

Fall 2011



Guilderland Central School District



Community Conversation focused on “Looking Ahead” set for October 25

From skyrocketing costs and a tax “cap” to state mandates and increasing standards for both students and staff, school districts throughout New York State will once again be facing an uphill battle to prepare a sound educational spending plan for the upcoming school year.

Having already faced several years of budget cuts, public school districts—including Guilderland—can no longer look to reductions as a means to combat the financial crisis. Instead, schools will need to look for more innovative ways to utilize available resources to meet the changing needs of their students and communities.

To that end, the Guilderland Central School District would like to invite you to join us on Tuesday, October 25, 2011 for “Looking Ahead: Innovation and the future of GCSD.” The event, which is open to all district residents and school community members, will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. in the Guilderland High School LGI and will feature a brief presentation on the current state of the district followed by small group work sessions. Participants will have the opportunity to learn more about many of the issues currently facing our school district and will discuss several essential questions related to how to improve student learning despite these challenges.

“Maintaining the structures of the status quo is not a viable option for our district,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Marie Wiles. “Now is the time when we need to come together as a community to discuss our options for innovating our way out of this economic crisis.”

Last year, more than 500 school community members participated in the district’s community conversation events. “Their feedback provided valuable information for district leaders regarding the priorities of the school community and made a real impact on the budget put before voters last May,” said Wiles.

We hope that you will be able to join us on Oct. 25. If you plan to attend, kindly R.S.V.P. by October 24, 2011 either by phone at 456-6200, ext. 3102 or via e-mail, supergcsd@guilderlandschools.org. ♦

Fact Check...

A closer look at the property tax “cap”

For many years, New Yorkers have paid some of the highest property taxes in the country, spurring individuals and business owners to continually seek tax relief. This summer, state leaders responded by enacting a law that places new restrictions on how school districts (and municipalities) may increase their tax levies. The property tax “cap” has been a hot button topic in the media and will be just one of the many issues discussed at the Oct. 25 community conversation.

Fact? The new tax “cap” law means that school tax levies cannot increase by more than 2 percent.

Fact Check: Although the new law has been referred to as a “2 percent tax cap,” it does not in fact restrict any proposed tax levy increase to 2 percent. The law does, however, require at least 60 percent voter approval for a school budget if the proposed levy increase exceeds a certain amount. That amount, called the “tax levy limit,” will be determined by each district according to a formula outlined in the law, and will vary by district.

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GCSD

GHS welcomes Principal Thomas Lutsic

Students returning to Guilderland High School this fall were greeted by a new face around the halls of school—Principal Thomas Lutsic. Lutsic joined the team at GHS in July 2011, following his unanimous appointment to the position by the Board of Education last spring.

He comes to Guilderland after serving as secondary principal in the Hamilton Central School District in Hamilton, New York, for the past three years. Prior to that, he served as an assistant principal at Eastridge High School in Rochester, New York, and as an English teacher at Geneva High School in Geneva, New York.

“We are delighted to welcome Tom to the district,” said Superintendent of Schools Marie Wiles. “His knowledge and leadership experience will be great assets to the students, parents, and staff of Guilderland High School and to the greater school community. We look forward to many years of his continued service.”

Lutsic is a graduate of SUNY Buffalo, where he received his bachelor’s degree in secondary English education, and of SUNY Brockport, where he completed both his master’s degree

in educational administration and his administrative certification.

When asked why he was interested in coming to

GCSD, Lutsic cited the district’s “great reputation for innovation and willingness to try new things,” he said.

“I was so impressed by the amount of offerings the school has for its students and staff,” he added. “It was just an incredible opportunity for me.”

Lutsic has spent his first few months on the job familiarizing himself with the culture of the district and establishing relationships with the students, parents, and staff of GHS. “Schools are all about people, and building positive and open relationships is crucial for all of our success,” he said.

In addition, Lutsic has been reviewing how the school functions as a learning community.

