Black History Month exhibit showcases student talent

Amy Higgins
Communications director
The Elyria Arts Council and Leaders of Today, a local nonprofit centered on teen growth, have awarded scholarships to a talented group of students at Elyria Schools.
The students highlighted their artwork — centered on racial equity, nonviolence, unity and positive mental health — at the Elyria Arts Council during the Black History Month Art Exhibit at 336 Broad St. in Elyria.
The Elyria High students who submitted artwork for the show are Priscilla Yrad, Abigail Clayton, Ayden Pol, Sylvia Lyons, Michelle Stanley and Emese Toth.
The art show's remaining date is 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Feb. 27. For more information, visit www.leadersoftoday.org.

Emese Toth, 12th grade, Elyria High School

Above: Sylvia Lyons, 12th grade, Elyria High School.

Left: Priscilla Yrad, 11th grade, Elyria High School.

Right: Ayden Pol, 11th grade, Elyria High School.

Photos courtesy Leaders of Today

Pioneering the podcast platform

Amy Higgins
Communications director
In this world of virtual everything, podcasts offer a wonderful break from the video screen.
There’s just something about honest, casual conversation among compelling, interesting people that seems to appeal to listeners who want their information delivered in a fun, friendly medium.
Podcasts definitely fit that bill. Elyria Schools has recently joined in on this fun format, launching the Petey Podcast on the buzzsprout.com platform. It’s also available on Spotify and all other popular hosting platforms.
Podcasts have in recent years become a leading tool for people as they seek to digest news, entertainment, education and other areas of information.
The format for these chat sessions can vary greatly depending on the type of podcast you listen to.
Some podcasters create material that’s long, formal and structured, while others create fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants interviews that are short, pithy and highly entertaining.
Nearly every smartphone out there has the capability to play podcasts. On iPhones you can listen to them under the Podcast app; Android phones also have apps available.
If you haven’t gotten in on the podcast experience yet, now’s your chance!
You’ve heard the saying: All good things come in threes.
That’s on full display at The Wishing Well at Pioneer Place, a vast storehouse of gifts, goodies and supplies earmarked for the students of Elyria Schools.
The project, which kicked off just before December 2020, is the brilliant creation of a trio of caring individuals connected to the Elyria community — Mary Felton, Tammy Koleski and Pam Richards.
The Wishing Well materials are available to the school district’s staff, who can choose items based on needs they see within their own classrooms.
Since the staff work directly with the students every day, they know exactly what types of items — coats, crayons, shoes, clothes, supplies, backpacks, etc. — the students may need.
The three women have funded the project almost entirely on their own, although Felton’s employer also has donated to the program. They’ve worked closely with bulk discount centers to obtain the variety of materials at a low cost.
Just before the holidays, they also managed to package together hundreds of gift bags containing an assortment of items such as bath products, cosmetics, electronic accessories, toys and more.
The gift bags were then given to Elyria Schools staff, who hand-delivered the items to surprised children throughout the district.
“It’s the culmination of a small little thing that started out as a couple of small ideas, then turned into this with a couple connections that Mary has,” Koleski said. “It’s a labor of love at this point. We’d love to keep going all year round.”
And now that is indeed their goal.
“It’s free to the teachers, the educators, the principals, the social workers, the guidance counselors, to come and fulfill the needs for any given student. From clothing to shoes to coats to toys to gift baskets — to brighten someone’s day.”
Tammy Koleski

“We wanted to supply a room for them to be able to come and shop and feel good about getting what they can get for the families of this great Elyria School district,” Felton said.
If you’d like to contribute funds, email wishingwellatpioneerplace@gmail.com.
Elyria athletes sign letters of intent

Amish Higgins
Communications director

Congratulations to Elyria’s student athletes who signed letters of intent to attend prestigious colleges and universities and to continue playing their chosen sport.

All of these athletes have earned notable recognitions and awards while playing sports in school. And this month, two of these athletes were presented with stand-out rewards that deserve mention.

Abby Monn
Abby is attending Edinboro University for volleyball.

Abby earned recognition as Lorain County’s Miss Volleyball 2020 for her prowess on the court.

