



SMITHTOWN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

# DIGEST

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY

WINTER 2017

## Science Stars

### THREE STUDENTS HONORED BY SIEMENS

Sarah Adamo from High School West and Anjali Balamurugan and Erika Nemeth from High School East are among more than 400 students from across the United States named semifinalists in this year's prestigious Siemens Competition, the nation's premier competition in math, science and technology for high school students. Additionally, Sarah and Erika's projects were selected to compete in the regional finals but did not move on to the next round.

Sarah's project, "Using *Nematostella vectensis* to spotlight the ancient roots of Nicotinic Cholinergic Neurotransmission," is an in-house study with all the experimental work conducted at High School West. She studied nicotinic receptors in the sea anemone, *Nematostella vectensis*, which is believed to be among the first animals in the tree of life to possess a nervous system. By understanding how these receptors work in this basal system and by studying the relationships of the receptor proteins in *Nematostella vectensis* to those in higher organisms, the goal is to discover the ancient roots of this important neurochemical system and explore how it evolved into its current state in higher organisms.



Erica's project is "Cell-Based delivery of Gene-Silencing products Via Gap Junction Channels." According to Erika, the goal of her study was "to effectively deliver microRNAs and confirm the effects on cancer cells. It was found that microRNAs significantly decreased the expression of specific cancer proteins and cancer cell division. Also, in order to deliver microRNAs from a donor cell to a cancer cell, a transfer model was investigated. Results showed that microRNAs were successfully delivered through this cell-based model and were still functional, maintaining their regulatory properties. Based solely on molecules inherent in the body and fundamental cellular communication, this study establishes

foundations for therapeutic applications of a specifically targeted method of tumor suppression."

Anjali's project is "Blood metal Concentration in Association with Thyroid Hormones and Autoantibodies in Avid Seafood Consumers." According to Anjali, "this study aimed to investigate the association between toxic blood metals and their respective thyroid markers from the data gathered by the Long Island Seafood Consumption Study."

Launched by the Siemens Foundation in 1999, the Siemens Competition awards more than \$600,000 in college scholarships to students annually through regional and national events administered by Discovery Education.



# District Enters Contract for NYA Property

During our October 25th meeting, the Board of Education approved a contract of sale of our New York Avenue property to national developer Southern Land Company. This decision was reached following months of careful planning and extensive research. When deciding to move forward, the Board weighed a number of options, including the potential impact to our students, our school community and our taxpayers. This decision was not made lightly.

Our school district enrollment continues to decline each year - plummeting from a recent high of 10,800 in 2009 to the current 9,300. It is projected to continue declining until it reaches approximately 8,500 students in a few short years. Even with the closing of Branch Brook, our remaining elementary schools have room for an additional 1,200 students among them.

Both the ninety-three year old New York Avenue main building and the 1964 addition require extensive work and funds to keep safe as a workplace. The district would receive no reimbursement from the state for this cost since this building is used for administration, not instruction. Due to required asbestos and lead abatements, the demolition of the building would cost in excess of \$2 million. All developers assumed the cost of the demolition in their bids.

Prior to listing the property on the market, members of our administration met with town and county officials to discuss the prospect of the sale, our district's declining enrollment, and the Town's plan to revitalize Smithtown's downtown Main Street area. Specifically, following conversations with the Town, the district's real estate brokers solicited developers who conformed to the Town's desire to see a rental development be constructed on the site of the New York Avenue property to be part of the downtown revitalization.

The sale of the New York Avenue property will yield approximately \$15 million or more to assist the district with future budgetary concerns. The sale will also put these 13.25 acres back on the tax rolls and be an additional source of revenue to the Town and school district. These funds can be used for a variety of purposes from much needed building improvements to reducing the tax levy.

One of the Board's primary responsibilities is to be fiscally responsible to the residents of the entire Smithtown Central School District. Throughout this entire process, the Board of Education has done its due diligence and worked to ensure this process will benefit the greater Smithtown Central School District community.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### When was the sale of the New York Avenue property discussed?

