

# ONTEORA

Fall 2016

## MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

### DEAR ONTEORA COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

There is much to be said about living in Ulster County, especially in the beautiful Onteora Central School District community. Since my arrival as the new superintendent, I have had the good fortune of meeting many school district employees, Board members, and community members. Each meeting brought with it a conversation about the pride people felt about this community and their expectations for our school district.

As I wrote in my first letter to the community, circumstances do not determine whether a good school district can become a great school district; it is a matter of conscious choice and discipline. It is the understanding of what fuels this district's fire: its rigorous curriculum, its talented teachers, administrators, and support staff, and disciplined action over time. The fundamental purpose of this district is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. Excellent schools have a clear vision of what they are attempting to accomplish, and it starts with the Board of Education stating its vision for the district.

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## Another School Year is Under Way!

THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR BEGAN ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, and the newness was everywhere. Onteora's Elementary School students arrived in bright new sneakers, toting new backpacks; the Middle School students fumbled with their new lockers; and a new crop of freshmen navigated the school's hallways. In all, more than 1,300 students streamed into the school buildings ready to learn.

Teachers and staff members were there early to welcome the students as they arrived, helping the littlest ones off the buses, directing them to their classrooms, and reassuring the occasional teary-eyed youngster.

It was the first day of school for a number of educators as well.

In addition to new Superintendent of Schools Bruce Watson, seven teachers and a library media specialist have joined the staff. Also greeting the students was the District's new School Resource Officer (SRO), Brandon Schiller.

Shortly after the first bells rang, teachers and students had already begun to settle into a familiar routine. New sheets of loose-leaf paper were inaugurated with notes, new books were cracked open, and the summer-long stillness was broken as students, teachers, and staff in Onteora's Elementary, Middle, and High Schools began the 2016-2017 school year.



Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella greets Kindergarten students Kendyl Pezzello and Kiernan Blakely.

Bennett students Arthur Yang (left), Jett Conti (right), Ada Helm (below right), and Sophia Odato (below center) arrived ready to learn on the first day of school. Woodstock student Pesea Bowler (below left) checks out the books in her new classroom.





# Woodstock is Going Green

THERE'S A NEW CLASSROOM AT WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, but it's not the traditional kind. The new "room" is actually a working greenhouse, which was built over the summer on the school grounds, next to the garden named in honor of local legend Levon Helm.

This fall, students have been hard at work in the greenhouse, filling the raised beds with soil, transporting plants from the outside garden, and planting cold-tolerant crops like spinach and kale.

"The new greenhouse is being used to teach our children about plants, gardening, scientific concepts, healthy food choices, and so much more, including the simple pleasure of growing, harvesting, and eating their own produce," says Woodstock Principal Scott Richards.

The greenhouse project, which has been more than two years in the making, was the idea of the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA). According to PTA Co-President Cheryl Spada, the group felt that the greenhouse would be a welcome addition to an existing in-school program that encourages students to make healthy food choices.

"It is a perfect fit with our 'Healthy Heroes' program and the philosophy that our kids should have access to fresh produce in the cafeteria that they grow themselves," Mrs. Spada explains. "We saw that the

Woodstock student Henry Bernstein helps parent Cheryl Spada, co-president of the Woodstock PTA, bring soil into the school's new greenhouse.



Woodstock student Angel Maize holds a Swiss chard plant, which she is about to transplant from an outdoor garden to the school's new greenhouse.

best way to expand this program was to have a means to grow produce for a longer period of time, during the school year."

Parents, students, staff members, and community members helped make the greenhouse project a reality by pitching in with fund-raising, labor, and continuous support and encouragement. Transportation and shipping costs were donated by Spinneweber and Jeff Collins.

Key support was also provided by Longyear Farm, says Mrs. Spada. "Matt Longyear built the greenhouse as a 'kit' and brought it to the school for the volunteer build on August 15," she reports. "He also donated all of the lumber for the project, essentially slashing the cost to a fraction of what it would have been."

Also pitching in is volunteer chef Robert Kothe, formerly a cook with the Onteora Food Services. Mr. Kothe, aka "Broccoli Bob," is committed to helping make the garden- and greenhouse-grown produce available to students, regardless of whether or not they purchase lunch at school. "He has a cape, mask, broccoli-shaped chef's cap, even his own dance move!" Mrs. Spada says. "It is amazing to see all of the kids dancing with their empty vegetable cups. It's a moment of pure fun!"

## Student Government at Bennett

AT BENNETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, students aren't simply learning about elections, leadership, and government from books or newspapers. They are also learning by doing.

