



The Irish Highlighter

Volume 14: Issue 1

Seneca High School

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Fall/Winter 2023





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER



Message from our Superintendent, Dr. Dan Stecken

The Property Tax Levy Process at Seneca High School

Each year in our Fall newsletter, we have written to you about our tax levy process. The process can be confusing and we always want to be as transparent as possible with our community members. Every year, schools throughout the state of Illinois, including Seneca High School, present their annual **TAX LEVY** at the December Board of Education meeting, as required by law. Here at Seneca High School, our Board of Education begins this discussion in October at our first Finance Committee meeting, and then discusses the tax levy openly in October, November, and our December public meetings. If you have kept your property tax bill records over the past decade, you can see that Seneca Township High School District 160's property tax rate has been reduced the past decade from roughly \$1.80 to \$1.70, representing a significant decrease. Additionally, we carry **ZERO** taxable bonds or interest (which would raise your tax rate) for debt.

Tax Year:	Taxable Rate:	Increase/Decrease:
2013	\$1.79838	0
2020	\$1.74838	-0.05
2022	\$1.72838	-0.02 (-0.07 overall)
2023	\$1.70838	-0.02 (-0.09 overall)

A tax **LEVY** is a request for tax dollars. The levy is determined by the simple equation: Tax Rate x EAV (Equalized Assessed Valuation of your property) = Tax Dollars Requested. Within your levy, there are multiple taxing districts that comprise the total tax dollars requested for all taxing bodies. For example, Seneca HS District 160 taxing body represented \$1.72838 of total \$7.129 in last year's total taxable rate.

Arriving at the \$1.70838 tax rate listed above can be a bit confusing, so I would like to remind you of one of the extra steps Seneca High School takes in the levy process called **ABATEMENT**. Annually, in December, featured in The Ottawa Times, you may read that the district's tax dollar request is over 5% higher than last year's property tax levy **EXTENSION**, or the amount of actual dollars received. We call this advertisement the "Black Box" due to its black border in the newspaper. This is also called a **TRUTH IN TAXATION** hearing. Please remember that although the district is requesting this amount, we will always reduce the levy or "**ABATE**" down to the agreed upon final tax rate of \$1.72838. Currently, the district has a 5-year tax agreement with Constellation Energy to keep our maximum tax rate at \$1.72838 through 2026. Seneca High School does not control the assessed value of your home, that lies with your local township assessor and the LaSalle County Assessor's Office, however we do control our property **TAX RATE** requested. Your property tax rate has again been lowered by Seneca High School, representing a pattern over the last ten years, as featured in the chart above.

This abatement process occurs in the spring after the district receives its first draft of the anticipated property tax extension from the LaSalle and Grundy County Clerks. By levying an amount greater than what we are seeking, we can ensure that the "**DRAFT**" tax rate requested in December's levy, that we receive in the spring, is greater than the intended target. This allows the district to fully capture maximum capped funds in areas like special education and transportation, and then abate to the precise rate for all taxpayers in the district. This process has been used by our District for the past 10+ years as part of the agreement with Constellation Energy's LaSalle Station (as shown in the table above) and rest assured, by the time you receive your tax bill in the mail in June, your property **TAX RATE** will be **LOWER** than last year (from \$1.72838 to \$1.70838). In early June, I will again remind you that the tax rate has decreased, but the assessor's office valuation of your property has increased.

Significantly, Seneca High School's property tax rate is substantially lower than every high school district, not only in the county, but also in the greater area. We are proud of the quality educational programming offered to our students and community, while keeping our tax rate for the citizens of Seneca, one of the lowest around, with no taxable debt. As an avid daily reader of The Times, I have noted the many "**BLACK BOX**" Truth in Taxation advertisements I have seen over the past few weeks in the local newspaper. Again, any time a property taxing body requests 5% more than last year's received extension, a Truth in Taxation hearing must be held and an advertisement in the newspaper must be displayed. The increase in property tax assessments has led most taxing bodies, as required by law, including school districts, fire departments, townships, etc. to list these advertisements in the local newspaper. What is different about Seneca High School District 160 from most of these bodies, is that we will abate our real rate down to \$1.70838 in the Spring.