With the prestigious title came a towering trophy that Abby said currently resides in her room at home but is soon to find a more prominent display space.

“This feels great to win this award,” Monn said. “I’ve worked hard for four years at school and on the court and I’m happy my hard work paid off.”

“The Elyria volleyball program is amazing. The coaches saw my abilities and pushed me to be great. I would not be as successful without the help of my teammates. Volleyball is a team sport and my team would give it their best effort every time we stepped on the court and that’s the best thing I could ask for,” Monn said. “Everyone in the program is very supportive and wants to see everyone grow as a person and a player.”

Congratulations, Abby!

Jesse Stevens
Jesse is attending Walsh University for football and received the Lorain County Lombardi Award.

On Jesse earning this award, Elyria Pioneers Coach Devlin Culliver said, “The athlete must show excellence on the field and sportsmanship and leadership. And he must be in good standing with his coaches and teammates.” Culliver said. “He also has to be a dominant player that shines.”

Congratulations, Jesse!

Elyria fall and winter sports athletes who committed to college play include:

Jake Evans: Indiana University for wrestling.

Enrique Munquía: Kent State University for wrestling.


Colin Noel: Campbellsville University for wrestling.

Perryon Benton: William Penn University for football.

Core’Aun Washington: William Penn University for football.

Congratulations to these hard-working scholar athletes and to all our fall and winter sports teams.

Food news you can use: Student meals and cookies

Amy Higgins
Communications director

The Elyria Schools Central Kitchen is a whirlwind of activity.

The foodservice team — led by Aramark, the district’s foodservice provider — is preparing and serving more than 55,000 meals a week in-school and with at-home deliveries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the department upped its meal services to include breakfast, lunch and dinner, plus weekend meals.

Through a partnership with First Student Transportation, the Aramark team has made weekly door-to-door deliveries to families with children, 18 years and younger. Families can request this service at elyriafoodservices@gmail.com.

The team also has kept up a weekly drive-through meal service on Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., at Elyria High School, while providing full service in-school the rest of the week for students who are attending in person.

The school meals are free for all students through the end of the 2020-21 school year.

Pinkalicious

There’s nothing like an Elyria Schools Pink Cookie to turn a frown upside down. That’s why Aramark launched Pink Cookie Pop-up Shops in January to give Elyrians a reason to smile.

The Pink Cookie, usually an item that can be ordered anytime during the school year through Aramark/Elyria Schools catering services, took a back seat during the pandemic when basic student meal needs were at their height.

The Pink Cookie Pop-up Shops were announced on Facebook.com/elyriacityschools and would show up on Elyria Schools properties in January, and the 100 dozen or so cookies that were available at each shop would sell out in less than an hour.

It was fun, but also could be frustrating for those who missed out or were unable to attend.

Well, good news ... Chef Mark of Elyria Schools said Pink Cookie orders can resume beginning March 1. Orders can be placed a dozen at a time by emailing elyriafoodservices@gmail.com.

Orders must be placed one week prior to pick up, and Aramark will stop taking orders when the orders reach 40 dozen per week.
Spreading some holiday cheer

Elyria schools staff organized drive-through events to provide crafts, gifts and hot meals.
Beaming!

Students of the future Westwood and Eastern Heights campuses signed their names to structural beams that will be placed in the new buildings and visible for all to see.
Farewell, friends

We're sending out a great big virtual hug to these fine educators who are leaving Elyria Schools for retirement. Thank you for your dedicated service and your devotion to Elyria's children and families.