Last spring, the students voted for their Student Council officers. The winning candidates — Takemi Sono-Knowles (president), Hudson Turbo (vice-president), Clare Voelker (treasurer), and Marena Quick (secretary), have been meeting regularly with homeroom representatives this fall, planning fund-raisers and special events like spirit week, the school's annual dodgeball tournament, and Pink Shirt Day, an anti-bullying initiative scheduled for February. On occasion, they also share students' concerns — for example, about the condition of an athletic field used during recess — with Principal Gabriel Buono.



Bennett Student Council officers Hudson Turbo, Takemi Sono-Knowles, Marena Quick, and Clare Voelker pose for a group photo before a recent meeting.

Speaking of the students' fund-raising efforts, which this year will include a faux "movie premiere," Takemi says, "We're raising money so we can get things done for the school."

This year, explains Hudson, the student government hopes to contribute to a long-term goal of the music department: the purchase of risers as well as soundproofing material that would facilitate band and orchestra practice sessions. "I play in the orchestra," he says. "It's hard to play when the band is practicing next to us."

"The Student Council offers students a chance for their voices to be heard," says Technology Teaching Assistant Cheryl Formant, who co-advises the group along with Grade 6 Teacher Joan Mayone-Allison. "It also teaches them how to address issues, tackle problems, and make a difference."



# MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The vision of the Onteora Board of Education is stated in the following recently adopted goals:

## EDUCATIONAL VISION AND ETHICS LEADERSHIP

- 1. Promote and maintain a stimulating, healthy and safe environment conducive to learning that improves the educational experience for all students.

## BUDGET AND FINANCE

- 2. Maintain a short and long term fiscal plan that protects and maximizes the district assets through continuous review of programs and practices in a cost effective manner, and provide the funding to support the aforementioned.

## COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

- 3. Foster an open, collaborative and responsive relationship with the Community. Improve the district-wide school culture through interaction, clear communication of Board priorities, and appreciation for staff initiatives and student achievement.

Goals 1 and 3, which relate to the climate and culture of our school district, are backed by research. The works of educational researchers Ron Edmonds, Larry Lezotte, and others have identified certain characteristics associated with effective schools. One characteristic is the shaping of organizational culture and climate, which is critical to the creation of an excellent school and district. Similarly, educational researcher Richard DuFour has written, "The culture and climate of a school is reflected in the collective set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within a building that make up the group norm.... This norm represents shared expectations for behavior and serves as a guide for what is to be done, how it is to be done, and by whom." Armed with this knowledge, Onteora is committed to further improving the culture and climate of our school district.

I am excited to have joined this fine district and I look forward to working with the Board, administration, faculty, and all of the support staff to continue to shape the organizational culture and climate of our district.

Sincerely,

**Bruce Watson**  
**ONTEORA SUPERINTENDENT**  
**OF SCHOOLS**

# Phoenicia's Labyrinth Promotes Students' Well-Being



Corey Breitenstein (kneeling), a local landscaper, helps direct the community build of Phoenicia Elementary School's new labyrinth.

**LABYRINTH**—the word usually conjures up images of mythical mazes, not children's play areas. Nevertheless, a labyrinth is the newest addition to Phoenicia Elementary School's playground.

Unlike the mazelike structure celebrated in Greek mythology, however, Phoenicia's labyrinth wasn't built to confine a ferocious beast. The school's version is a circular walking path intended to promote students' personal and psychological growth and overall well-being.

"Students can walk at their own pace by themselves or with an adult, depending on the situation," explains Grade 3 teacher Robert Hallock, who is a member of the school's PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) team, which planted the seeds for the project. "They can engage in breathing exercises, talk out their problems, or just walk quietly."

The original concept for the labyrinth, Mr. Hallock notes, came from school Social Worker Patti Rosenbloom, who raised the idea during a PBIS meeting. "My hope is that the labyrinth can be used by students to reduce their level of stress, clarify their thinking and feelings, and improve their sense of self-control and well-being," she says. "Students are taught, with staff support, how to slow down so they are more capable of figuring out how their thinking, feelings, and behavior may be part of the problem, and then, how to fix it."

Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella suggested incorporating the labyrinth into the school's playground, and the PTA lent its support. A parent committee designed the layout, which includes a paving-stone and grass path, as well as benches for resting.

