

2022 – Spring/Summer Newsletter:

Message from the Board of Education:

It might sound cliché, but the 2021-22 school year has been one of great excitement. The district administrative team worked hard to return Seneca High School students back to a “normal” educational program. The pandemic, along with the corresponding governmental rules and regulations, proved quite challenging to overcome; but, overcome them we did. The meaning of Irish Pride was elevated to an entirely different level, as I watched the commitment of our staff and students to our school year norms and traditions.

Seneca High School fought hard to return to normal, being the first community in the LaSalle County area to return to normal mitigations in February. Superintendent Dan Stecken spoke in our wonderful traditional graduation ceremony about adversity and character. He said to the Class of 2022, “You’ve triumphed in education here at Seneca High School, Class of 2022, in the face of difficult circumstances. Adversity doesn’t build character; rather, it reveals it.” Our students and staff have risen to overcome adversity these past few years, revealing their character.

This school year also presented challenges for our Board of Education. We held many Board of Education meetings with the goal of continuing the district’s vision of the Seneca Way and serving our students, staff, and community with Irish Pride. I am proud of my fellow Board members and our teachers and support staff who continued to put the best interest of our students first. Seneca High School would not have been able to accomplish any of our goals without these committed and dedicated professionals.

Looking ahead to the 2022-23 school year, the Board of Education is excited about the direction of our young administrative team. Our Superintendent, Mr. Dan Stecken, Our Principal, Mr. Mike Coughlin, and our Dean of Students, Mr. Mark Giertz, have led this year with great enthusiasm and passion for Seneca High School. Our school is experiencing a changing of the guard in a few key arenas. I wish Mr. Steve Haines, Activities Director, Mr. Kent Weber, Agriculture Instructor, and Mr. Barry Buchanan, Maintenance Director, all the best in their retirement, and I want to thank them for their service to the Seneca High School Community. As our retirees ride off into the sunset, we welcome some new faces into these positions. The SHS Board of Education is excited to work with Mr. Ted O’Boyle as new district Activities Director, Mr. Mitch Miller and Ms. Cally Diss, Agriculture Instructors, and Mr. Jim Harsted, our new Maintenance Director.

On behalf of the entire SHS Board of Education, thank you, Seneca High School Community, for your continued support of our school. Our sincere best wishes for a healthy and happy summer break, and we are looking forward to a great 2022-2023 school year.

Ron Frye

Board of Education President

Message from Principal, Mr. Mike Coughlin:

It's my pleasure to be able to provide a recap of the Graduation ceremony for the Class of 2022. The ceremony was held in the Seneca High School Gymnasium on Sunday, May 15th. First, I want to thank the Class of 2022 for their dedication and daily habits that provided so much leadership over the past twelve months. Now, for the graduation ceremony recap!

Mr. Stecken, the SHS Superintendent, began the ceremony asking everyone to join him for the Pledge of Allegiance. During his speech, Mr. Stecken reminded the graduates of exactly how far they have come over the past four years. He shared a favorite quote hanging on a wall in a children's home formerly run by Mother Teresa. *"Give the best you have and you [may] get kicked in the teeth, [but] give the world the best you've got anyway."* Lastly, Mr. Stecken spoke about the bright future with many opportunities and possibilities for all the graduates. *Of course, he thanked them for their contributions and wished them the best.*

Mr. Stecken then introduced our student speakers, all of whom had earned this opportunity because of their distinction of Summa Cum Laude. Brady Danek was the first student speaker. Brady is the son of Brian and Heather Danek. Brady will be attending University of Missouri in the fall and majoring in Industrial Engineering. Brady challenged his classmates to find their inner superhero in everything they do in the future. He reminded the graduates that, "With great opportunity comes great responsibility."

The second student speaker was Elizabeth Davis. Elizabeth is the daughter of Dana Watson and Floyd Davis. Elizabeth will attend Illinois Wesleyan University in the fall, majoring in Biology. Elizabeth shared with her classmates that she "admired their class for the ability to be there for each other, despite the circumstances that could have separated us." Elizabeth went on to say, "Being a student at SHS has shown me how grateful I am to be part of a community that cares about their students and the students care about each other."

The last student speaker was Emma Smith. Emma is the daughter of Luri Maier-Lorntz and Dave Smith. Emma will be attending Illinois State University in the fall, majoring in Animal Science. Emma reminded her classmates of all the wonderful things they learned in kindergarten that are relevant to everyone, regardless of age. She ended by encouraging her classmates to take advantage of the opportunities available to them, as they never know when that opportunity will expire.

