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SALUTE TO EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Scholarship & Awards Gala

2018 EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AWARDS

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COMMUNITY NEWS

Hazelwood West High School alumna earns pilot license

Shelby Schulz, a Hazelwood West High School Alumna, recently earned her private pilot's license.

Schulz caught the flying bug when she participated in a week-long transportation summit at St. Louis University Parks Airport.

"I wanted to have my pilot license before graduating from high school last month, but I continually had check rides cancelled due to the poor weather conditions," said Schulz. "Now I am working on earning my driver's license!"

Schulz has many talents and will be attending University of Central Missouri in the fall studying aviation and working towards a bachelor's degree in commercial pilot. Earlier this spring, she received the Kenneth W. Thomason Aviation Opportunity Scholarship from the University of Central Missouri. Schulz also auditioned for the University of Central Missouri Orchestra and marching band. She was offered a spot in both to play violin for the orchestra and snare for the drum line.

Schulz aspires to become an airline or a corporate entity pilot.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association High School Aviation Initiative is one of the com-



Photo courtesy Hazelwood School District

Shelby Schulz, a Hazelwood West High School Alumna, recently earned her private pilot's license.

ponents of You Can Fly, an umbrella program. The program is designed to build the pilot community with initiatives to support flying clubs, encourage best practices in flight training, and help high school students learn about careers in aviation.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Hazelwood West High School alumnus excelling in engineering field

Blake Osecki, Hazelwood West High School alumnus, is making his way through the engineering field. Osecki is currently a project manager at Robert Bosch, working on hydrogen fuel cell semi-trucks. Bosch is a German multinational engineering and electronics company headquartered in Gerlingen, near Stuttgart, Germany.

Osecki graduated from West High in 2009. He then went on to receive a bachelor's degree in materials science engineering from Purdue University and a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Mississippi. However, his interest in engineering started back when he was a child.

"Coming from parents who are both engineers, engineering was something I was interested in from a young age and that I felt I should pursue," said Osecki. "Becoming an engineer has opened many doors for me - both during and after graduating from Purdue University and in my professional experience as well as starting a business."

Osecki founded his own company, SlideStax Modular Home & Garden. SlideStax provides high-quality, sustainable, durable and modular home and garden project kits, to do-it-yourself projects of any age or background.

"Slidestax products utilize a patent-pending technology that allows for three to five-minute assembly without the need for any tools or fas-

teners," said Osecki.

In addition to starting his own business and working at Bosch, Osecki worked at General Motors in a variety of areas including Chevrolet ZH2 (Off Road Fuel Cell Electric Truck), Chevrolet Bolt EV, Chevrolet Volt, Cadillac ELR, Chevrolet Malibu Hybrid, among others.

When asked what advice he would give high school students who are interested in engineering, Osecki said, "Don't let questions go unanswered."

"Put yourself in a position to ask the right questions to the right people. If you have an interest in driverless cars, take the initiative to figure out what attracts you to that sub-

ject or product, then backtrack to how you can chase that interest in your current situation. Maybe something as simple as bringing this interest up to a counselor could get you enrolled in a technology-focused course or program and open doors for you that are both important and interesting."

"There is no one-size fits all approach, but what has helped me the most throughout all levels of school, professional life and especially now in starting a business - is to figure out the right questions to ask, and the right people to ask them to. There are more resources out there than ever before to help you along the way, you just have to know where to look," Osecki said.



Photo courtesy Hazelwood School District

Blake Osecki, Hazelwood West High School alumnus, is currently a project manager at Robert Bosch, working on hydrogen fuel cell semi-trucks.

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Back-to-school fair equips students with all the basics

BY BRIAN FELDT

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

As any seasoned parent can attest, back-to-school time can be hectic.

The checklist can seem never-ending with various supply lists to satisfy, required health records to turn in and, not least, getting their kids excited to get back in the classroom.

For the parents of the 3,300 students in the Normandy Schools Collaborative, it's all taken care of.

The Normandy Schools Collaborative (formerly known as the Normandy School District) and the nonprofit Beyond Housing organization on Saturday hosted their annual Beyond the Backpack back-to-school event at Normandy High School.

The free event is designed to get kids ready for school and provide them and their families the resources needed to have a successful school year.

More than 3,000 backpacks were given away, each of them stuffed with grade-specific school supplies such as crayons, tissue paper, rulers and other items.

Free haircuts, health screenings and immunizations were

also available, as well as food and information on various community resources such as sports teams, the St. Louis County Library, the Magic House, the Boy Scouts, the St. Louis Chess Club and others.