**Eva Dowdell**
Elyria High School foodservice, 10 years of service

**Roger Raber**
Elyria High School, language arts teacher, 27 years of service

**Raymond Pileski**
Westwood Middle, math teacher, 32 years of service

**Michael Brand**
Elyria High School art teacher, 31 years of service

**John Cake**
Elyria High School guidance counselor, 26 years of service

**Colleen Kamody**
Elyria Early Childhood Center, preschool teacher, 27 years of service

**Ramona Mendak**
Assistant director of academic services, 34 years of service

**Rebecca Porter**
Elyria Early Childhood Center, preschool teacher, 33 years of service

**Kathleen O'Shaunghnessy**
Crestwood teacher, 18 years of service

**Rene Null**
Northwood Middle, building support associate, 28 years of service

**Catherine Jackson**
Elyria Early Childhood Center, special education paraprofessional, 22 years of service

**Rebecca Pence**
Administrative assistant human resources, 11 years of service

ART TEACHER'S WORK ON DISPLAY

Elyria Schools art teacher Anne Kolenda, Northwood Middle, is the featured artist this month by the Lorain County Metro Parks at the Carlisle Visitor Center. Her paintings are displayed prominently there. Congratulations, Anne!

PODCAST

From 1 chance — the Petey Podcast has launched nearly a dozen episodes in the past month alone.

It's hosted by the author of this article (Amy Higgins, Elyria Schools communications director) and produced by Marty Yadon, the district's video and audio producer.

It's recorded and produced completely in-house at the Elyria Schools administration office, which makes it easy for our fascinating guests to drop by for interviews.

Some of the folks highlighted in recent episodes:
- Elyria Schools alumna Marsalis Hammons (EHS Class of 2012). Hammons' compelling life experience has inspired him to create a nonprofit that helps build young leaders throughout schools in Lorain County, with a special focus on students in Elyria and Lorain. He also works full time for Cleveland Metropolitan School District, where he plays a lead role in shaping the district's important hiring and recruitment achievements. He recently earned Leadership Lorain County's Emerald Award for Inspirational Leadership. He's a truly dynamic young leader and a mentor to scores of local young people — and he was kind enough to share his insights during a visit to the Petey Podcast studio.
- The Petey Podcast also has launched a series of truly illuminating interviews with three mental health experts who work at Elyria Schools: Chantelle Jackson, Cristina McCarthy and Marissa Pelsoy. Over the series of interviews, this trio explores a host of tools and techniques that people can use to better cope with the challenges of workplace dynamics, personal relationships, day-to-day struggles and more. They offer a wealth of information and, most importantly, in every episode they deliver tips, tools and strategies that people can use to help achieve optimal outcomes in their daily lives.
- Other upcoming interviews:
  - Superintendent Ann Schloss will talk about what the district has encountered throughout the pandemic and how it's shaping up for the year ahead. She'll chat about the district's new school buildings and the shape of their programming opportunities in the coming year. It's a podcast not to miss if you're interested in the trajectory of Elyria Schools.
  - Elyria Schools art teachers Heather Hale and John Hiltiak will join the podcast to talk about imagination and all things creative — how art can encompass many forms and how it helps shape minds young and old.
  - Other interviews are in the works, but consider this a casting call: If you know of Elyria Schools alumni who are particularly interesting — or if you fit that bill yourself — reach out to us! We'd love to talk about a possible interview.

We're also interested in hosting community leaders, current students, parents and others in the greater Elyria and Lorain County community or beyond who are making a mark on the world in their own unique way.

Email ask@elyriaschools.org or call (440) 284-8183. Check out the Petey Podcast site at https://elyriapeteypodcast.buzzsprout.com.
Little Pioneer registration roundup

Amy Higgins
Communications director

Calling all little Pioneers! On Saturday, Feb. 27, Elyria Schools is hosting the Little Pioneer Roundup registration fair at Elyria High School.

All new and returning preschool and kindergarten students are encouraged to come and sign up for the 2021-22 school year.

The Little Pioneer Roundup will be in Elyria High School’s dining hall 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The first 50 registrants will receive a beautiful backpack loaded with goodies and supplies courtesy of Ready, Set, Go to Kindergarten.

All registrants will earn their very own Petey Pioneer coonskin cap and other fun items.

To enroll, parents should bring their ID, such as a driver’s license; their child’s birth certificate and immunization records; two proofs of residency, such as a utility bill and rent receipt; and proof of custody, if necessary.

Registrars will be on hand to help parents through the process of enrolling their new student in the Five Star preschool program of Elyria Schools, or in the highly acclaimed all-day kindergarten program.

