



## At a Glance

- Page 2**  
Gopher STEAM  
Battle of the Books
- Page 3**  
Upcoming events
- Page 4**  
Staff author/editor
- Page 5**  
Proud Of...
- Page 6**  
Elementary music
- Page 7**  
Battle of the Books  
Hoopin' to Help

## Key Dates

- April**
- 9.....877 Scholarship Foundation  
Pork Chop Dinner, 4:30-7 p.m.
  - 10.....Two-hour early release day
  - 13...School board wksp., 4:30 p.m.
  - 13...MESI Innovation Night, 5-7 p.m.
  - 16-18.....BHS spring play, 7 p.m.
  - 18.....ECFE Family Fair, 10 a.m.
  - 21.....Disabilities Resource  
Fair, 4:30-8 p.m.
  - 23.....NES Gr. 2 musical, 6 p.m.
  - 24.....TESS Spring Fling, 5 p.m.
  - 27.....BHS/PLC conferences
  - 27.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.
  - 30.....BCMS Gr. 6 open  
house, 4 p.m.
  - 30..NES ice cream social, 5:30 p.m.
  - 30....DES choir concert, 6:30 p.m.
  - 30.....BHS band concert, 7 p.m.



**The Gopher STEAM event wowed students with scientific magic. See Page 2.**



## Musical March

Musicians around the district were busy last month, as elementary schools performed spring programs, middle school students held 'A Little Night Music,' and the high school hosted 'Night Out for Music.' Here, Discovery Elementary School students play a song during their Recorder Finale on March 18. See more photos inside.

## Last bell

### Miller retiring after 22 years as Director of Teaching and Learning

The same values that defined the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District when Pam Miller arrived 37 years ago continue to set it apart today.

Miller, who became Buffalo High School's first Spanish teacher in 1989, and who has served the past 22 years as the district's Director of Teaching and Learning, is preparing to retire at the end of the school year.

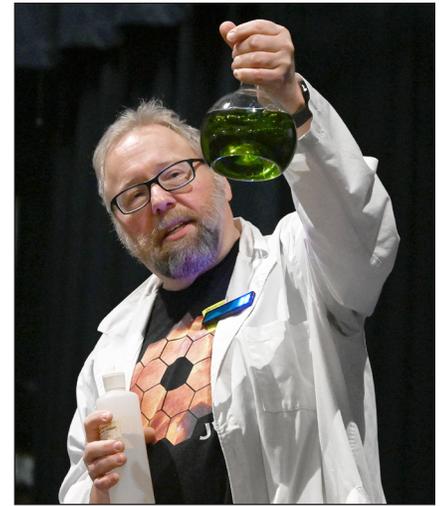
"Our foundation is on relationships. I think that's not always true of other districts," Miller said. "And we're a district that has always valued choice. That was true when Buffalo had one spotlight and Pamida was here. Now the community and the district look different, but those things are still true



**Development of the school district's Portrait of a Graduate was one highlight of Miller's 37-year career with BHM.**

in 2026. That's been neat to see, how those things change over time, but also how they remain true."

**See Miller**  
Page 6



## Science and smiles

Parkside Elementary School students enjoyed 'Gopher STEAM: Science is Magic' in the Discovery Auditorium on Friday, March 20. They used the scientific method to solve mysteries, watched polymers make liquids disappear, saw chemistry employed to change colors and create fireballs, and more.



## Northwinds continues 'Battle of the Books' tradition

When the dust settled on the third- and fourth-grade Battle of the Books competition at Northwinds Elementary on March 12, teammates Liam Grangroth and Cole Pearsall were the last contestants standing.

The pair of fourth-graders took first-place honors out of 22 teams and 47 total contestants who read 10 books in recent months, then answered trivia questions about each that tested their comprehension and retention of the material. The field was whittled down through three successive rounds of competition, until only three teams remained in a tense final round.

"When we were waiting to see who would move on it was kind of nerve-racking," said Pearsall. "I really wanted to move on because last year I didn't make it out of the first round."

