

## 2023 – Spring/Summer Newsletter

### Message from the Board of Education:

In March of this school year, the Board of Education, in coordination with Wold Architects & Engineers, and Shales McNutt Incorporated broke ground on our new gymnasium addition project. On that cool day, March 15<sup>th</sup>, what took a couple of years to design, and many years to save and plan for, had finally arrived. Since then, a couple of months of hard work has led to major developments in the project, from foundation footings poured, walls completed, the south entrance roadway being ripped up, and as you read this, steel bar joists being set by crane and ironworkers. A little progress each day adds up to big results. While the gymnasium project is one project that we are incredibly excited about, did you know that Seneca High School has also upgraded facilities in other areas too in the last few years? For example,

#### Auditorium & Fine Arts Improvements:

- Auditorium Handrails for Audience Safety
- New Auditorium LED Lighting
- New Auditorium Projector System for High-Definition Presentations
- New Auditorium Flame Retardant Stage Curtains
- (This Summer) New Auditorium Wireless Headsets for Plays & Musicals
- New Graphic Design & Robotics Labs

#### Safety Improvements:

- Upgraded Security Camera System
- New Perimeter Fencing
- (This summer) Upgraded Access Entry Controls
- (This summer) Upgraded Track & Baseball LED exterior lighting

#### Energy Efficiency & Facility Improvements:

- (This Summer) Upgraded Chiller Systems
- (This Summer) Upgraded Boiler Plant Systems
- All Parking Lots Re-Sealed
- South Roadway Entrance Re-Designed for Traffic Flow
- Parapet Wall Roofing Repair
- (This Summer) Brick Tuckpointing as Needed
- Fitness Center Equipment Upgrades

Seneca High School is fortunate to have some of the greatest educational facilities around. We are constantly striving to produce the best facilities for our students, staff, and our community. Long range facility projects take careful planning and research, and we are fortunate to have a Board of Education and Administration who carefully plans, saves, and coordinates these projects without elevating property taxes through bonds to complete this work.

On behalf of the entire SHS Board of Education, thank you Seneca High School Community for your continued support of our school. The road to success is always under construction, but with daily progress, great success is built. Our sincere best wishes for a healthy and happy summer break and we are looking forward to a great 2023-2024 school year.

Ron Frye  
Board of Education President

Message from Principal, Mr. Mike Coughlin:

It's my pleasure to be able to provide a recap of the Graduation ceremony for the Class of 2023. The ceremony was held in the Seneca High School Gymnasium on Sunday, May 21<sup>st</sup>. First, I want to thank the Class of 2023 for their dedication and daily habits that provided so much leadership over the past twelve months. Now, for the graduation ceremony recap!

Mr. Calvin Maierhofer, Senior Class President, began the ceremony leading everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance. Dr. Stecken, the SHS Superintendent, welcomed everyone and reminded the graduates of exactly how far they have come over the past four years. Lastly, Dr. Stecken spoke about the bright future with many opportunities and possibilities for all the graduates. Of course, he thanked them for their contributions and wished them the best.

Dr. Stecken then introduced our student speakers, all of whom had earned this opportunity because of their distinction of Summa Cum Laude. Ashley Alsvig was the first student speaker. Ashley is the daughter of Kevin & Joanne Alsvig. Ashley will attend Trivecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee and will major in exercise science. Ashley challenged her classmates to remind themselves of all their positive memories, including a lot of athletic and academic accomplishments.

The second student speaker was Anna Bruno. Anna is the daughter of Matthew and Tamara Bruno. Anna will attend University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota majoring in music and English. Anna shared the importance of caring and supporting each other. Anna highlighted all the connections and relationships, some biological, that make SHS seem like one big family.

The last student speaker was Dominic Traina. Dominic is the son of Dan and Cheryl Traina. Dominic will attend Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee and will major in biology pre-med. Dominic reminded his classmates the importance of being proud of yourself as an individual. He noted that they are not defined by their grades, test scores and extracurriculars, rather by their actions.

