be in possession of tobacco product, which includes e-cigarettes. I encourage you to speak with your teen about vaping and any matters of addiction. There are many resources at SHS, including Student Success Counselor Ms. Lockridge and School Psychologist Mrs. Rockrohr with whom students can speak if they feel they have a problem with vaping. We strive to not only provide a safe, distraction-free learning environment, but a healthy one as well.

I wish the Class of 2019 good luck with future plans and congratulate students on their achievements while here at Seneca High School. It has been a pleasure to share this year with a great class of seniors. My freshman school year at SHS as the School Resource Officer has come to an end; we all learned a lot, especially me, and I am eagerly looking forward to next school year and taking another active role in keeping your kids and the entire campus safe. Go Irish!

Officer Sangston can be reached at (815)357-5000 Ext. 6123

From the Desk of School Psychologist, Jill Rockrohr

News from the Special Education Department

The 2018-2019 school year brought several changes to the Special Education Department at Seneca High School. We were fortunate to welcome two teachers to the department, Ms. Allie Lardi and Mr. Levi Derber. Both teachers bring experience, innovative ideas, and positive attitudes to our building and have been excellent additions to the department.

This year also saw the expansion of our course offerings to include our first co-taught course sections. In co-taught classes, a general education teacher and special education teacher work together to plan and implement classroom lessons to meet the needs of all learners. Research supports co-teaching as an effective instructional strategy for improving outcomes for both students with disabilities and their general education peers. Co-teaching creates a positive climate for learning and sets high expectations for both academic performance and classroom behavior. Additional benefits for all students include more student involvement, increased accountability, reduced stigma, reduced discipline problems, and enrichment and re-teaching opportunities. This year, two co-taught sections of English III were implemented, with progress noted in both academic skills and classroom behavior. Given the success of this initiative, co-teaching opportunities will be expanded for the next school year to include sections in Math and Science, as well as English.

Another addition to the department is the expansion of the Life Skills and Transition programs to include an apartment-style classroom. Using the existing classroom kitchen and laundry areas, Mrs. Jackie Ugolini utilized attached classroom space to create a living area. These spaces allow students to learn and practice the independent living that they need to be successful into adulthood, including budgeting and bill paying, meal planning and cooking, performing household chores, and planning leisure activities. Looking into next year, Mrs. Ugolini plans to add additional practice with social, emergency, and independent thinking skills in community

settings. In addition, the Transition program will expand employment skills training through classroom modules, as well as school and community jobs.

From the Desk of Assistant Principal, Mike Coughlin

We have had another successful year at Seneca High School! I'm very proud of the students, faculty, and staff for all their efforts. I want to thank all the parents for the many positive conversations and efforts to stress the value and importance of education to their children. Your efforts go a long way to ensuring your child's success here and for their future.

In regards to our students . . . I specifically want to mention the Class of 2019 and your leadership, which started immediately in August. To all the seniors, we send you out the door with Best Wishes for your future endeavors! In regards to our faculty . . . I want to take a moment to thank Mr. Don Brown, Mrs. Mechthild Ferguson, and Mr. Kirk Houchin for their friendship, professionalism, and true commitment to SHS. We had a nice night on Thursday, May 2, in Utica as we celebrated their teaching careers with the three of them at the Excellence in Education Banquet. I hope that Don, Mechthild, and Kirk enjoy the best parts of their retirements.

The staff here is simply awesome . . . I want to thank all the staff members for everything they do for the students at Seneca High School. Everyone who works at SHS knows what a privilege it is to work at such a great school. Part of what makes it such a special place is a wonderful staff that routinely goes above and beyond for the benefit of others.

I'm hoping that everyone has a safe and enjoyable summer! I look forward to seeing everyone on Friday, August 16th!

Seneca FFA Has a Banner Year in Career Development:

FFA Career Development Events (CDEs, aka "contests") give students an opportunity to exhibit what they have learned in the classroom and from their SAEs. The events are designed to assist in preparing students for agriculture related careers. Classroom instruction comes to life as students demonstrate their skills in a competitive setting, providing for friendly competition between schools. Over 100 Seneca FFA members competed in 35 CDEs this past year. This semester saw many accomplishments in CDEs by The Seneca FFA, highlighted by a state championship in the Horticulture CDE.

FCCLA

FCCLA has taken a new focus the past couple years and are really putting a lot of effort in to community outreach. This year FCCLA took part in a service project almost every month from September through May. The goal this year was to help others! In September, FCCLA sold Pink Irish Hoodies to help raise money PINK HEALS, an organization that supports women-fighting cancer. In October, we helped Milton Pope with their Mum fundraiser. FCCLA member also had a fun day with HOSA at Six Flags Fright Fest. This is our annual fun day out, it is a great way to kick off the year. In November, many of the FCCLA members and NHS members helped at Milton Popes Concession stand. This month FCCLA also helped put on the Seneca Grade School Family Reading night. The members created and ran games all night for the grade school students. December is a busy month, but Seneca Grade school asked us to bake dozens of cutout cookies for the SGS Family Christmas party, we were happy to help!

