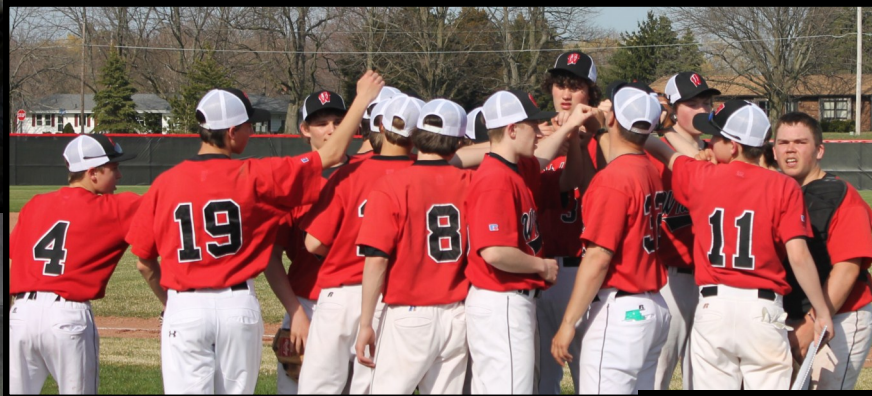


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## Graduation Changes

Whitehall High School is breaking tradition this year. Instead of having graduation on a customary Sunday afternoon, the Class of 2013 graduated Thursday, May 30. Principal Dale McKenzie made the decision to move the ceremony to a Thursday night and also took the commencement keynote speaker out of the ceremony.

The decision to move graduation to a Thursday night was made for many reasons, according to McKenzie. With the underclassmen students and staff being in classes all day on Thursday, he hoped more staff members would participate in the graduation ceremony. Having it on a school day would also assist in announcing the location of the

ceremony if there were changes due to weather conditions. The district also hoped to cut expenses as they didn't have to pay for maintenance personnel overtime to set up for commencement on a weekend.

McKenzie said this is not the first year that Whitehall graduated on a Thursday night. In the early 2000s the ceremony took place on a Thursday night at the LC Walker Arena, due to construction in the school district. Not every school district schedules their graduation ceremony on a Sunday. Commencements are scheduled all days of the week at the discretion of the district, according to McKenzie.

In addition to the date being changed this year, McKenzie made the decision to not have a keynote speaker as well. In previous years, the senior class chooses a staff member to address the class during the ceremony. This year McKenzie wanted the

ceremony to be more student-oriented, with the focus of the ceremony being done by members of the class. In future years, McKenzie would like alumni to come back and speak at the ceremony and encourage the new graduates.

When asked why the changes were made for this year's graduation, McKenzie replied, "I am a leader. Leaders look at things differently and try new things." Contrary to popular rumors among the students, the changes made this year were not made primarily to cut expenses or to shorten the ceremony, according to McKenzie. "This is not a permanent change. If all goes well, we will keep things this way. But if not, we will make adjustments in the following years," said McKenzie.

*Writer: Lauren Throne*



## Habitat Help

As the warm weather arrived, people began to clean, do yard work, and become more active. On April 11, a group of 25 members from Whitehall's National Honor Society went out in the community and helped build a house with the Habitat for Humanity organization.

Students drove to a habitat site located in a Muskegon neighborhood, where they gathered together to complete tasks given to them by the habitat workers. While many of the students expected to take part in building a house, they were surprised to see there was a house already built with a family living there when they arrived. The house and property were donated to the Habitat For Humanity organization by an elderly man who had passed away, so instead of building on the site, Habitat worked to remodel the accommodation from an old run down house into a modern house that stood out in the neighborhood.

Students worked to make the house stand out even more by putting finishing touches to the property. They divided into two groups; one group worked on landscaping the yard, while the other group built a large shed on the property. They landscaped the property by pulling weeds, raking leaves, laying mulch, making rock

arrangements, and planting various flowers and plants. The shed that was built is to be used for tools, a lawn mower, and other storage items. NHS Advisor Marty Shafer said that overall, "Our finished work on the house really made it stand out in the neighborhood."

The students completed their work within four hours. However, some students chose to go above and beyond that expectation and stayed after their scheduled time to get everything completed, even though it rained and sleeted throughout the day. "The students enjoyed what they were doing and took great pride in what they had created knowing that they were helping someone who really needed it," said Shafer. NHS member Dylan Medendorp said that he, "enjoyed the process of watching the house transform as the students worked throughout the day," and that he was very happy with the turnout.

Shafer was also pleased with the outcome of the experience, and

hopes that NHS will work with the organization in the future. He said, "Habitat was a great organization with great people working for them," and that, "it was a pleasure to be a part of this."

Overall, it was said to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Both students and Shafer hope to become more involved with the organization in the future and even have their families take part in the experience. The Habitat workers mentioned the students were hard workers and they appreciated the time and effort put in the project. The outcome of the house was beautiful and helped represent the hard work and effort that students from Whitehall strive to achieve.

*Writer: Sam Sawyer*



Pictured left to right: Chris Lopez, Joe VanLoon, Jared Christenen, Emmitt Mikkelson, Devin Schweigert, and Isaac Love.

