



WINTER 2023-2024

Commack Courier

Regeneron Scholar



Jonathan Z. (center) is congratulated by his teachers/mentors and administrators on his Regeneron win! From left to right: Commack High School Principal Carrie Lipenholtz, Research Assistant Andrea Beatty, science teachers Jeanette Collette and Daniel Kramer, and Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Jordan Cox.

One of only 300 students globally, Commack senior Jonathan Z. was named a Regeneron STS Scholar for his Behavioral Science project, "Efficient Differentiation of Sleep-Related Hypermotor Epilepsy and REM-Sleep Behavior Disorder via Neural Aperiodic Components." The Regeneron Science Talent Search is the most prestigious math and science competition for students.

Each scholar (and their school) will be awarded \$2,000. Forty of the 300 students will be selected as finalists and granted a trip to Washington, D.C., to compete in March for a piece of \$1.8 million in prize money. The competition provides students a national stage to present original research and celebrates the hard work and novel discoveries of young scientists who are bringing a fresh perspective to significant global challenges. Scholars were chosen based on their exceptional research skills, commitment to academics, innovative thinking and promise as scientists.


Jonathan's dedication to science is demonstrated by his enrollment in Science Research classes, while maintaining Academic Leadership status in a rigorous IB Diploma curriculum. He balances his studies with community service work and instructs Python classes for AiGoLearning. Jonathan has extended his computer science interests and implemented his skills as he developed an app finding COVID vaccine appointments during the pandemic. For his Regeneron winning project, he coded a software program to diagnose sleep disorders in mere minutes! Jonathan plans to continue his interest in Computer Science as he starts his college career.

Please extend your congratulations to Jonathan for this well-deserved and hard-earned recognition, to his technology teacher Kristen Holmes, and to the Science Research team of Jeanette Collette, Dr. Daniel Kramer, and Andrea Beatty.

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Commack Star Awards!



The very essence of excellence!

**November
Maura Palillo**

November's Star Award was awarded to Maura Palillo, a science teacher at Commack High School. Maura's passion for teaching is second to none. She is a true team player who emits enormous positive energy, always willing to go out of her comfort zone to implement the most recent practices in education and the new science standards. Maura gladly volunteers for projects to propel science forward and approaches them with enthusiasm.

Maura is kind, passionate, and dedicated to the students and staff of Commack. She truly exemplifies all of the qualities of a Commack Star. Congratulations Maura!



**December
Lori Wright**

Lori Wright, principal office assistant in Commack's special education department, is one of a kind and the December Star Award winner. Lori consistently goes above and beyond for the students, staff and families, and is well-loved by our high-needs families. She acts as an advocate for our students and also a support for families. Many parents will call her just to be calmed by her warmth, caring demeanor, and her assuring words. In addition, if problems arise she is the first to look for solutions. Lori is resourceful, a problem-solver and is always fun to be around. She treats everyone like family, always puts Commack students, staff, and families first, and truly embodies what it means to be a Commack Star.

PARENT RESOURCE CENTER



PARENT WORKSHOPS

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

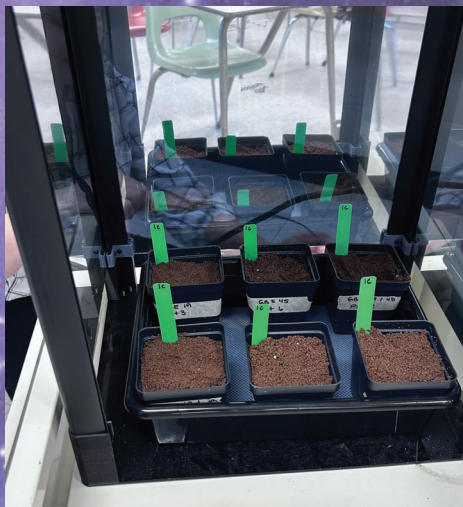
We are pleased to let you know about an important updated section on our website - the Parent Resource Center. The Parent Resource Center was created as an educational resource designed to support parents and guardians in addressing various concerns impacting their children throughout the school year. The site includes helpful resources for supporting students including but not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Bullying
- Parent advice for coping
- Organizational skills
- Behavior management skills

The resource center provides links to helpful sites for more specific information on any given topic, and features our Parent Workshop Series presentations which are accessible at any time. Additionally the site offers more information regarding our partnership with Northwell Health including access to referral and intake forms.