Second place went to third-graders Quinn Erickson and Lindsay Erickson, and fourth-graders Nathan Cassada and Everett Eller



From left, finalists in the Grades 3-4 Battle of the Books competition were: fourth-graders Nathan Cassada and Everett Eller (third place); fourth-graders Cole Pearsall and Liam Grangroth (first place); and third-graders Lindsay Erickson and Quinn Erickson (second place).

claimed third place.

Those individuals survived several elimination rounds, including numerous tie-breaking questions, in order to make it to the final table. What was the ultimate key to success?

Grangroth and Pearsall focused their independent reading time each school day on the books in the contest, and emphasized the memorization of key details. Both said their favorite book

was "Wayward Creatures" by Dayna Lorentz.

"One thing that helped was not going too fast when we read," said Pearsall. "You want to read it at a good pace, not too fast, so you understand it."

Entering competition, both said they had some butterflies.

"I was nervous because I didn't know if there were going to be really good teams. So I had to lock in,"

said Grangroth.

With a supportive crowd of fellow students and parents on hand, the boys soaked up the satisfaction of victory.

"When they were cheering for us, when we won, I was practically crying," said Grangroth.

Pearsall encouraged other students to sign up for the competition in future years for the quality books and the overall experience.

"It seems like something that would make you nervous to a lot of kids, but it's probably good to go through that when you're younger so you get used to it, the nervous things in life," Pearsall said. "It's just really fun. The books were really good and it was fun being on stage in front of half the school answering those questions."

See Page 7 for coverage of the fifth-grade event.

## Upcoming Events



### 877 Foundation's 32nd annual Pork Chop Dinner takes place at BHS on April 9

For more than three decades, the 877 Scholarship Foundation's Pork Chop Dinner has helped Buffalo High School graduates take the next step on their college or career pathways.

Order meals now  
Scan for  
advance tickets



The 32nd annual dinner takes place from 4:30 to 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 9, at Buffalo High School. One pork chop meal is \$12, and a two-pork chop meal is \$17. Beans, applesauce chips and dessert are included. There are also \$5 hot dog meals for kids. Dine in the BHS cafeteria, or choose curbside pickup. If you're going to one of the many athletic

events hosted by BHS that afternoon, buy a "brat box" for \$10 that includes brats, chips and a cookie. These meals will be available out at the fields.

See [877foundation.org](http://877foundation.org) for more information or to donate.

### Disabilities Resource Fair set for April 21

A Disabilities Resource Fair will be held from 4:30 to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, April 21, at the Discovery Center in Buffalo.

More info  
Scan for  
event details



This free event features three speaker seminars, a comprehensive vendor fair, and more. The objective is to provide resources and support to families of individuals with disabilities of all ages (birth to adulthood).

All are welcome to attend, including those who do not live in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District. The event is sponsored by Autism Allies and the Special Services Department of BHM Schools.

For more information, scan the code above or see <https://www.bhmschools.org/disabilities-resource-fair-april-21>.

### ECFE Family Fair arrives on April 18

The annual Early Childhood Family Education Family Fair, including hands-on activities for families and children, a school board book giveaway, entertainment, silent auction and more, takes place from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 18, in the Discovery Center gym. The event is free to enter, and all are welcome.

## BHS spring play is 'The Skin of Our Teeth'

Buffalo High School Theatre will present "The Skin of Our Teeth" Thursday through Saturday, April 16-18 at 7 p.m. each day.

Completed by Thornton Wilder less than a month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, "The Skin of Our Teeth" (1942) broke from established theatrical conventions and walked off with the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Combining farce, burlesque, satire, and elements of the comic strip, Wilder depicts an Everyman family as it narrowly escapes one end-of-the-world disaster after another, from the Ice Age to flood to war.

"I felt the students needed a break from something as intense and emotionally exhausting as the last few productions have been," said director Debb Bestland. "When I read it I was more than surprised to see its relevance. ... It is fun for the students and has some hidden wisdom amongst the lines. Educational and fun – that's a great combination!"



