

# WISSAHICKON SILVER LININGS

## WISS NATION'S WEEKLY ROUNDUP OF THE UPLIFTING & UPWORTHY



May 2022

### WSD Celebrates Autism Acceptance Month



The world is shifting in language and symbols. What used to be Autism Awareness is now being referred to as Autism Acceptance. The change of language comes from the idea of creating more inclusivity. Most individuals are “aware” of autism so now let’s accept, connect and learn more. Let us strive to build meaningful relationships and accept individuals for who they are and who they want to become. We no longer use the puzzle piece to represent Autism since individuals with Autism are not incomplete and do not need to be solved. Autism Acceptance is now represented by the rainbow or gold infinity sign which is inclusive of the neurodiversity movement. Help Wiss spread the word on acceptance and celebrate someone today!

*Pictured: Marcus Hernandez and Jason Baehr from WMS*

### Wiss Nation Heroes: Teena Derkosh and Kathy Dearborn

WSD is proud to honor the 2020 Wiss Nation Hero, Teena Derkosh. At a School Board meeting, Mrs. Derkosh was honored for her dedication to the district and commitment to serving students. Mrs. Derkosh retired in 2020 after working in public education for 31 years, including 22 years in the WSD Administration Office. Superintendent Dr. Crisfield and former Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Gary Abbamont, recognized her as did Mike Bani, longtime, dedicated district custodian, who worked closely with Mrs. Derkosh for years overseeing local donation drives for [Trucks for Maddox](#), a charity created in memory of her grandson.

Additionally, WSD congratulates the 2021 Wiss Nation Hero, Kathy Dearborn, WSD Nursing Department Chair and Stony Creek School Nurse. Mrs. Dearborn was recognized by Dr. Crisfield, SCE Counselor Janice Walsh and SCE student, Max Joseph, all of whom noted her kindness and dedication to our students, families and staff and her extraordinary professionalism, leadership and medical expertise during the COVID pandemic.



[WATCH AWARD PRESENTATION](#)



[WATCH AWARD PRESENTATION](#)

# Social Emotional Learning (SEL) IN ACTION

**Ms. Geiger's kindergarten students at Blue Bell Elementary** worked on setting goals for themselves to earn class rewards. The class decided that they wanted to work on body safety with the reward of watching Ms. Geiger get pied in the face by Principal Farlow! Of course, these ambitious students had no trouble reaching their goal. Great way to learn self-management skills while having fun!



**Stony Creek** "SEL" ebrates students making good choices by spotlighting them and giving tickets. The monthly spotlight recognizes one student per classroom for being kind, respectful, and hard-working. Teachers fill out a congratulations post card to the student which is copied and placed with a student photo on a "Caught in the Spotlight" bulletin board located in the main lobby for all to see. At the end of each month students are invited to a Home and School sponsored breakfast.



It's always good to have a buddy, isn't it? At **Shady Grove**, students in different grades are paired up with a buddy for mentorship, having fun and building relationship skills. Mrs. Barlow's 3rd graders recently joined their kindergarten buddies on a school-wide scavenger hunt.

At **Stony Creek**, 5th graders are paired with a kindergarten buddy. They meet several days a week to work together and play games.

**Blue Bell 2nd graders in Ms. Neft's class** have been keeping Happiness Journals to help them build self confidence and get comfortable with self expression (SEL skills). Each day, they answer a prompt in their journal such as "I feel proud and confident when..." or "Something I am getting better at is..." Students also decorate their journals with pictures and stickers that make them happy.



Stony Creek welcomed two new students from Korea, **Aaron (2nd Grade)** and **Rhiannon (4th Grade)**. Ms. Tecce's students were so excited to make Rhiannon feel at home in their classroom, they made cards and a huge welcome banner for her first day!

First Place – Mrs. Wenninger’s HR



Runners Up – Mrs. Fenstermacher



Mrs. Karabin



Kudos to the **WMS Student Council** and students who participated in a door decorating contest with the themes of inclusivity and belonging. Student Council had the difficult task of judging the best of 28 door decorations. The motivational messages of support for the entire WMS community is really inspiring!

