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THE GROWLER

Odessa High School, Odessa, Missouri

OHS Speech and Debate Team places third in tournament

By Lana Quick

OHS Speech and Debate Team placed third out of 11 schools on January 8 at the Lexington Tournament, with five OHS students placing in eight categories. Of the schools competing, Excelsior Springs and Carrollton were the other conference schools attending.

Wybie Owings, junior, placed first in dramatic interpretation and third in champions prose reading. The ten-minute dramatic interpretation was “On The Exhale” by **Martin Zimmerman**.

The monologue, which Owings memorized and performed, was about a mother who lost her son in a school shooting. The mother became obsessed with the assault rifle the shooter used and ended up trying to kill a pro-gun senator.

“To prepare and get into the mindset, I have to think about something that makes me angry,” Owings said, “because the mother is angry and sad at the world and has a deep, profound sadness over losing her son.”

Owings said it is important to practice the piece a couple of times before the competition starts. Owings said it is important to “practice deep breathing to clear the mental palate and focus and leave everything else at the classroom door.”

Samantha Hall, sophomore, placed second in oratory and sixth in radio.

“I loved my piece, an oratory, about why feminine products should be free,” Hall said.

Hall enjoys speech and debate because she said she likes



The Speech and Debate Team placed third on January 8 at the Lexington tournament. Students pose with their individual awards: **Samantha Hall**, sophomore; **Haley Burke**, freshman; **Kylee Brown**, freshman; **Wybie Owings**, junior; and **Chase Sullivan**, sophomore.

presenting and talking in front of people and feels it will help prepare her for a future career.

“I think I want to be a lawyer, so it will help me learn to speak in front of crowds of people,” Hall said.

Other winners included the following: **Haley Burke** and **Kylee Brown**, freshmen, placed fifth in duet acting; Burke also placed second in prose reading; and **Chase Sullivan**, sophomore, placed fifth in poetry reading.

“Placing third overall at this tournament was a huge success for our team,” **Connor Bush**, OHS Speech and Debate coach, said. “Having the students see first-hand what the outcomes can be if we all come together and work hard was an eye opening experience. I look forward to our next tournament to see how far these students grow.”

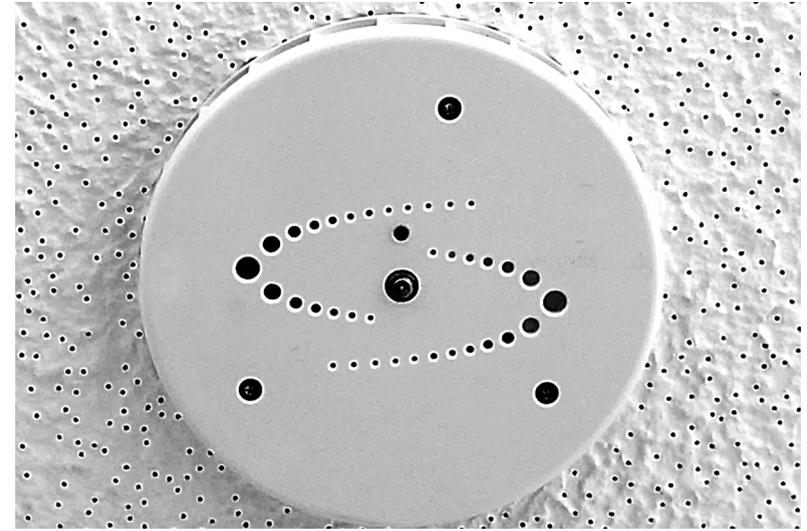
Bush was pleased with their

performance and said it was difficult for them to prepare because they had just come back from Christmas break. He said they continued to work over break and didn’t let themselves fall behind. He wants the team to practice slowing down and use their class time wisely before the next competition.

Students continue to practice on their pieces and prepare for the conference tournament in February. Districts will be held the first weekend in March, and if they advance, state will be held in April.

Students who are interested can join speech and debate any time by talking to Bush. Members can letter by earning points attending practices and participating in competitions.

HALO Smart Sensors help deter vaping at OHS



OHS installs HALO Smart Sensors to increase student safety and deter vaping.

By Lorelai Burch, Emmalea Munsterman and Elizabeth Armstrong

HALO Smart Sensors, all-in-one health, safety and vape devices, were installed in the OHS bathrooms over Christmas break to deter what administrators recognized as a growing concern—student vaping.

