



Capital Education

Winter 2024

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Albany High robotics: 20 years and growing

On a recent February afternoon, small groups of Albany High School students clustered around a worktable loaded with wires, boards, tubing and other mysterious objects.

Others hunched over laptops. Still others used nearby high-tech milling machines, routers and 3-D printers to create parts and pieces.

They are all members of Albany High Robotics Team 1493, and they were smack in the middle of building a robot they hope will be best-in-show at a regional tournament in March.

Team 1493 celebrates its 20th birthday this year. With equipment like laser cutters, computer-controlled mills

and other fancy gizmos, they are light years away from their humble beginnings.

"It's a very big deal," Team 1493 President Cole Solomon said. "We've worked hard. We have 20 years of experience. A lot of people have gone into making this happen, and it's good to celebrate it."

In 2004, Rich Kissane was an Albany High technology teacher tasked with starting a team that could compete in a FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics contest. With help from RPI students and Albany High families, he gathered the money and materials to make it happen.

In the early years, the team traveled to RPI for work and

practice because the high school lacked space. With support from the school district and community partners like RPI and National Grid, the team continued to grow and thrive.

Team 1493 has competed in FIRST events every year for the past two decades (except two years of in-person competition lost to the pandemic). The team boasts an annual roster of about 40 kids, five faculty advisers and numerous longtime volunteers.

They are working out of Abrookin Career and Technical Center this year; in 2025 they will move back to the main Albany High campus into a spacious new technology lab currently under construction.

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STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Badia Syed: valedictorian of Albany High's Class of 2024

Albany High School senior Badia Syed says she's "a little nitpicky."

It's a trait that's not only served her well, but those around her, too.

Syed will graduate first in her class in June with a nearly perfect average of 99.78. She has been an outstanding student throughout her academic journey, first at Pine Hills Elementary School, then Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School, and now at Albany High.

Both her parents were born in Pakistan and met after moving to the United States. Her mom emigrated in the 1990s and learned to speak English as a middle school student in Niskayuna. Her dad, a college professor in Pakistan, learned it in the jobs he took when he moved to America as an adult.

The tech-savvy Syed learned to be a navigator, and, when necessary, a translator for her parents when dealing with a purchase at Best Buy or the day-to-day running of the family sub shop where she occasionally works.

It's not just her family that benefits from Syed's help.

Technology teacher Kevin Allen has had Syed as a student since ninth grade and has seen her assist other students as she pursues a given subject.

"Throughout the years, I've observed her collaborate with classmates numerous times, offering explanations on various topics to aid others in grasping the concepts we're studying," Allen said.

"She not only dedicates herself to her own academic success but also frequently lends a helping hand to guide her peers toward a deeper comprehension of the material."

Indeed, Syed said her years at Albany High have broadened her education in and outside the classroom.

"It's a very diverse school and we have a lot of options for classes," she said.

"I've also met a lot of people who come from everywhere, and I've learned from people who have different lives than I do."

(Continued on page 6)



FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

The importance of good systems

For obvious and extremely good reasons, much of the attention on the function of a school district typically focuses on academics and areas that provide direct support to students.

This is as it should be. Regularly evaluating the mechanisms of teaching and learning to be sure they are meeting the needs of all students is fundamental to our work.

It has been clear during my first year that, while we know there is always room to do better, the City School District of Albany has a well-established process in place to ensure an ongoing cycle of research- and standards-based review and continuous improvement on the academic side of our organization.

Having those systems solidly in place is providing an opportunity to take a similar look at key functions on the operational side – human resources, maintenance and communications.

The behind-the-scenes roles that our employees in these areas fulfill are critical to student success. Yet, they often are overlooked as we focus on what's happening in our classrooms.

Leaders in these key areas are working with partners this school year to evaluate their systems, staffing and strategic goals. These independent audits will help us understand if we are doing the right work, in the right ways, with the right staffing levels to support our academic goals.

We already know what one finding will be in each area – that we have talented, dedicated employees at all levels who care deeply about the success of our students. This is not in question.

We also know that some of the challenges we face in our operations are the same as our challenges on the academic side – and the same that I'm sure many of you face in your own workplace.

Hiring and retention.

The labor force changed significantly during the pandemic. The ability of employers in nearly every industry to restore their workforce to pre-pandemic strength remains a challenge.

