

LIBERTY



Central School District

Summer 2011

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Class of 2011 Celebrates the Future, Reflects on Lessons of the Past

Smiling faces filled Liberty High School as the Class of 2011 celebrated their graduation this June. Family, friends and educators packed the school gymnasium to watch 109 seniors cross the stage in robes of red or white.

The 114th annual commencement exercises were particularly noteworthy for Principal Jack Strassman. His daughter graduated this year, and he has known her fellow graduates since kindergarten.

“Graduation is the beginning, not the end,” he told the audience. “As we all look back today, we can see how far these students have progressed as they prepare for their future. It has been an honor and a privilege to be part of their journey, one which has had many wonderful memories.”

He spoke of the bright futures ahead of graduates, as did salutatorian Jessica Dunnigan. She shared a personal story about the importance of believing in yourself and being willing to accept when

things don’t work out exactly as you hope. She promised that hard work would pay off eventually for those who strive to be the best they can be.

“Believe in yourself, believe that you can achieve whatever your heart desires. The world needs us,” said Dunnigan.

Those desires are quite varied among members of the Class of 2011. Graduates have expressed interest in the fields of nursing, business, education, science, dentistry, computer engineering, astronomy, music, criminal justice, nanotechnology, engineering, and medicine to name just a few. Nearly 83 percent plan to attend a two- or four-year college or technical school. Three class members are joining the military, and the rest will join the workforce.

Valedictorian Paulina Kleinberger had mixed emotions about the upcoming changes, but she said she was grateful for her experiences in Liberty. She thanked all of the families, friends, teachers, coaches and community members who had supported her and her classmates over the years.

“We are all extremely lucky to come from a community where a common philosophy is ‘service above self.’ We are surrounded by people who care and have the drive to actually see each and every one of us succeed in life,” she said.



Glad Grads: At left, seniors Adalberto Ponce, Benjamin Grisafe, Sabrina Mastrogiovanni, Paige LaPolt, William McGuire, and Candido Acevedo prepare for their walk across the stage. At right, Principal Jack Strassman congratulates new graduate Tiffany Arroyo.

Scholarship Winners

Arnold Miller Perseverance Award.....	Dillon Cerullo
Arthur Tursi Memorial Scholarship.....	Jessica Dunnigan, Margaret Goble, Benjamin Grisafe, Angelique Ramos, Kristie Wallgren
Barbara Sims Memorial Scholarship.....	Megahn Burke
Beaverkill Foundation Award.....	Tanise Cannonier
Ben Klein Memorial Scholarship.....	William McGuire
Benjamin and Sylvia Heller Memorial Scholarship.....	Jaclyn Kimmes
Bethel Lions Memorial Scholarship.....	Paige LaPol
Bonnie Stang Memorial Scholarship.....	Edwin Soto
Brian Ingber Memorial Scholarship.....	Megahn Burke
Briker Family Music Scholarship.....	Dillon Cerullo
Catskill Shopper Scholarship.....	Brianna Mir
Daniel Reed Memorial Scholarship.....	Evan Austin
Dr. Irvin M. Borish Scholarship.....	Claire Pavlak
English Award.....	William Sheehan
E.N.Y.F.C.U. Scholarship.....	Jonathan Ramirez
George A. Sinacore Memorial Scholarship.....	Jonathan Ramirez, Frankie Skindzier
George Beimler Brotherhood Award.....	Andrew Cross
Greater Liberty Chamber of Commerce Award.....	Margaret Goble
HSBC Business Scholarship.....	Hailey Butler
Hudson Catskill Central Labor Council Scholarship.....	Dillon Cerullo
JC Young Hose Company John S. Nichols Memorial Scholarship.....	Andrew Cross
Jennifer Orseck Memorial Award.....	Amber Wallgren
John J. Driscoll Memorial Scholarship.....	Paige LaPol
Joseph Scarvalone Memorial Scholarship.....	Kimberly Rosado
Keep Your Dreams Scholarship.....	Dillon Cerullo
Leonard Martello Music Scholarship.....	Megahn Burke, Dillon Cerullo, Melanie Downing, Kirk Medina, Brianna Mir, Christine Lazar, Danielle Strassman
Liberty Elks Lodge Citizenship Awards.....	Dana Balsler, Ryan Harnish
LFA Scholarships.....	Blu Bloat, Jennifer Brannigan, Megahn Burke, Tanise Cannonier, Dillon Cerullo, Jessica Dunnigan, Michelle Giarratano, Margaret Goble, Amy Hosking, Paulina Kleinberger, Christopher Lockwood, Sabrina Mastrogiovanni, Juan Mercado, Claire Pavlak, Adalberto Ponce, Jonathan Ramirez, Juan Ramirez, Conor Siegel, Danielle Strassman, Amber Wallgren
Liberty Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary Scholarship.....	Margaret Goble
Liberty Fire Department Scholarship.....	Melanie Downing
Liberty Fire Fighters' Scholarship.....	Andrew Cross