**Lower Gwynedd 4th Graders** in Girl Scout Troop 7263 wanted our bus drivers to know how special they are and how much they appreciate them! From donations during cookie sales, they chose to donate 8 cases of cookies (100 boxes!) to our bus drivers - their choice of Hometown Heroes. They also made a poster and cards for the drivers, which they dropped off at the Transportation Department. Thanks to Moira Rober, Anna Cesarone, Hannah Brinkley, Charlotte Koppel, Chloe Lo, Lucie Castello, Cassidy Moore, Elle Thomas, Eden Tolmie, Emma Simons and Teaghan Trainor for showing how much #WissCares!



Teamwork! Listening! Support! Gratitude! These were among the social emotional skills **Shady Grove** students practiced during their SELebration this week. Every grade participated in an assembly hosted by LifeSeeds, which included a variety of team-building activities. Students sang and danced together, shared what they are grateful for, built towers with solo cups, played charades and more. You can see how much fun the students had!



## Student **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Congratulations to **Michael Johns** who was selected to receive the Widener University High School Leadership Award, designed to recognize high school students who embody the university's commitment to develop and inspire leaders to affect positive change. With this award, the Widener University High School Leadership Awards Committee recognizes Michael's ability to demonstrate leadership by standing up for what is right, finding a way to address a wrong, or making a difference in a significant way.

As a recipient, if Michael enrolls at Widener University as an undergraduate student, he will take part in the Apogee Scholars Leadership Program and receive a \$20,000 scholarship over four years. Apogee Scholars receive four years of leadership programming, including a Widener Leadership Certificate.

Congratulations to our **North Montco Technical Career Center students** who competed at the SkillsUSA competitions with a special shout-out to first place awardees (*pictured on right*), Junior Thomas Bridges (Culinary Arts Career Pathways Team) and Senior Tinera Kinley-White (Restaurant Service). First place winners have the opportunity to compete against their peers from across the nation during the National SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Conference in June.

Congratulations also to our students who received medals at the district level SkillsUSA competition:

- Senior Savana Johnson, Job Interview, Cosmetology: First Place
- Senior Tinera Kinley-White, Restaurant Service: First Place
- Senior Julia Keller and Senior Brianna Zielinski, Health Knowledge Bowl Team, Allied Health: Third Place

Audiences enjoyed three spectacular productions of the WHS Musical, "Sondheim on Sondheim", this March. The musical featured stage performances of Stephen Sondheim's best loved songs, interspersed with a video presentation. Sondheim, who passed away in November, was an American composer, songwriter and lyricist, best known for writing music and lyrics for Broadway productions, such as "West Side Story". The **WHS musical cast and crew** delighted audiences with more than 30 of Sondheim's songs! What talent!



Shout out to **7th Grader Alexa Bowers**, author of *Quarantine: What People Can Learn From the Craziest Year Ever*. Just 12 years old, Alexa has been mentored by her mother, father and entrepreneur coach. She was motivated to make an impact with others and strives to make the world a better place.

Her book, available on Amazon, gives a comprehensive look at pandemic life and provides tips and takeaways to help you in school, life and business.



Go Trojans! WHS gave an enthusiastic send-off to the **Unified Track and Field athletes** as they departed for their first competition against Upper Merion. New to WHS, Unified Sports includes students with and without intellectual disabilities. The team is inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding!



The **WMS Black Dog Band** competed at Abington Jr. High's Middle School Jazz Band Festival and returned with great accolades for their best performance of the year! Judges said the Black Dog Band is the "swinginest band," has exceptional dynamic contrast, and a wide array of talented soloists. The Trombone Section also won the "Best Trombone Section" Award. Jacob Mathew (8th grade) won a soloist award and Brandon Furman (8th Grade) won an overall best soloist of the night award.