"Too often the challenge is not when you get to school, but the stuff that is happening outside the four walls of the school that really get in the way," said Chris Krehmeyer, Beyond Housing's president and CEO.

"We see this as a springboard for the beginning of the school year."

After Saturday's event, he said, the organization will have 13 staff members embedded in Normandy schools to interact with families and students.

"A lot of times, we hear about what they need, such as utility or rent assistance or food for the house," he said. "So we're here to provide the parents with things that help get their kids coming to school ready to learn."

With mid-90-degree temperatures and sunny skies, the event was well-attended, with kids running around to learn about various organizations or to hop around in a bounce house.

Parents were busy meeting with soon-to-be teachers and

schools staff at their children's respective school.

Even grandparents were getting in on the action.

Doris Harris, of Pagedale, was at the event with her 9-year-old granddaughter, Allison Rainy, who will attend Lucas Crossing Elementary when school begins on Monday. Harris said she was helping her daughter, who was with Allison's two older sisters getting their hair done.

"It's just a way for me to help out and then (her daughter) can take the other two to get their stuff," she said. "But it's nice to come and get these backpacks with all the supplies you need. Saves on time and money."

The event, said Beyond Housing COO Deb Dombar, costs about \$40,000 to put on. It's one of several initiatives the organization does to help that area.

"Our mission is to ask, align and act," she said. "So we ask the community what we need, align ourselves with those needs and then act on them."

About a decade ago, the organization helped bring in a Save-A-Lot grocery store after area residents said the community was in the middle of a food desert.

A movie theater, community

bank and coffee shop have also been added because of work done by Beyond Housing. The organization also has a housing services unit that helps families buy or repair homes.

"It's all about placemaking and good communities start with good schools, which bring in good families and make better neighborhoods," Krehmeyer said.

Other school districts in the region, such as Hazelwood and Ferguson-Florissant, have held such fairs previously. Others around the region will soon host similar events of varied sizes.

The St. Louis Public Schools on Aug. 11 will host its annual back-to-school festival in partnership with the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis at America's Center downtown.

SALES TAX HOLIDAY DRIVES BUSINESS

Those who showed up at Normandy High School on Saturday were among the tens of thousands of parents and children getting ready for a new school year.

Some others took advantage of Missouri's annual sales tax holiday that began Friday and runs through the weekend.

The event coincides with back-to-school season and exempts purchases of clothing, school supplies, computers and other items from the state's 4.22 percent sales tax.

Local municipalities and other taxing districts could also choose to participate and exempt their sales taxes. For businesses in some of the cities that participated, it was a boon for business.

Retailers such as Kohl's, Best Buy and Target have all been running sales and marketing toward the busy shopping season.

Several Best Buy stores in the area increased staff ahead of the weekend to meet demand.

"We know that many customers like to shop during the back-to-school season and sales tax holiday, so we plan our staffing accordingly," said Best Buy spokesman Matthew Smith.

Jordan Lee, the computer lead at Best Buy's Chesterfield Valley location said back-to-school season is among the store's busiest shopping periods.

To add incentive for customers, Best Buy was running promotions on certain computers and tablets in which students could get up to \$150 off on top of other markdowns and the sales tax holiday.

Drownings occurred in dangerous area of river

BY DENISE HOLLINSHED
AND LEAH THORSEN

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS COUNTY • The deaths of a woman and girl in the Meramec River at Castlewood State Park bring the number of people who've drowned in that portion of the river to 14 in the last 14 years.

Divers found the bodies of Rose Shaw, 35, and Deniya Johnson, 12, late Saturday, about seven hours after they went underwater, a St. Louis County police spokesman said.

They were part of a group of five in the Meramec River, all of whom went underwater about 2:30 p.m. in a part of the Meramec where there is a drop-off. A man and two other girls were rescued by people in the area, police said.

Authorities described Deniya as being a friend of Shaw's daughter. Shaw lived in the 1300 block of Tahoe Drive in Florissant. Deniya lived in the 2500 block of Littlefield

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PHOTOS BY J.B. FORBES • jforbes@post-dispatch.com
People continue to get in the Meramec River on Sunday after the drowning of two people at the popular swimming spot in Castlewood State Park in south St. Louis County. Signs are posted everywhere to warn people of the dangers posed by the river.

Meramec River has a long history of claiming lives

DROWNINGS • FROM A1

Drive, north of Florissant near Sunset Park.