## Teachers' Thoughts

Skepticism followed hot on the heels of schedule changes at Whitehall High School. Students and teachers alike didn't quite know what to expect. Students were afraid that classes would become too confusing and simply didn't understand why such a change was necessary or why teachers had to change the pacing at which they taught. The school was used to operating at trimesters with the occasional half day and one-credit classes taking two trimesters to complete. The changes meant half days being abandoned in favor for shortened Fridays and one credit classes taking all year to complete.

The changes have been integrated into Whitehall High School and most are used to it, but the way it has impacted seems to be different than expected.

English teacher Mrs. Stoffan said, "It Improved core courses by adding more time, and if we haven't gotten used to it we will."

Mr. Shafer said, "There have been difficulties with the schedule, but that was expected. I'm happy I have more time to teach."

Mrs. Romine added to the positivity by saying, "I liked the year-long classes and the shortened Fridays were a good break."

Any teacher that had any trouble with the schedule will be able to improve next year such as Mr. Malbouef. He said, "Core classes may

have changed to all year, but somehow this year I ended up teaching less." A new schedule will definitely cause some disorder when it comes to teachers and the way they teach. Having to completely change will create some problems when Instructors have to design a new way to give the students information such as giving themselves too much time for one area and finding out near the end of the course that they don't have as much time as they thought.

According to teachers, the schedule changes seem to be a good thing. Students were able to learn more and complete more work. Teachers felt more at ease having more time to instruct and share more with students; and of course, shortened Fridays became a welcome and enjoyed practice. Even though the schedule changes mostly

impacted the teachers, students and teachers can learn from this year and the coming ones and make the new schedule easier and more helpful.

Writer: Adam Warren

## A Thirteenth Year

Degrees. Planning. Studying. Difficult. Challenging. Post-high school. Professors. Exams. These are some of the words associated with college. Most students finish out their high school career and attend a college or university the next fall. However, seven Whitehall juniors had the opportunity to go to college while in

high school. They attend a program called Early College for Muskegon County, or ECMC. These students were Sabina Colston, Ryker Morningstar, Anna Goddard, Claudia Wilks, Savannah Parmley, Adrian Roy, and Shashaina Dagen. There were 50 positions for all the schools in the county, but some schools did not send any students. Schools that participated included Fruitport, Holton, Montague, Mona Shores, Muskegon, Muskegon Heights, Oakridge, Orchard View, Ravenna, and Whitehall. Next year, these same schools will participate, and North Muskegon, Reeths-Puffer, Muskegon Catholic, and Waypoint Academy will be added to the program. Eighty students from these schools will participate, so there will be a total of 130 students in the program. From Whitehall, Mayleigh Myers, Jeff Bowne, Dakota Button, Scott Christensen, Montana Martin, Jason McWhinnie, Caleb Sanford, and Kendall Schmitt will attend the college next year. These students will save around \$4,800.

ECMC gives students in high school the opportunity to earn an associate's degree while in high school. During their junior year, students will go to Muskegon Community College during fifth and sixth hours, and during their senior year they will go to MCC for three to four classes. After their senior year, they will attend college for their "thirteenth year" of high school but only go to the college. By doing this program, these juniors will have their Associate's degree after their first year out of high school. Since the

students have to attend a thirteenth year, they must be committed to the program for all three years. After high school, they will still attend MCC.

The ECMC program provides many benefits and enjoyments for students. Students have to only pay for their transportation to and from the college. They also have a college background for work later in life, and it also gives these students a head start in their careers. "I will get a head start to my nursing career in which I hope to be completed with by 2015 when we graduate from MCC. The program really has driven me to be the best I can be personally and showed me that I am smart enough to do this," said Dagen. Some enjoyments for students include meeting other students in the county, being a year ahead of other college students, and receiving two free years of college. "What is there not to enjoy about the program? We get two years of free college and end up one year ahead of the average student. We get to challenge ourselves and enjoy meeting other people, while gaining the experience of adjusting to diverse cultures and class sizes. It is a very unique program, and one that shouldn't be looked over," said Roy.

This is the first year of the ECMC program. Students went through quite the application process to be included in this program. First, they had to fill out an application, receive two teacher recommendations, and write a one-page paper on why they should be chosen for the program. Next, the school counselor would give the dean of the program their application. They would have an interview, and they

would wait to hear if they were accepted into the program. Once students found out they were in the program, they would take summer classes to prepare them for college. They jumped right into their fall semester at college. "It wasn't too time consuming and no time was wasted. The application process was very well put together," said Roy.

The students had many opinions of the program, but they all enjoyed the program over all. "I love ECMC because I have met so many new people and made many friends. ECMC is the opportunity of a life time," Morningstar.

"I love the program personally, I think it's a drive to be all you can be, as well as the opportunity to stand out from others and earn a degree at the same time," said Dagen.

"I enjoy that I can come together with others in Muskegon County to be a part of this brand new program. I can make new friends that I would most likely have no other way of meeting except for at the college," said Wilks.

