

Chagrin VALLEY TIMES



Chagrin Falls enrollment decline not as bad as county stats

By SUE REID

While the Chagrin Falls Exempted Village Schools has not been immune to the national and local trend of declining enrollment, their decrease has been significantly below Northeast Ohio trends.

At a recent Board of Education work session, Treasurer Ashley Brudno said that enrollment has gone

down about 8.9 percent in the state of Ohio over the last 10 years. In Cuyahoga County, it has gone down 17 percent and in Geauga County, 24 percent.

By comparison, Chagrin Falls has gone down 9.8 percent.

“We have not declined as quickly as the two counties our students come from,” Ms. Brudno said. “We are

growing by every single grade, and we are attracting students and increasing the number of students we have.

“Every single grade, first grade through seniors, has more students now as they did when in kindergarten,” she continued. “We attract students, and we gain students as they move through their grades. That is why we think our decline is not

as steep as some of our neighbors.”

Ms. Brudno added that the biggest factor that plays into enrollment declining is that the birth rates are down. “Fewer kids means fewer students,” she said.

“We believe that the secret to our relative stability is that parents recognize the quality and value of

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Questions still lingering about Grove Hill access

By SUE REID

Questions regarding handicap access to the proposed Grove Hill Park and a desire for a more defined project outline were among talking points raised during a meeting of the Grove Hill Commission last week.

“The ADA analysis is causing paralysis in our process,” George Warnock, land steward with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, who attended the meeting, said. “There’s no way to go forward.

“Is there a way to set that aside?” he asked of getting an opinion on the access, while moving ahead with plans.

In late August, Mayor William Tomko updated members that issues regarding handicap access to the site at the northwest corner of West Cottage and North Main streets had been brought to light and the village was seeking an opinion from its law director on the matter.

Dale Markowitz, the village’s law director, said last week that he forwarded his research last month to the mayor but could not disclose it.

Mr. Markowitz sent an “early opinion,” Rob Jamieson, the village’s Chief Administrative Officer, noted, “but there is more to look into.”

Mr. Jamieson said that the village will soon have further information on what is possible at Grove Hill Park regarding the ADA accessibility.

“We will issue a position of the village on how ADA applies to our park’s property and some thoughts from me on how to proceed on looking what to do (there),” Mr. Jamieson said.

Mr. Warnock said in his research, generally ADA requirements have a lot to do with the size of the property. In the case of Grove Hill Park, which measures .3 acres, “they would probably avoid doing anything for ADA because of the size and the topography,” he said, noting that it would be putting too much infrastructure into too small of a space.

In addition to the question of the ADA access, some in attendance expressed frustration on the timeline of the project.

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Photo by Peggy Turbett

The Chagrin Valley Little Theatre came alive Tuesday during a special kick-off celebration marking the official start the 2022 Chagrin Documentary Film Fest. In addition to being able to view Laurens Bubendorfer’s film “Emerald Paradise – Fly Fishing in the Soča Valley,” the celebration of Slovenia culture included singers, dancers, wine, food, and home baked goods. This year’s film festival continues throughout the week through Sunday. For a complete schedule of events, visit ChagrinFilmFest.org. See more coverage on Page **A12**.

Local VFW members helping area homeless vets one sock at a time

By SUE REID

Members of the Chagrin Falls Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12067 are making the difference in the lives of homeless Northeast Ohio veterans — one pair of socks at a time.

Actually, more than 600 to be exact.

That number represents the number of socks the post has collected thus far through “Operation Change Those Socks,” a community-wide effort that kicked off Sept. 12, with collections ending on Veteran’s Day, Nov. 11.

Why socks? South Russell resident, post co-founder and veteran Army Reserve pilot Todd D. Lyle explained.

Historically, from initial military training to the worst of ground conflicts, service members have been directed to change their socks with frequency to maintain healthy feet, he said.

Well, homeless veterans need healthy feet too, Mr. Lyle noted.

That is where the post comes in.

“This is just about an act of kindness,” Mr. Lyle, 58, said. No politics. No agendas.

“You can’t have any negativity toward socks,” he said. When fellow post member Dale Moravec, a retired

veteran of the U.S. Army, first threw out the idea of the collection, he said with a laugh, “there’s not a lot of romance with socks.”

But post members saw a simple idea grow — and the community embrace it.