All three speakers did an excellent job-sharing great advice with their fellow graduates. I had the privilege of recognizing a couple different groups of students within the Class of 2023. First, I recognized the Senior members of the National Honor Society. The National Honor Society is an organization that promotes scholarship, service, character, and leadership. I then recognized the Illinois State Scholars. The Class of 2023 had ten students earn the distinction based on criteria of grade point average and SAT exam scores. The groups of students that graduated with academic distinction, based on their earned grade point average, were also recognized. All students graduating Cum Laude, Magna Cum Laude and Summa Cum Laude were recognized in the program and by the special honor cords that they wore in the ceremony. Lastly, we recognized four seniors who have made the commitment to serve their country in the United

States Armed Forces.

Mr. Giertz had the pleasure of announcing all the graduates as they received a handshake and their diploma from SHS board president, Mr. Ron Frye. After all ninety-one graduates walked across the stage, I also had the pleasure of honoring Mr. Jeff Maierhofer. Mr. Maierhofer has taught Agriculture education for thirty-four years at Seneca High School. He's had an amazing career capped off by receiving a standing ovation from all in attendance and the opportunity to lead the Class of 2023 out of the gym. Thank you Mr. Maierhofer! As the Class of 2023 switched their tassels, Mr. Luke Windham fired up the Band.

Thanks again to the Class of 2023 and everyone that attended or had a role in making the Graduation a special day for a wonderful group of students.

Mr. Mike Coughlin  
Principal

Message from our Superintendent, Dr. Dan Stecken:

Over the past few years, previous newsletters have highlighted the work that the Board of Education and Administration has undertaken in preparation for our gymnasium addition project. In the Fall of 2022, I shared an update on our progress as we completed the "Construction Document" phase. This was the third and final phase of pre-construction. Since the winter has passed, construction has begun. We are proud to say that, a few months in, we are on schedule. At the time of publication of this newsletter, the roofing system will be installed on the gymnasium addition.

As stated in December, our plan is a 12-month construction process, which began with ceremonial groundbreaking on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and we look forward to a ribbon-cutting ceremony in or around March of 2024. In addition to the 30,000 square foot gymnasium addition, the district's south roadway redesign is well underway, and in the late winter, the mezzanine of the current gymnasium will also have a redesign to better serve all our student-athletes. The Board of Education has been planning and saving for this project for quite some time. As we continue our work in the construction mode, we continue to update our website and social media channels with our progress for the community to see.

When viewing our website, select the "High School" tab and click the dropdown for "Gymnasium Updates" and one can see a chronological update of the project from start, to soon enough, finish. There are monthly recaps of our progress as well as bi-weekly video clips, including drone footage of our progress. A transparent process, one that the community would be proud of, continues to be some of the guiding principles of the project. Once the gymnasium is open to our student-athletes, we anticipate more family friendly practice times and a tournament facility to host large venues and multi-team events. We will continue to update our progress for all to see, with #irishpride

<https://www.senecahs.org/vnews/display.v/SEC/High%20School%7CGymnasium%20Updates>

One of the guiding lights of the educational programming of Seneca High School is to support the mission and vision of the District. As we continue to further develop “The Seneca Way,” our brand of education, we focus on our mission: “Preparing and supporting ALL STUDENTS for success and post-high school opportunities through a challenging, rewarding, and engaging educational program, while developing Irish Pride.” Truly, we are proud of all of the extensive offerings that Seneca High School provides its students from over sixty college hours of Dual Credit coursework, some of the best career and technical education electives offered at a small school, and many other great courses. Developing Irish Pride is a concept that permeates throughout our classrooms, hallways, athletics, and in the community.

I was excited to partner with about fifteen students over the last two years to further this mission. Excitedly, the student group, “The Superintendent Student Advisory Committee,” spent hours scrolling through yearbooks of the past to find images that represented Irish Pride to adorn our commons areas. This group of students tackled strategic planning, budgeting, and graphic design to create custom Irish Pride and Seneca Way wall collages to promote our mission. I am excited to share these images in our newsletter for you to see, but also excited to see where this group grows from here with future Irish Pride displays in our Agriculture Hallway and our Athletics Hallways next year. Further group plans include Fine Arts and Seneca History. Our hallways beam with #irishpride.