PTA President Denise Warren secured a generous donation in the form of a large discount from Herzog's Home Center, which supplied the stone used for the project. The chosen location—in back of the existing playground—was cleared by the Onteora Buildings and Grounds Department in preparation for the November 5 community build, which attracted a fair number of hard-working parents, staff members, students, and community members.

As this newsletter was going to press, the labyrinth was still awaiting some finishing touches.

"Once the labyrinth is complete," says Mrs. Sella, "it will not only be used by students wishing to 'de-escalate,' but it will also be available for use by any student seeking a quiet place to reflect, read, or walk during recess. We are all very excited about this endeavor and can't wait to celebrate!"



# Middle School Launches New Wilderness Club

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS HAVE A BRAND-NEW EXTRACURRICULAR OPTION: the Wilderness Club. The club is the brainchild of Science teacher Rich DeRuvo, who explains that he wanted to engage students in the world outside of the classroom walls. The club began meeting in mid-November.

“The Boiceville campus,” Mr. DeRuvo notes, “offers many acres of natural places to explore.” With that in mind, he aims to involve students in activities ranging from gardening in the Middle School/High School courtyard to practicing wilderness survival skills and tracking on the trails behind Bennett Elementary School.

“Recently, there has been rising support to ensure that students get outside daily,” Mr. DeRuvo comments. The club, he hopes, will serve as a bridge between the successful outdoor programing at the elementary schools (which offer recess, gardening, maple sugaring, and nature-trail walks) and the High School’s Science of Survival class (which he developed and teaches).

Tracking and wilderness survival are particular interests of Mr. DeRuvo, who has trained extensively with Tom Brown Jr., a world authority on these subjects. Mr. DeRuvo has already shared his passion for the outdoors with the students in his Science of Survival



An Onteora student examines a frog during Mr. DeRuvo’s Science of Survival class.



Wilderness Club members can expect to garden in the Middle School/High School courtyard.

class, where the lessons have focused on topics like plant identification and utilization, orienteering, fire-by-friction, stone carving, water purification, and gardening.

“Our environment is better protected when the people of a region have an intimate knowledge of their surroundings and see themselves as part of nature instead of removed from it,” Mr. DeRuvo declares. “Fostering that relationship must begin with our children. The club is an opportunity to get kids into the sunlight and fresh air while gaining the skills and confidence to survive any situation. We are so fortunate to have these natural resources available to us. We just need to lead our students.”

# Onteora Celebrates Homecoming

HUNDREDS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS CELEBRATED HOMECOMING IN LATE SEPTEMBER.

Festivities kicked off on Thursday, September 22, when High School students voted for the Homecoming Court during their lunch periods. On Friday, the students showed off their school spirit at an afternoon pep rally.

Homecoming was on the following Saturday. The day’s full morning of sports activities included a Modified football game against Rondout Valley, a Varsity field hockey match versus Cocksackie-Athens, and a Varsity girls soccer contest with Saugerties. There were also Varsity and JV volleyball matches against Tuxedo, and a Varsity boys soccer game against Saugerties.

In a moving ceremony of remembrance before the Junior Varsity football game against Rondout Valley, members of all the sports teams released balloons to honor the memory of Madison Creagan and Damein Kovacs, who both passed away during the past year in motor vehicle accidents.

During the Senior Recognition ceremony, senior athletes and their parents

were honored with flowers and photographs. This year’s homecoming king and queen, Danny Wang and Niaya DeLisio, were crowned along with members of the homecoming court: Benjamin Covi, Hunter Crawley, Emily Downs, Hailey Mainieri, Jordan Meade, Kalo Talley Narragansett, Matthew Shields, and Sierra Shultis.

Another highlight was the annual Red Dress Run, sponsored by Bennett Elementary School. Patterned after a charity run held each year in New Orleans, the event raised funds for the purchase of an outdoor, octagonal table for the school’s Courtyard Garden.

At the end of the long day, the High School’s Homecoming Dance brought the day’s activities to a close.





# Onteora Hosts College Fair



**ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LOOKED TO THE FUTURE IN LATE SEPTEMBER,** when they explored various colleges and post-graduation options at the school's annual college fair. Admissions counselors and representatives from approximately 40 institutions, including the armed services, were on hand to provide information to students about their programs. For a list of attending institutions, go to the High School website.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ONTEORA SENIOR JUSTIN LANE** (seated, second from left), who signed a National Letter of Intent on November 9 to play Division I Golf at Binghamton University. Looking on are (clockwise, from bottom left) Onteora Golf Coach Scott Via; Onteora High School Principal Lance Edelman; Justin's sister, Grade 8 student Nicole Lane; Justin's father, Kevin Lane; Interim Athletic Director Lou Cioffi; and Justin's mother, Tracy Lane. Justin, who plans to major in business, will be attending the University's School of Management.