We have nearly 1,800 employees, and our Human Resources Division has hired them all – among many other functions related to the needs and responsibilities of one of the region's largest workforces.

Our HR audit is examining whether that office has enough staff in proportion to the size our district, and whether the right number of staff are assigned to each function.



This audit also will help us broaden our recruitment efforts – not just to find more employees, but to attract and retain a more diverse group of employees, especially in our teaching workforce. Diversifying our teaching staff is a priority, and we believe this audit will help us move more purposefully toward that goal.

Our Maintenance and Operations Department keeps track of 879 classrooms, 2.1 million square feet of space in 21 buildings, 6.5 miles of sidewalks, 121 acres of lawns, playgrounds, athletic fields and parking lots.

The audit in this area is evaluating facilities management and staffing needs. While we have struggled to maintain full staffing in this area since the pandemic, we also are eager for feedback on how we deploy our staff.

Effective two-way communication – listening as well as providing timely, relevant information and answers – is a foundational element of strong relationships that support student success.

Our Communications Department employs a broad range of tools, tactics and outreach efforts to help us meet these goals. This audit will gather important feedback about perceptions of our district overall, and help ensure that communication efforts throughout the organization are even more effective moving forward.

In sum, these audits are efforts to evaluate vital areas that help form the backbone of our district, and to identify ways in which we can better support the dedicated people doing this important work.

Sincerely,

Joseph Hochreiter
Superintendent

VOICES

Q: Who or what motivates you to do your best?



“ I am motivated by the Scholars (after-school program), especially when I can express my thoughts in writing. My family also motivates me to be a good student. They are always willing to help me with my schoolwork. This builds my confidence. ”

— **Mohammad Nore**

Giffen Memorial Elementary School
Fifth Grade



“ People who motivate me are my mom and dad. They are always trying to get me to do my best, and they always help me try to be successful in school, in sports or at home. Other people who motivate me are my sports coaches. They always push me to my limits, or beyond my limits. ”

— **Molly Kraus**

Stephen and Harriet
Myers Middle School
Sixth Grade



“ My friends motivate me to do my best because they cheer me on in games or when I'm feeling down. Isla motivates me by cheering me on in games at the JCC. Le'Ciana encourages me to try new things. Riley W. motivates me with kind words to help me. My friends motivate me by helping me with things I need to work on. ”

— **Jordan Jones**

Montessori Magnet School
Fourth Grade



“ My best friend inspires me to always do my very best. He always encourages me to never give up and give everything my all. When I grow up, I really want to have a really long and successful career. ”

— **Sayed Haque**

Eagle Point Elementary School
Fifth Grade



“ My motivation stems from the belief that diligent efforts and a quality education will ultimately yield success. The driving force behind my hard work is the aspiration to provide for and support those I hold dear. I am fueled by the hope that my dedication will create a better future for both myself and those close to me. ”

— **Wamedh Othman**

Albany High School
Senior



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Marching Falcons returning to France

The Albany Marching Falcons continue to plan and prepare for their highly anticipated trip to France in June.

Under the direction of marching band director Bryan Cady, the Marching Falcons are scheduled to be one of only two bands – and the only one from America – to perform on Omaha Beach in Normandy this June 6.

The performance will be part of France's events marking the 80th anniversary of the historic battle that changed the course of World War II in Europe. The trip also will include several concerts in Paris and Normandy, as well as the parade that will follow the course of Omaha Beach between the villages of Vierville-sur-Mer and Saint Laurent-sur-Mer, two of the first towns liberated on June 6, 1944.

The Marching Falcons also participated in the 75th anniversary D-Day events in 2019 (they were scheduled to perform for the 80th anniversary of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 2021, but that trip was canceled due to the pandemic).

In addition to several local performances annually, the district's marching band also has performed at St. Patrick's Day parades in Dublin, Ireland and New York City, and at the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C.

Visit ddayband.com for a wealth of information about the trip to France and ways to support it, including tax-deductible donations through the Albany Fund for Education.

Stay tuned for updates!

New opportunities for Falcon athletes

For the second time this school year, the list of athletic opportunities for female student-athletes at Albany High School has expanded!

Girls' flag football will be the newest addition to our spring sports lineup this year. Along with girls' wrestling – which debuted in the recently concluded winter season – this marks another historic first for our student-athletes and our athletic program.

City School District of Albany officials joined administrators from throughout the Capital Region on Feb. 7 to outline local implementation for girls on the gridiron.