Message from Samantha Leake, School Social Worker:

### **Breaking Barriers to Education**

Seneca High School has taken extra strides this school year to make sure that our student's basic needs are being met and to minimize barriers students may be facing to their education. As a lifelong community member of Seneca and a past grad myself, we sometimes think our community is immune to issues such as hunger and basic needs not always being met. We know that according to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, needs lower in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to higher needs, like their education. The lowest part of the hierarchy is physiological needs (i.e., food and clothing). Here at SHS, we are ensuring that we are equipped to meet all our students' needs. I have been able to address these needs with the support of the SHS administration and community partnerships. We are excited to offer our students a Packs for Pals program throughout the school year and summer, in addition to the creation of the Irish Care Closet in the SHS building.

### **Packs for Pals**

Hunger directly impacts students within the classroom in many ways. Many common characteristics of hunger in the classroom include the inability to focus, struggle with academic engagement, and emotional, behavioral, and other potential academic problems. Packs for Pals is a program that was created many years ago with churches local to our community. This program initiative is to feed all of the hungry children of our community. Packs for Pals impacts not only students of Seneca High School but also our feeder schools, Seneca Grade School, MVK Elementary and Junior High, and Milton Pope. Although this program has been in place for

years, this is the first school year SHS has participated in the program. The program has made a profound impact on our students. Packs for Pals currently feeds almost 200 children every single week right here in our community during the school year.

Packs for Pals meets every week at the Lutheran Church right here in Seneca to pack bags for families. These bags are then delivered to the school districts and distributed to students discreetly on Thursdays or Fridays. In these bags, the students will find nonperishable items they can use for school day snacks, school lunches, or weekend meals. Every Thursday is truly something the students look forward to. Until the bags arrive, I receive many emails and stops in my office asking if the bags have arrived yet. Any student is able to receive this bag of snacks, no questions asked, at the parental request. Students that might not receive Packs for Pals on a weekly basis are aware of the program, and when they are struggling in class due to hunger, many students will stop by my office to grab a snack.

From an administrative needs assessment this year, the idea for a Packs for Pals summer program was born. SHS has worked diligently with the Packs for Pals team on the bones and implementation of this summer program to meet the needs of not only our own student population but also the students of our feeder schools. We are so excited that the summer program will begin June 1st and run every single Thursday at West Campus. As transportation is often a large barrier in our rural community, SHS is working to overcome this hurdle by delivering these bags weekly to the MVK area students.

### **Irish Care Closet**

The Irish Care Closet is something that is also new to SHS this school year, as a one-stop shop to meet all of our student's basic needs. In the care closet, students can find clothing, socks, shoes, hygiene products, school supplies, etc. Any student is welcome to visit the Irish Care Closet anytime, no questions asked. The Irish Care Closet was something that actually began in my office this school year after seeing the needs of our students. With the support of the administration, Irish Care Closet now has a permanent location within the building to house all of these items. With it being the first full semester with the Irish Care Closet, it is off to a great start. Students visit the closet throughout the day, grabbing items they need.

Message from Stacey Gould, CSBO:

In early May, the Business Office at Seneca Township High School received the annual LaSalle and Grundy County Tax Extensions. The purpose of this section of the newsletter is to inform the taxpayers of Seneca Township High School District #160 of our annual abatement process. Every year, schools throughout the state of Illinois, including Seneca High School, present their tax levy at the December Board of Education meeting. This past year marked the end of a two-year extension of an original seven-year agreement with Exelon, now known as Constellation, on the valuation of the LaSalle Station. Within this agreement, the taxable value of LaSalle station was agreed upon at \$460 million, as well as the pledge to maintain a constant tax rate of \$1.74838 for all district taxpayers. For the original seven years of the agreement,

Seneca High School had a property tax rate of \$1.79838, lowering the taxpayer's rate of \$0.05 each year in the two-year extension. With the new five-year agreement effective this year, the taxable value of LaSalle station increased to \$530 million, again putting the district in the position to decrease your tax rate of \$1.74838 to \$1.72838.