The Black Dog Band also competed at the Tohickon Middle School "Toh Jam" Jazz Festival. The band came away with a Superior rating while Meredith Blight (8th grade) earned a solo award for her work on flute, and Jacob Mathew (8th grade) earned a "top soloist of the evening" award for his solos on guitar.

Shout out to **WMS 8th graders, Samir Abbas, Emma Brocklesby, Lilah Gallagher, Virginia Highley, Shieun Koo, Riya Koshy Cherian, Kavya Mittal, Alisa Puenpatom, Sylvie Sanders, Walter Vandegrift**, who participated in the PMEA Junior High Song Fest. The students were selected by audition and joined students in grades 7, 8, 9 from 10 other middle schools for a day of rehearsal followed by a concert for their families. Beautiful music and so much talent!



Please join us in congratulating the **2022 Montgomery County Media and Design winners!** Out of the 19 students who attended the competition, 18 students placed in the top three for their respective categories; six of these students came in first place, securing them a spot at the state level.

- Austin Yeh – 1st place, 3D Design
- Grace O'Donnell - 1st place, Animation
- Eric Jiang, Andrew Li, and Ray Pelletier – 1st place, Web Page Design
- Emma Brocklesby - 1st place, Logo & Graphic Design
- Petra Lee – 2nd place, Animation
- Sophia Kim – 2nd place, Digital Movie
- Kelley MacCormack and Lexi Pak – 2nd place, Web Page Design
- Indigo Satko and Xander Seith – 2nd place, Logo & Graphic Design
- Reed Harris and Luke Lampron – 3rd place, Animation
- Arlind Saro – 3rd place, Digital Movie
- Brandon Furman and Lauren Heinsen – 3rd place, Web Page Design
- Kavya Mittal – 3rd place, Logo & Graphic Design
- Eli Perilstein – Honorable Mention, Digital Movie

Please congratulate our winners. They represented Wissahickon well, and we are proud of their accomplishments!

## Learning SPOTLIGHTS

The **4th grade at Shady Grove** received a STEM grant with DiscoverE for Engineering Week. The students read *Iggie Peck, Architect* and participated in TEAMS calls with STEM professionals (Structural engineer, Navy Blackhawk Helicopter engineer, Computer Science engineer) to learn about STEM careers and engineering. Next, groups created structures to solve a problem and chose award categories for the designs. The entire school voted on the winning entries from each class and awarded the top team with \$5 gift cards!

Shout out to the Bookie Monsters, Lit Wits and Slithering Slythadorrs - our **WMS Reading Olympics teams** who took on the challenge to read 25 books and compete against other school teams in the county to test their knowledge of what they read. During the competition held via Zoom, teams answered 50 questions (two from each book). With months of preparation under their belt, they rocked it!



**8th grade English Language Arts teachers** are using current events and conversation topics to teach students how to craft a sound argument for debate using reliable materials. The students are able to self-select the debate topics (within reason), and are encouraged to explore relevant controversial topics that are part of the background noise of their daily life. Among these: school start times, masking, mandatory vaccines, criminalizing hate speech, cancel culture, and regulating social media access. In addition, there are classic topics like lowering the legal age for alcohol consumption, lowering the voting age, and making state colleges offer free tuition.

The initial lessons involve finding reliable sources and citing the points that are valid on both sides of the argument. The students then learn the rhetorical appeals and bad argumentation pitfalls while crafting their argument and viewing sample debates. They must also compose an argumentative essay citing the source materials and conduct a debate in class. Great way to learn and apply information!



Hands-on math alert! The **geometry teachers at WHS (Mr. Almeida, Mrs. Colonna, Mr. Crofton, Mr. McCabe, Mrs. Nocero, and Mrs. Uthgenannt)** took students outside to use similar right triangles to estimate the height of the light poles in the tennis courts. They used measuring tape and mirrors to set up two similar right triangles. In case you were wondering, the average height for the light poles in the tennis courts is 50 feet tall!





