



SCHOOL NEWS

HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

MAY 2024

Guitar Heroes

Popular KHHS class making profound impact on students, musical landscape

By Don Coble
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KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – If the walls of the chorus room are shaking, everything's all right at Keystone Heights High.

The muffled sound of loud music makes Principal Laurie Burke smile, even as early as the first period.

"It's great to hear them when I'm on that end of campus," she said. "Any time a student finds something that they're interested in and start becoming good at it, those students end up liking school and doing well because of that.

"Not everybody likes school just because of math and English. Sometimes, you have to have something that connects you with school. For a lot of our kids, it's guitar class."

And to stay in the class, the students must pass their other classes.

David Golden's Guitar 1, 2 and 3 classes have become three of the most popular classes on campus. Students who fail a class will return to pass a year later just to get a seat in the guitar class. Others admit the classes are the main reason they haven't dropped out.



Henry Carter is the lead guitarist and songwriter for Shopping Mall Guerrillas.

"Sometimes I think, 'Oh, I gotta go to school today, but I get to play guitar, so I think it all works,'" said junior Henry Carter. "It makes it a lot easier to get through the day. It makes it a little less aggravating, and I can get some music out of it."



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Some of the students join Keystone Heights High teacher David Golden before a rehearsal in the cafeteria.

Henry and three classmates from Keystone Heights created a band called Shopping Mall Guerrillas. The others are bassist Matthew Hallowell, drummer Austin Girouard and guitarist Dylan Miller. The band opened in front of thousands for Duval County Line Friday night at Food Truck Friday at Spring Park in Green Cove Springs.

"There's nothing like that feeling when you step on stage," Hallowell said. "Music is a great way to express your emotions. There's something about that energy that you can't describe to anybody until you're on stage with your friends and you're playing music you enjoy. It really touches your soul."

Golden said musicians, especially talented musicians, are eccentric by nature. Their ability to think outside the norm separates them from others with ordinary talent.

"We have a lot of bad days; some days are good," he said. "We have artistic differences. Different people want to do differ-

ent things. They all have to buy into it. And that's what I appreciate: they all buy into it. This is a group process. We take turns being the stars. There are 20 people in the class who want to have their music played. Everybody has different musical tastes, so they have to buy into it. And they do a good job of that. I have an ego, too. At the end of the day, I get to win. Sometimes, they can convince me to change my mind. I have to be the one that makes the final decision about what we're doing or what song we're playing."

Music is the common bond that ties the teacher and students.

Another band spawned from Golden's classes is Bad Decision, which features A.J. Gouldrup on lead guitar.

"Music brings people together," Gouldrup said. "It's what brings us together. I haven't always thought of school, but I've always focused on my music. So when I

HEROES CONTINUED



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Clay County Schools Art Show draws 4,000 at Thrasher-Horne

More than two dozen pieces to be displayed at Clay County Courthouse

By Don Coble
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ORANGE PARK – The Thrasher-Horne Conference Center was awash in vivid colors and astonished looks Friday and Saturday as hundreds of young artists put their works on display at the 35th Annual Clay County District Schools Art Show.

More than 4,000 attended the two-day event. All ribbon winners will have their pieces, including a Best of Show and an Award of Excellence submissions in Ceramics by Orange Park High Senior Hope Koestens, on display again at the Clay County Courthouse in June as part of the

Art in the Courthouse program.

Best of Show winners were Clay High freshman Alissa Mihalik, Asbury Lake eighth-grader Teagan Montesano, Lakeside Junior High eighth-grader Vera Irby and Koestens. Clay High Senior Audrey Milligan, Clay Junior High ninth-grader Olivia Moran and Haley Nalepa, Fleming Island High Junior Abbey Paul and Senior Emily Brown, Lake Asbury Junior High eighth-grader Hailey Nalepa, Lakeside Junior High seventh-grader Katie Moffitt and eighth-grader Reece Ratliff, Middleburg High Senior Savanna Lafontaine, Oakleaf Junior High eighth-grader Jeniya Boggan and Koestens were given Awards of Excellence.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

More than 4,000 strolled through the rows of art exhibits prepared by students from Clay County District Schools Friday and Saturday during the District Schools Art Show.

Honorable mention ribbons were given to Alayna Godwin, Harlie Wilson and Montesano of Lake Asbury Junior High, Olivia Jiang of Green Cove Springs Junior High, Chloe Hughey and Emma Heck of Clay High, Julia Mokhtar and Victoria

Jimenz of Oakleaf Junior High, Alivia Corral, Calli Christen and Caleb Green of Fleming Island High, Lailan Salem of Oakleaf High, Aryn Miller and Jacob Woodruff of Orange Park High and Lily Parker of Lakeshore Junior High.



Clay High Sophomore Best of Show submission by Alissa Mihalik.



Fleming Island High Senior Award of Excellence submission by Emily Brown.



Orange Park High Senior Best of Show submission by Hope Koestens.

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- ★ Named Academically High Performing School District by the Florida Department of Education.
- ★ Ranked #1 county with best public schools in Florida by Niche in 2023.
- ★ CCDS offers 34+ Career and Technical Education programs.
- ★ All junior high and senior high schools have accelerated learning programs.
- ★ Seven CCDS schools are recognized as a Purple Star School of Distinction by the Florida Department of Education.
- ★ Enhanced and increased security measures to keep students and staff safe.
- ★ Secured over \$1.2 million in grant funds for fine arts programs across all schools.
- ★ All students have digital access through Chromebooks and Wi-Fi at every school.
- ★ Graduation rate is 95% for the District's seven traditional high schools.

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Clay High Award of Excellence submission by Senior Audrey Milligan.



These colorful submissions were provided by Tynes Elementary.



Lake Asbury Junior High eighth-grade Best of Show submission by Teagan Montesano.



Green Cove Springs ninth-grader Award of Excellence submission by Olivia Moran



Fleming Island High Senior Award of Excellence submission by Emily Brown.



Lake Asbury Junior High Award of Excellence submission by eighth-grader Hailey Nalepa.



Lakeside Junior High eight-grade Best of Show submission by Vera Irby.



Left: Fleming Island High Junior Award of Excellence submission by Abbey Paul.

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A.J. Gouldrup, left, and Matthew Hallowell jam during Rockin' for the Stockings last December.

Heroes

come to school, I can't wait for my guitar class. That makes me so happy. Music has a big touch on my heart."

The program's success prompted Paul Wane to donate a sound studio through his Rising Star Give a Kid a Guitar foundation. The gift included guitars, bass, drums, keyboards and lights.

Burke said the guitar classes have profoundly affected the entire school. Attendance has improved, and the school earned an 'A' rating and a "School of Excellence" designation from the Florida Department of Education.

"Does it have an impact on some of our students? Looking at the data with it, I would say yes, 100%," she said. "Do kids stay in school because of that? I'm sure they do. We've got some very big success stories with students here."

Sarah Coleman is a senior who only needs three credits to graduate. She can complete her studies online but chose to be on campus for chorus and guitar classes.

"I only have three classes here, and two of them are with Mr. Golden," she said. "That's pretty good motivation to come to school."

And to keep rockin.'



Henry Carter, left, and Matthew Hallowell perform at Rockin' for the Stockings.

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