ECMC is the opportunity of a lifetime for these juniors. To get an Associate's degree a year after graduating from high school is great. A head start to a student's career is always beneficial to them. This college program is great for high school students wanting to go above and beyond by choosing a thirteenth year to better themselves, and their future.

*Writer: Leah Thompson*

## *Stimulating Surveys*

Everyone at Whitehall High School recently took a sigh of relief emphasizing, "We made it." The school year of 2012-2013 brought many new changes to the old system including scheduling, staff positions, and safety concerns. After a full year, students and faculty have either rolled with the punches smoothly, or they have been treading against the current of modifications. Lately, rumors concerning even more changes had been circulating the building.

Senior Patrick Gilland decided to lead a student-led survey for the juniors and seniors at Whitehall. The survey was taped onto the lockers of the eleventh and twelfth-grade students for them to fill out and return to Gilland, if desired. It asked basic demographic questions such as gender, grade, and grade point average. It also asked the student to name three teachers that made a positive impact on their life and what grade they earned in the class. These surveys were kept anonymous. The purpose of this survey was to relay information about the high school and the experiences of the students to the administration in an organized way to help them realize the juniors and seniors were aware of what was



happening and there was a general concern for the school as a whole.

Gilland set up a meeting for Tuesday, April 14, with Superintendent Mr. Jerry McDowell, high school Principal Mr. Dale McKenzie, and his parents to further discuss the results of the surveys. Gilland’s main concerns going into the meeting were the trends that appeared in the survey results. These trends included frustrations regarding the changes in the school such as the absence of a keynote speaker at graduation, the layoff of teachers, and the new hybrid schedule. There were also positive aspects with the feedback from students like the lunch room changes, new janitors, and Mrs. Goodrich’s new counseling position.

One result from the survey conveyed the top three recognized teachers for high quality instruction. They were Mr. Scott Hector, Mr. Kirk Mikkelson, and Mrs. Eileen Stoffan. Overall, almost all of the teachers who work at the high school were recognized as quality educators by the students who returned the surveys, at least once. This shows that all of the teachers who work at the high school have made a positive impact on at least one student’s life and are highly respected by students. Other information concluded that over 90% of the responders thought the teachers genuinely cared for students.

Gilland was also concerned about the kids who were failing their classes, and how the schools were handling it. McDowell said, “We cannot watch kids fail. It is the responsibility of teachers to respond to students who

are both successful and those who struggle in a timely manner. There are opportunities for us to intervene as soon as we recognize that a student is struggling and we need to take those opportunities. The goal of a teacher is to reach all children. This is one of the most challenging tasks in a school. As soon as you recognize that a student or students are not meeting with success you have to step back and rethink or redesign how you are delivering your instruction. We are fortunate to have teachers in our schools that go the extra mile all the time for all students. I am very proud of the work we are doing and the strides we are making to insure success for all students and will always be looking for ways to support our students and our teachers.”

The surveys themselves had little effect. However, Gilland believed the surveys and his interaction with the administration have shown that students can take a stance for what they believe in and to not give up until they take the time to listen. It also shows the cooperation of the administration with the students and their flexibility to take the time to listen to those who are experiencing issues first-hand in the classrooms.  
*Writer: Samantha Huebler*

## Awarded for Art

This spring, juniors and seniors from both Whitehall and Montague were able to apply for the Montague Foods Scholarship and the Amber Rose Brown Memorial Scholarship by submitting a piece of art along with a description about what inspired them to produce it.

The Montague Foods Scholarship was based on popular vote by grocers who viewed the art pieces. The first place prize is a scholarship worth \$1,000, and it went to Whitehall junior Luke Westrate. The second place prize was worth \$500 and went to Samantha Huebler, also a Whitehall junior. The third place winner was junior Hailey Cockerill of Montague, winning \$250 toward her college expenses.

The Amber Rose Brown Memorial Scholarship has been going on for three years now, and is a scholarship of \$500 that goes toward college. The winner of this scholarship was Samantha Huebler.  
*Writer: Hannah Zwemer*

Pictured left to right: 2nd place winner Samantha Huebler, 1st place winner Luke Westrate, and 3rd place winner, Hailey Cockerill of Montague.



## Pins & Wins

Zachary Cooper moved to Whitehall High School this year so that he could be involved in Whitehall's wrestling program. Cooper received a lot of recognition for his performance as a wrestler this year. He was named for Mr. Wrestler, which is an award that goes to seniors in each state, six nominations per state. Cooper's record was 226-8. He wrestled four times all conference, four times all districts, four times all regional, three times state champion, and one time third place for state. Cooper said, "I really enjoyed Whitehall wrestling. Coach Sandee and coach Johnson were great coaches and I felt very welcomed into the team. All of the kids were like part of my family. Mr. Haughn and Mr. McKenzie are great guys and very conscientious."

Writer: Samantha Huebler



Pictured: Zac Cooper standing beside his family after a meet.

# -VALHALLA-

This newsletter is produced by the Viking Communication Class of Whitehall High School. Students in grades nine through twelve learn various skills producing this newsletter. Writing, photography, layout, interviewing, and communication skills are just some of the advantages students gain from participating in this class.



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