

Local Schools



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PB R-I Food Service Director Receives Homegrown Hero Award

MAY 06TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

PB R-I Food Service Director Receives Homegrown Hero Award

Poplar Bluff Food Service Director Dixie Harden has been selected as one of three bi-state recipients of the Homegrown Hero award, sponsored by the St. Louis District Dairy Council.

Harden, who is employed by Chartwells School Dining Services, ascended out of 21 finalists from Missouri and Illinois as a grand prize winner for striving to improve the lives of others every day in her community, according to an SLDDC press release issued this month.

“Each year, we are amazed by the heroes nominated, and the work they do right here in our own backyard,” stated Kelsey Hulcher, SLDDC nutrition educator. “It’s wonderful to learn about school cafeteria workers, teachers, custodians and volunteers who creatively and tirelessly work to make their communities a better place.”

Having taken the helm in 2016, Harden has increased breakfast participation and catering services, reduced waste across campus, received kitchen equipment grant funds, assisted with Community Eligibility Program efforts to provide free meals to younger students, and implemented well over a dozen new programs and services at school sites, according to nominator Trish Wilson, Chartwells administrative assistant.

Enhancements to the district’s food service operation Wilson cited include: introducing smoothies, coffee, deli options, on-the-go carts and teacher snack bars, plus providing second chance breakfasts, a dinner option, oversight of Boys and Girls Club dining services, Mule Pack distribution, and expansion of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program as well as the district’s free Summer Food Service Program.

“Within no time Chartwells exploded under Dixie’s leadership,” wrote Wilson, adding that Harden quickly became acquainted with each employee to assess their strengths. “Dixie’s number one priority is feeding her kids nutritional meals.

Established in 2018, Homegrown Heroes is a school-based initiative of SLDDC aimed to promote the local dairy industry in the region. Poplar Bluff R-I was one of two districts in the country to partner with the National Dairy Council and Prairie Farms Dairy to participate in a bulk milk dispenser pilot program two years ago.

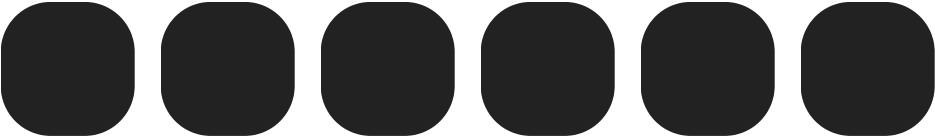
Kelsey Hulcher (right) of the St. Louis District Dairy Council presents Chartwells Food Service Director Dixie Harden with the Homegrown Hero grand prize on Wednesday, April 13.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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PBHS Choir Students Selected to Perform at State Music Festival

APRIL 28TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

PBHS Choir Students Selected to Perform at State Music Festival

Poplar Bluff High School Choir students earned exemplary ratings in solo and ensemble performances, qualifying to advance to the state level, during the Missouri District Music Festival hosted at Three Rivers College.

Receiving the highest rating in both the performance and sight-reading segments of the recent festival were: Emma Harris, Christian Redding, Isaac Reid, Lexy Rowland, Ella Skillman, Emma Tinsley, Dawson Vaughan and Brent Hanley in mixed double quartet; Brent Hanley, Isaac Reid and Dawson Vaughan in men's trio; and Kerrigan Conley-Halliburton, Bralin Duckett, Emma Harris, Christian Redding and Isaac Reid in the solo category.

The qualifiers will perform at the Missouri State High School Activities Association State Music Festival beginning on Thursday, April 28, at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

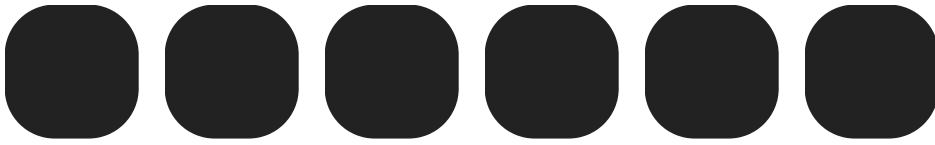
(Back row, from left) PBHS Director of Vocal Music Joshua Allen, Brent Hanley, Christian Redding, Bralin Duckett and Lexy Rowland; (front row, left to right) Dawson Vaughan, Isaac Reid, Ella Skillman and Emma Tinsley. Not pictured are Kerrigan Conley-Halliburton and Emma Harris.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Student-led Group Volunteers to Remove Invasive Trees from Campus

APRIL 12TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

Student-led Group Volunteers to Remove Invasive Trees from Campus

A voluntary group of students and district personnel has begun to remove hundreds of non-native, invasive pear trees from the Poplar Bluff High School campus.

