



Inside Track

A Model District Where Students Want To Be
Home of the Railroaders!



First grade students at Bertha Neal Elementary participated in an annual service project called "Trees for Troops". Students brought in money to purchase Christmas trees to send to a military base in Texas. They decorated ornaments and made paper chain garlands to send with them. The First Grade classes were able to purchase 5 trees this year!



Students of the Month

The following students were chosen by staff members as Railroaders of the Month for December: 8th grader Jordan Call, 9th grader Devin Wood, 10th grader Kyle Godley, 11th grader Kellie Medina, and 12th grader Gordon Novak. Congratulations!



Navy Support from FCCLA

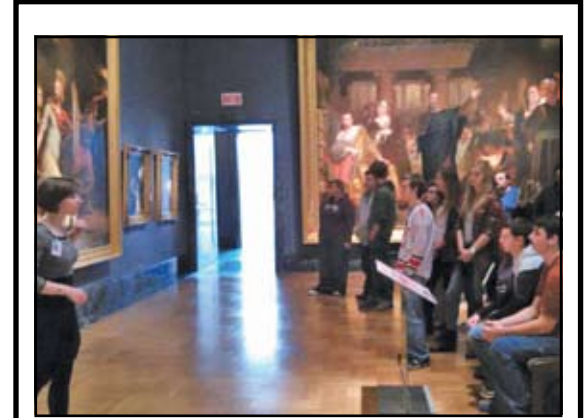
The Durand Area Family and Consumer Science Program and FCCLA have partnered to send 40 boxes of home baked cookies to members of the United States Navy stationed in Yokosuka, Japan. All of Mrs. Salfate's high school classes made cookies, cards or decorated containers to send to the sailors. Members of our FCCLA Chapter packed the cookies and prepared the boxes to ship. The cookies were then sent to Durand High School Graduate Kayla Thayer stationed in Yokosuka. Kayla will disperse the boxes to sailors. FCCLA members Kassi Ross and Kayla Frizzell will present this project at the FCCLA State Leadership Conference in March. FCCLA would also like to thank the Durand Athletics Department for their help with the shipping costs.



Students at Robert Kerr are hosting both a canned food drive and filling a box for Toys for Tots. All donations will benefit local charities.



Robert Kerr students wanted to spread some holiday cheer throughout the community. Students performed holiday carols at the Depot, Lodges of Durand, and the Sycamore House.



Art News

On December 2nd, the advanced art students at DHS had the opportunity to take a field trip to the Detroit Institute of Arts. Students spent the day visiting the DIA with tour guides and were able to see many famous works of art. Students will use this experience to help them create their semester art show coming soon on January 5th from 4-8 p.m. in the Durand High School Cafeteria. Be sure to mark your calendars!

Superintendent News

As many of you may have read in previous issues of the Independent and the Argus Press, many Michigan communities, including a few in Shiawassee County, have had ongoing issues of declining student enrollment which have resulted in the consolidation and closing of school buildings. You might be interested to know that last spring the high schools in Shiawassee County collectively graduated 1,200 students and had an incoming kindergarten class of only 600 combined. Additionally, these communities have also taken steps to successfully sell closed buildings. Durand Area Schools is currently experiencing the same challenges as others in regards to declining enrollment, the closing of Wilbur Bills and Doyle Knight elementary schools in 2011.

In the last year our school's teachers, administrators and board members have discussed various ways to repurpose these buildings and potentially re-open one of them in a new capacity. Also, during this time the Board of Education has been approached by a few outside entities inquiring about the possibility of purchasing these buildings. This has been a catalyst for us to consider again, all of the options regarding the closed elementary schools. What follows breaks down some of our discussion points and building issues that impact our thoughts on how to move forward with these shuttered buildings?

During each conversation we have, the overriding consideration is, "How will this impact the communities of Lennon or Bancroft?" With our current situation where people are interested in purchasing

the buildings, we know it is important for us to be mindful of what each community might think about the sale to an outside group. We are currently in the process of setting up meeting times in early January to have conversations and gather input from each community regarding the potential sale of both Wilbur Bills and Doyle Knight elementary.

Much of the conversation that we would like to have is to share some of the issues and costs involved in maintaining closed buildings. The bottom line? The buildings have become a financial drain on the school's budget. Currently, we still need to pay bills for insurance, gas, electric, water/sewer, snow removal, mowing, and electronic security protection. Added up, the bills amount to over \$28,000 per year. This amount doesn't include the time involved by school personnel to monitor and handle problems within the buildings.

There's another financial monster lurking that would be unavoidable if we were to re-open one of these buildings for instructional purposes. By law, after a school building has been shuttered for an extended period of time, in order to re-open the school, all code updates would be necessary. These code updates include adhering to the Americans with Disabilities Act, fire code, mechanical and electrical updates, etc. The cost? In discussions with our school attorney, architects, and construction manager, the going rate at a minimum would come to \$30 per square foot to bring everything up to date. With a 25,000 square foot building, that would be \$750,000, at the very least, just to re-open one of the buildings. A more realistic number was quoted to me at the rate of \$60-\$90 per square foot. Again, the bot-

tom line? It would not be cost effective at all to re-open either Doyle Knight or Wilbur Bills as a school setting. Knowing last year that we could potentially end up needing to resolve our school dilemma, the district had a professional projected student enrollment study completed. Last fall, the district had 1,502 students in the October count. By 2019/2020, the projected enrollment for Durand Area Schools is to be 1,300 students. Translation...there won't be a need anytime in the next several years for additional space for students. That knowledge, combined with the ongoing costs and future costs, has the district needing to address this issue.

Recently at our December 14 board meeting, the Board of Education voted to accept bids for the potential sale of both Wilbur Bills and Doyle Knight elementary schools. Bids will be accepted up until 3 p.m. on January 11, 2016. The Board of Education would like to invite everyone to our board meeting that evening at 7 p.m. at the middle school. We intend to have an open discussion regarding all issues regarding the potential sale of the buildings during this time. No action regarding the potential sale of each building will be taken during the January 11 board meeting. The earliest any board action would take place would be at the January 27th board meeting held at the administration building at 6:30 p.m.

Have a wonderful break with your family, and please contact me in the event that you have any questions.

Regards,

Craig McCrumb
Superintendent, Durand Area Schools