Academic Excellence Honored with Top 10 Graduates

Liberty High School named Paulina Kleinberger valedictorian and Jessica Dunnigan salutatorian of the Class of 2011. Several of their accomplishments are listed below along with those of other students in the top 10 of a graduating class of 109 students. All top 10 students had greater than a 94 percent grade point average.



**Paulina
Kleinberger**

Class of 2011 Valedictorian

Paulina Kleinberger was active in clubs, sports and service projects throughout her high school career. She was class vice president and a member of the National Honor Society, high school Leadership Team, Honors Orchestra, and Interact Club, which she co-founded. She was a varsity soccer captain and played on the softball, indoor track and basketball teams. She volunteered for groups such as the Catskill Regional Medical Center, American Youth Soccer Organization and St. Baldrick's Foundation. She also earned numerous awards, including an All-County Orchestra Musicianship Award, Charlie Barbuti Softball Sportsmanship Award and Rochester Institute of Technology Creativity and Innovation Award. She plans to study industrial engineering at RIT next fall. Visit www.libertyk12.org to view a picture from the annual Sullivan County Legislature Valedictorian Recognition Day at which Kleinberger was honored.



**Jessica
Dunnigan**

Class of 2011 Salutatorian

Jessica Dunnigan stood out for her athleticism throughout high school. Most recently, she won the 200-meter run for a second straight year at the girls' Division II New York State Public High School Athletic Association championship (see page 5). She also competed in track and field events, and was a varsity soccer captain. She played in the high school band, Honors Band, Jazz Band and Pep Band. She was a member of the National Honor Society, Student Council, Tri-M Music Honor Society, Interact Club, and the Go Green Committee. She frequently volunteered in the community, helping with events such as Liberty Elementary School Math Night and fundraisers for groups such as the Liberty Rotary Club, Liberty Booster Club and St. Baldrick's Foundation. She had many academic and athletic accomplishments, including winning silver and bronze medals at the Empire State Games, being chosen for All-County Jazz Band and Symphonic Band, and earning a musicianship award all four years. In June, Dunnigan signed a National Letter of Intent to attend Northeastern University, a NCAA Division I private college in Boston, Mass., and compete on its women's track and field team.

#3 Adalberto Ponce served as vice president of the National Honor Society and as a student member of the Building Leadership Team. He was captain of the football team his senior year and also competed in track and field events until his junior year. He plans to attend Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to study biomedical engineering.

#4 Benjamin Grisafe was a member of the National Honor Society, Science Olympiad and the varsity teams for both soccer and baseball. He plans to attend the University of Albany to study nanotechnology.

#5 Conor Siegel attended the Rotary Youth Leadership Award and Conference for three summers, served as a student member on the Liberty Board of Education and participated in groups such as the National Honor Society, Tri-M Music Honor Society, Student Government and Student Council. He played in the band and on the varsity soccer, baseball and track teams. He plans to study international affairs at American University in Washington, D.C.

#6 Sabrina Mastrogiovanni has earned numerous photography awards. She served as a treasurer for the Class of 2011, National Honor Society and Debate Club. She was also a yearbook coordinator and member of the varsity tennis and track and field teams. She plans to study business management at Sullivan County Community College, where she earned a two-year scholarship.