“It is so important to not only look at where we are as a school today, but where we want to go as a school tomorrow,” he said. “We need to ask ourselves what kind of learning community we want to look like in one year or in five years and then figure out what steps we need to take to get there.”

This is not necessarily an easy task, he noted, given the financial challenges facing the district and schools throughout New York. State and federal mandates also add to the complexity of the problem. Yet Lutsic is optimistic that the school and district will rise to the challenge.

“My hope is to work with the entire school community from this point on to collectively form a vision for our future,” he said. “We all come from different backgrounds and bring varying perspectives on what is important for our students, our school, and our community. We all play a role in the success of our schools.” ♦

A closer look at the property tax “cap” (Continued from page 1)

Two percent (or the rate of inflation, if less) is just one of eight factors in this calculation. Although schools have the option to exceed their “tax levy limits” with voter approval, the reality is that any proposed school tax levy increase will be compared to this levy “limit”—or against the now-prevalent expectation of “2 percent”—adding to the pressures schools face to keep taxes low despite escalating costs and rising expectations for teaching and learning.

To learn more about the property tax “cap,” please plan to join us on Oct. 25!

WEATHER-RELATED SCHOOL CLOSINGS/DELAYS

With winter weather just around the corner, there may be occasions when Guilderland Schools need to delay opening, dismiss students early, or close due to weather or other emergency conditions. These cancellations will be posted on both the district Web site and on cable channel 16 in the Town of Guilderland, as well as sent out as an e-mail or text message via the district’s School News Notifier (SNN) service.* In addition, school closings, delayed openings and early dismissals will also be announced on various local TV stations and posted to the district’s Facebook and Twitter pages.

**Visit the district Web site to sign up for the SNN e-mail/text service today!*





Redefining teamwork...

Guilderland football teams aid in local Hurricane Irene recovery efforts

When members of Coach Dan Penna's Guilderland High School varsity football team heard that their coach had a close friend affected by the recent flooding in Schoharie, there was no question about what to do next.

"That community needed our help and we wanted to be there for them," said Guilderland High School senior Noah Poskanzer. So the team joined together with their junior varsity counterparts and headed out to help the local victims of Hurricane Irene.

Penna, along with JV football coaches Jason Usher and Craig Jensen, worked with members of the football booster club and the Schoharie Volunteer Center to organize a trip

to some of the hardest hit areas. On Saturday, September 17, a group of 45 student athletes joined with their parents and coaches to assist in the clean-up from the flood damage.

"We knew it would help them a lot," said sophomore Brad Johnston.

While Penna's friend, retired Guilderland High School English teacher Tom Smith, did not suffer major property damage, many others were not so lucky. "It was amazing to see how much work there was to do," said Poskanzer.

"The pictures on television didn't do it justice. It was tough to see what actually happened," added GHS senior Connor Drislane.

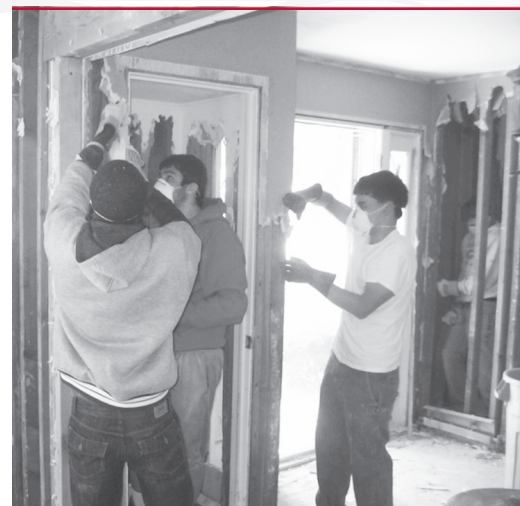
Through the volunteer center, the group from GHS received "work orders" from residents seeking assistance at three locations: two homes on Fair Street and at the local baseball field. The volunteers split up and got right to work tearing down sheet rock, cleaning up trash, and moving debris.