So far, the OHS administration and teachers are pleased with the sensors. They are becoming increasingly popular across the country as well. As of 2021, the sensors are used in over 1500 school districts to help fight the vaping epidemic and have won more than 50 security awards from various organizations.

When students returned from winter break on January 4, the HALO sensors were activated. The first day back in school was hectic with many reported incidents being detected by the sensors. As the week went on, the rate of incident reporting decreased to low levels. Presently, the incident rate has remained low.

“This is helping to make

the school a safer place and to create a dialogue about health and safety with the students of OHS,” **Brad Briscoe**, OHS principal, said. “Student safety is our top priority. Trying to provide an environment that is free of vapes is not only an Odessa school district problem, it’s a society problem in general.”

Vaping has been especially difficult to curtail in schools because unlike traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes do not set off smoke detectors or have a strong smell, making them popular in school bathrooms.

Detecting vaping is just one of the benefits of the sensors. HALO Smart Sensors are made to detect not only vapor but also THC from electronic cigarettes, gun shots, tampering, vandalism, aggressive language/bullying, air quality and much more.

The high-tech devices come with 11 sensors and can be programmed to detect specific sounds, the tone of a person’s voice, and even key phrases. According to the company’s website, the voice recognition

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Travis Wittman, OHS band assistant, enjoys support and culture at OHS

By Teagan Loehr

Travis Wittman, OHS/OMS assistant band director, made his career choice before he was old enough to drive but says he is pleased with his decision and plans to teach band until he dies.

“I get paid to make music all day,” Wittman said. “What more can I ask for? It’s awesome.”

Derek Twombly, OHS band director, said Wittman is a good fit for the program.

“I think that our philosophy of education is aligned very well,” Twombly said. “We both think band should be fun. He embodies the enjoyment of music, as well as teaching music through joy, very well.”

Wittman grew up and attended school in Oak Grove where he graduated in 2014. Wittman played tuba in the band and also ran track. During his sophomore year, he realized he wanted to be a band teacher. His mom’s entire side of the family was teachers, so he thought teaching was a logical choice for him.

After graduation, Wittman attended **National Guard Army** basic training in Fort Jackson, South Carolina for ten weeks of basic training. Then he headed to Virginia for technical school where he studied to be a small arms and artillery repairman. By attending college and participating in drill once a month, the Army helped pay for his education.

After technical school, he then went to the **University of Central Missouri** in January to study Music Education with Instrumental Emphasis. He graduated with his bachelors in 2019.

After college, Wittman accepted a position as band director at Wellington-Napoleon where he taught for two years before accepting a position as band assistant at Odessa High School. He was glad to get to work with a band of a similar size as the one he played in during high school.

“It’s a completely different animal entirely to where I did my first two years of teaching, where my biggest band was 22



Travis Wittman, OHS assistant band director, enjoys spending time with his family, including Ellie, his infant daughter.

members strong,” Wittman said. “Going from that to a band of 70 where we get to do full production halftime shows, play pep band for basketball games, and play in the stands for the entirety of the football games, is a lot more like it was when I went to high school.”

Wittman said he enjoys the support the band receives from parents, students, staff and administrations, and he said the culture at OHS is band-oriented. He also enjoys how the band uses props to tell a story through their show, as well as competing and seeing the show improve.

While Wittman appreciates the support from students and staff, his teaching style is appreciated in return.

“His approach to a student struggling with something is perfect,” Twombly said. “To build a band program, you need people like Mr. Wittman on board to make students feel safe and comfortable.”

Aiden Sutherland, junior, is new to the tuba this year and has improved with Wittman’s help.

“He takes time with me, especially when I am having trouble,” Sutherland said. “He listens and really pays attention. He has helped me get better at the tuba.”

Wittman is also able to push them to grow and try new skills. His persistence and encouragement do not go unnoticed by students.

Reagan Medlock, junior, said Wittman has pushed her out of her comfort zone and has encouraged her and given her the confidence to try new things.

“I auditioned for All-District band for the first time because of him,” Medlock said. “I wasn’t going to do that. I was just going to audition for jazz. Then, he emailed me, and when I didn’t email back, he came up to me in class and told me I needed to audition. I said ‘ok,’ and now I’m in the Honor band.”

Wittman and his wife, **Logan**, have two children, **Oliver**, who is two, and **Ellie**, who is six months old.

OHS installs vape detectors

VAPE from page 1 capabilities are similar to Amazon’s Alexa. The devices are not used to record conversations, but only to recognize key words and phrases, so administrators feel they are a good choice for privacy areas where cameras and microphones are not appropriate. The district has plans to possibly expand the sensors’ usage in the future by focusing on high incidence locations as they become noted.