"We are incredibly proud to offer this significant opportunity to our student-athletes," said Assistant Superintendent For Curriculum, Instruction and Professional Development Karen Bechdol.

"The addition of girls' wrestling this

winter, and now girls' flag football this spring, means more Falcons are able to participate in a sport, represent their school community and be part of a team."

The inaugural flag football season will include 10 games starting April 10, and will be topped off with a sectional championship in late May followed by the first-ever state flag football championship game in Cortland.

While *Capital Education* went to press before the spring season began, the girls' wrestling team (pictured at right) had a successful first season and we look forward to continuing to grow both programs.

"It's really exciting," said Harriet Westin, a sophomore who has been a Falcon wrestler since seventh grade. "It's nice because we are all friends. We practice together and there is more bonding."



Mail-in voting now available to all

Albany voters will have a new and convenient option for casting their ballots in this spring's school budget vote and Board of Education election – early voting by mail.

Early voting by mail will work much the same way that absentee voting traditionally has. The main change for this year is that the vote-by-mail option now is available to everyone.

The City School District of Albany will continue to automatically send absentee ballots to people the Albany County Board of Elections designates as having a permanent disability or are in the military.

However, everyone else also can vote by mail now, too.

Applications for a vote-by-mail ballot will be available later this spring at

albanyschools.org/vote. You also can call (518) 475-6015 and ask to have a vote-by-mail application mailed to you.

If you want a vote-by-mail ballot sent to your home, the district clerk must receive your completed application at least seven days before the vote – by Tuesday, May 14 at 4 p.m.

If you want to pick up your vote-by-mail ballot in-person at the district headquarters in Academy Park, you must have your completed application to the clerk by 4 p.m. the day before the budget vote – Monday, May 20.

All absentee and vote-by-mail ballots must be received in the clerk's office by 5 p.m. on the day of the vote – Tuesday, May 21.





(Above left) Albany School of Humanities had the most substantial student academic growth of any school in the state on last spring's ELA and math exams, and was nationally recognized as a National ESEA Distinguished School (see page 7 to learn more). Principal **Marie Culihan**, Assistant Principal **Glenn Westfall Jr.** and fourth-grader **Vivienne Ciccone** were among those in attendance at a Dec. 19 celebration of this incredible accomplishment!

(Above) Pine Hills Elementary School fifth-grader **Elijah Barton** headed to the front of the class to point out an important piece of evidence during a Jan. 19 ELA lesson on informational writing pieces in **Mikayla Shade's** class.

(At left) Albany High School orchestra teacher **Tony Berman** was one of the many teachers who flexed their musical and comedic talents at our annual Music Teacher Concert on Jan. 23.



(At left) The future Clarence Darrows and Sonia Sotomayors in **Marni Neenos'** fourth-grade class at New Scotland Elementary School debated the pros and cons of genetically modified food in a mock trial Jan. 26. Here, chief attorney **Ronny Tiburcio** (center) is advised by co-counsel **Ahmed Mohammed** (left) and **Ryan McCarthy** (right).

(Below left) On Feb. 12, first-graders in **Linda Serapilio's** class at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology made their own mini-greenhouses out of plastic jugs with guidance from our terrific community partners at the Vegetable Project. Mixing potting soil and water for their greenhouses are (L-R) **Devin DeLuke**, **Quiyani Freeman**, **Naioke Stratton** and **Luna Gabbidon**.

(Below) The Albany Indoor Percussion Ensemble's Home Show on Feb. 10 was smashing! Here, (L-R) senior **CeCe Carmon**, freshman **Sidney Blanken** and junior **Anna Baldes** pass along briefcases as part of the varsity team's performance "The Heist." Congrats to the varsity team for earning first place in the "Percussion Independent A" category!





(Above left) Albany International Center and Dual Language Program students radiated joy Feb. 8 during a workshop on African drum and dance with the M.J.G. Group, a trio of Ghanaian drummers. **Abubakr Sadik Ruhia Maltiti** is pictured getting students into the groove during a workshop with fifth-graders, one of many ways the school celebrated Black History Month.



(Above right) North Albany Middle School student **Jelani Gorousingh** was hard at work Feb. 16 during independent ELA work in **Lois Gaines'** combined grade 6, 7 and 8 class!