In December, our District levied an amount greater than the target with the plan to "abate" to the agreed upon rate. This process has been used by our District for the past 10 years as part of our agreement with Constellation to ensure we arrive at the precise rate for all taxpayers. This process of abatement occurred after receiving the annual extensions from both LaSalle and Grundy Counties this past month. As you can see by the yearly tax rate trend below, your property tax rate for Seneca High School will decrease this year to \$1.72838

If you ever have any questions regarding the levy process, tax rates, or any other financial issue involving Seneca High School, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at [sgould@senecahs.org](mailto:sgould@senecahs.org) or by phone at 815-357-5000.

Message from SRO, Ken Sangston:

The day before prom we had Joshua Jahn in to speak with the student body and share his story. Mr. Jahn's wife, son, and daughter were killed in a car crash by an impaired driver at Rt 47 and Gardner Rd on November 6, 2008. He spoke to the students about the power of choice. His presentation was well received by the students and staff, we are very thankful he was able to come and share his message. Several weeks ago a parent shared their anxieties with me about their child receiving their drivers permit and becoming a new driver. They asked me about my past experiences in law enforcement and if I had any tips or advice for them and their student driver. High school and its activities seem to move faster than ever. Adding a new driver and vehicle along with phone technology into the mix, can leave a student driver and parent feeling overwhelmed or pulled in many directions. I explained that distracted driving comes in many forms including excessive passengers, vehicle radios, vehicle navigation systems, eating, and of course your mobile phone. Distracted driving by the way of the mobile phone is the leading cause of car accidents among teens, ranking above knowledge and ability of the new driver. In fact, car accidents are the leading cause of death among teens up to 20 years of age. Their focus should be on the task at hand when they are driving. A new driver needs to be taught what distracted driving is, the dangers and consequences. Parents and guardians need to remain conscious of their student drivers practices and correct any distracted behavior that can be a danger to themselves or others. My daughter was a softball pitcher at the collegiate level, I remember her pitching coaches would tell her it takes doing something 21 times in a row correctly, to trigger muscle memory. When taking this formula to a new driver the more we drive without being distracted, the safer habits we can gain. In an age of mobile phone technology and teens chasing likes on social media, parents need to be more in tune and vigilant to their students driving behavior than ever. And let's not forget, they learn by example. Have a happy and safe summer.

Irish Pride!!

SRO Sangston

Message from Dean of Students, Mark Giertz:

### 2022-2023 Retiring Seneca Staff Members

The 2022-2023 year has come and gone and with that we will see three great staff members move on from the hallways at SHS to the relaxing life of retirement. I would like to take this small opportunity to celebrate the success, love, gratitude and passion that these three have all given to our community and district for so many years. It truly has been an honor and privilege to work with these three the last few years and seeing so many students' lives molded into adults makes the educational world all worth it.

The first staff member I would like to recognize and honor is Mr. Kevin Misener. Mr. Misener has been a part of our Seneca team in the Auto department for over 13 years and has been a key component to “fine tuning” our young students. Whether it was showing them the ropes on welding tricks, changing brakes on a car, and even as simple of changing oil on their own vehicle, Mr. Misener has dedicated an unmeasurable amount of time that we can not thank him enough for. No doubt we will miss Mr. Misener and the profound impact he had on our Auto shop. Here at Seneca High School, we wish him the very best in his new chapter and hope to see him back in our shops any time he has the chance to come and visit us.