### The storyline

George and Maggie Antrobus of suburban Excelsior, New Jersey, (married for 5,000 years) bear more than a casual resemblance to that first husband and wife, Adam and Eve, and represent the human race. The two Antrobus children are Gladys (perfect in every way) and Henry (who likes to throw rocks and was formerly known as Cain). Their garrulous maid, Sabina,



**Cast and crew members rehearse lines and prepare set pieces for the upcoming spring play at BHS.**

takes it upon herself to break out of character and interrupt the course of the drama at every opportunity.

Whether he is inventing the alphabet or merely saving the world from the apocalypse, George and his redoubtable family somehow manage to survive – by the skin of their teeth.

Tickets are available online by clicking the desired date on the activities calendar at [www.bhmschools.org](http://www.bhmschools.org).

# Carlson-Giving completes book project

After years of research, reflection and practical experience, Bryden Carlson-Giving has orchestrated a symphony of diverse voices to advocate for a fresh approach in the practice of occupational therapy.

The fruit of that labor, a collaborative book titled "Neurodiversity-Affirming Occupational Therapy," will be released on April 21. Carlson-Giving, an occupational therapist for Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools, developed the concept, edited the entire work, authored and co-authored several chapters, and illustrated the book, but insisted that ownership of the project does not belong to him alone.

"I'm just one voice. I really wanted this book to be a collective effort," he said, adding that he enlisted nearly 50 contributors from around the world to share their expertise and personal experience. Along with leaders in the field, contributors include those living with various conditions – including non-speaking individuals who are given voice through the written word.

"I will never say the book is mine," said Carlson-Giving. "It's ours."

## What is neurodiversity?

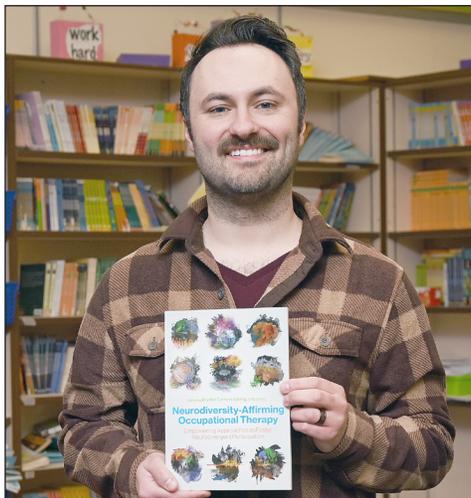
Carlson-Giving explained that neurodiversity refers to the various ways people experience the world.

"We sometimes don't realize how many pre-conceived notions we have of what ideal functioning needs to look like," he said. "If someone is autistic or they have schizophrenia or ADHD or Downs Syndrome, it doesn't necessarily mean they're lacking in skill or that the way they experience the world is bad. The point of neurodiversity is to acknowledge that there is a wide spectrum of how people learn, listen, process, move and experience things, and doing so helps us better individualize what we're doing."

In an educational setting, that approach can make a big difference in how well students of varying abilities are served.

Carlson-Giving said the best part of his job is evaluating students and building on their abilities.

"Sometimes in occupational therapy we look at students in a deficit-based way," he said. "We focus on what's 'wrong.' But I love doing strengths-



**BHM occupational therapist Bryden Carlson-Giving co-authored, edited and illustrated a book for others in his field that will be released later this month.**

based interviews with students. I love working with students and figuring out how I can help change the activity or environment in a way that is sustainable for teachers. I also help teach the student to advocate for what they need to create a better fit."

## Book project

After an early career in outpatient and inpatient pediatric care through M Fairview Masonic Children's Hospital, including work with intensive care and bone marrow transplant patients, Carlson-Giving pursued post-professional doctorate work through Boston University, where his research focused on helping occupational therapists ensure that their practice aligned with the wishes of their clients.

**'His thoughtful and student-centered approach makes a meaningful difference in our schools.'**

**Amy Ernst**

Special Services Director

After discussing that approach and neurodiversity on a podcast, Carlson-Giving received an email from a publishing company asking if he would be interested in writing a book on the topic.