All three speakers did an excellent job sharing great advice with their fellow graduates. Before Mr. Giertz announced the names of all the graduates, I had the privilege of recognizing a couple different groups of students within the Class of 2022. First, I recognized the twenty-four seniors that are members of the National Honor Society. The National Honor Society is an organization that promotes scholarship, service, character, and leadership. I then recognized the Illinois State Scholars. The Class of 2022 had eleven students earn the distinction based on criteria of grade point average and SAT exam scores. The groups of students that graduated with academic distinction, based on their earned grade point average, were also recognized. All students graduating Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude and Summa Cum Laude were recognized in the program and by the special honor cords that they wore in the ceremony. Lastly, we recognized four seniors who have made the commitment to serve their country in the

United States Armed Forces.

As the Class of 2022 switched their tassels, senior student Bailey Johnson made her way to the podium to lead the Band. Bailey is the daughter of Brent and Bonni Johnson. During her senior year, Bailey was selected to perform with the Illinois Music Education Association District 2 Concert Band, and she has been selected to perform with the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles Youth Orchestra in Prague, Czech Republic this July. Bailey is the winner of this year's John Philip Sousa Band Award and will be attending Bradley University this fall to major in Music Education.

Thanks again to the Class of 2022 and everyone that attended or had a role in making the Graduation a special day for SHS and a wonderful group of students.

Mike Coughlin—Principal

Message from Superintendent, Mr. Dan Stecken:

In the Fall of 2021, I wrote to our community about the district's work with Wold Architects & Engineers on our "Competition Gymnasium Addition" project. At that time, we were completing the first of three phases, called Schematic Design. Since that time, our gym planning group, consisting of Board of Education members, community members, administration, and other key stakeholders has continued the second phase, "Design Development." This summer we anticipate the conclusion of the second phase, preparing for the third and final pre-construction phase, "Construction Documents."

As you may recall from that last writing, the Board of Education has been planning and saving for this needed project for several years, building its "Capital Projects" fund balance over \$6 million. Before the project begins the district anticipates having 70% of the project completely saved for in this fund and will pay the remainder from operating funds. Again, this means there will be no bonding and no increase in the property tax rate. When we first set out to begin this project, we established goals and former Superintendent, Dr. Jim Carlson, engaged the community in the Summer of 2021 with guiding principles. Our goals have not changed in our committee's work and the entire process has been an exciting moment of IRISH PRIDE. Those previously established goals include:

The Guiding Principles of the Committee's Work:

Community pride in our end product.

Multi-use facility beyond "just a gym."

More family friendly; eliminating early and late practices.

Tournament facility with the ability to host large venues and multi-team events.

Engage the community in a transparent fashion.

Increased community access to the West Campus.

As our work has continued, I am excited to share some of our preliminary gymnasium photos

here. You will note that the group wanted the addition to blend in with the existing structure as much as possible, taking great pride in our building. Additionally, the group wanted a main “Competition Court” with auxiliary courts to maximize practice space to continue to be a family-friendly district. Finally, now that we are over a year into the planning, I am excited to share that our website features a “Gym Blog” that has early plans, pictures, and will offer ongoing progress photos and meeting notes to make the process as transparent and community engaging as possible. This project is an exciting phase in the growth of our district, one that our students, employees, and community can be extremely proud of, continuing our efforts along The Seneca Way with great IRISH PRIDE!!

Dan Stecken, Superintendent

Message from Fiscal Services Director, Stacey Gould:

On April 28th, Seneca High School had its first ever job and career fair in the school gymnasium. The event was a huge success with over 35 companies here to share career information with our students. Some companies were even issuing applications and offering jobs on the spot.

Although some may believe that high school career fairs are irrelevant due to many students heading to college instead of the workforce, that couldn't be farther from the truth. Not only are students allowed to network and engage with businesses in the local community, but they also have the opportunity to explore different careers and receive advice from employers about their field or industry. Students have the opportunity to ask questions, discover a new career path, or even just make a connection that could eventually turn into an internship, apprenticeship, or another entry-level job in the future.

