



The Wigwam

Southern Local School District Newsletter

Spring 2021

Southern Looks Back on Challenging Year

Southern Local High School seniors savored some final moments together before turning the page to a new chapter in their lives, but they also looked back on what they overcame amid the tumultuous times of COVID.

Fifty-two graduates would go on to collect their diplomas and turn the tassels on their mortarboards on May 28. For them, it was the culmination of their hard work to reclaim a bit of normalcy after the coronavirus pandemic led to remote learning, mask wearing and social distancing in 2020. They and school officials said working together enabled school to remain operational at a time when many remained shuttered and online. As students gathered for one of their final events—a senior assembly in the high school gym earlier that week—several looked back fondly on what they managed to achieve.

“The bond that we created,” said Mackenzey Infanti, when asked what stood out for her this year. “We got a lot closer.”

What will she miss the most?

“Them,” she replied, noting her fellow classmates. “Hanging out in Mr. I’s [teacher and father Ron Infanti’s] room.”

Senior Conner Lewis said he would miss seeing people in the school hallways and talking to them each day. Lewis was most impressed with how the school district handled the COVID situation and the janitors maintaining the building so education could resume.

Senior Bradley Sloan said watching his class come through the adversity amid COVID and be able to hold events from sports to senior trips, unlike last year.

“That makes it all the sweeter and all the more unforgettable,” he commented. “And I’ll miss the routine of coming here every day and seeing all my friends and classrooms and not having that constant in my life. Being in a small town, you are more connected to them.”

SLHS Principal Jay Kiger highlighted the impact of COVID on keeping kids apart during an important time in their



Southern Local’s latest alumni said “hat’s off” to successfully navigating the challenging school year as 52 seniors graduated on May 28. Students and officials looked back on the obstacles they faced and the hope ahead for a brighter future. (Photo/Jimmy Jo Savage)

lives.

“For me, it became an issue of how much more are we going to take off the kids. They understood the pandemic and knew what was going on, and not one time did I hear a complaint about masks from the kids and staff. The staff also needs a lot of credit for online teaching. It’s not our forte but we took what resources we had and we made the best of it. Everybody knew and understood we were on the same boat and we all got through it.”

Kiger continued that when the senior class asked to hold prom, officials were onboard, albeit with an altered format. Constant contact with the Columbiana County Health Department and awareness of CDC guidelines would dictate what could and couldn’t be done, but the class was able to hold a dance in the school gym and build some positive memories. Another plus was that the 2021 commencement exercise would be open, unlike the virtual

graduation last year.

“I think the kids got a little bit of normalcy in their senior year,” Kiger said.

He also credited athletic director and senior class advisor Bob Shansky for helping maneuver students through the frequent rescheduling of games and support of seniors to help make special events in their final year happen. Kiger further noted school nurse Heidi McIntosh for her work to ensure kids—and everyone else—remained healthy.

“All things considered, I think we came out of this relatively unscathed. It all has to play out over the next few years academically, but we learned some lessons from it and implemented the Indian Academy online school option and Edgenuity and moving the sixth grade to the junior high will also help with education.” I want to get back to normal and get back to five

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Creative Mind: Westover is a Model of Ingenuity

Southern Local High School junior Bobby Westover is a consummate creator.

Westover, the son of Robert and Tammy Westover of Highlandtown, spends hours constructing miniature aircraft, tanks and other vehicles and operates with the patience of Job. Should a test flight fail, he simply goes back to the drawing board to perfect his design. That level of skill and ingenuity has amazed school teachers and administrators alike, and they all say there is nowhere for him to go but up.

Ask him why he does it, and he will simply say because he can. His interest came in his youth when he opted to forego conventional directions and respectively turned his Legos and K'Nex sets into large semi-trucks with trailers or massive towers. His father's scrap business has also provided him with a plethora of pieces to construct, but he has spent a majority of his time working on a self-built Computer-Aided Design (CAD) system and a 3-D printer at school to form planes and other moveable objects.

"I never liked to go by instructions," he said. "Being in a junkyard, you build your mechanically inclined side. I build parts in CAD, which takes longer than making parts by hand. You can do anything with the stuff at school."

His projects began about six months ago when he noticed a bevy of materials stored in one of the classrooms and decided to make them useful.