# Onteora Pre-K Students Celebrate Halloween

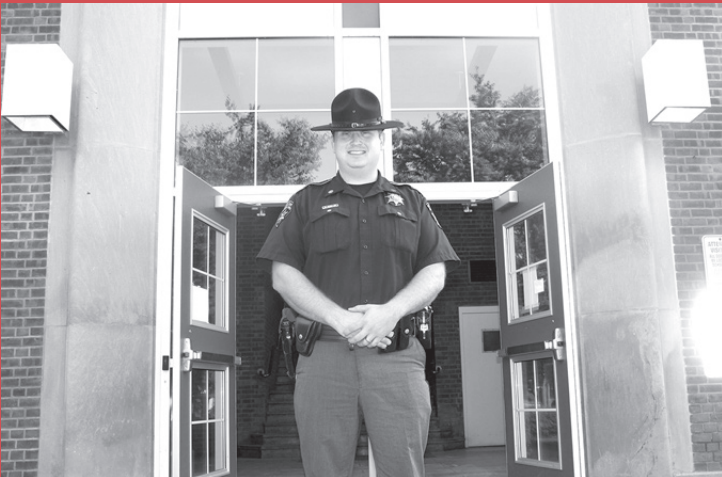
THIS YEAR'S TRICK-OR-TREATERS INCLUDED youngsters enrolled in Onteora's Universal Pre-K program. Pictured are children who attend Pre-K classes at First Steps Early Childhood Education Center in Woodstock. The students' Halloween Parade took them to a neighboring business — Innovative Products of America (IPA) — and to neighboring households, which gave the children trinkets that had been previously provided by First Steps.



Onteora Pre-K students Carter Nadler (above) and Mayleth Londono (left) prepare to go trick-or-treating with their classmates. The children's Pre-K program is administered by First Steps Early Childhood Education Center in Woodstock.



## ONTEORA WELCOMES SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER



The Onteora Central School District believes that establishing a safe and secure learning environment is fundamental to student learning and success. To that end, Onteora recently partnered with the Ulster County Sheriff's Office to place a School Resource Officer (SRO) within our schools. Deputy Brandon Schiller, Onteora's new SRO, looks forward to being a positive influence in the District. "I hope to serve as an 'approachable' School Resource Officer, who is able to work with both staff and students to address and resolve any issues that may arise," he says. "My goal as a School Resource Officer is to work jointly with the District to ensure a safe environment where everyone is able to thrive."

## FORMER PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE SHARES STORY OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

"THE COURSES OF OUR LIVES ARE DETERMINED BY THE DECISIONS WE MAKE," former professional athlete Ken Bartolo told Onteora Middle and High School students during daytime assemblies on October 25.

Mr. Bartolo, who played lacrosse for the Rochester Greywolves, recounted some of the many terrible decisions he has made in his life, decisions that led to drug and alcohol addictions, the loss of college scholarships and a promising athletic career, the break-up of his family, years of jail time, and more than one near-death experience. Sober now for five years, he described his hard-won journey back from addiction. "My story is my gift to you and I hope you take it," he said.

Mr. Bartolo also shared his harrowing—yet ultimately inspiring—story during an evening event that was open to the public. Community organizations, including Family of Woodstock, the Ulster Prevention Council, and SPEAK (Ulster County's Suicide Prevention Coalition), were also on hand to offer information about available resources available to community members.

According to High School Principal Lance Edelman, "Mr. Bartolo's visit was part of the District's ongoing efforts to promote a healthy, safe environment conducive to learning. Substance abuse is a pressing problem in our country, and we want our students, parents, and community members to be equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to stay safe and healthy."

For more information about the presentation, please visit [www.kenbartolothereandback.com](http://www.kenbartolothereandback.com).



Sobriety advocate Ken Bartolo talks to Onteora High School and Middle School students during a daytime assembly. Mr. Bartolo also participated in an evening event that was open to the community.

# Bennett Students: What They Love About Their School So Far

Shortly after the new school year began, Bennett students shared their enthusiasm for learning with a visitor. Here’s what they had to say:



**Keegan Burkhardt:**  
“My favorite things about school so far are library and saxophone lessons. It’s my first year learning the saxophone with Ms. McKenna.”



**Elias Sheldon:**  
“My favorite subject is library, because it’s fun to look around for new books. My favorite books are Harry Potter; I’ve read them all at least twice.”