Our second staff member retiring this year is Mrs. Kelly Pandolfi. The passion, knowledge, love, and humor that Mrs. Pandolfi has brought to our main office here at SHS for the last 6 years is irreplaceable. The tireless efforts, hard work, and dedication Mrs. Pandolfi provided her staff, students and most importantly, her administrative team cannot be matched. Mrs. Pandolfi could always be counted on in some of the most difficult situations and did so with a smile on her face. Mrs. Pandolfi never cracked under pressure and gave us all the professionalism and positive attitude we needed to make our school a better place. We will greatly miss Mrs. Pandolfi's warm smile, dedication, and unwavering dedication to the excellence of our students. As you move to the next chapter of your career Mrs. Pandolfi, we wish you all the best and will greatly miss you.

Finally, our last staff member retiring this year is none other than, Mr. Jeff Maierhofer. Mr. Maierhofer has demonstrated an unwavering commitment and dedication to excellence in the classroom, at the school farm, to his FFA program, his students, coaches, fellow colleagues, and his family. Throughout his career here, Mr. Maierhofer has strived to make his FFA program the best it can be not only in the area, but in the state! No one has put in the time, effort and energy into his content as Mr. Maierhofer. There isn't a day or week that went by in his career where Mr. Maierhofer wasn't juggling multiple FFA events, contests, volunteering for a community project or updating historical SHS stats, and he did this with a smile on his face. Mr. Maierhofer's drive to make Seneca High School's FFA program the best it can be is very evident when you walk down the hallway leading into his classroom. I know Mr. Maierhofer wouldn't hang his hat on the awards, accolades, and trophies propped up on the shelves, but that he formed

a community through a program he helped build from the ground up.

As we say farewell to these remarkable individuals, we won't be able to thank them enough for the guidance, wisdom, and infectious enthusiasm they brought to us on a daily basis. We are so excited for them as they move into a new chapter of their lives and wish them all the rest and relaxation they are deserving of. Once again, thank you Mr. Misener, Mrs. Pandolfi and Mr. Maierhofer for everything you have done here at Seneca High School

Mark Giertz  
Dean of Students

Sports Recap from Activities Director, Ted O'Boyle:

What an amazing spring for the Irish and Lady Irish teams. Our Softball team was TCC Champs and won over 20 games for yet another season and competed for a Regional Championship. Our Baseball team finished 18-9 and really improved and gave defending state champ Joliet Catholic a great challenge in the regional. Our boys track team also had an outstanding season highlighted by a 2nd place finish in our own invite and sending multiple boys down to the state meet. Our spring season was highlighted by our girls track team who dominated all season and finished 2nd in the State Meet at EIU. This was the first time our track team has ever brought back a team trophy from the state meet. Anna Bruno was a State Champion in the Long Jump and our 4X4 relay (Clara Bruno, Lila Coleman, Evelyn O'Connor, Anna Bruno) defended their State Title as well. We took a total of 15 girls to the state meet and they did not disappoint as they finished only 2 points behind the State Champion.

The 2022/2023 school year was filled with many tremendous accomplishments with nearly all of our team sports winning over 20 games and many of our individual sports qualifying athletes for state competition. We are very proud of all of our programs at Seneca High School and look forward to many more accomplishments next year.

Mental Health Awareness Month – May 2023, by School Psychologist, Jill Rockrohr:

This month, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month with the *More Than Enough* campaign. *Through this initiative, NAMI sends a message of hope and inclusion and aims to recognize the inherent value that each individual holds, regardless of their diagnosis, appearance, socioeconomic status, background, or ability. "All people, no matter where they are on their mental health journey, are deserving of support, resources, fulfillment, and a community that cares."*

According to NAMI:

- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.
- 1 in 6 youth in the U.S. aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year.



- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10 to 14.
- High school students with significant symptoms of depression are more than twice as likely to drop out compared to their peers.

We at Seneca High School are not immune to these statistics. However, we are fortunate to have a community and school district that puts students first. We have a broad spectrum of supports available to students who are struggling, including links to community resources, in-school counseling through our counselors, school psychologist, and school social worker, school health services provided by our school nurse, academic interventions, and more in-depth supports for students with disabilities, including emotional disabilities and mental health diagnoses.