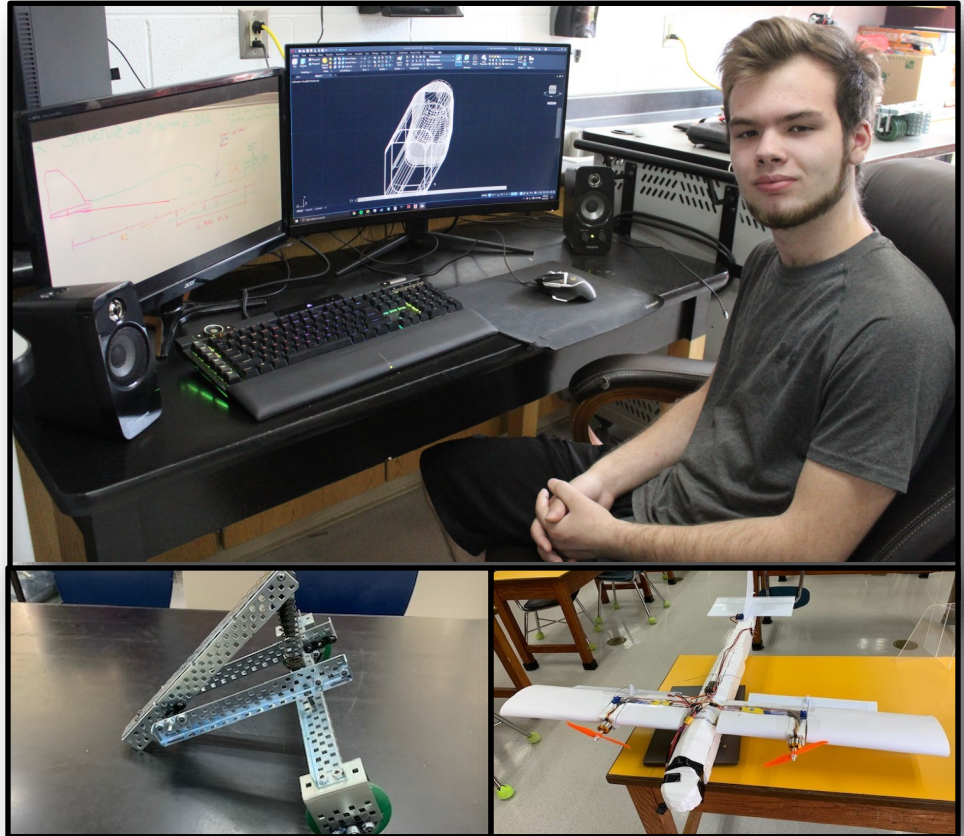
"I came in to [teacher Todd Walters'] classroom one day to look for parts and saw things on the shelf. I saw there was nothing I couldn't do and I built track vehicles," Westover said, adding that he constructed a 4-Horsepower drag car. "I wanted to do a massive vehicle but needed more parts, so I started to do planes."

He has been learning on his own about aerodynamics and built four iterations of planes from Mark 1 to Mark 4, three of which were unsuccessful. However, his fourth attempt went airborne at 615 feet and he recently finished a six-foot-long, dual-engine Mark 5 aircraft boasting 12 HP of action. In addition, he completed a tank featuring a 6-HP engine which he counts as his favorite creation.

"I had never built or flown a plane before and had to learn in the 10 seconds I had it in the air, but now I have a simulator," he remarked.

Building computers also comes naturally since he assists district Technology Director Josh Manist in putting equipment together for school use. He recalled assembling 10 computers in one night over Christmas break and spends most of his free periods aiding Manist as a technology intern. Westover is often seen in classrooms working on projects, but he also uses his skills to Robotics Club members with their projects.

Although he yields a 2.9 grade point aver-



Southern Local High School junior Bobby Westover is a modern marvel when it comes to creating designs. He is self-taught and built small tanks and aircraft using a computer-aided drafting system he established himself and officials hope to see his talents soar.

age, he doesn't base his intellect on the numbers but rather his skills. Westover is interested in engineering but has no set college plans at this time.

"No one does this, so you feel special," he said. "I've accomplished something. To me, it means a lot. To see a plane go into the sky after working on it, it's a great feeling, and I can't thank the teachers enough."

His teachers and school leaders are amazed by his talent, saying he is nothing short of a brilliant mind.

"He is self-motivated and self-paced and thinks outside the box," said Walters. "The kid is not afraid of a challenge and he's not afraid of failure. Failure is not failure; failure is a learning option. When he crashed a plane, he went back to the drawing board. He is a true craftsman."

Walters said the teachers simply facilitate Westover and he works on his own, likening the teen's innovations to college-level Capstone projects.

"Someone like him, you don't put a leash on. You let him go. I want to see what he can do. I want him to take it to the maximum limit."

"Bobby is a good kid with a brilliant mind. He is hyper-focused on projects that interest him," added teacher Justin Krulik. "He has an out-of-the-box mentality that

allows him to set goals that are highly spirited. I gave Bobby a workplace in my room that allows for his creativity and hands on logistics, from design to finished product."

SLHS Principal Jay Kiger is awed by Westover and said he's found his purpose in life.