#7 Megahn Burke participated in Honors Orchestra, Tri-M Music Honor Society, Student Council, Student Government,

and National Honor Society. She was class president and captained teams for varsity soccer and varsity basketball. She also volunteered in the community and participated in numerous leadership conferences. She plans to study architecture at Pennsylvania State University.

#8 Paige LaPolt enjoys horseback riding and racing stock cars. She also played on the varsity softball, basketball and volleyball teams. She was a member of the National Honor Society, National Vocational Technical Honor Society, high school Leadership Team and Town of Bethel Youth Board. She has volunteered for a soup kitchen, blood drives and youth programs such as the Boys and Girls Club. She plans on studying equine science and management at SUNY Morrisville.

#9 Jenny Park was a member of the Honors Band, Jazz Ensemble, Pep Band, Pit Band, All-County Band, and Tri-M Music Honor Society. She was also a member of National Honor Society, Interact Club and the Go Green committee. She played varsity tennis for two years as well. Park plans to study communications at Hunter College in Manhattan.

#10 Dillon Cerullo was a member of A Capella Choir, Honors Chorus, Mixed Chorus, Pep Band, Jazz Band, Honors Band, Tri-M Music Honor Society, National Honor Society, and Science Olympiad. He played varsity soccer and tennis. He also volunteered as a soccer referee, in a nursing home and for St. Baldrick's Foundation. He plans to study music at SUNY Fredonia.

Scholarship Winners

Liberty Indian Booster Club Scholarships.....Megahn Burke, Jessica Dunnigan, Paulina Kleinberger, Jonathan Ramirez
 Liberty Lions Club Scholarship.....Megahn Burke, Jonathan Ramirez
 Liberty Masonic Lodge #521 Senior Award....Conor Siegel
 Liberty Rotary Club Scholarship in Memory of Carmela Staropoli Education Award.....Dillon Cerullo, Danielle Strassman
 Liberty Rotary Fosler Award.....Megahn Burke, Jessica Dunnigan, Paulina Kleinberger, Brianna Mir, Conor Siegel
 Lorraine Carrington Memorial Award.....Brittany Clarke
 Louis Soracco Excellence in Chemistry Award.....Adalberto Ponce
 Marjorie Siegel Music Achievement Award...Dillon Cerullo, Danielle Strassman
 New York Blood Center Scholars.....Amber Wallgren
 NYS Comptroller Achievement Award.....Megahn Burke
 NYSCOPBA Statewide Scholarship.....Angelique Ramos
 PBIS Recognition of Seniors.....Blu Bloat, Markie Bloat, Megahn Burke, Brittany Clarke, Jessica Dunnigan, Shannon Froehlich, Ryan Harnish, Amy Hosking, Jaclyn Kimmes, Paige LaPolt, Brianna Mir, Jenny Park, Benjamin Pavlak, Claire Pavlak, Adalberto Ponce, Jonathan Ramirez, Angelique Ramos, William Sheehan, Amber Wallgren, Kristie Wallgren
 Physical Education Department Ron Francisco Memorial Scholarship.....Paulina Kleinberger, Quentin Granum
 Robert Langer Humanitarian Award.....Andrew Cross, Brianna Mir
 Rose & Kiernan, Inc. Scholarship Fund.....Markie Bloat, Dillon Cerullo
 S.A.A.N.Y.S. Region 5 Scholarship.....Danielle Strassman
 Samuel Launer Memorial Scholarship.....Kristin Lynch
 Senior Stellar Student Awards.....Blu Bloat, Brittany Clarke, Jessica Dunnigan, Amy Hosking, Jenny Park, Benjamin Pavlak, Claire Pavlak, Jonathan Ramirez, Angelique Ramos
 Sheryl Kalter Memorial Scholarship.....Brianna Mir
 Sochinski Family Award.....Travis Johnson
 Sullivan County Cares Coalition Award.....Jenny Park
 Sullivan CCC Scholars Award.....Sabrina Mastrogiovanni
 Swan Lake Hose Co. #1 Scholarship.....Hailey Butler
 Swan Lake Hose Co. #1 Ladies' Auxiliary Scholarship.....Frankie Skindzier
 Visual Arts Award..Sharon Benzenberg, Heather Bitjeman, Blu Bloat, Hailey Butler, Jennifer Brannigan, Joseph Cuttita, Amy Hosking, Christine Lazar, Sabrina Mastrogiovanni, Nicole McArthur, Taylor Stoddard
 Worden Family Memorial Scholarship.....Amy Hosking
 Yearbook Award.....Margaret Goble, Brianna Mir