I encourage anyone who cares about Seneca High School, at any time, to stop in and have a cup of coffee with the Superintendent, strike up a conversation at a game, or to pick up the phone and call 815-357-5000 if you have any questions about anything at Seneca High School. You will be met with a smile, and I will gladly fill in any gaps you may have. We are all proud of the **SUCCESS AT SHS** and look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time.

Cordially,
Dan Stecken, Seneca Township High School Superintendent

THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Seneca High School families and friends! Let's take a moment to reflect on the incredible collaborations and achievements that filled our November with warmth and community spirit.

Our Ag. students set the stage by attending the National Conference in Indianapolis, where they not only gained knowledge but also formed bonds that will last a lifetime. Their passion for agriculture is unmatched!

Inclusivity and professional growth took center stage as our special education teachers attended the Council for Exceptional Children conference in Naperville. Their commitment to enhancing their skills ensures that every student receives the support they need at Seneca High School.

Mr. Witte and his Vocational Math students were hard at work, bringing joy to Milton Pope Middle School by constructing a Gaga ball pit. Their dedication not only enriched the lives of others but also showcased the power of practical skills and teamwork.



On November 11th, we gathered as a school community to honor the heroes among us during our Veterans Day assembly. It was an important moment to express gratitude and learn from those who have served our country selflessly. Mr. Jon Deering was our keynote speaker. He encouraged us to be thankful in our thoughts and actions to recognize all our local veterans.



And as we approached the Thanksgiving season, our school spirit reached new heights with the launch of our 1st Annual Thanksgiving Basket Program. Together, we came together to provide nourishment and warmth to families in need within our local community.



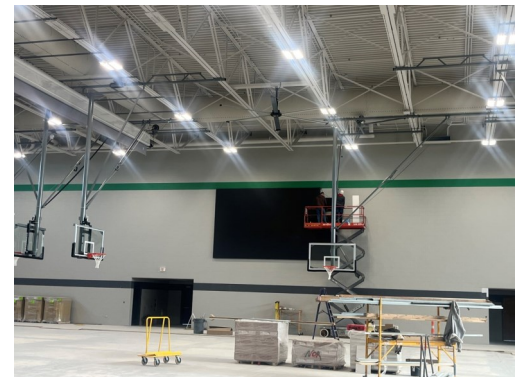
Each example represents a unique story of collaboration, growth, and compassion. As we carry these memories, and many more, into the winter months, let's continue to foster a spirit of collaboration and support. Thank you for being a supportive part of our Seneca High School family.





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

This school year our gymnasium addition project has been rapidly progressing and is getting closer and closer to opening for the 24-25 school year.



THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

During safety week, SHS shows gratitude to our favorite SRO, Mr. Ken Sangston! Seneca High School is blessed to have a SRO as dedicated to keeping our school safe as Officer Sangston does. Mr. Sangston continues to create positive relationships with the students and staff, as well as being a great coach for the Fighting Irish Football team. Seneca High School would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his service and dedication to our school.



Keeping our school safe for all students, faculty and staff.



NEW Employees for the 2023-24 School Year



Left to Right: Bryna Coop Special Needs Paraprofessional, Luri Maier-Lorntz Main Office Secretary, Matt Houchin Full-time Substitute, Josie Lauth, Special Needs Paraprofessional, Jennifer Leo Paraprofessional, Laura Zomboraz Science Teacher.

Not Pictured: Special Needs Paraprofessional Janet Thompson



Cactus Program—

Community Activity Center To Unite Seneca

This is open to all Seneca Community Members on Friday mornings at our West Campus facility from 9:00am to Noon. Typically there are snacks, games, and open gym (includes pickleball).

THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER



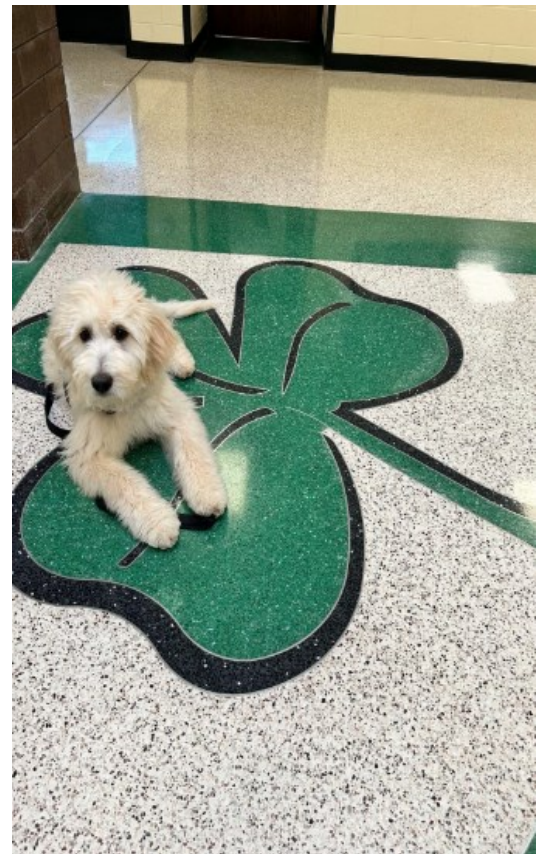
Meet Lucky



We are excited to introduce you to a new member of our staff who will be joining us this spring. We will be welcoming Lucky to our team as a Certified Therapy Dog in training. Lucky is a hypoallergenic English Doodle who is completing her certification through Precision K9 Training.

Numerous research studies have shown many benefits of therapy dogs in schools, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and academic benefits. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to integrate Lucky into our school community.

We would like to thank the United Way of LaSalle County for their guidance and support in bringing Lucky to Seneca High School.





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

2023 Fall Athletics:

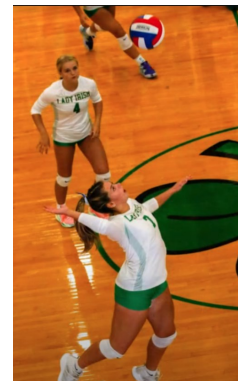
Cross Country

The Cross Country team had an outstanding season highlighted by the girls team qualifying for the State meet at Detweiller Park in Peoria.



Golf

The Boys and Girls golf teams had a great season highlighted by Piper Stenzel qualifying for State and placing 33rd overall. The girls team won the first ever Regional Championship for a girls golf team at Seneca High School.



Volleyball

The Volleyball team had another solid season and finished 24-11.



Football

The football team had a great season and finished 11-1 as a state quarterfinalist. It was a proud moment of Irish Pride to see the whole community come together to decorate Main & Scott streets and to see our stands full every Friday Night. Coach Maxwell was honored as an Illinois Coach of the Year and Chris Peura was a 1st Team All-State honoree.



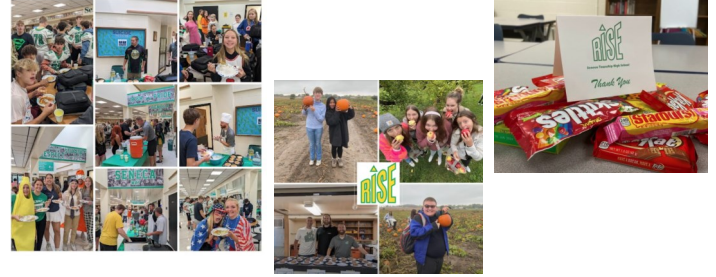
Our winter seasons are off to another great start as we hosted the final Thanksgiving Turkey Tournament. We are incredibly excited to host the first Seneca Christmas Tournament in our new gymnasium in 2024.



THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

During the month of September, we highlighted the ways in which Seneca High School demonstrates progressiveness.

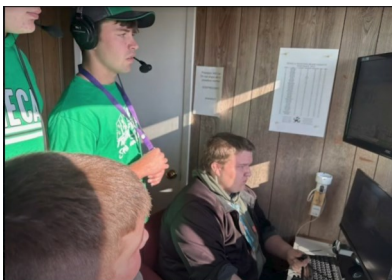
- RISE, our school incentive program, was created to help our students achieve the Seneca Way by encouraging them to Be Here, Be Kind, and Be Accountable. While RISE's main focus is to encourage students to improve their academic performance, school attendance, and behavior, building community and culture became a secondary mission. RISE has already hosted several school-wide events this year, many of which were surprises for our students.