"Bobby has helped Josh with technology, and it was pretty apparent early on that this kid was gifted. He's taught himself on CAD, which is not easy, and he's really gifted when it comes to mechanical applications. Our job now is to find a college that will take advantage of his skill set," Kiger added. "The sky's the limit for him. When he puts his mind to something, you can guarantee he will get it done."

Superintendent Thomas Cunningham also praised the young man's skills.

"Bobby is a high-energy, hands-on student. His brain and thought processes work like that of an engineer. He is always thinking of how something works and how to make it better," said Cunningham. "He does not enjoy sitting in lectures, but wants to be actively engaged and learning through projects. Bobby has worked with our technology director and this summer was very involved with our virtual implementation and connectivity for students. He has the potential to do great things."

District Showcase Event Makes a Comeback

Southern Local Schools' annual District Showcase returned on May 20 following a COVID-related hiatus.

This year's event was conducted outdoors with a smaller crowd in attendance, but officials cited safety restrictions and hot weather as the cause. Still, a great time was had by all and officials and participants alike were glad to see it return.

Organizer Laura Krulik, district director of special education, said other changes included the fact that the venue was held later than the usual mid-March calendar date. Despite the alterations, she was happy to see the turnout.

"It was great having an in-person event again," Krulik said. "Everything was outside and it was in May instead of March, and all of the reactions were good."

The showcase was formed in 2007 and has attracted hundreds of students, their families and community members to view displays, informational booths and school performances and art shows. COVID put the activity on the backburner in 2020 but organizers wanted to offer something as a sign of normalcy.

An estimated 35 stations were on hand and included community agencies, school clubs and other organizations. Among them were Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, Columbiana County Department of Job and Family Services, county Emergency Management Agency, Community Action Agency Head Start, Blue Sky Employment, Family Recovery Center, Mercy Health Dental Van, Red Zone, Family Children First Council, Columbiana County Mental Health and Rehabilitation Services, Southern Local Future Farmers of America and the Utica Shale Academy. Student work samples were also on display to showcase what pupils have completed over the past school year and the football boosters held their spaghetti dinner benefit while a basket raffle raised funds for a good cause.

"We made almost \$900 on our basket raffle



Parents and students perused the annual Southern Local District Showcase, which made a return on May 20. Food, displays and other offerings were on hand at the outdoor event and pictured at the FFA petting zoo are members Marissa Stewart and Emily Walker as elementary student Sophia Pierson enjoyed the animals. (Photo/MARJORIE HILLER)

and we typically make around \$1,000, so if that's a good indication, we did well," she said.

Southern Local Elementary sixth-grader Kiah Sloan was happy to see the showcase return after the challenging school year.

"It's good. All the kids got to design stuff to show," she added.

Southern Local Jr. High eighth-grader Emma Prendergast agreed.

"It feels good to have everything open

again," Prendergast commented.

School leaders echoed those sentiments.

"It's nice to get back to normal," said SLES Principal Rich Wright.

Superintendent Tom Cunningham was also thrilled to see it come to fruition.

"Overall, I was very, very happy with the turnout and the presentations from the students and look forward to holding it again next year when we can highlight everything going on in the classrooms."

Summer Programs Now Available at SLSD

The Southern Local School District is planning activities to keep students on track after school lets out for summer.

Southern Local Elementary School is bringing back the Kids Summer Program three days a week for grades PreK-5. Activities will be held on June 15-17, June 22-24 and June 28-July 1 from 9 a.m. to noon and SLES Assistant Principal Emily Brinker said it will incorporate literacy, math, science and social studies.

"We have done this in the past, but not for a few years," she said. "We usually see at least 25-30 students and they will be exploring all subject areas. The purpose of summer camp is to provide students with further instruction throughout summer."

She added that district teaching staff and administrators will be involved with the activities and all school COVID-related protocols will be followed. In addition, students will be provided with transportation, breakfast and a snack.

Meanwhile, Southern Local High School will hold summer school

to help pupils in grades 6-11 maintain their course toward graduation. Assistant Principal Adam Loudin said activities will run from June 9-July 2 and registration forms would be found on the district website.

Students would attend on Wednesday to Friday the first week and on Monday to Thursday for the duration of the program with the time set from 7:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

"It is mostly for credit recovery but we will also offer test remediation," he continued.

Loudin said the summer school will utilize Edgenuity, an Arizona-based online program to help youth catch up on their education, plus it will also be part of the Indian Academy permanent online school option being unveiled this fall.

For more information about the summer programs, contact SLES at (330) 679-2344, Ext. 4017 or 4018, or go to the district website at <https://southern.k12.oh.us>.

Indian Academy Offers Online Option

Enrollment Slated for Educational Program

The Southern Local School District will implement the Indian Academy program as a permanent online school option for students.