Volunteers worked side-by-side with many of the affected families throughout the day. "It felt good to be there, helping out and making a difference," said Drislane. "But at the same time, you're tearing down a wall with a crowbar and just thinking 'this is someone's house.' It was an important experience," he added.

"It really made us value what we have," said Poskanzer. "We all realized that this could happen to any of us."

Coach Penna agreed that the day was much more than a community service project. "This was such a rewarding experience for all of us," he said. "It was incredible to see the awesome power of people coming together."

In just five short hours, the volunteers from GHS were able to completely empty and clean out two entire houses, in addition to



Above, members of the GHS varsity and junior varsity football teams help deconstruct a home destroyed by the recent flooding in Schoharie

completing a lot of outside clean-up work. Residents of Schoharie cheered the volunteers on, thanking them and letting the students know how important their help was to them.

In addition to assisting a neighboring community in need and building team spirit, Penna felt that the trip gave the students an even more important life lesson. "Experiencing the goodness of the human spirit was the most valuable thing for the players to see that day," he said.

"Despite the amount of work ahead of them, and being exhausted from playing in a game the night before, the boys didn't flinch at all," said Penna. "They rolled up their sleeves and did whatever needed to be done. I am very proud of them."

GCSD would also like to recognize the countless other district students and staff members who aided in the recovery effort by collecting donations, participating in the clean-up, or simply by sending messages of support. ♦

"The community needed our help and we wanted to be there for them."

*—Noah Poskanzer,
GHS senior*

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Guilderland

Central School District

8 School Road / PO Box 18
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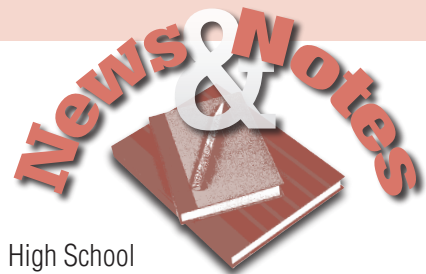
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An annual Halloween tradition...

GHS "Trick or Treat Street" promises fun for children of all ages



On Saturday, October 29, Guilderland High School will once again play host to an annual GCSD Halloween tradition: Trick or Treat Street. The event is open to children of all ages, and will run from 4 to 7:30 p.m. throughout the building. In addition to trick-or-treating, activities include: carnival games, face painting, a haunted house, sing-a-longs, a magic show, dance performances, bouncy bounces, raffles, refreshments, and more! Giffy's BBQ will also be on hand. The event is sponsored by the GHS Class of 2014. Tickets for Trick or Treat Street cost \$5 per child (adults are free) and include a game card, candy, and all entertainment for the evening.



Recycling Extravaganza set for Oct. 29 at Farnsworth Middle School

Looking to do a little fall cleaning around the house, garage, or yard? Then the Guilderland Central School District Fall Recycling Extravaganza is for you! On Saturday, October 29, district residents are encouraged to bring their unwanted papers, metals, and electronics equipment to Farnsworth Middle School for free disposal and recycling.*

This service is provided by the district's recycling partners Regional Computer Recycling & Recovery and T. A. Predel's Paper and Metals Recycling.

Eligible items include:

- All metal items (including metal swing sets, grills, steel eye-beams, bicycles, fences, refrigerators and more)
- Paper items (including newspapers, magazines and catalogues, copy paper, phone books and more)
- Electronic items (large and small appliances, computers and terminals, phones, pagers and more)

In addition, representatives from Nike will be on hand that day to collect and recycle old sneakers (without

metal/rivets) as part of their national ReUse a Shoe Program. To date, the program has recycled more than 25 million sneakers throughout the country.

For more information on the upcoming Recycling Extravaganza, please contact Renee Panetta, district recycling and conservation coordinator, at 518-861-5246 x 338 or visit www.guilderlandschools.org. We hope to see you there!

* Excludes any items containing hazardous materials.

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