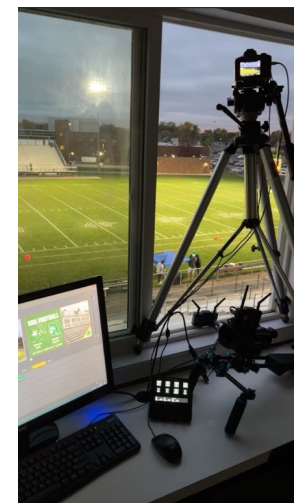
- Our co-teaching model benefits all students by reducing the student-to-teacher ratio, reducing stigma, and providing enrichment or reteaching opportunities. Students with disabilities have the combined benefit of access to general education curriculum with a highly qualified content specialist as well as greater access to accommodations and modifications in the general education setting.



- The creation of our Irish Care Closet has been a welcome addition for students in need. This space includes casual and formal clothing, shoes, school supplies, and hygiene supplies which are available for any student to access. Most items are obtained through community and staff donations.



- We also continue to show progressiveness through our incorporation of new technology. Our student-led Irish Live channel does a fantastic job broadcasting school events for the community, while our Broadcast Journalism class makes school announcements feel interactive and fresh. Our sports highlights and gym progress videos have helped support community engagement. When drone footage is incorporated into our videos, it makes the viewers feel like they are part of the experience.





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Students of the Month Award Winners—1st Semester

August Students of the Month

Andrew Danek —Role Model
Kate Biros —Student of the Month
Taylor Mino —Irish Pride
Tori Skelton —Rookie

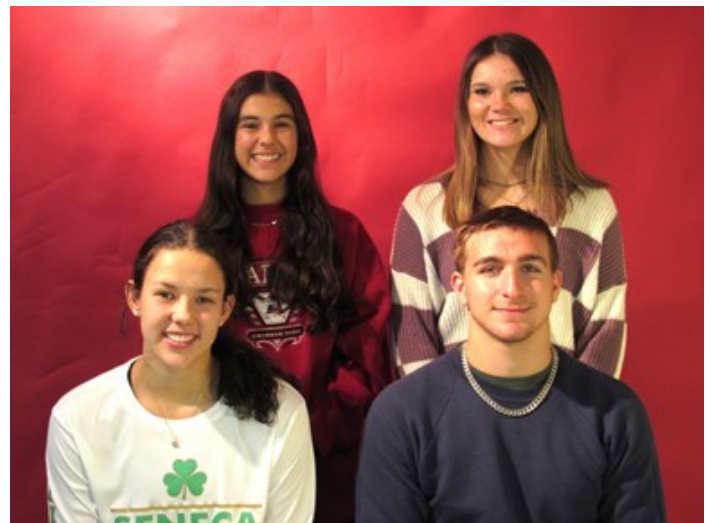
AUGUST 2023



September Students of the Month

Faith Baker —Student of the Month
Chris Peura —Irish Pride
Aurora Weber —Rookie
Gabi Maxwell —Role Model

SEPTEMBER 2023



October Students of the Month

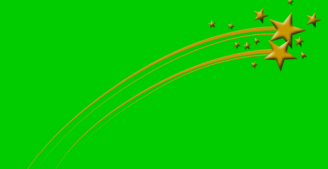
Kenneth Daggett —Role Model
Jeremy Gagnon —Irish Pride
Emmelyn Blakley —Rookie
Gracie Steffes —Student of the Month

OCTOBER 2023





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER



Students of the Month Award Winners/Recognitions—1st Semester

November Students of the Month

- William Milton—Student of the Month
- Gracie Smith —Rookie
- Michelle Govea —Role Model
- Lainie Olson —Irish Pride



NOVEMBER 2023

2023 Illinois State Scholars

Congratulations to the following Seneca High School seniors for being named Illinois State Scholars:

From Left to Right

Front Row: Kenneth Daggett, Chase Buis, Faith Baker, Peyton Enerson

Back Row: Jolena Odum, William Milton, Carter Thomas, Kate Biros, Julia Hogan



The Illinois Student Assistance Commission selects Illinois State Scholars based on class rank and ACT/SAT scores.

The Illinois State Scholar program is an honorary recognition without any monetary award. To be named an Illinois State Scholar is an outstanding accomplishment that will be a highlight of the recipient's academic record.



THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Student Recognitions—1st Semester



DAR Good Citizen Award Student Honored

Kate Biros was recently honored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen Award for Seneca High School. She is the daughter of Tiffany and Scott Biros of Seneca 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.