The program, which will be introduced during summer school in June, officially kicks off this fall. Southern Local High School Associate Principal Adam Loudin said the district contracted with Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Edgenuity, which offers K-12 learning solutions and partners with schools and districts throughout the country. The program will assist with credit recovery and test remediation during summer school and will provide engaging curriculum for students when classes resume.

"We are starting Indian Academy as a permanent online option for anyone who wants to enroll," he said. "We did a survey and about 10 percent of district parents said they wanted to keep their kids home. We explored a lot of options and [Southern Local Elementary School Principal Rich Wright, SLES Associate Principal Emily Brinker, SLHS Principal Jay Kiger] and I presented this in March. We basically outlined what we wanted to do and I think we have a very solid plan.

"We will start using Edgenuity at summer school and Indian Academy will be ready to go live on Aug. 24. Kids can still participate in extracurricular activities if they enroll."

He said officials were now working to promote the program and get students registered, and letters were sent home with families detailing how students have the online learning option. The change also means the current Virtual Fridays will cease but the Indian Academy curriculum is user friendly with video lectures and resources embedded within the program.

Students receive daily monitoring in a self-paced learning environment, have

weekly progress checks, gain access to Southern Local counselors and administrators for support and receive a school-issued device. They may still participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, band, choir, school events and College Credit Plus courses, although the latter are solely online. Students are also eligible to receive school meals but distribution is still being determined. Core courses are available including English/Language Arts, math, science and social studies, while Indian Academy will also have test prep courses for kids in and out of the academy with a subscription, plus some career tech options and life skills courses.

"We plan on introducing a curriculum to sixth-graders as a life skills class when they transition to the high school," Loudin noted, adding that the junior high will also have a vaping education program imbedded within that course.

He said the Indian Academy was a win-win for everyone.

"This is one of the areas where COVID sped things up," he said. "I think it benefits everybody—it benefits the community, it benefits students and it benefits the school. The partnership with Edgenuity gives us a curriculum where students stay more engaged."

Brinker added that it also was a plus for elementary students.

"Just having the online piece is great. We still have 5-to-10-percent of our student population online and being able to offer it gives parents flexibility," Brinker said. "It's also geared toward grades K-5 and will include all four core subject areas and two extracurricular subjects. We'll have an online facilitator to help keep kids up to date."

For more information, contact the district office at (330) 679-2305.

Sixth-graders

Moving to SLJHS

Sixth-graders are making the move to Southern Local Jr./Sr. High School this fall and officials are getting ready for the transition.

About 60 current fifth-graders will advance to the junior high as the Utica Shale Academy finds a new home at the Kenneth Hutson Building in Salineville. Officials began discussing the plan this year and said it will free up extra space in the school and also help the elementary focus on educating the younger students.

"The sixth-graders need to be in the middle school," said SLHS Principal Jay Kiger added. "It will be grades 6, 7 and 8 and we will treat it like a true middle school. What makes it possible is Utica Shale Academy is going downtown and we'll only need two or three classrooms as of now. It also frees up staff and space to work with the elementary. It's more of an academic initiative than it is a space issue."

Southern Local Elementary Principal Rich Wright said an additional 68 current sixth-graders also will move on to seventh-grade next year.

"Having the Utica Shale Academy move downtown gave us the space we needed. It also gives us more options than we have here and more academic choices. It's an adjustment but it will be an advantage for the district down the road. It frees up more room and we've added a teacher for grades K-3 and it makes sense for [sixth-grade] to be in the middle school."

Superintendent Tom Cunningham noted that elementary students would be able to receive more individualized attention and foster a strong foundation in early literacy programming while there will be expanded academic services for sixth-graders. The latter will have a dedicated science and math teacher and can participate in activities such as robotics and band.

YEAR

(Continued from Front)

days a week and do things we've always done."

Shansky said Southern Local and schools like it were among the few to remain open at a time when many remained shuttered.

"It was very trying, but it wasn't just us; it was every school in the country. Athletically, we were constantly making changes and the [East Ohio Athletic Conference] agreed and everyone was willing to move things, so it worked out, and athletic directors were sympathetic. Every school handled COVID in a different way. We were

fortunate at Southern Local to remain open. Kids need this. They need camaraderie and hands-on education," Shansky continued. "People really tried to work together and we were doing everything for the kids."

Southern Local Superintendent Tom Cunningham agreed that while it was a challenging time, the school and community pulled together to make it work.

"It was trying for everyone—the teachers, parents and students—but I think we learned a lot from it and took positives

from it, whether it was the way we teach virtually or whether it's doing more hands-on projects to engage the students. We need to look at things down the road educationally and with the social-emotional piece. I think we always knew how important schools are to communities, but I think it was magnified with the feeding program. We take care of the whole child and not just their educational needs. "

He also thanked the staff and parents for making it successful in a non-traditional way.



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**Have a
Fantastic
Summer!**