March Madness fun! **Stony Creek 5th graders** participated in 3 days of basketball themed academic activities in “Mrs. Reese’s Arena”. On the first day each student was given a scratch off “draft card” to reveal which team they were “drafted” to. Teams then had to work together to complete each question and task. After each correct answer the team was able to shoot the ball into the basket and tallied their points throughout each “quarter.” They learned a lot through perseverance and team work!



Can you answer these questions? In celebration of Earth Day, **Stony Creek 5th graders** played Earth Facts Jeopardy. Not easy! Flip the page to see the answers.

1. In a volcano, gas and lava separate to produce this rock.

What is pumice?

2. This desert is Earth’s largest.

What is the Sahara Desert?

3. If you’re 10 years old on Earth, you’re this age on Mars.

long as a year on Earth.)

What is five years? (A year on Mars is nearly twice as

Students had a special virtual author visit to coincide with the **WMS Scholastic Book Fair**. Author Sarah Weeks provided an extended homeroom presentation about the writing process and talked about some of her books. Weeks has written more than 60 picture books and novels for young readers and also teaches writing workshops for children and adults.



## Belonging: Equity & Inclusion Update

An important goal of Wissahickon School District is to create a culture of belonging for staff and students, which is one of our areas of focus in our equity efforts. The District Equity Planning Committee, consisting of staff, students, and administrators, reviewed several climate surveys and selected the PSSM, The Psychological School Sense Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993), to best meet our district’s needs. The purpose of this survey is to help assess the degree in which staff and students in our district perceive a sense of belonging. Specifically, the student and staff survey will help answer the question: “To what extent do students feel a sense of belonging in our school community?”

The survey is comprised of eighteen Likert items to measure perceptions of belonging and engagement in school. Respondents can choose from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree for each stem presented. The overall average PSSM score is represented as a score out of 5.

Information gathered from the confidential survey will be used to direct next steps in professional learning, social emotional lessons, and our ongoing efforts in equity and cultural responsiveness. Additionally, for interested students and staff, we will have opportunities for them to take part in focus groups to assist us in addressing the identified needs and in developing action plans to help all members of our community feel a sense of belonging. Administration of the climate survey will occur annually to monitor our growth in creating a sense of belonging in our school community.

[VIEW SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY RESULTS](#)  
[Community Conversation: A Sense of Belonging - YouTube](#)

## Wiss Nation HAPPENINGS

"I'm coming back for seconds" - overheard in the WHS cafeteria as students enjoyed a special Build Your Own Pho Day. **Stephen Calise with The Nutrition Group** (who said his family typically eats pho once or twice a week!) made the delicious beef broth served with a wide selection of traditional pho ingredients and garnishes. Did you know? Food services also has special lunch days like Reuben Sandwich Day, Build Your Own Burrito Bar and Wing Day. Due to the success of these events, WHS plans to have an action station with Mr. Calise once a month.



Congrats to our March District Artist of the Month, **Paolo Seponara-Sills**, 5th grader at Lower Gwynedd Elementary, who was selected for his beautiful acrylic and watercolor landscape. In this assignment students focused on perspective and using techniques to create a realistic impression of depth. Paolo's painting will be featured in the LGE Art Show on May 19th.

For April, we are pleased to recognize five artists from WHS, one from each discipline, who were congratulated by Principal Dr. Blair, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dawan and their art teachers (*pictured on right*): Christine Channick (Art & Creative Expressions), Serene McLaughlin (Graphic Design), Ian Williams (Art 3/4), Dr. Scott Williamson (Ceramics and Candace LeClaire and Mike Hood (Photography).

**Rylee Peterson** is a freshman mixed media artist who loves to investigate texture and earth tones in her work. In Creative Expressions and Art 1, Rylee has demonstrated persistence throughout various artistic processes and topics, while also exploring her own creative voice.

**Blake Zimmerman**, a current Graphic Design 1 student, is a sophomore who plans to continue his art journey throughout the multiple disciplines over the next two years. With an eye for detail, Blake utilizes his creative edge to drive his art process and develop an individualized aesthetics and unique designs.