In a world full of technology, social media, and less and less in-person interaction, opportunities such as career fairs are becoming a critical component in preparing our students for life after high school. While receiving a lot of great feedback about our students, there was also some concern that many lacked interpersonal skills, such as good eye contact and the ability to think and respond on their feet. It's feedback like this that will serve as a baseline for more relevant curriculum and instruction choices in English and CTE classes, to prepare our students for events like this. We hope this event will continue to grow and be successful year after year, attracting more local businesses and providing even more opportunities for our students.

Message from SRO Ken Sangston:

This year marks my 30th year as a police officer and my fourth year as a school resource officer. An SRO is a sworn law enforcement officer in the State of Illinois, a member of the local police department who is assigned to a local school district to promote and provide a safe and secure campus. It is much different being an SRO at Seneca High School than it is in a large school district or a school in a large city. In fact, the least performed duty while at the school is that of policing. Yes, I have referred kids to juvenile probation on some extreme cases, and I have issued citations, either traffic or city ordinance on occasions to kids, but it is a rarity. In addition to having an armed police officer on campus at all times, there are many policy and safety

procedures that are in place during a school day. There is a controlled and limited access to the campus on a daily basis. The controlled access includes a check in procedure of all visitors entering the campus for a meeting or business. This procedure cross checks the sex offender database and wanted persons lists before admittance to a business. Hall monitors check doors throughout the day to assure the building remains in a secure state. The faculty and staff are trained in A.L.I.C.E. (Alert Lockdown Inform Counter Evacuate) and attend a refresher course every two years for a reminder about how to respond to a violent critical incident. There are systems in place that allow all staff to report a violent incident by pushing a button on their smartphones, which will automatically call 911 and place the building on lockdown in seconds. There are many more systems including infrastructure, electronic, training, or policies that are in place. Seneca High School has made safety and security a priority and has spared no expense, always looking for ways to improve and stay current. It has always been my goal that, when your kids are dropped off at school, you have assurance that I will do everything possible to keep them safe.

Have a great summer, Go Irish!!

Message from Dean of Students, Mr. Mark Giertz:

The 2021-2022 school year has made it to the final days and we all can look back and say, “what a whirlwind it has been.” We have seen such a resilient student and staff body push through circumstances that were tough on everyone, yet we saw so many accomplishments take place. For the first time in over 2 years, we were able to have Freshman Orientation return by walking the hallways on the first couple of days laughing, asking questions, and making new friends, as they had the building to themselves to get lost in. Although we couldn’t see their smiles just yet, having our new incoming students in the building meant we were one step closer to our goal.

Our Freshman ‘kick-off’ days were just the beginning of things to get back to normal around here. As all grade levels made it back into the building, the positive vibes began to climb around all aspects of Seneca High School. Indoor sporting events came back to a regular feel, as our fans began to fill the bleachers again and the student section picked up right where they left off two years ago, by packing their seats on a nightly basis. Students began to get into their daily routines, have class and club meetings, sit back at their regular lunch tables, and be in a “normal” class with their friends right there to join in great conversations.

We saw our Homecoming and Prom dances venture out into the transportation building, student assemblies and motivational speakers come back in full force, pep rallies, food trucks, warm pretzels, and lemon shake ups that all students and staff seemed to enjoy. No matter what curveball was thrown at our Seneca HS community, we pushed through this together. I have been so impressed with how our students handled small challenges that were constantly thrown at them this year. To the ever-changing guidelines, down to the athletes who had to play their indoor sport with a mask on, our students showed an unbelievable ability to adapt and persevere.

The second semester then brought to us our first ever career day at Seneca High School. We had an unbelievable turnout from over 30 small businesses, military, and college representatives offering advice, displaying job opportunities, and career paths available for our student body to look forward to as their educational careers begin to take shape. The student body did a fantastic job participating, and we look forward to continuing this event in the future.

In conclusion, I want to thank our dedicated staff, teachers, administrative assistants, students, and parents for bringing this year to normalcy in the best possible way. What we have all accomplished this year shows the true resilience that this community has and will continue to have for future generations. I look forward to seeing continued success and progress from each of our students over the summer break and anticipate a great start to the 2022-2023 school year here at SHS.