(At right) Fourth-graders **Ava Croley** (left) and **Riley Johnson** (right) were all smiles Feb. 14 at "Café Arbor Hill." During the beloved annual event at Arbor Hill Elementary School, older students set festive tables – complete with creative center pieces – and serve younger students a special Valentine's Day lunch.



(At left) Students experienced the rhythms of the Afro-Diaspora through movement and music at Sheridan Preparatory Academy's Black History Month celebration Feb. 16. Guest drummer **Jordan Taylor Hill** (left) gave fifth-grader **Ezikel Dacosta** (center) and fourth-grader **Braxton King** (right) a quick music lesson and, by the end of it, everyone in attendance was on their feet dancing.

(Below left) The weather was dreary, but the mood was bright and cheery Feb. 22 at Delaware Community School's Winter Celebration. Families packed the gym for a yummy community dinner and fun activities for kids. Staff needed to bring in extra tables to accommodate the great turnout! Enjoying the feast here are (L-R) first-grader **Fatima Aboukoura** and second-graders **Adam Aboukoura** and **Mathias Cordoba Barros**.

(Below) On Feb. 16, Albany High School's **Devin Baker** was all smiles during **Donna Mannarino's** dance class as the students prepared for their Black History Month performance at Abrookin Career and Technical Center.



Non-public school transportation deadline

State law requires Albany parents and guardians whose children will attend a non-public school in 2024-25 to submit a written request for transportation to the City School District of Albany by April 1.

The purpose of this deadline is to enable districts to budget funds and make necessary arrangements to provide reasonable and economical transportation. This applies to students who will attend private, parochial and charter schools next school year.

The district transports all eligible elementary students (grades K-5) via yellow buses operated by First Student. Eligible non-public secondary students (grades 6-12) are transported via CDTA buses unless their Individual Education Service Plan (IESP) requires specialized transportation, which First Student provides.

For non-public students who move into the city after the April 1 deadline, parents and guardians must submit a written request for transportation within 30 days after establishing residency.

In order to qualify for transportation, students must meet the requirements under the district's Transportation Policy, which is available at albanyschools.org/transportation.

Requests should be mailed to:

Durett Miles
Director of Transportation
City School District of Albany
75 Watervliet Avenue
Albany, NY 12206

For more information, contact the Transportation Department at (518) 475-6170.

Important special education reminders

Parents and guardians have the right to request a referral and evaluation of a child for the purposes of special education services or programs.

If you believe your child has a disability that requires special education or special accommodations, contact your child's building principal.

You also can call Assistant Director of Special Education Christina Lebrecht at (518) 475-6150 to discuss whether your child should be referred to the Committee on Special Education or the "504 Team" for a full evaluation.

For more information, please visit albanyschools.org/specialed to download *Special Education in New York State for Children Ages 3-21: A Parent's Guide and Procedural Safeguards Notice: Rights for Parents of Children with Disabilities, Ages 3-21*.

If your child is home-schooled or attends a non-public school in Albany, you may request an evaluation to determine eligibility and need for special education by writing to the Committee on Special Education, 75 Watervliet Ave., Albany, NY 12206.

For a student found eligible before April 1, a parent or guardian may request

services to begin within 30 days of the determination.

If you plan to home-school or enroll your child in a non-public school in Albany in 2024-25, you must provide a written request for services by June 1. We urge you to provide your request as early as possible so the committee can develop an Individual Education Service Plan (IESP) for your student.

Please note that there is an April 1 deadline for requesting transportation if your child will attend a non-public school in Albany (see *related story above*).

If your child will attend a non-public school outside Albany and you want services, you need to request the services in writing from the public school district where the school is located, also by June 1.

The district does not provide services to non-public-school students found eligible for accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Please contact the Special Education Department at (518) 475-6150 if you have questions.

Syed (continued from page 1)

Some students take it easy senior year. Not Syed.

Her schedule is loaded with Advanced Placement courses in calculus, economics, statistics and U.S. government and politics. She also has an internship with the Vegetable Project, learning how to do the books and taxes for a non-profit.

She discovered a knack for social media last summer as a member of the Bank of America Student Leadership Program, where she had a paid internship through United Way of the Capital Region. There, she analyzed and promoted a free community summer meals program.

She also wrote a blog about the program (although she denies being an influencer!).

Syed's exceptional attention to detail has made her an indispensable member of the Albany High yearbook team for the last two years, said adviser Amanda Weklar.