"I almost deleted the email," he said. "I just thought there was no way I could write a book."

Instead, he created an ambitious framework covering both theory and practical application, then mustered up the audacity to contact other professionals that he admired in the field, along with individuals he felt could provide valuable perspective. To his surprise, almost all agreed to help.

He assigned topics, provided feedback to shape the content into a cohesive whole, and authored portions of the book himself.

"I think it actually would have been easier if I did it myself, but I would have been far less happy with it in the end," he said.

## School focus

While the book editing process was underway, Carlson-Giving also transitioned his day-to-day career from the medical field to school-based occupational therapy in order to pursue his interest in education. He worked one year in Minnetonka before joining BHM Schools for the 2024-25 school year.

"When it comes to work-life balance, that's been a little off-kilter for the last year or two," he said with a laugh. "But I do think my work on the book has brought a lot more meaning to my everyday work here as well."

While the book itself is meant for other occupational therapists rather than the general public, Amy Ernst, Special Services Director for BHM Schools, said that local students and their families profit from its principles.

"Our Special Services team has greatly benefited from the addition of Bryden Carlson-Giving. He brings a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to occupational therapy and is especially skilled at incorporating strengths-based practices into his work," she said. "He generously shares his expertise with colleagues, and his unique perspective encourages growth and inspires new ways of thinking in the field. He is intentional about including student voice and partners with individuals, teams, and families to embrace differences and support student well-being. His thoughtful and student-centered approach makes a meaningful difference in our schools."

# Proud Of...

Those listed below were submitted by district staff and recognized by the BHM School Board for their special contributions and accomplishments.



The BHS Repertory Orchestra, which received two "Superior with Distinction" ratings, the highest possible, and was selected to perform at the State Honor Orchestra Festival at Orchestra Hall on March 31. This is the third straight year the Repertory Orchestra has earned this rare distinction.

Sophomore swimmer Morgan Sims, who broke the school record in the 500 Free and placed sixth in the state swim meet.



BHS wrestlers who competed at state. From left are Aiden Herbst (placed 4th), Dylan Keeler, Gabe Roehl (placed 2nd), and Courtney Kotish (placed 3rd).



BHS Boys Swim & Dive Coaches John Crosland and Chris Kosek, Section 8AA Coaches of the Year for the second consecutive year.



BHS jazz students who performed as members of the Central Minnesota Band Directors Honor Jazz Ensembles: Finn DeWitte, Lilah Dongoski, Max Pearsall and Josie Roehl.

BHS Boys Basketball Coach Josh Ortmann, who was named Section 6AAAA Coach of the Year.



BHS Knowledge Bowl Coach Ryan McCallum, Coach of the Tier this season for Region 7AAA schools.





# March music

Elementary musicians have been busy over the past few weeks. At right, Northwinds students present, 'On the Radio.' Below, Hanover students performed 'Pandemonium.' Below left, Tatanka students sing for families. At left, Discovery students play percussion for 'The Lion Sleeps Tonight.'



## Miller

from Page 1

"For over 20 years, Pam's leadership of the Teaching and Learning Department has been a cornerstone of our district's success, leaving an indelible impact on students and staff alike," said Superintendent Scott Thielman. "Her remarkable success in spearheading key initiatives leaves behind a legacy of innovation and a standard of collaboration that will inspire us for years to come."

### Entering education

A native of Sacred Heart, Minnesota, Miller grew up as the daughter of a teacher who advised his children against careers in education because of the challenging nature of the field. But a desire to serve in a "helping profession," and time spent working at a school for migrant children while she was in high school, ultimately led Miller to change her major at Mankato State University from physical therapy to teaching.

She graduated in the spring of 1989 with a license to teach both math and Spanish, and applied for any open positions near and far.

She landed in Buffalo when then-BHS Principal Nick Miller hired the school's first in-person Spanish teacher to replace a previous remote learning class done over television.

Though Miller had not known Spanish when helping with the migrant school, the experience was formative nonetheless.

"The people were so lovely," she said. "I fell in love with the culture before I fell in love with the language. In college I needed a language elective so I took Spanish and I loved it. It's so sequential, just like math is, so it came easily to me."