This year FCCLA held our 3rd Annual Mom/Son Night in February. We had over 200 guest attend our Weird Science Show and dance the night away with DJ Kelsey Adams. In May, we ended the year by hosting our most popular event, the 4th Annual Daddy/Daughter Dance. We hosted over 250 fathers and daughters. So many students helped make this night successful. FCCLA could not be part of any of these activities if it was not for the time and

effort of the member's. We are grateful that we were able to reach our goal of helping others in the community this year.

Woodworking:

As a person that got into teaching to be a woods teacher, I am thrilled once again to be teaching woods here at SHS. Up until three years ago, I hadn't taught woods since teaching at GSW High School in 2000. When Mr. Kluzek was getting ready to retire, I knew I wanted to take over the woods program, ironically from the person that taught me in high school woods. It's very gratifying to see students working with their hands to create something useful and practical. Each year, I have tried to raise the bar a little as far as expectations go. I am somewhat of a perfectionist, and I try to pass some of that trait onto my students. I want them to care about the quality of their projects and do the little things that can turn a good project into a great one. Students have done a wide variety of great projects throughout the year. Some of them include butcher block cutting boards, drink coaster sets, shelves, book cases, end tables, tavern mirrors, coffee tables, benches, blanket chests, etc. Although this year is winding down, I am already looking forward to next year. I have some new projects ideas that I have come up with for students to try and we will be adding another table saw and a CNC machine to the woods lab. I don't give out any woods awards at the end of the year, but I would like to recognize outstanding work in the woods lab for the 2018-19 school year. Here are the names of students that had one or more outstanding projects this year: Trey Thorsen, Brett Yegge , T.J. VanNess , Nic Greco, Colton Kline, Ethan Knoebel, Ben Hogue, and Sam Grushkin.

Bryan Erickson, Woods and Engineering Graphics Instructor

10 Reasons Why Woodworking Classes Are Relevant in the 21st Century

Gives students the opportunity to perform precise work and to produce useful products.

Instills habits of attention, perseverance, and patience.

Instills a pride of accomplishment and self-esteem.

Students gain hands-on skills that can transfer to many different types of careers.

Helps students gain confidence as real world problem solvers.

Allows for students to demonstrate skills and pursue excellence in a non-core class.

Provides relevancy of other subjects to their lives, thereby preparing them for a lifetime of learning.

Hands-on learning helps students become more adept at grasping complex concepts.

Students learn to use tools and machines and the safety concerns involved with each.

Emphasizes math and measuring skills.

Philanthropy:

At an award banquet held on the evening of May 9th at Morris County Club, seven members of the *SHS Young Philanthropists Group* presented three local nonprofits with grant checks to support their missions. Three other local schools presented checks, as well, for a total of \$25,000 being disbursed by the Young Philanthropists to their chosen local nonprofit organizations. Seneca High is proud of the effort and time committed by these students and their advisors.

Throughout the school year, approximately fourteen students from Seneca High attend scheduled Young Philanthropy Group meetings led by Devan Gagliardo, Program Director of the *Community Foundation of Grundy County*. During the meetings, Devan educates the students about humanitarianism, having a social conscience about one's community, and how to delegate charitable funds. Each year the YP students learn about local nonprofit organizations that rely on grants and donations to help fund their causes. The students in the YP Group must then decide, as a team, who would benefit the most from their allotted funds and what portion of the \$5000 total grant monies each np organization will receive. This year, the Seneca YP Group chose three organizations to receive grant checks: All those left behind at \$1,500; Special Connections at \$1,500; and Community Nutrition Network at \$2,000. SHS Guidance Counselor, Chris Jackson, was Devan's first school advisor to help get local students involved in the CFGF young philanthropist endeavor. This is the fifth consecutive year that Seneca High students have participated in the Young Philanthropy Program, which now includes YP Groups from Coal City, Gardner-South Wilmington, and Morris High Schools.

St. Baldricks:

St. Baldrick's is a charity that funds grants for Childhood cancer research through head-shaving events and other fundraisers across the globe, so kids with cancer can live long, healthy lives. Seneca High School hosted its 11th St.

Baldrick's event on Friday, February 22, 2019. The event was organized by Mandi Beck (11 years) and Jenna Maierhofer (2 years). Seneca High School faculty members Allie Lardi and Alison McCarthy served as treasurers for the event, with Erica Read serving as barber coordinator. Barbers were Brandi Rowley and Oscar Luevano. We had a total of eight shavees who participated, including Ben Klinges and Claire DeGraaf (Seneca High School), Allison Lyles and Chloe Thompson (Seneca Grade School), Chris Smith (MVK), Calvin Maierhofer (Milton Pope), Mike O'Kray (Seneca High School staff), and Tara Bersano (community member). Three participants raised over \$1000 each for the event, with Chloe Thompson leading in all funds raised (\$1524.21), followed by Ben Klinges (\$1477.38), and Allison Lyles (\$1111.18). Two participants were repeat shavees, Calvin Maierhofer returning for his sixth year, raising a total of \$1572.30 over his six years, and Chris Smith returning for his third year, raising a total of \$1649.53. This was our biggest year yet, with a total fundraiser amount of \$5780.39! Over the eleven years that Seneca High School has hosted a St. Baldrick's event, we have raised over \$26,000 for childhood cancer research!

We truly wish all of our graduates the best of luck in all their future endeavors!