"Knowing her has been an absolute gift," Weklar said. "She makes me laugh and checks in with me every day to discuss joys, frustrations and concerns."

"She is going to do wonderful things and, as happy as I am to see her move on and grow (as all students must), I am truly going to miss her and am lucky to have been a part of her journey."

Syed already has been accepted at a slew of colleges including RPI, Binghamton University and the University of Buffalo. She awaits word from Columbia University – her top choice; she longs to go to college in New York City – as well as Harvard University, New York University and Northeastern University.

As for further study, she loves mechanical engineering and physics and may be interested in a side hustle in accounting. Above all, she's receptive to new challenges and being flexible.

"I'm very open to change and seeing what I end up liking," she said.



Volunteer Spotlight: Garry Sanders

Since 2018, Garry Sanders has read with students in Cynthia Edwards' fourth-grade class at Roots Academy at West Hill (with a break during the pandemic when visitors weren't allowed in schools).

He's pictured here with reading buddies Karson Kilburn and Tinesha Lynch, students he devotes an hour to every Tuesday. Sanders is a volunteer through Jewish Coalition for Literacy, a community partner in several City

School District of Albany elementary schools.

On why he volunteers: "I know it's a trite thing to say, but I get more out of it than they do," Sanders said. "Having a chance to have an impact one-on-one is very meaningful."

Interested in volunteering? Visit albanyschools.org/volunteer or call Community Engagement Coordinator Cathy Edmondson at (518) 475-6067.

Robotics (continued from page 1)

All the world's a robotics stage

FIRST Robotics is a giant worldwide organization.

Each year the company gives a themed challenge to thousands of high-schoolers from all over the world: Build a robot for competition in six weeks.

The 2024 challenge? Design, build, program and drive a robot that can score points by delivering an orange ring – a "note" – to designated scoring areas around an area about the size of a basketball court.

Team 1493 won the regional FIRST event in 2018, when its partners in the final round included a team from Brazil. Albany High advanced to the international tournament in Detroit that year. Albany High also advanced to the 2022 international tournament in Houston with a wild-card berth as the top Capital Region team at the Tech Valley competition.

This year, the team hopes to celebrate its 20th anniversary by regaining the outright title at the Tech Valley FIRST Regional Robotics contest March 21-23 at MVP Arena.

Solomon, a senior who joined in ninth grade, started out doing small tasks. As his confidence grew, so did the tasks he took on.

This year, he's leading efforts to design, build and, for the second year, operate the robot. Last year's experience has blossomed into this year's poise, he said.

"I was really nervous the first year," he said. "I'm a lot more confident now."

A capstone STEM experience

Robotics is among multiple capstone STEM opportunities for district students at Albany High. They start getting hands-on experience in STEM-related projects as early as kindergarten, programming tiny robots like "Bee-Bots," "Ozobots" and "Dash/Dots."

Sara McGraw, the district's elementary STEM instructional supervisor, said young learners have fun as they develop problem-solving skills and perseverance while they navigate coding challenges.

Elementary and middle schools use robotics technology at enrichment clubs and in summer programming, and it's a big focus at Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science and Technology, the district's STEM-themed magnet elementary school.

Celebrating two decades of robotics at Albany High is a big deal for the district's STEM programming, McGraw noted.

"Just think what the next 20 years will bring!" she said.

By the time students reach Albany High, their STEM-related options are many.

Albany High has 10 technology-related classes, including one specifically focused on robotics. Students also can follow a Project Lead the Way engineering pathway, taking specific courses to meet the requirement for this national program and earning a state endorsement when they graduate.

For some Team 1493 members, robotics is a step toward their future.

"I'm really into this. This is my thing," said junior Karly Grant, in her second year on the team. "I want to do engineering in college as well, and this is a good way to start."

In addition to Kissane, faculty advisers include recently retired Albany High math teacher Andre Castagna, Ph.D., and technology teachers Kevin Allen, Brent Cady and Allen Landman.

They're all Team 1493 veterans who come back every year for more, along with longtime volunteers from RPI and National Grid (National Grid's Jake Ennis also serves as an adviser).

"It's enjoyable. It's fun. It's challenging," Kissane said. "And the kids are fantastic."

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

ASH growth earns national recognition

Albany School of Humanities (ASH) students achieved the highest growth of all schools in the entire state on last spring's 3-8 exams!