“I have 88 pairs in the car right now,” Mr. Moravec, 73 of Aurora, said excitedly. “This is really all about helping the veterans.

“We are like any other organization that does good for the community.”

Mr. Lyle, a father of two sons in the Chagrin Falls schools, even reached out to the schools, where blue collection buckets have been placed in all of the main offices at all four of the buildings in the district, as well as at the Chagrin Valley Fire Department and the Chagrin Falls Historical Society, where the post members meet each month.

Mr. Lyle, also known as the “sock man,” collects from the bins with his old Army laundry bag.

“We are averaging 33 pairs a day, and we have only focused here in Chagrin,” he said.

“We have blown past our goal,” Mr. Lyle added of the initial hope for 12 dozen. “This has been very

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heartening.”

“Operation Change Those Socks is just one of the many examples of how our students and staff partner with volunteer and support organizations, such as the Chagrin Falls Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12067, to assist and serve others,” Superintendent Jennifer Penczarski said. “The project not only allows our students to give back to those who have bravely served our country, but also continues to write the story of these experiences.”

Any socks will do, post members noted, including old, new, crew, athletic and just about any variety.

“They can give old, new, whatever,” Mr. Lyle said, noting that the majority collected thus far are new.

“There is everything you can possibly imagine.”

Veterans recalled their own experience with needing dry socks during their military stay.

“When I was in Vietnam, and it was raining, it was cold rain,” Mr. Moravec, a Purple Heart recipient, said. “I didn’t care if I was dirty and dry, but I wanted dry socks.”

Mr. Lyle, who served for two decades on classified missions and hostile duty tours, said this whole idea of changing socks begins at basic training.

You won’t find a more miserable Army person, than in training, with wet feet, Mr. Lyle said.

“The sergeant will make the kids change their socks because foot care is so important.”

Once the collection period is over, post members will deliver the socks to four county facilities they have a relationship with, including the Freedom House, among others.

This is one of the many examples of how the Chagrin post, numbering about 50 members, gives back to the community.

The members of VFW Post 12067 have helped bring soldiers home for the holidays through financial support, helped fund the “Honor Flight” trips to Washington, D.C., and also sponsor an annual essay contest where they award cash prizes to area students.

On Veteran’s Day, they will once again lead a ceremony on the Triangle downtown, which includes a moment of silence and various speakers.

“This is such a wonderful community,” Mr. Lyle said. “It’s been so heartwarming to go around and pick up these socks.

“The most important thing is having the community take part.”



Photo by Geoff Powers

Socks of all styles, size and color are being collected by the Chagrin Falls Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 12067 until Veteran’s Day (Nov. 11). More than 600 pairs have been collected thus far as part of “Operation Change Those Socks,” benefiting homeless Northeast Ohio veterans.

Safe Routes’ annual ‘Walk to School/Town’ Day back in full force

By SUE REID

Safe Routes Chagrin’s annual Walk to School/Walk to Town Day – a time-honored event in the community — is back in full force, and organizers couldn’t be happier.

“What I love about this event is it is something that celebrates what is special about Chagrin Falls,” Kathryn Garvey, board president of Safe Routes Chagrin and Chagrin Falls resident, said. “It connects our students to our community and local businesses in celebrating walkability, which is what makes Chagrin Falls a special place to live.”

The event, aimed at Chagrin Falls Intermediate and Middle School students and postponed due to the pandemic in 2020 and modified last year, will take place fully for the 12th year on Oct. 13.

Walk to School/Walk to Town, made possible through the efforts of roughly 50 volunteers, is expected to draw more than 400 students.

“I am very excited to be involved in the return

of Walk to School/Walk to Town this year,” Chagrin Falls resident and committee co-chair Jaclyn Drum said. “We are so lucky to live in a village where the community comes together to put on this great annual event, and the students enjoy walking to and from school while being safe and having fun.”

The event is geared toward all students, regardless of whether they live in walking distance or not, Ms. Garvey noted.

“We want this to be for every student in the district regardless of where they live,” she said, with those students gathering at designated drop-off locations.

Festivities kick off in the morning, prior to the start of the school day at both of the schools, with students and staff donning complimentary Safe Routes T-shirts.

Students will walk to school in the morning and walk to town after school, with the Intermediate School students enjoying a fun fitness fair in Riverside Park and the middle school students

enjoying an historical scavenger hunt throughout town. A theme of “Animated Characters” awards teams for most accurate, most creative, and most fun costumes.