We are here to help! Please reach out to your child's guidance counselor, teacher, or one of our mental health professionals for additional assistance. You can access the Parent Resource Center by visiting the Commack School District website under the Students and Families or Access and Opportunity drop-down menus, or on our Special Education Programs page.

A Cosmic Partnership: From Commack to Space



The "grow box" is based on the identical units in use on the International Space station.

In a innovative collaboration, Commack High School has joined forces with Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden and NASA to explore the possibilities of growing food in space. This innovative program, initiated by NASA, aims to test protocols for cultivating plants in controlled environments, a crucial step towards sustaining human life during extended space missions.

Commack High School was selected as one of the pioneering institutions to participate in this unique venture. The school received a comprehensive kit, including seeds, soil, fertilizer, and a specially designed humidity and light variations control box. This initiative aims to examine the growth of two different plants, bok choy and misome, under precisely controlled conditions that simulate the environment of space.

The trials kicked off with the planting of seeds in the controlled environment. Students were entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing and documenting the growth of the plants over the course of approximately 28 days. Each week, meticulous measurements and data points were recorded and uploaded to a centralized spreadsheet, where the progress of each plant could be analyzed and scrutinized.

The uploaded data includes crucial information such as the height, weight, and mass of the plants at different stages of their growth. The students meticulously documented any variations in humidity and light conditions, creating a comprehensive dataset that will contribute to the ongoing research conducted by NASA and Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden.

Participation in this unique program not only exposes Commack High School students to cutting-edge scientific research but also enhances their understanding of the intricacies of plant biology, agriculture, and space exploration. The hands-on experience of cultivating plants under controlled conditions provides valuable insights into the challenges and possibilities of growing food in space.

Science teachers Ryan McGrath and Nicole Fuchs' students engage from start to finish to plant, nurture, record, and report the results including the edible mass of the plants. This extraordinary venture not only nurtures scientific curiosity among students but also paves the way for future generations to contribute to the development of sustainable food production methods beyond the boundaries of our planet. Our students and staff are playing a pivotal role in cultivating the future of space agriculture.

CONGRATULATIONS! ASSET BRIGHT LIGHT RECIPIENT 2024



SUSAN ABBOTT

CHS TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT TA
COMMACK SCHOOLS

Congratulations to Susan Abbott, Technology Support TA at Commack High School, for being Commack's first recipient of the ASSET Bright Light Award.

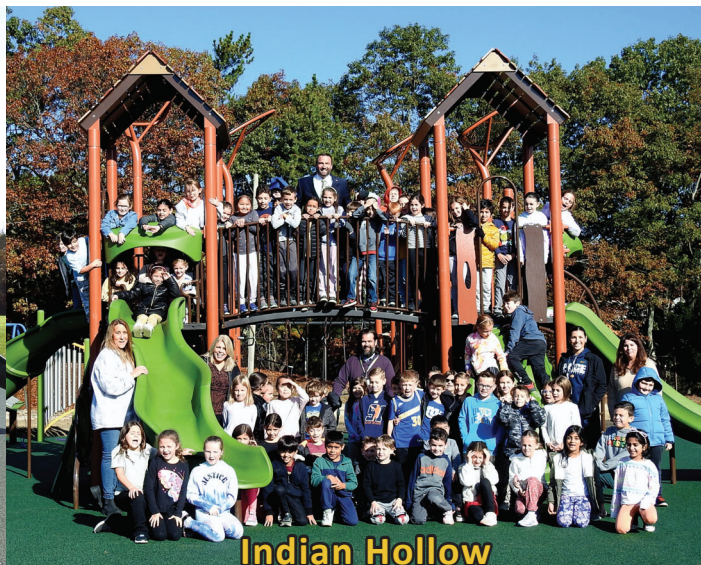
ASSET, Long Island's premiere Association for Supervisors of Educational Technology, honors individuals from all over Long Island for the transformative work they do in the area of instructional technology. Susan was selected this year for her high level of expertise, and dedication to the students of Commack High School in support of the District's 1:1 Chromebook Initiative.