Kate is head of the leadership officers in FFA, she is captain of the scholastic bowl team, and an officer of Teens Resisting Unhealthy Social Temptations (TRUST). She is involved in Student Council, Student Advisory Council, Student

Ambassadors, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, National Honors Society, Spanish Club, Academic Challenge in Engineering and Science (ACES), Drama Club, multiple school plays and musicals, Speech Team, Math Team, FCCLA. Kate has been nominated as Rookie of the Month, Role Model of the Month, and Student of the Month through her years at SHS.

Being the recipient of the DAR Good Citizen Award, Kate will complete an essay that will have the opportunity to advance through state and national levels of judging. The DAR Good Citizens program and scholarship contest is sponsored by the Illini Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



The Tri County Leadership Conference was held on Monday, October 16th at St Bede High School. Ted Wiese was the keynote speaker who presented a Dynamic Leadership & Team Building Program. The students worked in small groups to learn leadership qualities through activities and games with the other school representatives. The students who represented Seneca High School:

From Left to Right: Peyton Enerson, Chase Buis, Gunner Varland, Alex Gagnon, Memphis Echeverria, Hailey Culbertson, Addysen Applebee, Tori Skelton





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Seminar 2024

Shan Balandang and Jaxson Finch, Seneca High School sophomores, have been selected to represent Seneca Township High School at the 2024 HOBY Leadership Seminar.

The Leadership Seminar is designed for high school sophomores to recognize their leadership talents and apply them in becoming effective, ethical leaders in their home, schools, work-place and community.

The students will participate in hands-on leadership activities and meet state leaders in such areas as business, government, education, media and the non-profit sector.

Each September, every accredited public, private and charter high school in the country is invited to select and register outstanding sophomores as representatives to their local state seminar. Currently, nearly 9,000 sophomores, representing as many high schools nationwide, attend HOBY Leadership Seminars annually. Shan Balandang is the daughter of Thomas and Maybelle Mack of Seneca, Jaxson Finch is the son of Jeanette and Jeffrey Finch of Verona. All Seneca High School sophomore students were invited to pick up applications and submit essays for the opportunity to attend this seminar. Congratulations to Shan and Jaxson on their accomplishments.



This year Seneca High School hosted an event called the Reality Store. All sophomore students participate in the Reality Store to learn about the costs of living. Students get a "paycheck" with fake money in it, and using the money, the students have the chance to spend one month's salary on the necessities of life including housing, utilities, transportation, insurance, groceries, entertainment, clothing, etc. Besides Seneca High School, the event is made possible by Old National Bank of Seneca and Caldwell Banker Real Estate Group of Morris. The Old National Bank and Caldwell Banker had representatives to work at the Reality Store, they both brought prizes to be given away through a random drawing.

This event really helps students to understand the importance of getting a good paying job for their adult life. It also hopefully gives them the insight of what their parents are going through monthly to try to make ends meet.

Here is a list of the expenses students will incur throughout their "Reality Store" experience: Housing, Recreation, Groceries/Clothing, Child Care, Bank, Wheel of Fortune, Utilities, Insurance, and Transportation.



THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Coach Baker puts together his IRISH POWER Strength & Conditioning Newsletter each month. Below are a few slides from his December Newsletter. If you are reading this newsletter via the School's website under Announcements you will find the complete Strength & Conditioning December Edition Newsletter.

Thanks for checking out the Irish Power Newsletter

The purpose of this monthly newsletter is to inform parents & community members of the hard work & accomplishments of our Irish athletes as they train for sports performance.

One Team Mentality

After every training session, our athletes do a huddle-break that begins with the mantra of "One Team." It's a short phrase, but it means a lot. Seneca High School is not a big school, so it's important that all of our athletes stick together. No matter what sport, I like us to see ourselves as one big Fighting Irish family. We support and encourage each other, share success, and train together. Unless it is part of a practice, there is not always the need to break things up by sport, gender, or any other category with the numbers we have. I think this is great that we can train in a unified program. It builds relationships, leadership qualities, and a sense of community amongst all of our Irish athletes.

As a part of this One Team mentality, it is important that athletes attend any off-season training sessions with their teammates. Sure, athletes absolutely have the need to develop individual skills on their own time, but they also need to put in the sweat equity WITH their teammates. The Irish Power League in the Winter and Summer has been a great way to not only build that camaraderie within athletic teams, but also the greater collective Irish team. When we train together, we get better together, and succeed together.