### Administrative shift

After 10 years in the classroom, and encouragement from colleagues to seek out a role in administration, Miller began to split time as a teacher and as an administrator overseeing implementation of the state's new Profile of Learning accountability program.

After two years in that capacity, she became the full-time Coordinator of Accountability, managing testing, the high school's Student Services department and master schedule, and the school's professional development efforts. She

also obtained her principal's license, having decided to pursue additional leadership opportunities.

The next step was a district-wide position supporting the curriculum director, and when the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment retired two years later, Miller took over.

"I thought, 'I don't know if I'm ready for this yet,'" she recalled, but she earned the job and obtained permission from then-Superintendent Jim Bauck to change the title to Director of Teaching and Learning.

"I didn't like the CIA title," she said with a laugh. "I felt like it encompassed more of what I wanted the position to be, about teaching and learning instead of curriculum instruction. The other title sounded more about compliance instead of support for teachers and principals: 'You must do this,' rather than, 'What can we do together?'"

### Teaching and learning

Not having served as a principal herself, or as an elementary or middle school teacher, Miller said she initially dealt with "imposter syndrome" since her new role primarily consisted of overseeing the district's

principal group, its K-12 curriculum and the associated professional development training.

"For a short period of time I was supervising Nick Miller, who had hired me as a baby teacher coming right out of college," she said. "I wasn't going to tell Nick Miller how to do his job."

Instead, she adopted a "learning by listening" approach that helped her excel as a supervisor, evaluator and developer of classroom teachers and educational leaders alike.

"I never taught young students how to read, so the elementary teachers were the experts in their field, and I learned through the process," Miller said. "It was the same with the principals. I had to use a coaching method because I hadn't been in their shoes, but I could learn how to support them in those roles."

In addition to those primary tasks, Miller's role involved managing a plethora of other areas within the district, including its multi-tiered system of supports for student interventions, federal grant applications and programs, American Indian education programming, partnership

**See Miller**  
Page 8

# Fifth-graders enjoy last Battle of the Books

After taking third place in last year's Battle of the Books competition for third- and fourth-graders at Northwinds Elementary School, Lila Becker and Aria Muhonen were feeling optimistic coming into this year's final competition for fifth-graders only.

"I felt like we had a good chance, but I thought we would get second or third place because Ingrid (Karvonen) and Adalyn (Jacobs) won in both third and fourth grade," said Muhonen.

When those four found themselves in the final buzzer round on March 12, along with a third team consisting of Dani Karson and Dylan Sargent, nerves began to take over.

"In the buzzer round, my voice was shaking," said Becker.

"I was very nervous," said Muhonen.

In the end, Becker and Muhonen took first place out of 16 total teams and 34 total contestants that started the competition, which challenged students to read 10 books and answer trivia questions that tested their memory of the content. Karvonen and Jacobs took



**From left, finalists in the Grade 5 Battle of the Books competition were: Adalyn Jacobs and Ingrid Karvonen (second place); Lila Becker and Aria Muhonen (first place); and Dylan Sargent and Dani Karson (third place).**

second, and Karson and Sargent finished third.

"My sister said she wanted to see what I won when I went home. I told her I might get third, or second, or maybe not win anything. So I'm

really excited to show her this," said Muhonen, holding up her first-place trophy.

How did the pair prepare for success?

"We read all the books, but we split them up into five

and five so we didn't have to deal with the stress of reading all 10 books. It felt fair that way," said Muhonen.

"And also, if we read one a while ago, like in September, we would read it and re-read it so it stayed fresh in our minds," said Becker.

Becker's favorite story was "The Misfits: A Royal Conundrum" by Lisa Yee, "because I kind of like mysteries and adventure. It keeps me into it and it's very interesting," she said.

Muhonen's favorite was "Hoops," by Matt Tavares.

"I like graphic novels. I feel like they're easier to read," she said.

As fifth-graders in their last year of the competition, the pair was excited to go out on top. But both embraced the process as much as the result.