The sale of the property has been a goal of the district for many years. In fact, the sale of the property has been one of the published Board of Education goals since 2014.

The public discussion of the sale of the New York Avenue began most recently in the fall of 2015 as the Board was determining whether to close an elementary school in the 2017-18 school year. Many community residents requested that efforts be made to determine the feasibility of the sale and its future financial impact for the district.

Attempts to sell the New York Avenue property were also undertaken in 2012 when Nesconset Elementary was closed and records indicate the sale of the property was initially proposed and offers considered as far back as 1994.

### Is a vote required to sell this or any district property?

No, as a central school district, voter approval is not required to sell real property. The right to sell real property was granted when the Central School District was formed in 1955.

### Why is the land being developed for rental property?

Conversations with Town officials regarding what type of project would likely be approved were held prior to the marketing of the property. The desire to see a rental community developed was relayed by Town officials as most "favorable."

### Is the sale complete?

The district entered a contract of sale for the property. The developer can withdraw from the contract for any reason until February 9, 2017. After that, the completion of the sale depends on the developer obtaining a zoning variance from the Town. If they don't receive the variance, they have the right to cancel the contract.

### What happens to the soccer fields?

The current developer plans to maintain approximately three soccer fields at New York Avenue. Additional fields can be constructed on other properties the district owns so that there will be no loss of the soccer fields.

## Familiar Faces in New Places



**Christopher Elsesser**, *Assistant Principal at High School West*

**Prior employment:** I have worked as a business teacher at High School West since 2008.

**Educational background:** Bachelor of Science in marketing management and business education certificate from Siena College; MBA in general management from Fairfield University; advanced graduate certificates in school building leadership and school district leadership from

Dowling College.

**Most looking forward to in new position:** I am most looking forward to building strong relationships with students, parents, staff and community members to help ensure the academic and social success of each student in our school.



**Michael Freiberg**, *Acting Administrator for 504s and Special Projects*

**Prior employment:** Most recently, I was the assistant principal at High School West since 2012. I also served as assistant principal of Great Hollow Middle School from 2004-2012.

**Educational background:** Bachelor of Arts in child development from Tufts University; master's degree in learning disabilities,

master's degree in educational administration and master's degree in reading disabilities from Teachers College, Columbia University.

**Most looking forward to in new position:** I look forward to helping students with their individual needs by providing them with appropriate supportive measures.

# PLTW Takes Learning to a New Level

After launching Project Lead the Way at the start of the school year, the district is witnessing some of the successful connections the program is making with its elementary and middle school students. PLTW is the nation's foremost provider of science, technology, engineering and math programs, and the district has successfully integrated it into the curriculum for all students in grades K-5 and as an elective in seventh-grade.

With an array of hands-on activities, students are engaging in learning, discovering and exploring all at the same time. For example, elementary school students have been introduced to coding. Working in collaborative learning partnerships in an activity called Rosie's Run Time, they created a set of instructions to simulate writing code. The students are learning how to "pair up" when programming, with one person being the "driver" and one as the "navigator." The students were encouraged to problem-solve by "debugging" their program to move the character Rosie from the start to the finish while completing tasks along the way. With a focus on efficiency when coding, students learned to utilize run, repeat and if/then functions.

In the fourth-grade computer module, students are taking their coding skills a step further. They created an image on

a grid and wrote code using the simple data compression technique of run-length encoding. The code was then shared with another student, who used it to recreate the image. Once completed, the two students compared their images to see if they perfectly matched or if there were any "bugs." If they found a bug, they had to go back to the code, debug it and determine if there was an error in the encoding (the writing of the code) or the decoding (the reading of the code).

Fifth-graders explored the "mystery germ" under ultraviolet lights. Even after they had cleaned their hands, the germs would glow, indicating the importance of proper hand-washing.

At the middle schools, seventh-graders in the Flight and Space course tested their project-based learning by building hot air balloons and test launching them. The students learned about engineering, design and flight to get the background required to build and launch their balloons successfully.