Commack High School Assistant Principal, Eric Biagi, said, "Anyone who knows Sue knows that she is one of the hardest working, talented, and caring people you could ever meet. Commack High School is incredibly lucky to have her on our team and our school is a better place because of her."

New Playgrounds! More Fun for ALL!



North Ridge



Indian Hollow

North Ridge and Indian Hollow Primary Schools were delighted to announce the grand opening of their brand new playgrounds! These new state-of-the-art playgrounds are designed to inspire imagination and foster active play while helping with balance and motor skills to create lasting memories for children and families. To celebrate these momentous occasions, special ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held. Dr. Cox cut the ribbons and enjoyed playtime with the students as they explored these new recess activities.

Wood Park and Rolling Hills Primary Schools are awaiting the spring thaw to install the new playgrounds at those schools!

CMS Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports



Commack Middle School held its annual kick-off event for the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. This program is designed to teach and remind students of the school's core values: respect, responsibility, and relationships. Throughout the day, students take part in a number of activities that help them connect with each other and the larger community.

During the event, students participate in team-building activities and games both indoors and outdoors. Leaders discuss respectful and responsible behaviors.

Each core value of PBIS is learned through a number of activities. Respect activities included the eighth-grade students writing letters of gratitude, seventh-grade students creating meal delivery bags for local soup kitchens, and the sixth-grade stu-



dents making holiday cards for Stony Brook Children's Hospital.

The responsibility activity was a Matrix Game Show program. Students were split into groups and had to work together to win points for their teams.

Relationship activities were team-building events that happened on the outdoor turf. Students participated in recreational activities such as Kam Jam, Spike Ball, and kickball. They created friendship bracelets and played board games.

The PBIS program also aligns with the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP), which helps students develop ten Learner Profile Traits, including Caring, Principled, Reflective, and Balanced. The goal is for our students to understand and relate to each other and the greater community.

Tennis With The Teachers



Commack High School's Girls Varsity Tennis team members paired up with their favorite faculty members for a competitive tennis tournament to raise money for breast cancer prevention and research.

According to the Girl's Varsity Tennis Coach, Jackie Clark, Tennis with the Teachers is "The most competitive and gut-wrenching sporting event of the year!"

Each varsity player matched up with their favorite teachers and this year, Superintendent of Commack Schools, Dr. Jordan Cox, was asked and engaged in the competition. The event was set up tournament style with eliminations at the end of each match.

This event raised funds for the breast



cancer research foundation, Play For P.I.N.K. The tournament ended with a win by Dr. Cox and his varsity partner, Bianca. Ku-

dos to all the teachers who participated and helped raise money for cancer research.

Ready, Set, Lead!

CHS students competed at the "Ready, Set, Lead" competition hosted by St. Joseph's University in Pat-chogue. This was the 21st year our business students succeeded in shining at this event and we could not be prouder of the 27 students who competed.

The students prepared a presentation based upon a brief case study that proposes a solution to a business problem - ranging from marketing, to finance, to increasing patient retention in a health-care setting. Each team of two presents to a judge and responds to questions. A nerve wracking experience to say the least - yet our students knocked it out of the park!