Liberty Works to Sync Up with Area Districts

Bus Pick-up and Drop-off Times to Remain Unchanged

Liberty Central School District is working with other Sullivan County districts on a common school year calendar and the synchronization of bell schedules. The details are not yet final, but any changes should be in place by the start of the school year.

A common calendar and synchronized bell schedules will

allow schools to share resources such as academic courses, transportation and itinerant staff. This will increase academic opportunities while decreasing the costs of those opportunities for individual districts.

The proposed changes will only affect class schedules. Students who are transported to and from school

on district busses will find no change in their bus pick-up and drop-off schedules. School principals will send parents a letter regarding students' class schedules later this summer.

Visit www.libertyk12.org for more updates on this joint venture and other school initiatives throughout the summer.

Thanks and Best Wishes, Retirees!

This year, Liberty schools bid farewell to eight employees who retired. They are listed below, by years of service, along with five retirees from the 2009-10 school year who were not able to be included in last year's summer newsletter. All are due thanks for their dedicated, valuable service.

LINDA ETESS, 39 YEARS

Etes spent nearly four decades as a senior typist/administrative assistant in Liberty. During that time, she held numerous other roles such as district clerk for the last 17 years, director of team 89 for 15 years and records management officer. She has also been an officer of the Sullivan County Secretaries Association and a presenter at many professional conferences.

PATRICIA CADY, 36 YEARS

Cady was an elementary education teacher for 36 years. She was also an English language arts facilitator, peer mentor, literacy coach, Steering Committee member, AIS afterschool instructor, and tutor.

RALPH BRESSLER, 29 YEARS

Bressler taught math, science and computer classes in Liberty for nearly three decades. During that time, he also served as a webmaster, computer lab facilitator, summer school teacher and a coach for cross country and track and field. He taught adult education computer classes and worked on "The Advisor" and "The Comment" newsletters.

JOAN GRECK, 27 YEARS

Greck was a speech and hearing handicapped teacher for nearly three decades. During that time, she was involved in numerous activities such as the Celebrate Success awards and the honors celebrations. She also coordinated and helped run the middle school store. Sadly, she passed away in June.

CARLA JEAN DWORETSKY, 25 YEARS

Dworetsky was an elementary teacher. She also served as director of L.E.A.P., ran Junior Great Books and was the Homework Help supervisor, a grade-level facilitator, an afterschool instructor, a building team leader, and a summer school teacher.

FRANK EDWARDS, 25 YEARS

Edwards was originally a substitute member of the support staff, but he spent the last 25 years as a full-time cleaner.

GLENN SPIELMANN, 25 YEARS

Spielmann was a teacher and an administrator. He participated in curriculum development, AIS and summer school registration. He also

served as an instructional facilitator and peer mentor.

MARILYN ATKINS, 24 YEARS

Atkins held numerous support service roles during her time in Liberty. Those roles included being a school aide/monitor, a food service helper and finally a cashier in the elementary school cafeteria.

CYNTHIA TEGNANDER, 21 YEARS

Tegnander was a French teacher for more than two decades. She was also an AIS instructor, teacher facilitator, Foreign Language Department chair, afterschool program director, peer mentor, steering committee member, crisis team member, and boys soccer coach.

ELAINE EDWARDS, 20 YEARS

Edwards began working in Liberty as a food service helper, but she spent the next two decades as a teacher aide.

ROLANDO PABON, 17 YEARS

Pabon became a full-time cleaner in 1999 after spending almost five years as a part-time cleaner.