Some of the resources available for research and design include laptops, whiteboxlearning.com and the PLTW learning management system. Lessons include virtually lighter than air vehicles, the four forces of flight, Newton's Laws of Motion, Bernoulli's principle, the history of flight and the Wright Brothers.



# Ring in the Season of Giving

All around the district, students and staff warmed up for the holidays. When it comes to community service and helping those in need, there are plenty of activities that show just how caring Smithtown students and staff are. Here are a few examples of holiday happenings:

Dogwood's fifth-grade Peanut Butter Gang created recycled holiday cards out of cards from last year. The club also made treat rolls filled with candy, crossword puzzles and positive messages for the residents of a local nursing home. The school also had a Giving Tree in the lobby for donations to local and district families in need.



Mills Pond participated in its annual PTA-sponsored coat, mitten, glove and hat drive. The school collected more than 120 coats and boxes full of gloves, hats, scarves, socks, snowsuits, sweatshirts and blankets. The Mills Pond Cares Club sponsored a healthy snack sale during parent-teacher conference days and donated the proceeds to the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Tackan second-graders made wash kits for the homeless. The school also collected food and toys in December to ensure students and their families enjoyed the holiday season.

The Family, Career and Community Leaders of America club is a new organization at the district's three middle schools and two high schools. The members participate in events throughout the school year. Students at Great Hollow spread holiday cheer by devoting one of their meetings to making holiday cards that were sent with thanks to the men and women serving our country overseas. The FCCLA at Accomsett Middle School decorated doors for residents at the Nesconset Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation.



At High School West, National Honor Society members helped decorate Santa's workshop for the Smithtown Children's Foundation's holiday breakfast. The school also hosted Operation Santa: Be an Elf, a spare change drive with proceeds earmarked to purchase gifts requested by underprivileged children's letters to Santa.



High School East participated in Operation Gratitude, creating ink-screened cards to show their appreciation to one another during the holiday season.

# LEARNING LIFE SKILLS

The district's Functional Academic Secondary Transition program, also known as FAST, gives special education students in grades 9-12 the ability to move into a work environment by preparing them with hands-on learning skills.

The district partners with Abilities Inc., an organization that prepares individuals with disabilities for the workforce through job training and employment placement services, in three phases for the program. The first phase starts with students who are beginning high school. They learn prevocational skills, career exploration and functional academics. Next, they transition to a combination of functional academics and go to job sites three periods per day. The third phase reinforces and continues functional academics and has students work on-site for six periods per day.

Locally, the district and Abilities have aligned with many community resources to provide job experience for FAST students. Stop & Shop, SteinMart, CVS, Savers, Home Depot, Party City, Gap and Outback Steakhouse are just some of the many organizations where the students are garnering real-life job experiences. The job sites are geared to meet students' interests and change throughout the year to expose them to different experiences and possible new interests.

Students in the FAST program also engage in community service activities throughout the year. So far this year, the students held a bake sale and collected food items for Thanksgiving.

Students are not only working and helping in the community, they are also exploring the local area through field trips and guest speakers. They have visited the fire department, the

Smithtown Library and an apple cider orchard. Throughout the year, they also learn how to navigate the community safely through travel training opportunities.

Another aspect of the FAST program incorporates socialization, teaching students how to participate at events and form friendships outside of school. Once a month, students take part in activities such as bowling or ice cream parties.

"The new FAST program is off to a great start," said Matthew Prah, assistant administrator for special education. "It's wonderful to see students learning functional academics in school and applying those skills at the job sites. Students have been excited to go out into the workforce and have taken pride in the work that they do. It truly is an exciting program that better prepares our students for life after high school."

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## Parent U Offers Education, Resources

The district, in conjunction with the PTA and the Suffolk County Police Department, presented Parent University in late October.

During the evening event, parents had an opportunity to attend one of two educational workshops: "The Ugly Truth," an informational presentation on heroin and prescription drug use and awareness, or a screening of "Screenagers," a documentary on the impact of screen time on students.