Merry Christmas to everyone! Enjoy your Winter Break!

GO IRISH!
Coach Baker

ALL-TIME IRISH POWER RECORDS

Plenty of changes again this month. Records are made to be broken!

It's great to see our athletes always striving to compete. Congrats to all who newly made or moved up the boards!

SENECA HIGH SCHOOL					
IRISH POWER					
BOYS			GIRLS		
BENCH	SQUAT	CLEAN	BENCH	SQUAT	CLEAN
TOP 3	TOP 3	TOP 3	TOP 3	TOP 3	TOP 3
Sean 275 Jack 275 Liam 275 Caleb 275 Hector 275 Dillon 275 Gavin 275	Sean 615 Piper 550 Lucas 550 Abe 550 Piper 550 Piper 550 Gavin 500	Sean 315 Piper 315 Piper 315 Piper 315 Piper 315 Piper 315 Piper 315	Sean 160 Piper 160 Piper 160 Piper 160 Piper 160 Piper 160 Piper 160	Sean 305 Piper 305 Piper 305 Piper 305 Piper 305 Piper 305 Piper 305	Sean 165 Piper 165 Piper 165 Piper 165 Piper 165 Piper 165 Piper 165
40 YARD DASH					
Matthew 65 Mia 472 Mia 472 Mia 472 Mia 472 Mia 472 Mia 472	Conor 366 Conor 363 Conor 363 Conor 363 Conor 363 Conor 363	Conor 361 Conor 361 Conor 361 Conor 361 Conor 361 Conor 361	Conor 51 Conor 51 Conor 51 Conor 51 Conor 51 Conor 51	Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267	Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267 Conor 267

CURRENT IRISH POWER LEADERBOARD

IRISH POWER				
BENCH	SQUAT	CLEAN	Vertical Jump	40 YD. DASH
Piper 375 Lucas 375 Dillon 300 Hector 285 Klinker 250 Piper 250 Piper 250 Piper 250 Piper 250 Piper 250	Piper 615 Lucas 550 Dillon 510 Dillon 510 Piper 410 Piper 410 Piper 410 Piper 410 Piper 410 Piper 410	Piper 315 Dillon 290 Lucas 265 Hector 260 Piper 265 Piper 265 Piper 265 Piper 265 Piper 265 Piper 265	Clayne 34" Dillon 33" Barr 35" Saber 37" Piper 39" Piper 39" Piper 39" Piper 39" Piper 39" Piper 39"	Neal 4.65 Stuel 4.78 Duggan 4.78 Hector 4.84 Eplin 4.87 Coleman 5.0 Johnson 5.0 Johnson 5.0 Johnson 5.0 Johnson 5.0
Maxwell 115 Duggan 115	Maxwell 230 Duggan 230	Maxwell 130 Duggan 130	Maxwell 29" Duggan 29"	Maxwell 5.45 Duggan 5.45

← BOYS

← GIRLS



We welcomed several freshmen into our Life Skills and Transition program this year. They have had a busy start to the year, with a focus on core academics and adaptive skills. The program has incorporated several community experiential education trips, including to see a performance of A Christmas Carol at Drury Lane Theatre.





THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

For many years the Seneca High School Administration has created a twice-a-year newsletter to share with our community about the many highlights happening in the Land of the Irish.

For the past few years we have been sharing with you on social media channels about our work to develop our mission, what we call The Seneca Way. While our traditional paper newsletter is still available, this video newsletter will show you a different look at the many great events this Fall that align with the Seneca Way.

You can click on this QR Code to go directly to our 2023 Fall Newsletter on the website. Once there you can click on the link to the 2023 Fall Video Newsletter.



The Seneca High School Board of Education
would like to wish you all a very
Merry Christmas and a **Happy New Year**



Front Row: President Ron Frye, Vice President Sara Olson. Back Row: Board Members: Cory Yandell, Jason Eltrevoog, Board Secretary Rich Hamilton, and Board Members Tiffany Biros and Joe Johnson.



THE COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
SENECA TWP HIGH SCHOOL
WWW.SENECAHS.ORG

THE IRISH HIGHLIGHTER

Seneca Township High School
307 East Scott Street
Seneca, IL 61360