Message from Athletic Director, Steve Haines:

It has been my pleasure to have served the communities of Seneca, Mazon, Verona, Kinsman, all other surrounding areas, the board of education, faculty, staff, coaches and most importantly, the students that have attended Seneca High School. I have never used the term “work” when identifying with what I do for a living. Being the athletic director at Seneca High School has been an awesome ride with extreme highs and crushing lows. As we try to instill the importance of participating in extra-curricular activities, such as sports, to the students at Seneca High School, will offer you the opportunities for success and failure, which is the same in life. Everyone likes success, but success will not come without much hard work, sweat, and even sometimes tears. But even with the hard work, sweat, and tears, success is not guaranteed, failure is a possibility and many cases, more than likely. We also teach in extra-curricular activities that teamwork is the fastest way to success. Trying to do everything yourself is most often met with failure, rather than leaning on a teammate for help or a coach for guidance, these are qualities that these student-athletes will take into their lives after high school and will help them have success in work, family, friends, and fun.

My best memories of the Land of the Irish would be so extensive that this newsletter could not hold all of them, but here are a few of my favorites:

State Championship (2006) and 3rd Place (2005) in Boys Basketball. These two years were a special time at Seneca High School. The gym was full every night to watch these boys play, and I related it to when the Bulls made their runs in the 90s. Every game was a must see! This was most evident when these team reached the State Final in Peoria. Carver Arena was a sea of green and yellow. Each year, we sold out our section of the stadium, and we still had more fans sitting in other team sections just to get into the arena to watch.

Firetruck parades for state champion track & field athletes have been awesome. Our track & field facilities are second to none, and our program has matched that level of performance. Nothing has been more exciting than to see an individual (or group) of our athletes come back from the state finals as the best in the state. Alyssa Applebee was the first in my tenure in pole vault, followed by Tommy Lovett in the 110 hurdles. Then the remarkable feat accomplished by

Christopher Collett in 2018-19 school year, where he won all three legs of what track coaches call the “distance triple crown.” In the fall of 2018, he was the Class 1A state champion in Cross Country and in the spring of 2019, he was a state champion at the IHSA Track finals in the 3200 M run and the 1600M run. And then, just within the last month, the 4 x 400M relay team of Emma Smith, Anna Bruno, Clara Bruno and Evelyann O’Connor brought home gold at the state track meet.

Football playoff games, FFA State Chapters, TSA titles, sectional finals in softball, volleyball, boys’ basketball, and girls’ basketball are all events that I will remember. The athletes and coaches had everything to do with those successes and all I tried to do was give them the resources they needed and stay out of the way. I will put the roster of coaches we’ve had here at Seneca in the last 22 years up against any school. They have all been knowledgeable, great leaders, great educators, but they have been even better people.

Even though I have all of these great moments, my fondest memories are of watching my children participate in the Land of the Irish. Those are proud moments, from them singing the National Anthem at games to Kayla’s volleyball team losing in the sectional final. When you spend as much time watching and rooting on other young people here at Seneca, it was special for myself and my wife to be SHS parents.

All we tried to do every day at Seneca HS for the past 22 years is give our athletes, coaches, parents, community members, officials, opponents, and guests – the best possible experience they could have when they step foot into Seneca HS. I wanted (and still want) everyone that comes to Seneca HS to enjoy their time here, whether that was how we announce names, a good meal, names on foul boards, or greeting football team buses at front of school when they arrive. I want them to leave, saying – man, that school is a class act. They may have money to have all those bells and whistles, but I was treated with respect and class. We embodied two things (I think well) over the years – we made Seneca HS the “Land of the Irish.” Our students get involved! Our staff gets involved! The other is our “IRISH PRIDE.” This is not just 2 words...I lived it, our coaches embrace it, and our students are taught to respect it.

And as my days as athletic director are numbered...I just want to wish everyone at Seneca HS – Thank you and GOOD LUCK!

Message from Coach Welsh – Scholastic Bowl:

The Seneca High School Scholastic Bowl Team was ready to return to a regular schedule this season and did their best to maximize the opportunity. Both the Varsity and JV teams welcomed new members this year and there was an awesome team effort to improve and achieve success. The JV team was led by captains Carter Thomas, Kate Biros, and Brianna Brown and ended with a record of 11-8 for the season. The JV team was very successful in our conference; finishing with a record of 8-3 in conference play. Carter Thomas and Ben Biros led the JV team in the number of toss up questions answered correctly during the season while Ben Biros managed to have the highest percentage of correct toss ups when compared to toss ups attempted.