**Meghan McGeehan** is a dedicated 12th grade artist working in Art 3 and Art 4 this year. Her detailed and expressive paintings focus on scenes of nature and frequently feature animals, for which she has a passion. She has great skills in capturing light and mood in her paintings as well as depicting the character of her subjects. Her hard work this year has been exemplary and is truly deserving of this recognition.

**Dina Bueti** is an exceptional young artist (freshman) and her pieces exude maturity and experience beyond her years. She centers much of her work on animals, which she fully embraces through multiple mediums (clay,

*Below: Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dawan, Art Teacher, Ms. Banes and Principal Kanopka congratulated Paolo.*



painting, and illustration), showcasing her eclectic talents. She is a model student and is well deserving of this recognition for her talents and all her hard work.



**Troy Burt** is a stand out student in both Photography I and II for creativity and persistence. He never shies away from a challenge and has developed many excellent skills in exposure, composition, and editing. Additionally, Troy is a thoughtful community member; always quick to lend a helping hand.

**Mark your calendar for our Annual Art Shows** - a showcase of student artwork shared at the end of each school year! Each elementary school invites the community to attend their evening show at the school. WMS and WHS will host a combined art show at the WHS Square Gym. [VIEW DATES](#)

# Cultural Recognition and Celebrations

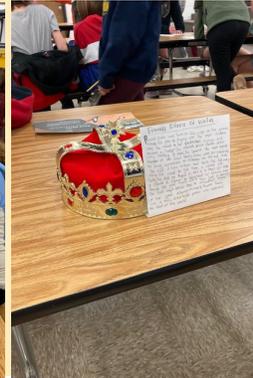
## Women's History Month: April

For her Women and Minorities in Science Project, **Hope Greenwood** shared her project of a reacting beaker in honor of Marie Maynard Daly. Pictured on right: **Kendall Dugas** recreated Rosalind Franklin's famous Photo 51 of DNA.

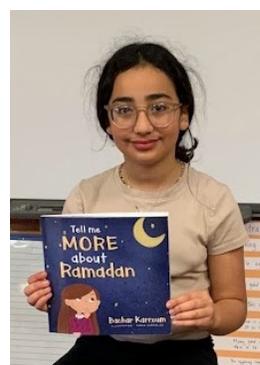


**WHS Project Lit** hosted a discussion of the powerhouse poetic memoir "Shout: The True Story of a Survivor Who Refused to be Silent" by Laurie Halse Anderson. They had a special virtual guest speaker, too – none other than Laurie Halse Anderson! (You can see her faintly on the screen!) Laurie is a New York Times best-selling author known for the unflinching way she writes about, and advocates for, survivors of sexual assault. It was an engaging dialogue between students and author. Kudos to the club sponsors, Mr. Smyth and Mr. Goraczko, for setting up this awesome experience.

**Sixth grade students on the Titans team** created an Influential Women's Museum. Students self-selected an influential woman to research, then created a one-page fact sheet along with a related prop. The teachers held a gallery walk to allow all students the opportunity to view each other's projects.



Students in **Mrs. Hinde's Spanish 3 class** just finished learning about Colombia and watching the movie, Encanto. As an extension activity, the students cooked Colombian arepas, cornmeal cakes that are an essential part of the cuisine.



**Noreen Nsioui, 5th grader** in Mr. Meyer's class at Stony Creek, shared an awesome read aloud about the Muslim holiday, Ramadan. In Muslim tradition, Ramadan is a month-long spiritual period of fasting and prayer, and culminates with Eid al-Fitr, a three-day celebration that involves praying, visiting relatives, giving gifts to children, remembering deceased loved ones and helping those experiencing poverty.

[CHECK OUT THIS VIDEO OF STUDENTS MAKING AREPAS & SHARING THE RECIPE](#)

Students at **Blue Bell Elementary** learned about different cultures during presentations by parents and grandparents. Families shared information about life and culture in countries including China, Italy, Haiti and France to name a few!