**Sophia Buono:**  
“I like recess. I think that kids work better when they have recess and can get their energy out. I also like PE. We started soccer and have been doing stretches.”



**Wyatt VanBlarcom:**  
“My favorite subject is math. We’ve been doing times tables.”



**Na’mari Keith:**  
“I like math and gym. I find math easy. We’ve been learning about place values and multiplication.”



**Brendon Jackson:**  
“I like art. We made a treehouse out of cardboard with Mrs. Ziembra.”



**Alexis Nielsen:**  
“I really like reading, especially fiction. I’ve been reading a book called *The Tail of Emily Windsnap* that I really like.”



**Cole Matteson:**  
“I’m enjoying learning the trumpet with Mr. Boyer. I practice every day.”



**Anna Johnson:**  
“I really like writing. We’ve been writing realistic fiction.”

## PROFESSIONAL PHOTOJOURNALIST SHARES PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



Photojournalist Tania Barricklo talks about her profession with Onteora photography students.

ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHY STUDENTS recently had the opportunity to benefit from the real-world work experience of a professional photojournalist: the *Daily Freeman*’s Tania Barricklo.

Armed with dozens of tearsheets of her work, Ms. Barricklo shared tips on a wide range of topics—from framing to focal points, lighting to lenses. Getting the perfect shot, she suggested, may sometimes require you to use your social skills to put people at ease, or to know your legal right to cover a particular event. Other times, waiting and watching—“keeping your eyes open”—might be the most important things you can do.

Speaking of her career choice, Ms. Barricklo said, “I found where my passion was. I advise you to follow what sparks you.”

Photography teacher Jennifer Wentland was thrilled to welcome the *Freeman* photographer to her classroom. “The photography students and I were very appreciative of Ms. Barricklo coming in to speak with us about her career in photojournalism,” she said. “She was engaging, informative, and shared her passion for capturing those unique moments.”

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT  
Selina E. Guendel  
CLASS OF 2009

SELINA (SENI) GUENDEL’S PASSION FOR SKIING, nurtured during her years as an Onteora student, has won her a prominent role as a National Ski Patrol “ambassador” as well as a new set of wheels.

Seni was one of two winners in a contest sponsored by the National Ski Patrol in partnership with the Subaru car company. By winning the contest, Seni has the use of a Subaru Outback (emblazoned with the National Ski Patrol and Subaru logos) for 10 months.

Seni, who was chosen from more than 1,000 applicants, is excited about her win. “I am proud to have this position to show other young patrollers and the general public that patrolling isn’t just an ‘old boys club’ and that younger patrollers, even women, can have a successful patrolling career,” she explains.

Seni, who is in her tenth year as a patroller, recently accepted a patrolling position with Snowbasin Resort Ski Patrol in Utah. But she got her start closer to home, at Belleayre Mountain. “I started as a ski patrol intern, basically shadowing patrollers and learning what it was all about,” she recalls.

“There is a lot more to patrolling than on-hill first aid,” she notes. “We are responsible for ensuring the safety of the whole mountain, lifts, trails, and all.”

Seni credits her skiing ability — and her current career

path — to her Onteora ski race coach, Herb Cyntryn. “My foundation as a ski racer has no doubt played a major role in my ability to patrol and to get injured patients off the hill quickly,” she says. “Herb was — and still is — a caring and invested coach.”

After graduating from Onteora, Seni enrolled at the University of Vermont, where she received a BS in exercise and movement science. After receiving a master’s in kinesiology (which involves the study of muscular movement), she returned to Belleayre last season and worked as a full-time, professional patroller.

At Belleayre, Seni became the first patroller in more than eight years to pass both the medical and skiing aspects of the Senior Patroller test in one season. The Senior Patroller Program, she explains, allows patrollers to hone their personal skiing skills as well as their ability to lead and manage emergency situations. The test included a medical management practical exam, a skiing skills test, and a toboggan-handling skills test, which required her to safely evacuate “patients” from the mountain’s most challenging terrain.

“Being a Senior Patroller means you will help take the lead in more advanced medical situations where there may be more pressure, and time is of the essence,” she explains.

Seni’s new position at Snowbasin began in mid-November. She looks forward to expanding her patrolling skills by learning about avalanche control and safety. “This is mainly why I was drawn to Utah, to further challenge myself as a patroller,” she says.

Getting paid to do something she loves is a dream come true, she suggests. “I enjoy patrolling because it allows me to be outside everyday, doing something I love.”

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