The Varsity team also had a great season with captains Brady Danek and Case Biros

leading the team to an overall record of 24-14 with a record of 16-2 in conference play. Varsity Scholastic Bowl finished second place in the Tri-County Conference Tournament, losing only one match to the first place Roanoke-Benson team. The team was proud of a few accomplishments that day beyond just taking second place. Both Chris Poyner and Case Biros were named as “All Conference” players and Seneca outscored every other team in every round except the one we lost. The Varsity team was also excited to make it to the championship match at regionals where they tried hard but succumbed to a very strong Westmont team. Chris Poyner, Peyton Weber, and Case Biros led the team in total toss ups correct during the season while Colin Collet answered the highest percentage of correct toss up questions.

November Students of the Month

Clara Bruno—Rookie
Elizabeth Davis—Student of the Month
Madilyn Bertrang—Most Improved
Evalynn Berg—Role Model

December Students of the Month

Hanna Beland—Student of the Month
Madeline Klicker—Role Model
Evelyn O’Connor—Rookie
Marissa Aguilar—Most Improved

January Students of the Month

Ryan Starwalt—Most Improved
Payton McDonald—Rookie
Noah Quigley—Role Model
Case Biros—Student of the Month
Owen Quigley—Role Model

February Students of the Month

Harleigh Varland—Role Model
Joseph Hamilton—Most Improved
Haley Einhaus—Role Model
Hailey Culbertson—Rookie
Audrey Jenkins—Student of the Month

March Students of the Month

Tyler Sproull—Most Improved
Peyton Weber—Student of the Month
Thomas Milton—Rookie
Owen Feiner—Role Model

April Students of the Month

Hailey Kennedy—Role Model

Staci Sherdon—Most Improved

Laura Yegge—Student of the Month

Casey Klicker—Rookie

May Students of the Month

Addison Eltrevoog—Role Model

Sydney Trager—Student of the Month

Tynan Justice—Rookie

Brianne Johnson—Most Improved

John Ourth Award:

The Starved Rock Region Illinois Principals Association has recognized a Seneca High School student for the John Ourth Award. The student who has been honored and given a plaque is Miranda Araujo.

The students who are honored possess the same traits that made John Ourth an outstanding leader and role model for others. Students are recommended by their school based on character, citizenship, leadership skills and scholarship, as well as possessing the potential to make a difference in the world.

2021 DAR Good Citizen Award Recipient:

Miranda Araujo was recently honored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (**DAR**) Good Citizen Award for Seneca High School. She is the daughter of Miriam Garibay and Martin Garcia of Marseilles IL.

The Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award honors an outstanding senior who exhibits the qualities of dependability, leadership, service, and patriotism. The selection was voted on by the faculty and staff.

Miranda currently serves as the Chairman of the FFA Leadership Team, the Pollinator Plot Manager and group leader for Conservation in Action, and the Spanish Club Vice President. She is in National Honors Society, FFA, Conservation in Action, Teens Resisting Unhealthy Social Temptations, State Academic Challenge Competition (ACES), Scholastic Bowl, Math Team, Speech Team, Young Philanthropy, Cross Country, Art Club, Drama Club, Spanish Club, Student Ambassadors, plays, and musicals.

Illinois State Scholars 2022:

Seneca High School is proud to announce 11 Illinois State Scholars for the 2021-2022 school year. This year's recipients are:

Madison Mino, Audrey Jenkins, Laura Yegge, Sydnie Trager, Elizabeth Davis, Brady Danek, Case Biros, Peyton Weber, Miranda Araujo, Hanna Beland, Emma Smith

Criteria for this prestigious award is as follows:

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) obtains academic data from the high school for students at the end of their sixth semester electronically.

The State Scholar formula calculation uses a combination of the test scores, unweighted GPA, rank, and class size. These students are selected based on SAT Test score and class rank.

2021—2022 Seneca High School Retirees:

Mr. Kent Weber (33 years)

Mr. Steve Haines (22 years)

Mr. Barry Buchanan (10 years)

2021—2022 Excellence in Education Award Recipients:

Mr. Levi Derber, Mr. Blake Slutz, and Mr. Bob Laycoax

Families can find their nearest summer meals site by calling (800) 359-2163, texting "FoodIL" to 877-877, or visiting <http://summerfeedingillinois.org/>

Summer Meals feeding sites in Illinois are now listed on the interactive map at <http://summerfeedingillinois.org/>. This map will be updated once a week. We will also continue to update the "2018 Summer Open Sites" Excel document at <https://www.isbe.net/sfsp>. The link to the list is also available on our [Seamless Summer Option page](#).

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