The PBHS Science and Environment Club partnered with the FFA to take on the project on Sunday, March 27, soliciting help from the Maintenance Department, among other individuals.

“It matters to our students,” explained PBHS biology teacher Gretchen Pendley, who sponsors the club. “We can’t fix all the big problems, but we can do some small work.”

Two years ago the Science Club, which concentrated mostly on chemistry, expanded to consider issues related to human impact on the environment, according to Pendley. The new organization decided to start by making a difference in their own backyard, but the pandemic caused the postponement of their first major project.

PBHS agriculture teacher and FFA sponsor Kathryn Clark said that Callery pear trees, better known as Bradfords, have been on her radar since the campus relocation of 2016. "It's a beautiful campus, but we also want it to be sustainable and environmentally friendly," she said. "Bradfords do more damage than good."

Native to China, the white flowering trees are popular for landscaping because of their "ornamental value," according to junior Emmalein Pendley, Environment Club vice president, but they have no "wildlife value." They crowd out habitats needed by birds and wildlife, out-competing native vegetation for light, water and nutrients, according to state conservation experts.

In addition, Bradfords have "no predator" or natural enemy, said Gretchen Pendley. The aggressive Callery pears were made available here in the 1950s because of their resistance to diseases such as fire blight. They became invasive when new cultivars cross-pollinated with the commercial variety, producing trees bearing small fruit with viable seeds that birds such as starlings eat and spread, allowing for escaped trees, according to the University of Missouri Extension.

Lastly, Bradfords are "weak trees," Clark went on. Since they are known to grow quickly with poor branch angles, the soft-wooded limbs are often split in high winds, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation. The expansive root system, partial to soil types common in the Midwest, deems the tree difficult to kill

R-I Maintenance Supervisor Colt Sievers headed up the eradication last weekend, along with his brother David, PBHS health teacher and football coach, later disposing of the downed trees with a tractor and grappling hook at an approved burn site. Sievers said treating the stumps with herbicide would also be necessary to destroy the root.

"Education and learning to be good stewards" will be essential going forward, since "one day I will be too old to hold a chainsaw," Sievers pointed out. He joked how his daughter Audrey, a PBHS junior, informed him what he would be doing with his time that day and he simply agreed. "I was volun-told," he continued.

Incoming president for Missouri FFA Area 16, Audrey Sievers completed a supervised agricultural experiment over the summer involving a pesky weed known as sericea lespedeza also identified on the hillside east of campus, and her father helped her get its spread under control as well. She admitted that prior to educating herself on its ecosystem, she—like many—just thought the Bradfords added some color to campus.

"If it's not helping, we don't need it; it serves no purpose," Audrey Sievers said. "It's a long process, but if we start working toward a goal now, future generations will benefit."

Alternative options of flowering trees, the group variously suggested, include Eastern redbuds, dogwoods, tulip poplars, white fringe trees and serviceberries. The Missouri Invasive Plant Task Force, formed several years ago, is collaborating to host buy-back events later this month throughout the state, including in Cape Girardeau, to replace Calleries cut down by property owners with free native trees. Visit moinvasives.org for more information about state invasive species management efforts.

PBHS students drag Bradford limbs cut down around Mules Stadium by David and Colt Sievers to a large pile.

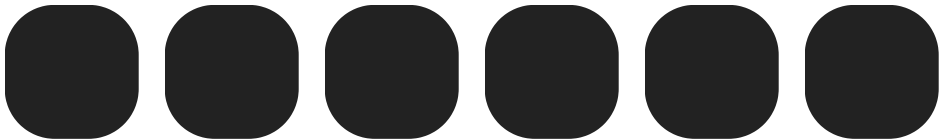
Pictured: With the supervision of teacher sponsors, students volunteer to gather clipped branches along the Oak Grove Road campus on a recent Sunday afternoon.