KATHIE ABERMAN, 12 YEARS

Aberman taught in Baltimore, MD, before becoming an English teacher in Liberty. Over the years, she assisted with the literacy part of "Allusions" and district newsletters.

Art Department Bird Houses Raise \$1,000 for Scholarships

Bird houses have become masterpieces thanks to a Liberty High School Art Department project that raised more than \$1,000 for student scholarships. This spring, students in studio art, advanced drawing and painting, and sculpture classes crafted and sold 60 bird houses inspired by famous artists.

For the project, participating students each selected an individual artist to emulate.

Inspiration came from a variety of art movements, including expressionism (e.g., Vincent Van Gogh, Alexander Calder), impressionism (e.g., Claude Monet), surrealism (Salvador Dali), and pop art (e.g., Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist). Students modified bird houses to accommodate certain birds' needs and then tried to replicate their chosen artists' masterpieces on the walls and roofs.

The project sounded simple at first, but it became very labor and time intensive, according to teacher and department chair Kathy Lambert. "Salvador Dali blew them out of the water because he's so detail-oriented. Still, at least six students picked him and did beautifully," she said.

Students had to tackle a variety of challenges on their way to beautiful, finished products. One of the first was to learn how to mix the same colors and use the same techniques as their chosen artists. They also had to figure out how to apply paint to the irregular surface and shape of a bird house, and how to maintain the proportions of a large painting on a small bird house.



Art for the Birds: Student-teacher Elizabeth Rosenkranz is pictured holding two birdhouses created for a high school Art Department fundraiser.

"I don't think any other project was more confidence-building or more applicable to what students can do with paint outside of the classroom," said Lambert. "They applied lessons from throughout the year in this piece. They saw how to find work that they like and apply it in their own lives."

The bird houses were the latest in a series of art fundraisers that support student scholarships. This year, 11 students received \$150 scholarships from a combination of bird house money and funds left over from last year's rain barrel sale. Recipients were chosen

from among those who took classes in the arts program, whether or not they planned to study art in college.

More fundraisers are planned for the future, so keep an eye out for the unique bird houses, chairs and rain barrels produced by Liberty students.

Spring Student-Athletes Shine Bright

Sports teams and student athletes at Liberty High School had a great season this spring. Below are some of their accomplishments. Visit www.libertyk12.org/Athletics/athletics.cfm for more updates on Liberty sports.

Standouts in Class...

Eight out of the top 10 graduating seniors are student-athletes (see pages 2-3). Among them, Adalberto Ponce and Paulina Kleinberger were also named this year's high school Male and Female Scholar-Athletes.

The following varsity teams each received a Scholar/Athlete

Team Award from the New York State Public High School Athletic Association. To earn the award, a certain number of athletes on each team must average 90 or better in the classroom during a season.

Golf	Boys Indoor Track
Girls Indoor Track	Boys Soccer
Girls Soccer	Softball
Boys Tennis	Girls Tennis
Boys Track/Field	Girls Track/Field

... and on the Track

Congratulations to relay team members Nikole Snyder, Lara Heslop, Rebeccah Harman and



Jessica Dunnigan on being Section IX champions and earning a spot in the state championship this year. Dunnigan also qualified for states in the 100 meter (pictured above), 200 meter and long jump events. She was the state champion in the 200-meter dash for the second year in a row.



The new elementary art room

Capital Project Ends, District Preps for Future

Work is now complete on a capital project proposed in 2007 to enhance facilities in Liberty Central School District. With voters' recent approval of a capital reserve fund, the district will be able to set aside surplus funds to address facilities issues not included in the most recent project.

At the close of this school year, the new library media center and music and art rooms (pictured above) were all in use at Liberty Elementary School. Those finished spaces brought to a close what Superintendent Michael Vanyo considers "phase 1" of an ongoing facilities improvement plan.

"With our original project, we had to delay some improvements. That work should still be done, but given our struggling economy, it may be prudent to wait a while longer," said Vanyo.

The capital reserve fund will take time, building up gradually over 10 years by using excess revenues or unspent appropriations left over at the end of each school year. It can be used to save up to \$5 million for future building projects. It was created in part due to uncertainty about the future of state building aid.