Briscoe and **Ryan Luethje**, OHS assistant principal, thought the sensors would be beneficial for the high school after talking to **Brad Begemann**, OMS assistant principal. The middle school has been using the sensors with success since the beginning of the school year. So, they met and talked with the building leadership team, made up of teachers representing each department, and talked about the issue of vaping at OHS. As a result, they decided to purchase the sensors.

Luethje said the administration was seeing a lot of issues with the overall student population that involved vaping and large groups of people in the bathrooms during class time and passing periods. However, after the sensors were installed, he said the issues are getting under control.

“This new technology has been out for two years,” Briscoe said. “I’m glad we got them at the time we did.”

Briscoe and Luethje said many teachers and students have made comments about how uncrowded the bathrooms are after installing the HALO Sensors. Luethje said he has also noticed a “drastic decline” in the amount of students asking to go to the bathrooms during class hours.

“I think it has had a positive impact on school,” **Allan Twiligear**, OHS science teacher, said. “It lets students know that we do take usage seriously, and hopefully they know, in the end, we really are looking out for their personal well-being.”

Donna Gwodz, OHS science teacher, said she has noticed that the number of students just hanging out in the restrooms has

decreased dramatically.

“Many students would ask to use the restroom during class because they couldn’t access them during passing time,” Gwodz said. “They definitely have had a positive impact.” **Brandon Lorenz**, sophomore, also noticed major changes occurring in the OHS bathrooms. Lorenz and others appreciate not having to wait in line to use the restrooms.

“I think it clears up the bathrooms,” Lorenz said. “There aren’t as many people in there during passing time.”

When the sensors go off, administrators get notified by email and text alerts. Each violation can have a different sound alert, and the sensor will also flash a different color in the bathroom whenever an infraction occurs.

Administrators then follow up after the alarms go off. They start by watching camera footage from the hallways and having a conversation with the students who were in the bathroom at the time of the alert. The conversations can allow students to share what they witness and help identify who set the sensor off. Discipline can lead to in school or out of school suspension depending on the number of offenses and the severity of the infractions.

Logan Seals, Odessa School District Technology Director, helps oversee the sensor system, and **Greg Daniel**, SRO, is also involved when illegal situations

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Staff spotlight

This month's featured reporter is **Trinity Alvested**, OHS sophomore. She said she loves having a small class filled with girls where she can talk while improving her writing and having fun.

Trinity, 15, is an only child, but she said her parents, **Scott** and **Tresina**, have always given her plenty of cats to play with. She realizes now that being an only child has advantages, such as not having to share her space and not dealing with sibling rivalry.

"Growing up, I always wanted a sibling," Trinity said, "but now, I completely disagree with what I said before."

Trinity stays busy with sports and fulfilling her Student Council duties. She is on the OHS volleyball team for the second year and loves practicing with her friends. She also loves going to eat after school with her volleyball big sister, **Emma Lett**, junior.

As her class's vice-president, she has a vital role in StuCo. She attended the Missouri School Board Association Conference held in Kansas City in November, helped with Homecoming and Patriot Week activities, and worked with **Kim Karr** from #ICANHELP among other activities.

She is also a member of the StuCo Digital4Good committee which helps determine what Digital4Good lessons will be done by the freshman mentors, and she is involved with TRACTION (Teens Taking Action to Prevent Traffic Crashes).

"I really enjoy being able to help others," said Trinity, "so I can't wait until this club (#ICANHELP) expands."

When Trinity isn't at school, she is usually working on her 4-H projects. She is her club's president and has been in 4-H for ten years and has competed for nine. Her projects include photography, woodworking, health and fitness and advanced visual arts. Trinity also prepares speeches and demon-



Trinity Alvested

strations to be judged at the county achievement day each year. She said she has learned numerous leadership skills while in 4-H.

After high school, she plans to attend a STEM (science, technology, engineering mathematics) based college to study civil and environmental engineering. After she gets her bachelors degree she hopes to get an internship at a well-known engineering firm. Her dream job would be working at Disney World or Disney Land as an Imagineer.

Growing up, she has gone to Disney World every other year and loved the experience of seeing people from around the world coming to see the same thing. She has been on a few Disney Cruises, with the Disney Alaskan cruise being her favorite. She even loves watching Disney Cruise vlogs on YouTube.