Article and photo by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Studio Jazz Band earns honors at Ellington Festival

FEBRUARY 23RD 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

Studio Jazz Band earns honors at Ellington Festival

Several Poplar Bluff High School Studio Jazz Band students received outstanding musicianship awards during the Essentially Ellington Jazz Festival last month at the University of Missouri in St. Louis.

Students honored included Brileigh Cates – alto sax; Logan Hale – trumpet; Ja’Lonnie Johnson-Spann – drumset; and Brileigh Cates, Connor Jones, Diamond Weaver and Jonathan Moreno – saxophone section.

Band Director Stephen Winters, who learned of the awards last week, commented that the festival clinicians judging are always top-notch. “... They are all a part of the New York jazz scene and are at the highest level of jazz teaching and performance. Some of them perform with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra led by Wynton Marsalis.”

Other participating schools this year included Eureka, Lindbergh, Fort Zumwalt West in Missouri, and Mascoutah and Williamsville High School out of Illinois. “This is a festival that... usually attracts some very good bands,” Winters continued.

PBHS has participated in the Essentially Ellington Jazz Festival multiple times at the University of Missouri prior to a temporary hiatus because of the pandemic, and was also a part of the original festival at Webster Groves High School. The festival typically requires bands to play arrangements by Duke Ellington, but this year arrangements by Count Basie were also permitted.

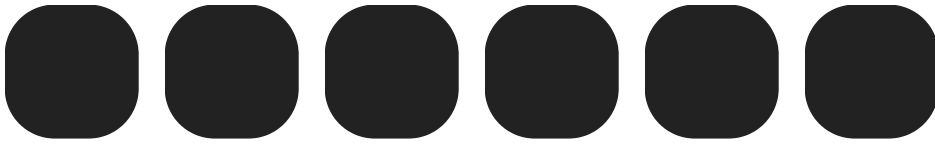
Pictured: Studio Jazz Band members (left to right) Connor Jones, Logan Hale, Diamond Weaver, Ja’Lonnie Johnson-Spann and Brileigh Cates recently received outstanding musicianship awards. Not pictured is Jonathan Moreno.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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TCC Hosts 55th Anniversary Tour during CTE Month

FEBRUARY 23RD 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

TCC Hosts 55th Anniversary Tour during CTE Month

The Poplar Bluff Technical Career Center held an open house for stakeholders on Friday, Feb. 11, in celebration of its 55th anniversary as a school facility during Career and Technical Education month.

Since the TCC opened in 1967, over 4,500 regional high schoolers have completed programs tuition-free there in addition to at least 500 adult students recorded, Director Charles Kinsey told an audience of community leaders and educators, both current and retired.

“The nation’s skills gap is getting close to a critical state, if not already in disarray [on top of] the global pandemic, and has been fueling a renewed interest in CTE by elected officials and prospective students alike,” Kinsey wrote in a column series being published this month.

The TCC is resultantly experiencing record enrollment, as its sending schools have expanded to 10, including newly-forged partnerships with Dexter Schools and Westwood

Baptist. The TCC boasts a graduation rate of 98.3 percent, and a placement rate—alumni entering the workforce, joining the military or continuing their education—of 89.97 percent, according to Kinsey.

“Desirable students have work ethic, show up and are teachable, plus have a base set of skills that make them functional on the job on day one – with minimal training,” Kinsey stated in another installment.

The guests of honor toured the facilities, and learned about the \$1.4 million in improvements over the last few years, according to Kinsey’s estimates. In attendance, former director Roger Slayton noted that he was responsible for the grant through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that established the east building in 2001, housing the then-new cosmetology program as well as the welding and auto collision repair programs.

Today the TCC also offers auto service technology, building trades, computer graphics & print technology, computer maintenance technology, computer science, culinary arts, health occupations and HVACR. Kinsey, who has dedicated 25 years to CTE both as a student and an educator, pointed out that five of his current instructors are alumni of the TCC, and the remaining six were involved in programs at other schools or else worked in the field.

To become an advisory committee member over one of the programs, or for additional information about the TCC’s various offerings, call 573-785-2248.

Pictured: PLTW computer science instructor Michael Barrett demonstrates a triple-pronged claw created in his class.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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