In addition to the supports currently in place, Mrs. Leake and I are teaming up this fall to conduct our first annual universal screener for social, emotional, and behavioral health. This screener will assess behavior related to student conduct, anxiety/depression, attention and focus, communication, relationships, and academic functioning. Through this tool, we will be able to better identify students who may benefit from additional social and emotional supports and interventions, including short term counseling, skill building, and connections with community resources. More information regarding this screener will be available in the registration guide and student handbook for Fall 2023.

If you or a family member are experiencing a mental health crisis, please know that you are not alone, and there are numerous resources available.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
- The Trevor Project - 1-866-488-7386
- Illinois Suicide & Crisis Lifeline - Call or Text 988

*More information regarding the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) can be found at <https://www.nami.org>*

Jill Rockrohr, School Psychologist, Director of Special Services

RISE – Year One in Review:

RISE, Seneca High School's new incentive program, was created to help our students achieve the Seneca Way by encouraging them to Be Here, Be Kind, and Be Accountable. RISE kicked off the year at Freshman Orientation, where all incoming students signed the Class of 2026 Commitment to Graduate banner. During the first week of school, students from all classes had the opportunity to make their commitment known by signing their own class banners. These are hung at the main entrance of Seneca High School to remind students of the commitment they made each morning as they enter the building.

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 hosted several school-wide events this year, many of which were surprises for our students. We kicked the year off with the RISE and Shine Pancake Breakfast, where faculty and staff served over 400 pancakes to our student body in the Commons. RISE followed this with events like Food truck Day and the Valentine's Day Social. These large events proved to be an outstanding way to build community among the students and reinforce the unique culture already established as part of the Seneca Way.

## **Celebrating Our Students**

While creating the RISE program, a major emphasis was put on celebrating our students' achievements. RISE partnered with the Student of the Month program to create a custom t-shirt for all winners. Through the RISE Card System, students were awarded many different perks throughout the second semester based on their academics, attendance, and behavior. An impressive 17.4% of our students earned a Gold Card, which allowed them to participate in Gold Day before departing for spring break. A special thanks goes out to Mr. Corey Kimes of Country Financial for his donation that made Gold Day possible.

### Co-Sponsors

Blake Slutz & Kelsey Adams

### Student of the Month Winners:

#### December 2022:

Ashlin Jackson—Student of the Month

Camryn Stecken—Rookie

Fallon Hamilton—Role Model

Jessica Bertrang—Irish Pride

#### January 2023:

Gracie Steffes—Role Model

Alexis Sprinkel—Student of the Month

Christopher Smith—Irish Pride

Madison DeGrush—Rookie

#### February 2023:

Sierra Culbertson—Student of the Month

Shan Balandang—Rookie

Keeli Pumphrey—Role Model

Bryce Roe—Irish Pride

Brady Sheedy—Rookie

#### March 2023:

Maya Underhill —Irish Pride

Carter Thomas—Role Model  
Chloe Riddle—Irish Pride  
Sammie Greisen—Rookie  
Madison Bricco—Student of the Month  
Ava Sulzberger—Rookie

April 2023:

Payton McDonald—Irish Pride  
Gabi Maxwell—Role Model  
Colin Collet—Student of the Month  
Tessa Krull—Rookie

May 2023:

Michael Breisch—Rookie  
Leslie Klicker—Student of the Month  
Paxton Giertz—Irish Pride  
Dominic Traina—Student of the Month  
Caitlyn O’Boyle—Role Model

Excellence in Education Retiree Recipients:

Mr. Kevin Misener (13 years)  
Mrs. Kelly Pandolfi (6 years)  
Mr. Jeff Maierhofer (34 years)

Excellence in Education Award Recipients:

Mrs. Samantha Leake, Miss Eva Bruno, and Mrs. Karen Ruder

John Ourth Award:

The Starved Rock Region Illinois Principals Association has recognized a Seneca High School student for the John Ourth Award. The students who has been honored and given a plaque are Anna Bruno and Calvin Maierhofer

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

Summer Lunch Info:

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

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

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