"Getting to see the beauty of Alaska while also being able to enjoy the Disney theme was amazing," Trinity said.

In her freetime, she likes to go shopping with friends, eat at fun restaurants and spend time with her boyfriend, **Ethan**, who is from Richmond. One of her favorite places to eat is at Blue Nile at the Kansas City Market. She loves the Ethiopian restaurant.

"I love trying new food from around the world," said Trinity.

OHS students visit Holocaust exhibit on a school scholarship

By Emma Jones and Olivia Fieth

Fifty-six OHS students visited the Holocaust exhibit "Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away." on January 12 at Union Station. The trip was free to students because of a scholarship awarded to the school. Students who were enrolled in a social studies class and signed up were able to attend. Students left at 8 a.m. and returned by the end of the day. Sack lunches were provided by Opa! as well.

On the trip, students learned about the Holocaust and Auschwitz in particular. **Terry Stever**, OHS history teacher and one of the trip's sponsors, said they learned about the millions of Jews who died in the Holocaust and the survivors who were left to rebuild their lives after everything was taken from them.

"The National Holocaust Museum is in Washington D.C.," Stever said, "and most students will never get to tour it, so I viewed this traveling exhibit as the next best opportunity."

Stever attends classes about teaching the Holocaust at the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education in Leawood, KS, each summer.

"Midwest Center for Holocaust Education is a co-sponsor of this exhibit," Stever said. "The resources they offer are always the best, so I knew this would be an incredible trip for OHS students."

At Union Station, the students first watched the movie "Auschwitz in Color." Then they had a couple of hours to go on a self-guided tour with audio headphones. Stever said most students wished they had more time.

"I really liked how they gave us the headphones," **Avery Slusher**, OHS junior, said. "It gave us the opportunity to learn at our own pace."

"I attended the exhibit in June when it opened," Stever



OHS students enjoyed Holocaust exhibits on the field trip to Union Station

said, "and spent over four hours touring the exhibit. It is such a powerful display."

Stever said the exhibition not only offers students a chance to see artifacts but also gives them the chance to more fully grasp the pain and emotion of the Holocaust. The exhibit showcased empty suitcases which "reminds us of the humanity of the victims" Stever said. The exhibit also had a display of shoes that belonged to victims, some belonging to young children, and this had an emotional impact on students.

"There was this little boy's shoe with the sock still stuck in it," **Connor Bennett**, junior, said. "They told him that he was going to get to take a shower, and then they killed him and kept his shoes. I believe this is something everyone should go to and figure out more about the Holocaust."

Auschwitz and the Holocaust are taught in the sophomore American History class. They cover uncommon materials such as Operation Reinhard, the codename that the Germans used for their plan to exterminate Polish Jewish People in the General Government.

"We try to cover as much of the Holocaust as we can," Stever said.

Students attending had assignments and tasks to complete for class as well. For example, students in "The History

of Media" were looking for evidence of any media involvement, such as propaganda. Prior to the trip, students reviewed the characteristics of propaganda and examples of World War II propaganda.

After the trip, follow up activities included students creating a propaganda flyer or poster to encourage other nations to get involved with the war efforts against the Nazis.

Students in "Sociology" watched "The Experimenter" about the life of Stanley Milgram who wanted to get answers about the Holocaust because his parents were some of the few who escaped and lived.

"His experiments in human obedience still challenge us today," Stever said. "We never want this to happen again."

The exhibition, which was previously in New York before coming to Kansas City, will move back to Europe when it closes. Observers from all over the country have come to Kansas City to observe this rare collection of artifacts.

Dave MacLean, Odessa R-7 Director of Teaching and Learning, recently attended the exhibition as a chaperone with his daughter's class. He discovered that the teacher had applied for and was awarded a scholarship to cover the cost of admission, so he applied and was awarded a scholarship for OHS as well.

See **HOLOCAUST**, page 4

OHS JV boys' basketball team looks for winning season

By Teagan Loehr

OHS JV boys' basketball team is 4-5 under the direction of **Marc Crowley**, coach, and with less than half of the season to go, the boys' goal is to improve their record to a winning season.

"From where we have come from day one to now is astronomical," Crowley said. "They (the team) are definitely getting our system down, and they are starting to see it work to succeed in the games."

Their first win of the season was on December 1 against Smithville in the Truman JV Tournament. According to Crowley, with "lots of hard work and great execution," the team was able to win 49-21. The win came after two losses to Truman and Van Horn and was followed up by a 47-24 win on December 13 against Excelsior Springs.