"This new fund puts us in a good place financially to prepare for our future," said Vanyo.

Adirondack Adventure

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

need. You don't need all that other stuff, like cell phones."

Their overnight field trip wasn't just educational; it was also a celebration of hard work. Each year, students in PBL classes raise money through projects such as collecting recyclables; building and selling picnic tables, storage sheds and furniture; selling worm compost; and running a snack cart at school. Those

fundraisers pay for exciting activities, but also enhance classroom lessons according to Paddock.

"We used the Pythagorean Theorem to figure out how long to make the angled legs of a picnic table," he offered as an example. "We want them to say, 'Look at how cool this is,' and use it."

Paddock, Kotarski and Garry spent two days – and nights – exploring Ndashkinna with students, but students will likely hold onto the memories for a lifetime.

LES Celebrates Healthy Choices

In June, little gardeners at Liberty Elementary School enjoyed the results of their hard work at an end-of-year picnic. Students grew foods such as snap peas, spinach, lettuce and parsley as part of a school-wide initiative to help children learn the importance of eating healthy.

The gardening project ended outdoors, but began inside classrooms, where it could be used to enhance lessons in math, science and even English language arts. Most of the supplies were donated, including planter boxes by Principal Jeri Finnegan and soil by Delaware Valley

Agway in Callicoon. The project also showed students how to grow indoor gardens at home in simple things like milk containers.

"The kids loved it. They were so excited to see the plants grow," said kindergarten teacher Kristine Kratz, who serves on the building-level team (BLT) behind the healthy eating initiative. "We're trying to get kids to see where food comes from; it's not just from the grocery store."

The BLT and the positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) team worked all year to promote a variety of healthy choices. For example, BLT posted a food pyramid and did fun weekly quizzes in the school cafeteria. Members also met with the head chef to discuss healthy alternatives to processed foods, which are

typically less expensive. For PBIS, promoting healthy choices meant replacing its pizza party rewards with physical activities, including extra recess periods and dancing in the park.

Healthy choices took center stage at

the end-of-year picnic, too. Students were offered sweet potatoes instead of pasta and chicken instead of hamburgers. This year's harvest was low because of some uncooperative weather, but students were still able to enjoy parsley biscuits and a salad that included some of their vegetables.

"It was a chance for them to eat and reflect on making healthy choices," said Kratz.



A classroom window garden

Seniors Honored by Sen. Bonacic at Excellence in Education Day

New York State Sen. John J. Bonacic honored three Liberty High School seniors at the 12th Annual Celebrating Excellence in Education Day at the State Capitol in June. Valedictorian Paulina Kleinberger, salutatorian Jessica Dunnigan and Conor Siegel were joined by other top students from the 42nd senate district.

"I was glad that Senator Bonacic brought this day back for the students in his district," said Principal Jack Strassman. "It really is a wonderful opportunity for our students to realize that their achievements are important not just to them and our community, but to our state law-makers as well."

Strassman, Superintendent Michael Vanyo and students' family members joined the seniors for a full day of events. Sen. Bonacic opened the day with some welcoming remarks. He



Capitol Honors: School administrators and family members are pictured with the three seniors who were honored by Sen. John J. Bonacic (back row, far right).

was followed by speakers such as Kenneth Adams, president and C.E.O. of the Empire State Development Corporation, and Jonathan Lippman, chief judge of the state.

The group then made their way to the Senate Gallery, where a resolution honoring the top students was read aloud and adopted during the legislative session.

Houses for Hope

Moved by the terrible earthquake and tsunami in Japan, Liberty third- and fourth-graders raised \$1,384 by creating "tiny houses," colorful and creative pins that they sold for \$5 each. The concept came from art teacher Tracie Euker, who led the project.

"Little houses give big hope. This project helped the kids realize that even a little effort can make a big difference," said Euker.



Seven Inducted on Liberty Wall of Fame to Start Tradition

On June 25, Liberty Central School District honored the seven inaugural members of the Liberty Wall of Fame with a breakfast reception and unveiling ceremony.