Please join us in congratulating the following teams:

- Victoria W. & Amantej R. - 1st Place in Finance
- Grace S. & Talia M. - 2nd in Healthcare
- Josie S. & Jillian R. - 2nd in Hospitality
- Ryan S. & Dan S. - 2nd in Sports Marketing
- Alex C. & Aidan C. - 3rd in Entrepreneurship
- Akarsh C. & Sean J. - 3rd in Retail Marketing Group A
- Heidi B. & Anam R. - 3rd in Retail Marketing Group B



Creative Commack Cougars



Two Commack High School student artists' work was chosen for the Huntington Arts Council's annual exhibit, Nightmare on Main Street. Students submitted work inspired by Halloween.

Congratulations to Scarlett W. and Olivia L. for being among the select few chosen from hundreds of works that were entered in the contest.

In photos, on the left is Scarlett, and on the right is Olivia with their art teacher, Mr. Frank Musto.



Sawmill Salute to a Special Veteran

Mrs. Sabatelli's fifth-grade class at Sawmill Intermediate School honored American Veterans in a unique way. Her students love to read and wanted to share that love with those in the armed forces.

They created "Bookmarks for Bravery" using the application Canva. Every bookmark was decorated to include Americans flags or quotes about bravery. These bookmarks were donated to local non-profits that help support veterans and their families.

In addition to creating bookmarks for the veterans, Mrs. Sabatelli's grandfather, an Army veteran, came into the classroom to share his experience in the armed forces. Paul Pedersen is a Vietnam War veteran. The class was so excited to do their part to help veterans and thank their teacher's grandfather for his service.



Indian Hollow Pajama Drive for Stony Brook Children's Hospital



The first graders at Indian Hollow investigated ways to give back to others during the holiday season. They decided that a student-led pajama drive for children at Stony Brook Children's Hospital was the perfect choice. The donation bin in the lobby was overflowing with pajamas! Over 100 pairs of pajamas were collected for children ages 3 – 10 who are currently receiving treatment at the hospital. This event was a wonderful way for the first graders to witness the impact they can have on others!

Burr Mini Marathon

In Memory of Shana Kay

Every fall, Burr Intermediate School holds their Mini Marathon. Students, faculty members, and parents lace up to run the track and perimeter of the school in honor of the Shana Kay Memorial Foundation. Former Burr student, Shana Kay, tragically passed away from viral encephalitis after her first year in college. The Shana Kay Memorial Foundation was created by her family to share her story and give back to the community as Shana always did. Part of their mission is to raise money to donate new equipment to Commack Schools and public facilities such as libraries.

The most recent donation was a Buddy Bench located at Burr near the recess playground. This new edition to the school was showcased at the Mini Marathon. Shana's parents were in attendance and said a few words to express their gratitude to Burr for helping keep their daughter's memory alive.

Everyone cheered for the runners as they raced through the charted course wearing their class shirts and having fun with their friends. Each race was led by Commack's Boys and Girls Varsity Cross Country teams. After each student ran through the finish line, they were honored with a medal!



That's the Ticket! Recognizing Acts of Kindness



The Adoption Center is open in Mrs. Murphy's third grade class at Sawmill Intermediate School! When students perform acts of kindness and demonstrate positive behavior, they earn the opportunity to cash in their tickets to "adopt" a small 3D animal eraser. Students can continue to earn tickets to purchase accessories for their pets! Accessories can include food, habitats, toys, and "friends" (all of which are other mini-erasers). Moreover, a class pet teaches children import-



ant values like compassion, empathy, respect, and responsibility for other living things, as well as give them much-needed leadership skills and stress relief. In addition, students have engineered a "Desk Pet Habitat" unique to their imagination, which has become a fun STEM activity. Students have created windows, doors, second floors and more! Most of all, the students have learned first hand the importance of caring for something.

An Outpouring of Love from our Families



This holiday season Mrs. Mari-Ciniski's class at North Ridge brought special smiles to others by showing Random Acts of Kindness. A random act of kindness doesn't have to be big, it just has to be meaningful and from the heart!