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Jennifer Bradshaw introduced the guest speakers for the "The Ugly Truth," which included Suffolk County police

officers, the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's Office and the Suffolk County Police Academy's EMT Unit.

"We are working on the protective and proactive factors in our schools," Ms. Bradshaw said. "There are many great resources available to parents at the schools and in our community." Following the presentation, parents were invited to receive free overdose and prevention training and a take-home kit on Narcan use. Representatives from various community resource organizations were also available with information.

Parents learned about the impact of screen time on



students and received expert advice from pediatricians, brain researchers, psychologists and technology researchers in the "Screenagers" film. A discussion facilitated by

district principals gave parents some time to talk about their ideas and struggles in effectively balancing technology use by their children.

\*\*\*\*ECRWSS\*\*\*\*

SMITHTOWN POSTAL CARRIER

## TEACHER SPOTLIGHT: ELIZABETH STEIN

Elizabeth Stein wears many hats. As the district's Special Education/Universal Design for Learning instructional coach and mentor teacher program coordinator, she is diligently working to embed UDL in the classroom.

"As we look at teaching through a UDL lens, we focus on eliminating barriers in the curriculum, not within the students," Ms. Stein said. "Students' abilities are valued and embraced while we design the learning environment to create access and meaningful, equitable learning experiences in all classrooms."

For example, at the elementary level, Ms. Stein co-taught with fifth-grade teachers to guide students to monitor their own performance and thinking as they transitioned to a math lesson. Students were actively engaged in a mindful moment using a mood meter activity that came from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to empower their ability to attend to and master content area learning. The results found that they

transitioned with greater ease and focus for the math lesson ahead.

At the middle school and high school levels, Ms. Stein works in small, cooperative learning groups. High school students in a global history class are immersed in UDL as they apply critical thinking skills to compare, contrast, analyze and synthesize information.

"Gone are the days where students sit in rows quietly and passively listen to the teacher share the facts," said Ms. Stein. "In a UDL classroom, they are active learners who sit in groups, share their understandings and extend one another's thinking through intentional design to provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. They take charge of their own learning."

Ms. Stein is also a cadre member of the CAST Professional Learning organization. She works with CAST researchers and professional developers to raise awareness and practical UDL applications through research, writing,

and training teachers in New York and other states to embed UDL within a natural learning process in any classroom.

During the summer months, Ms. Stein is one of the coordinators for Smithtown's Summer Resiliency CAMP, a program grounded in research to support growth mindset and educating the whole child through social-emotional, inquiry-based and project-based learning.

Aside from her passion for UDL, Ms. Stein is also an author. She has published two informative and comprehensive books that highlight approaches to instructional strategies in special education. She is also a contributing writer at Education Week Teacher and author of a blog, "Two Teachers in the Room," about reflections and solutions in embracing co-teaching success for all learners in the classroom, including the teachers. Ms. Stein is currently a doctoral candidate in Molloy College's Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities program.

### Register Your Child for Kindergarten Now

Children in the district who will turn 5 years of age on or before Dec. 1, 2017 are eligible to register for kindergarten in the 2017-18 school year. For more information and a kindergarten registration checklist, please visit the district website: [www.smithtown.k12.ny.us](http://www.smithtown.k12.ny.us).

### INCLEMENT WEATHER PROCEDURES

In preparation for the upcoming winter weather, parents and students should familiarize themselves with emergency school procedures. The following radio and television stations have agreed to broadcast news about emergency school closings, delayed openings and early dismissal procedures: WALK (1370 AM, 97.5 FM), WBLI (106.1 FM), News 12 – Channel 12, FIOS 1. The district's website, [www.smithtown.k12.ny.us](http://www.smithtown.k12.ny.us), will also post important information.

If inclement weather makes it necessary to dismiss students early, the radio and television stations will be notified, and the district automated calling system will be activated.

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY DIGEST

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