"It's fun that you get to read books and you get questioned on them," said Muhonen. "And if you get into the buzzer round, it's fun just beeping the buzzer and getting questions right."

"There's a first time for everything," said Becker. "You don't really need to win a prize; you just should enjoy it whether you lose or win."



**Tension was high during the final buzzer round of the fifth-grade Battle of the Books.**



## 'Hoopin' to Help'

Goofy costumes, friendly competition, live music and more highlight the annual 'Hoopin' to Help' Students vs. Staff Basketball Game that has become a traditional Spring Break send-off at Buffalo Community Middle School. This year's closely-contested game saw the staff edge the students 42-40. Proceeds from shirt sales go to charity.



\*\*\*\*\*ECRWSS\*\*  
RESIDENT DISTRICT 877

**Miller**  
from Page 6

with the Northwest Suburban Integration District, and more. Though in some ways the tasks were very different from teaching in a classroom, Miller applied a similar mindset.

"I loved being in a classroom and teaching high school students. I never felt like I wanted to get away from that, but I loved the process of education and embracing learning. So instead of students in front of me, then it was adults in front of me. I still look at what outcomes I want, my lesson, and what my curriculum is for the year."

One of the biggest adjustments was allowing extra time for change across multiple schools and departments, whereas in a classroom she could have made her own adjustments the next day.

"You can't just dictate change, because then it's compliance instead of commitment," Miller said. "I'd rather work for commitment."

**Highlights, challenges**

Two particular highlights of Miller's career in Teaching and Learning were the implementation of the new

school start times in 2016-17, and the development of the district's Portrait of a Graduate.

Later start times for the middle school and high school were based on educational research and the science of what would be most beneficial to teen students.

"Dr. Thielman and I heard the case for later start times at a conference and said, 'This is something we need to investigate,'" said Miller. "It was a true system change. From that starting process of just hearing about reasons for doing it and actually making it happen, how we went about that process, that is a highlight."

The Portrait of a Graduate, adopted by the district in 2023, outlines the framework of essential skills students should build each year, and gives staff members a common purpose.

"I really like that we have a vision that we're all working toward. If I'm a high school French teacher or kindergarten teacher, I can see how I'm able to contribute to those skills," said Miller. "Those are highlights of system-wide things we've done that I can see my footprint on and say, 'I loved being involved with that.' I loved working with the people I around me in order to make those things happen."



**SCHOOL BOARD**

- Bob Sansevere.....Chairperson
- Sheila Smude.....Vice Chairperson
- Adam Bjorklund.....Clerk
- Amanda Lawrence .....Treasurer
- Matt Hoffman .....Acting Clerk/Treasurer
- Angela Greig .....Director
- Mike Honsey.....Director
- Scott Thielman.....Superintendent
- Audyn Molesky .....Student Representative

In terms of challenges, the COVID time period was unsurpassed.

"How were we going to deliver instruction in a way that none of us have any research on? We couldn't point to any best practices," Miller said. "I don't like when people look to me, as a leader, to have the answer, and I don't have an answer. Then you just go with, 'Here's what I think we should do.'"

Those large-scale projects and difficulties kept the work fresh and engaging as time passed.

"It's been a long time. I never thought I'd do this for 22 years," Miller said. "I figured that if I wasn't going to get a new job, then I need to make the job new. So I've tried to approach evaluations that way: as someone who is supportive and asks how to help push you in an area so that you continue to find satisfaction and purpose in what you're doing."

**Looking ahead**

While she enjoyed her work, Miller said she is excited to enter retirement along with her husband later this year.

"Someone asked if I was nervous and I said, 'Not for a minute,' because I have a lot of interests and hobbies, and right now I have (very little) time for any of them. And believe I probably have more interests and hobbies that I have yet to discover," she said.

Gardening, spending time outdoors and visiting with her three adult children and extended family are immediate plans, and eventually she plans to do some traveling as well.

"I've been grateful for the opportunity," Miller said. "The district as a whole gave me so many opportunities to do great things, and I'm nothing but grateful for all of it."