Inductees were recognized again during the graduation ceremony later that day. Nomination forms for 2012 are now available.

The Wall of Fame was established to honor outstanding alumni, employees and community members who have made a lasting contribution to society, the district and the Liberty community.

This year's inductees included Dr. Irvin Borish (class of 1930), James Burke (past faculty), Alan Gerry (community member), Howard K. Schue (class of 1959), Sister Patricia

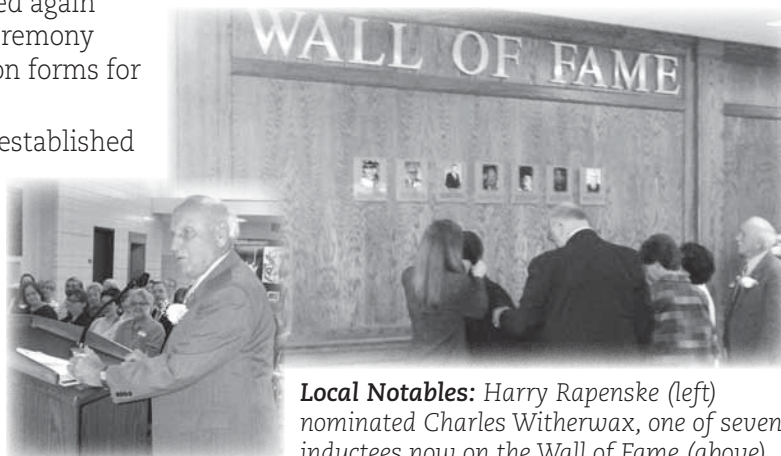
Ann Startup (class of 1965), Lawrence Stier (class of 1945), and Charles "Woody" Witherwax (past faculty).

After breakfast in the Liberty High School Media

Center, inductees and representatives for those unable to attend joined family and friends for the Wall of Fame unveiling in the lobby of the David E. Panebaker Auditorium.

"I am the person I am today because of Liberty," said inductee Howard Schue. "It gave me the foundation for all that I have accomplished in my life, and for that I am extremely grateful."

More information and nomination forms for 2012 can be obtained at www.libertyk12.org or (845) 292-5400, x2055.



Local Notables: Harry Rapenske (left) nominated Charles Witherwax, one of seven inductees now on the Wall of Fame (above).

LIBERTY

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
115 Buckley Street
Liberty, NY 12754

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Middle-schoolers have an Adirondack Adventure

The sounds of teenage laughter and splashing water drifted through the trees at Ndakinna Education Center this June. In a creek bed barely deep enough to cover their knees, several students from Liberty Middle School took a well-earned break. Their afternoon dip marked the half-way point of a two-day educational adventure for seventh- and eighth-graders who took classes through the project-based learning (PBL) program this year.

The middle school's two PBL classes offer a positive alternative for students who struggle in the traditional classroom setting. Teachers Brad Paddock and Kae Kotarski cover core subject areas such as English language arts, social studies and science, but they do so with a focus on hands-on learning opportunities, behavior management and social skills development. They spend almost every period with the same group of students, including lunchtime.

For students who might be considered at-risk or in need of special education services, the PBL format teaches positive, appropriate ways to manage conflicts, solve problems and overcome challenges.

"We put tools in their toolbox so when they confront challenges, they've got strategies that work," said Paddock, who worked with guidance counselor Diane Garry in the initial development of the PBL program.

The PBL class trip to Ndakinna, just outside of Saratoga

Springs, gave students a chance to put some of their problem-solving strategies to work. While there, they learned about regional Native Americans, Adirondack culture, wilderness skills and the natural world. Some of their activities included building a fire

and a shelter with sticks, putting up tents, navigating by the sun, determining which wild plants are edible, and learning Native American songs and stories.

Student Sabrina Keitt said, "I liked learning how to tell time with your hands."

Rayna Bryant enjoyed listening to campfire stories on her first ever camping trip. "I think I like this better than reading it in books. When I see it, I remember it better," she said.

"This is living it," agreed classmate Brianna Jackson, who liked learning about basic necessities such as food, water and shelter. "You learn about the stuff you really



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