There will be healthy food, prizes and a number of games and activities, including face painting. Prizes for the children include gift cards to local stores.

“This fun event energizes students who might not normally walk to school or to town to give it a try and find out first-hand how fun it can be to enjoy being active while walking with friends,” said committee co-chair Stephanie Osborne, a Chagrin Falls resident. “Walk to School events help to emphasize the importance of issues such as increasing physical activity among children, pedestrian safety, traffic congestion, concern for the environment and building connections between families, schools and the broader community.”

Safe Routes Chagrin is a cooperative endeavor between the Village of Chagrin Falls,

the school district, the police department, and the community.

The Walk to School event is part of an international effort, with the Walk to Town portion unique to Chagrin Falls, Ms. Garvey said.

The first time the event took place was in 2009. A rain date has been set for Oct. 21.

“The whole idea behind an event like this is encouragement,” Ms. Garvey said, “that we are encouraging students who may take the bus or get a ride to school to give it a try to see if they enjoy that time walking with friends to and from school.

“Hopefully this develops new habits that incorporate walking more regularly,” she added.

The element of walking to town is important, Ms. Garvey continued, and is what makes the Chagrin Falls community special.

“It’s about celebrating everything unique to us,” she said. “In all we do try to reflect back locally, and for us that element of walking to town is really important.”

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a Chagrin Falls’ education and move their children into the District throughout the grade bands,” Board of Education Vice President Lori Bendall explained. “The enrollment in each grade grows over the 13 years that our students are in school.

“For example, the class of 2023 started kindergarten 12 years ago with 121 students,” she added. “There are currently 157 seniors in the graduating class.”

Ms. Brudno said the district is projecting that enrollment will decline for the next four years due to the decline in birthrates from 2018-2021, “and we have to keep an eye on it and use it in all our decisions.

“We continue to closely monitor enrollment trends,” she said. “Enrollment is not a static number.”

Currently, there are 1,623 students enrolled for the current year. Last year, there were 1,711; 2021 had 1,722 students; 2020 had 1,756; 2019 had 1,811 and there were 1,878 in 2018.

The difference in enrollment in the 2021-2022 to 2022-2023 school year is indicative of the birthrate decline. “We graduated 73 more students than we welcomed in the kindergarten class,” Board of Education President Sharon Broz said.

Chagrin graduated 175 students in 2022 and in 2023 they welcomed 102 new kindergarteners.

The State of Ohio sets an annual date to measure enrollment, however, enrollment is very fluid, Ms. Broz continued.

“The administrative team monitors enrollment on a monthly basis and provides updated information to the Board for budgeting and planning purposes,” she explained. “Enrollment informs several areas including class sizes, staffing, programming and facility needs.”

Ms. Brudno said that to keep the trend going up, Chagrin looks at what they can do as a district to continue to retain students.

“There is much we can extrapolate from national and local trends such as declining birth rates, population loss, and pandemic

related student withdrawals,” Ms. Bendall said. “However, trends will only take us so far.

“Chagrin is a community that values education,” she continued. “We need to leverage that spirit to continue to elevate our students’ experiences and outcomes. One way is through strategic planning, another is by collecting the qualitative data from parents who chose to move their students in and out of the District.

They address such questions as “what are we doing well?” “What can we do more to narrowly tailor our educational offerings to elevate each of our students in their own way?” and “how can we most effectively allocate our resources?” she said.

The district also monitors closely both why students come to the district and more importantly, why they leave.

To that end, Jarrod Mulheman joined the administration team for this year as Director of Student Advancement to address important gaps identified early in the strategic planning process and lead initiatives that advance the student educational experience.

He has also been conducting entrance and exit interviews to help the district understand why parents make the educational choices they do, Ms. Bendall said.

“To authentically meet students and families’ needs, we must understand why families choose to attend Chagrin, and why families might choose to leave Chagrin,” she said. “This helps us ensure that our programming remains relevant and competitive.”

Enrollment also plays a role in the district’s strategic planning process.

“Enrollment is one of the many considerations in the strategic planning process and is particularly relevant for the Strategic Resources Inquiry Team,” Ms. Broz said of the community groups delving into key focus areas identified through recent surveys. “This group will explore the tools, partnerships, infrastructure and resources that will help us innovate and continue to offer a competitive and relevant educational experience.”

CHILD ADVOCATES NEEDED!



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