As a result of this outstanding accomplishment, ASH was selected as one of 65 schools nationally and only two in New York to receive National ESEA Distinguished School recognition for 2023!

"This award and accomplishment come as a direct result of an all-hands-on approach where every member of our ASH community contributes to the success of student outcomes," said principal Marie Culihan, in her seventh school year as the ASH principal.

"By working together, we have been able to ensure rigorous instruction, expose all students to grade-level standards and maximize our resources to increase student achievement and address their social-emotional growth."

Culihan and her team were recognized in February at the National ESEA Conference in Portland, Ore.

Hackett science out of this world

For the third year in a row, an experiment proposed by a team of eighth-grade scientists at William S. Hackett Middle School will be performed on the International Space Station.

Late this spring, astronauts on the space station will conduct, "The effects of a microgravity environment on the growth of mold on strawberries," a proposal crafted by **Jolie Benjamin, Bria Kelley, Paige Lemmon, Nicolas Toala** and **Emi Zerka**, under the guidance of teacher **Craig Ascher**.

Last fall, eighth-graders in the district's three middle schools took part in the Student Spaceflight Experiment Program design competition.

They worked in teams to design an experiment that tests the effects of microgravity – weightlessness – on a particular scientific variable.

A group of teachers and administrators judged all the experiments and forwarded the top three to SSEP, which selected the Hackett project from others submitted from throughout the country.

Singers selected for music fest

Seventeen Albany High School choir students were accepted into the Albany Pro Music Choral Festival, and two were selected to perform in the festival's honor chorus. The festival was held Feb. 17 at the University at Albany.

Students selected were **Tiana Adler, Veronica Allen, Margaret Ardrey, Ray Blanken, Declan Chirlin, Yazmin Chuqui, Julio Davis, Celia Diefendorf, Giuliana Fox, Nora Gordon, Macaylah Irving, Katie Myers, Isaac Olshan, William O'Neill, Nina Scandurra, Julian Shepersky** and **Iris Whalen**.

In addition, Allen and Myers were selected to perform in the Albany Pro Musica Student Honor Choir. Congrats to all!

Blood drive saves lives

Albany High juniors **Nathan Martel** and **Anya Stetzer** rolled up their sleeves Jan. 31 to donate life-saving blood at the school's Red Cross drive in the library as they took the reins as student coordinators of the event.

Martel convinced his dad, Tony Clement Center for Education Principal **Chris Martel**, to come by and donate. Thank you to our donors, whose collective 55 pints of blood will save lives! And great job by our new student blood drive coordinators as well as adviser **Alicia Abdul**.

Albany High's third and final blood drive of the school year will be June 5.

State track qualifiers

Two members of the Albany High School boys' indoor track and field team qualified for the state championships this winter.

Senior **Malachi Young** took first place in the 55-meter hurdles at the Section 2 State Qualifier Meet at Hudson Valley Community College on Feb. 10. Junior **Samir Gardner** also took first place in the long jump at the event.

That qualified them for the state meet March 2 at the Ocean Breeze Athletic Complex in Staten Island (*Capital Education* went to press prior to this event).

Congratulations to both student-athletes on their achievements!

Falcons soar at international competition

Albany High School student-athletes **Joshua Marx** and **Ya'ir Sasson** represented their country and community this winter at the Pan American Maccabi Games in Argentina.

Marx, a senior, and Sasson, a junior, were among more than 4,000 athletes from 20 nations in Buenos Aires for the Olympic-style event, which celebrates Jewish culture. The event took place from Dec. 28-Jan. 5; it was the first international competition for both of them.

A member of the Albany High boys' tennis team, Marx earned a bronze medal in U18 doubles. Sasson, a swimmer, earned medals in seven different events at the U16 level, including gold in the 4x100-meter freestyle relay.

Congratulations to both student-athletes on these accomplishments!

Hall of Fame 2024 nominations

Do you know a former City School District of Albany student or employee, or a community partner who excelled in their pursuits?

If so, we welcome your nominations for our Hall of Fame Class of 2024!

Nominations for the Class of 2024 will be accepted through April 1.

Visit albanyschools.org/hof to learn more about our Hall of Fame and to complete an online nomination form.