All of our schools collected food, toys, clothing, and gifts to donate to local organizations and directly to families in the community. "This is an incredibly generous and caring community," Superintendent Dr. Cox said. "I am amazed by the outpouring of love from our parents and students."



Helping others is very important to staff and students alike at Rolling Hills. From the Halloween costume collection to collecting food and toys for those without, everyone plays a part in caring for those less fortunate. Rolling Hills has created meal bags for 26 families for Long Island Cares Adopt a Family (that's 520 pounds of food!), collected over 100 items for the food drive and over 80 unwrapped toys for Toys for Tots. We also collected and wrapped lots of presents for those struggling at this time of year.

North Ridge Native American Day!



Kindergarten students at North Ridge learned all about the Native Americans and their customs. They learned, step by step, how to build a tepee and tried on handmade clothing. Some of the clothing was made from buffalo skin and fur, while another was embellished with shells. The children also learned and participated in a Native American song and dance. What a wonderful day! In photos are Mrs. Mariani's class.



Chill Out With A Good Book!



Rolling Hills is excited to begin Partners in Reading this year with "Chill Out with a Good Book!" The festivities began with Literacy Night, a fun-filled evening that children and families attended. Mrs. Santarpia enthusiastically read the book, *The*



Hat by Jan Brett, while teachers sat with groups of children displaying the book for all to see. Afterwards, the children enjoyed creating their own hat with many beautiful decorations. There were pom-poms, sequins, yarn, colorful strips of felt



and many other items to create a dazzling hat. The wonderful evening ended with *The Hat* raffled off to 3 delighted children. What a wonderful way to kick off Partners in Reading!!

Wood Park: Teaching Students To Communicate Effectively



Wood Park's Speech and Language Department is providing all second graders with interactive activities to learn about various ways to be better communicators and friends to all. These lessons educate all students on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). The goal is to promote awareness of different abilities, embrace differences, and encourage acceptance of others for what makes them unique.

The speech department is passionate about educating students, staff and families about communication differences. This program is a continuation of our inclusivity project that began with the addition of the AAC Core Board to our playground a few years ago.

Life-Sized Fun with Super Mario Brothers



Every winter, the gymnasium at Wood Park is transformed into a world of wonder and fun activities. This January, through the imagination and magic of PE teacher Cathy Pugh, students entered the world of Super Mario Brothers. Mario, Luigi and Princess Peach are among the cast of characters that inhabit the gym now!

The children are so excited and engaged with this life-sized video game, and can't wait for their next PE class. They can climb ropes into warp pipes, run obstacles to avoid piranha plants, swing the rings to collect star coins, and even attempt to avoid banana peel spin outs while go-karting around this new world!

COMMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT

ATTENTION:

COMMACK SENIOR CITIZENS



The **Senior Citizen Gold Card Program** is designed especially for our Senior Citizens who are residents of the Commack School District. We are proud to offer this program and thank you for your support and dedication to our school district.

You're invited! Our High School dramatic performances and musical presentations are of the highest quality and we look forward to you attending! We hope you will participate in our Gold Card program.

***Don't miss the
Senior Matinee and Dinner on March 21, 2024 - 1pm
MAMA MIA!***

Senior Citizen events, photos and resources can be found on the Commack Website under the Our Community dropdown.

<https://www.commackschools.org/seniorcitizens.aspx>

Use your Gold Card to attend athletic contests and student concerts! If you haven't already joined our program and are interested in obtaining a Gold Card, please call 631-912-2055 or email dvirga@commack.k12.ny.us.

The office of Community Relations will be happy to assist you.

Regional Winners at JSHS

Three Commack students were selected to present their research as Regional Semifinalists for the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium taking place on Sunday, February 11th.

The Junior Science and Humanities Symposium (JSHS) Program is a tri-service – U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force – sponsored competition which promotes original research and experimentation in STEM at the high school level and publicly recognizes students for outstanding achievement. Students must apply to present their completed original research at the first level of the fair, held at York College.