## #WissCares: Support for Ukraine

Shout out to the **WHS National Honor Society and National Art Honor Society** students who organized a fundraiser to support Ukrainians in need. WHS students and staff purchased and wore pins with the Ukrainian colors to show their support. Proceeds were donated to the National Bank of Ukraine.



The **WHS Indian Cultural Association** held a beautiful Festival of Colors in celebration of Holi - the popular ancient Hindu festival celebrated in India and other South Asian countries. The event raised \$500 for the Ray of Hope Foundation. [Check out their great video!](#)



In an effort to support those in Ukraine, the **WMS Interact Club**, led by Ms. Duke, held a schoolwide pajama day on March 22nd. Thanks to the generosity of our wonderful staff and students, WMS raised \$1,500 to help the Ukrainian refugees.

## Celebrating the Class of 2022

Our celebration of the Class of 2022 is underway! From now through Commencement on June 9th, WHS has a full schedule of activities for seniors, including Victory Laps!

[Check out the full calendar of Class of 2022 Celebrations](#)

If you would like to see what our seniors' future plans are after graduation, check out the district's Facebook or Twitter page or @wiss22grads on Instagram for our Senior Spotlights. We'll be posting spotlights every day until graduation.



Melody Gittes 



**TCNJ**  
THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

Criminology

## WMS Career Day: Real Life Learning!

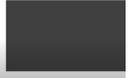


**Luana Atherly-Henderson,  
PhD, CMPP**

**Director, Oncology  
Publications**

**Merck & Co., Inc**

March 18, 2022 - Wissahickon Middle School Career Day



Thanks to the amazing presenters, including four WHS alumni, who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the WMS Virtual Career Day this March. Students in each grade enjoyed presentations from four different speakers in a wide range of professions including health care, marketing, professional athletics and finance. This year, several presenters discussed the programs at North Montco Technical Career Center (NMTCC) - an option for students when they enter high school. Speakers included:

- Keith Oliphant: LinkedIn's Finance Transformation group
- Chef Cole: North Montgomery County Technical Career Center Culinary Arts
- Stacy Anderson: WHS College and Career Counselor
- Bob Brocklesby: Organon, a global pharmaceutical company
- Chief Jeff Borkowski: Ambler Police Department
- Ken James: North Montgomery County Technical Career Center (NMTCC) architectural and technical drafting
- Phoebe Schecter: Former NFL coach, captain and middle line-backer of the Great Britain Women's American Football Team and captain of the England Kabaddi team
- Mal Nanayakkara: Vice President of Sales for Mayweather Boxing and owner of Philly Fit Box
- Tyler Knox: Welder, former NMTCC student
- Dr. Luana Atherly-Henderson: Director of Oncology Publications at Merck
- Tanoh Kpassagnon: NFL defensive end for the New Orleans Saints
- Robert Boudwin: Public Speaking & Marketing Consulting; Former mascot for the Houston Rockets



## Alumna Crowned Miss Pennsylvania USA

Congratulations to alumna, Billie LaRae Owens '14 crowned Miss Pennsylvania USA! Billie succeeds and was crowned by the 2021 queen Sydney Robertson and will now represent Pennsylvania at Miss USA 2022. She gave a stellar performance at the state finale. The #WissNation beauty is also a Syracuse University Alumna, part of HoopHers Girls' Empowerment Program, and is managed by Reinhard Model & Talent Agency.

## GIANT Donates Nearly \$8,000

Thanks to @GIANT Feeding School Kids initiative, Wissahickon is the lucky recipient of a \$7,704.37 donation to support the food service programs for our students. The Store Manager of the Blue Bell GIANT, presented the donation to our Food Services staff and students. The initiative is supported by GIANT customers who can choose to round up their grocery purchase to the nearest dollar or convert their CHOICE points into a donation. GIANT matched the first \$250,000 donated by customers. Thanks to GIANT for being such a GREAT community partner!