Hackett's space scientists



Father-son blood donors **Nathan** and **Chris Martel**



Student-athletes **Samir Gardner** and **Malachi Young**



Student-athletes **Ya'ir Sasson** and **Joshua Marx**

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OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

OUR VISION

The City School District of Albany will be a district of excellence with caring relationships and engaging learning experiences that provide equitable opportunities for all students to reach their potential.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the City School District of Albany is to work in partnership with our diverse community to engage every learner in a robust educational program designed to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for success.

OUR GOALS

Increase student achievement; Enhance the delivery of quality instruction; Build our leadership capacity and increase accountability; Empower families; Partner with our diverse community

LEADING THE WAY:

Jasmine N. Brown

Assistant Superintendent
for Elementary Instruction &
Albany High Class of 1997



If you know Jasmine Brown, you know she's positively passionate about education in our community.

A 1997 graduate of Albany High School, Brown began her career as an English teacher at her alma mater in 2002. She began her administrative career as an assistant principal at Lansingburgh High School in 2010 and returned to work in her hometown in 2012 as principal of Giffen Memorial Elementary School in the South End.

She took over in January as assistant superintendent for elementary instruction. In this new role, she serves all 12 of the district's elementary schools, working with principals and their teams to raise achievement for all students in pre-K through grade 5.

Q: How does growing up in Albany and our schools shape your vision for education?

Albany, both the school district and the community, has contributed immensely to who I am as a learner, an educator, a leader – a person. There were many staff members who molded me through various conversations, city programs that helped me connect with other young people beyond my neighborhoods and understand how big of a place this world is, and teachers who helped me see my brilliance even when I didn't see it in myself.

Q: How will you apply your experience leading Giffen in your new position?

Giffen always will hold a special place in my heart and has helped shape me into the leader I am today. I strive to be an empathetic servant leader while continuously lifting expectations that we must be intentional in our work and that, first and foremost, we are all accountable for the success. I will strive to build the same strong sense of community and commitment to the team (students, families and staff) that exists throughout our district.

Q: Who is a role model for you?

It is always difficult to identify one role model, as I have been supported, loved and encouraged by many through the years. I am often drawn to the strong truth-telling women in my life who have loved, encouraged and supported me through the years. My grandmothers, Juanita Freeman and Virginia Young, left imprints on me that I am forever grateful for. My mother, Zanetta Motley, has loved me unconditionally, always giving me her best and encouraging me to be my best, even when the world was not always kind to us. I am indebted to everyone who has inspired me through the years, and many who inspire me daily to be better and grow as a person.



ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT

Ellen Stutzman '99

If labor disputes were measured like athletics, the score would read: Ellen Stutzman 1, Media Behemoths 0.

That "1," however, actually was a victory for more than 11,000 members of the Writers Guild of America West. The chief negotiator in last year's highly public labor dispute with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, Stutzman helped win significant concessions.

The 148-day strike turned the bright lights of Hollywood dark from May until it was settled in late September.

"The solidarity of writers and their ability to stand together and withhold their labor until the industry was willing to negotiate a contract that addressed their concerns was the critical component to our success," said Stutzman, a 1999 Albany High School graduate.

The guild's assistant executive director during negotiations, Stutzman was elevated to its top position in November. *Variety*500 dubbed Stutzman "one of the strike's folk heroes," noting that she "tied the studios in knots by sticking to her guns."

Negotiating with teachers and administrators wasn't Stutzman's MO during her time at Albany High.

She was on the swim team and ran track, participated in

the Chinese Club, wrote for the school newspaper and worked on the yearbook. While none of those activities directly led her to a career in labor organizing, the influence of growing up in a city with high union enrollment cannot be diminished.

"More progressive politics were the norm (and) had an influence on my outlook and belief in social justice," she said.

Stutzman graduated from Albany High in three years. She spent a year abroad in Hong Kong before earning a bachelor's degree from the Industrial and Labor Relations School at Cornell University and an MBA at UCLA.

Her first job was as a researcher for SEIU Local 399 in Los Angeles. In 2006, she moved to the writers guild as a research analyst, then research director, and in 2018, assistant executive director. The guild tapped her as its chief negotiator in February 2023 before last fall's promotion.

"I have spent my career working for labor unions and representing workers because organized labor is the most important check on corporate power and corporate greed and gives workers a collective voice in their workplace," Stutzman said.

"It's not always easy to do the work when there are so many attacks on workers and unions, but knowing it is both right and necessary drives me forward."