The three projects moving forward to compete for scholarships, recognition and a place as a Regional Finalist are:

Jonathan Z:
"Efficient Differentiation of Sleep-Related Hypermotor Epilepsy and REM-Sleep Behavior Disorder via Neural Aperiodic Components"

Kevin M:
"Decreased Immune Activation Drives the Differential Therapeutic Responses to Chemoradiotherapy Between HPV+ Head and Neck Cancers and HPV+ Cervical Cancers"

Mehek S:
"Secretion of Francisella tularensis Protein FTL_1123 from Escherichia coli Containing the HlyBD Operon"

Congratulations to these students for this well-deserved and hard-earned recognition, and also to the Research team of Jeanette Collette, Dr. Daniel Kramer, and Andrea Beatty.



Regional winners Jonathan Z., Mehek S., and Kevin M.

Harvard Science Research Conference



Commack High School Science Research students had the opportunity to participate in the Harvard Science Research Conference (HSRC). HSRC is a two-day conference for exceptional high school students, hosted on Harvard's campus that entails a series of speakers, workshops, and mentoring sessions designed to encourage and promote interest in the natural sciences as well as research. Students were invited to apply to participate, and then selected to be part of the HSRC cohort.

This year, Commack was represented at the conference by the following students: Lily A., Saswati B., Mariam B., Nisa E., Many K., Michael P. and Mehek S.

While at the conference, students have the opportunity to take part in the Innovation Challenge, a competition where students work collaboratively with other high school students from all over the country to design a solution to a real-world problem. This year, one of our students who chose to participate, Michael P., was honored as First Place winner for his project: "Preventing Dengue: Controlling Mosquito Populations Through Recyclable Traps and Education."

Great work by our students and their mentors: teachers Jeanette Collette, Daniel Kramer, Andrea Beatty, Charlie Guercia, and Jeanne Suttie.

Commack School District
P.O. Box 150, Commack, NY 11725

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#CommackAthletics

GREAT FALL SEASON for our ATHLETES!

Congratulations to:

- Varsity Girls Soccer Team: Division 1 Champs
- Varsity Boys Golf Team: Section XI Conference 1 Champs
- Boys Cross Country Team: Section XI Champions League 3 Champs, Division 2 Champions, and Overall Team Champions
- Varsity Boys Soccer Team: League 3 Champs
- Varsity Girls Volleyball Team: League 2 Champs, Suffolk County Champs
- JV Soccer: League 3 Champs
- Visit our [Athletic Page](#) for Special Awards and upcoming winter highlights!



Girls Varsity Volleyball Team Suffolk County Champions



Boys Cross Country Section XI Champions

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION FOR THE 2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR

Children who will be five years old on or before 12/01/2024 are eligible for admission to Kindergarten for the 2024-2025 school year. Kindergarten registration for these children will take place in January/February 2024 through our electronic registration system. Information concerning this Kindergarten registration process was sent in January. If your child is eligible for Kindergarten and you do not receive a registration notice, please call the Registration Office at (631) 912-2028.



Private-Parochial Transportation Request Form

Due by April 1, 2024

www.commackschools.org/TransportationDepartment.aspx

Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program 2024-2025

The Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (UPK) is fully funded by New York State grants. After April 1, 2024 and pending passage of the NYS Budget, the application will be posted on the [Commack Website](#). The application must be submitted by May 1 in order to be included in the UPK lottery. There are a limited number of openings based upon the amount of grant money Commack receives from the State. The UPK half-day and full-day programs meet five days per week during the school year at local preschools.

Students must reside in the district and be four years old on or before December 1, 2024, to be eligible to attend UPK in the fall of 2024. Students are selected utilizing a lottery system to ensure that all applicants have an equal opportunity for participation. A numerical waiting list is maintained. In the event of availability, families will be notified in the order in which their number was chosen.