Elyria Schools offers two sites for preschool: the Elyria Early Childhood Village on Griswold Road and at Hamilton Elementary School on Middle Avenue (for students who reside in the Hamilton attendance zone.)

Elyria’s kindergarten classes are located throughout the district in neighborhood schools.

Last year the district opened three brand-new school buildings: Ely Elementary (grades K-4), Hamilton Elementary (grades PK-4), and Northwood Campus (grades K-8).

In the fall this year, the new campus of Eastern Heights will open (grades K-6), followed closely by Westwood Campus (grades K-8) just a few months later.

Video tours and updates on the new-school project can be found on Elyria Schools Pioneer TV on YouTube.

The art of self care

Amy Higgins
Communications director

Ever have moments or even entire days where you feel like you need a break?

At those times, it’s handy to have a few tips and tricks at the ready for calming your mind, body, and spirit.

Enter the self-care toolkit.

When you’re feeling anxious, overwhelmed, fatigued, unfocused or any number of other emotions that wear you down or leave you feeling depleted, self-care tools can bring you some measure of comfort.

Therapists, counselors and other experts in matters of the mind often refer to simple practices that people can employ to settle their thoughts when life’s stressors take root.

Elyria Schools social workers Chantelle Jackson, Cristina McCarthy and Marissa Pelozy meet up with us regularly on Petey Podcast to talk about tools and techniques for self care — physically and emotionally.

When putting together a tool kit designed to relax and refocus your thoughts and feelings, think about your five senses, Pelozy advised.

“First get yourself something that you can easily access,” she said. “It can be a plastic bin, it can be a wooden crate, it could be a bag. Have that and then think of the five senses: what can I do that will help me calm and help me improve my positive thinking, by using my five senses.”

“It’s also using your creativity to find what works for you,” McCarthy said. “When you thing of scent, for example, some people might say, ‘a candle and a bath, that’s so relaxing and calming, that’s my self care.’ Someone else may be calmed by the smell and taste of chocolate. It’s so different for everybody and I think that that’s the beauty of it, it’s so tailored to you.”

And be creative. If a nice hot bubble bath makes you happy, put a slip of paper in your toolbox to remind yourself in times of stress that a bubble bath brings you peace.

“We rarely take the time for ourselves to do things like this,” McCarthy said. “We might think that self care is ‘Well I’m not going to check my phone or work email after 5 p.m.’ and it’s not so much just stopping doing things it’s also implementing things that are for you and you only.”

“And when you’re in that hole, it’s too late to find all that stuff so if you have your kit already ready, you can go to it and find what helps,” Pelozy said.

Getting started

Self-care tool kits are uniquely personal. The items inside make a person feel relaxed, safe and happy.

These categories might help inspire you when building your personal kit:

- Taste.
- Touch.
- Audio.
- Aroma.
- Visual.
- An artistic activity.
- A body care item.
- Something spiritual.

Pelozy and McCarthy offered a few ideas and examples of some of their favorite self-care tools.

- Taste: A chocolate or two, some nice tea, a granola bar. Easy to eat foods that I enjoy and can reach for when I’m feeling like I need a quick pick-me-up.
- Touch: A worry stone, soft pair of socks, teddy bear or soft scarf/blanket are all great examples of touch items you can place in your self-care kit. A hairbrush, dry brush or body cream are also great touch items to add to your self-care kit. Additionally, a fidget spinner or cube could be great for touch.
- Audio: A pair of headphones, a mix of your favorite tunes or a guided meditation are all great examples of self-care activities that are specific to your hearing. A favorite CD or a special Spotify playlist can all be helpful in times of high stress.
- Aroma: Essential oils, your favorite perfume, pillow spray, incense or a candle. Scented Epsom Salts for a warm bath are another great idea. Aromatherapy has been practiced for generations. It’s the use of scents on the body and nervous system. Scents like chamomile, lavender and rose are all good options to add to your toolkit.
- Visual: Pictures of your friends and family, soft lighting like a Himalayan Salt Lamp, a beautiful painting. You can add any item that brings you joy. This also is a good reminder of gratitude and visually what we are thankful for. Also, I love the idea of incorporating ticket stubs and postcards from past adventures.