The stretch of the Meramec in Castlewood State Park where they drowned has long been a deadly one. It's about a quarter-mile downstream from a beach where a concrete boat ramp once was — the ramp was removed in 2016 in hopes of reducing the appeal of beach access, said Michael Thiemann, a spokesman for the Metro West Fire Protection District.

Deaths in that area include five children, ages 10 to 17, who drowned in 2006 when they visited the park with the St. Louis Dream Center, an arm of the Joyce Meyer Ministries.

The river changes abruptly at that spot.

Near where the boat ramp was, the water is shallow. Generally, people can walk across the river,



Jim Branson, 54, and his wife, Vivian Branson, 61, talk on Sunday about their neighbor, Deniya Johnson, 12, who drowned the day before in the Meramec River at Castlewood State Park. Jim Branson was demonstrating how when he was about Deniya's age and lived in Perryville, Mo., his friend drowned in Joachim Creek and almost pulled Branson underwater with him

with the water no higher than waist-level.

But just downstream, the current quickens. The water becomes choppy before it flows into an area that looks like a small pond. The river bottom changes from a firm, rocky surface that's easy to walk on to one that is muddy and harder to navigate.

The water deepens, dropping from just a few feet in depth to

about 16 feet deep.

"All of a sudden, they get into a very dangerous situation," Thiemann said.

The current pushes swimmers backward, and their natural reaction is to fight to get back to the safer part of the river. But they have trouble getting their footing on the slippery bottom and can go under, he said.

Authorities want people to

RECENT DROWNINGS AT CASTLEWOOD

June 30, 2004 • A 19-year-old man drowns while swimming with relatives.

July 9, 2006 • 5 children, including 4 siblings, slip under the river and die.

August 12, 2007 • A 15-year-old visiting from New York drowns at a family birthday party.

June 26, 2011 • Two St. Louis men, ages 18 and 20, drown while wading in the water.

April 12, 2012 • A 21-year-old Kirkwood man is drinking with friends when he is pulled under by the current.

June 26, 2016 • Two St. Louis teenagers drown after entering the river near the boat ramp.

Aug. 11, 2018 • A woman, 35, and girl, 12, drown after going under in the river.

enjoy the park and its beauty while staying safe. A meeting is planned for Monday with command staff to see what more can be done to alert people about the treacherous conditions of that portion of the river. Already, signs in the area warn people to be cautious, including one that says, "People drown HERE."

"It's a natural body of water, and no one controls a natural

body of water," Thiemann said.

He urged people swimming in the area to wear a lifejacket, saying it would save lives.

"We would never have another drowning there," he said.

Neighbors of both victims, who lived about four miles from each other, described them Sunday as kind and friendly.

Vivian Branson, 61, said Deniya was an only child whose mother was always taking her to activities.

"She always seemed sweet, and always waved. She was a very nice and pleasant kid," Branson said.

Jerry and Joan Everett also said Shaw, their neighbor, was energetic and nice.

Shaw had just registered her daughter and another child at Hazelwood Central High School for the coming year, Joan Everett, 58, said.

Jerry Everett, 61, said he had urged his son to wear a lifejacket when he camped with friends a couple of weeks ago along the Meramec. His son, 29, heeded his warning and bought a lifejacket.

"The Meramec is a dangerous river," Everett said. "It always has been."

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Classmates to honor drowning victim

On Tuesday, her friends will be wearing purple, her favorite color, to pay tribute to her.



HAZELWOOD, Mo. — Classmates of a little girl killed in an accident at Castlewood State Park will be honoring her on the first day of school.

Deniyah Johnson drowned in the Meramec River while there with friends. She would have been starting seventh grade at Northwest Middle School in the Hazelwood School District.

On Tuesday, her friends will be wearing purple, her favorite color, to pay tribute to her.

Ethical Society of Police host diversity career fair for those interested in law enforcement



ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MO - The [St. Louis County Chapter of the Ethical Society of Police](#) hosted its first ever diversity career fair at Hazelwood Central High School on Saturday. Potential recruits had the chance to meet face to face with officers from several area police departments to learn about career opportunities in law enforcement. They also had an opportunity to ask questions.

“We want people to know it’s attainable to become a police officer in our area,” said St. Louis County Police Officer Shanette Hall. “We want them to see how proud we are as police officers and how we want to serve our community and we want to encourage them to come along with us as well.”

“I believe residents feel more comfortable with people who look like them,” said St. Louis Metropolitan Police Sgt. Christy Allen. “It makes us much more relatable and it also helps with building that relationship with the community and the police officers.” Organizers plan on holding similar events in the future.