The team then suffered a loss to Grain Valley and a close, hard-fought loss to Marshall 28-31. Crowley said Marshall was a tough opponent, but he saw a lot of growth in his team.

"We showed a lot of fight during that game," **Zack Miller**, junior point guard, said.

On January 7, the team had a 41-27 win over Clinton.

"That (Clinton) was our best start to finish game as a group," Crowley said. "We got to put new guys in that hadn't gotten in there before, and we executed very well. We worked really hard. I think overall that was one of our best games of the year."

The team lost on January 18 to Fort Osage 37-46, but turned around and got a 32-30 win on January 21 at Center.

"Since the beginning of the season, we have become more of a team and we've built more chemistry," **Parker Mitchell**, junior shooting guard, said.

"**Zack Miller** and **Stryder Sumy** bring a lot of energy to the team," said Crowley.

Crowley said that Sumy always has a positive attitude.

"He brings the energy," Crowley said. "He's always excited. He



Parker Mitchell, junior, attempts a three-point shot over his opponent.

is one of my favorite players to coach for sure."

Crowley said Miller brings leadership to the team.

"As a junior, he's been there, and he's done it," Crowley said. "He's calming for our team. He also knows how to go out there and make something happen for us."

Sumy, junior post, set a goal for the season as well.

"Keeping the environment of the team positive, and making sure everyone is happy is a good goal to have," Sumy said.

The team also has a motto that they like to keep in mind. UBUNTU. UBUNTU is an old term from the late **Nelson Mandela**, the first president of South Africa, meaning "I eat because we eat."

"As long as we do our job to help out our brothers, and as long as they do their job," Crowley said, "it's going to help us out, and as a team, that's the best thing you can do for each other."

Crowley said the team stands

out because of its willingness to work hard and the family environment of the team. He said the "brotherhood" of the team is a "real thing out here."

Crowley, who is new to the OHS coaching staff, teaches high school social studies at Wellington-Napoleon. He started his coaching career in 2018 at Fort Osage.

He said he was interested in the Odessa job because of his friendship with **Micah Lewis**, OHS SPED teacher and coach. Crowley and Lewis went to high school together and coached basketball together at Fort Osage.

Crowley said that he is enjoying coaching in Odessa because of the family environment.

"I like that everyone fights for everyone," Crowley said. "There is a really good team environment where everyone always cheers everyone on. It's something that's pretty special out here."

Staff spotlight

This month's featured reporter is **Olivia Fieth**, OHS sophomore. She enjoys being one of nine girls in the newspaper class.

"We're like our own little family," Olivia said, "with Mrs. Poisal as the 'cool' mom."

Olivia has two younger siblings, **Claire**, 14, and **Jake**, 9. She enjoys spending time with her family, especially fishing with her dad, **Ryan**, and driving with her mom, **Christi**.

She also enjoys spending time with her pets: a dog, **Josie**; a guinea pig, **Pipsqueak**; a lizard, **Lizzy**; and a cat, **Zoey**. Josie is a puppy and keeps Olivia busy and up some nights.

"I love having all of them around," Olivia said, "but sometimes it feels like we're running a little zoo with all of our animals."

When Olivia is not with family, she is usually with her best friend, **Emma Hunter**, sophomore. They love to go on adventures and road trips together.

"She has definitely become my person," Olivia said.

While Olivia doesn't play any OHS sports, she enjoys supporting all of the sports teams with her friends **Samantha Hall**, **Emma Jones**, **Brooklyn Wade**, **Kaycee Combs**,



Olivia Fieth

Jewelita Lett and **Karmyn Smith**. They love going around and watching their classmates compete. In addition to watching school sports, she enjoys playing club volleyball which will be starting soon.

When not watching sports, Olivia enjoys participating in DECA, Student Council and Journalism I.

"I love being involved in the school," Olivia said. "It definitely makes high school a lot more enjoyable."

After high school, Olivia plans to go to college and later attend law school. She hopes to become a lawyer, but she said if a law career doesn't suit her, she would like to do something with children.

OHS students attend Holocaust exhibit

HOLOCAUST from page 3

"The exhibition was very moving and emotional, and it impacted me greatly, MacLean said. "I wanted this for our Odessa secondary students if

possible. I'm so thankful that our students had this opportunity to learn. We are very thankful to those who donated to the scholarships, so that students like ours may attend."



Monday-Tuesday
1pm-5pm

Wednesday-Saturday
10am-2pm