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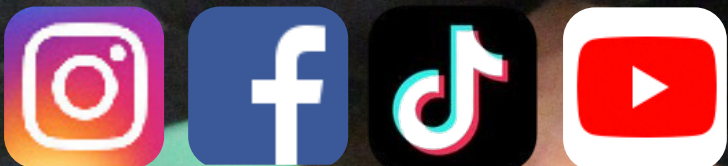
UHS AND COMMUNITY NEWS

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## CHARITY WEEK RAISES MONEY FOR HUMANE SOCIETY OF MACOMB



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Juniors Paola Rodriguez Casas and Jesslyn David gather cookie decorating supplies for their wintery treats. PHOTO BY SOPHIA LENDERS

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Senior Christian Nesovski and junior Jada Austin greeting everyone with a smile as they usher in new arrivals to the Utica High School Media Center for the annual Board of Education Breakfast on Dec. 4. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

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Sophomores Ethan Lesner and Mario Oddo helped raise over 160 dollars from the money grab securing the sophomore class bragging rights. PHOTO BY SAZAN LUHAIB

# Discussion at the breakfast table

Utica High School hosts the Utica Community Schools annual Board of Education Breakfast.

**ANNA BROWN, MARY LUBIEN, AND SAZAN LAHIB**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PAGE & SOCIAL MEDIA EDITOR, & REPORTER

Students dressed in their festive best to host the Utica Community Schools annual Board of Education Breakfast at UHS's Media Center on Dec. 4. This special event allowed high school students from across the district to discuss their experiences as K-12 students and improvements for the future with board members.

UCS Superintendent Robert Monroe discussed the importance of the breakfast during an interview, not just for UHS, but for the district as a whole.

"Our Board of Education is able to sit down with constituents, in this case our students, and pick their brains to get information about what are some of the things they can look at in the future for Utica Community Schools," Monroe said. "Our Board of Education is the governance policy. They look at all things for all kids. For high schools we ask, 'What are the things that we can do to improve the high school experience for our students?'"

Students in attendance were selected by principals and teachers at their schools to include every type of student represented at the breakfast - from athletes to club members. Senior Tanner Gonzales, known by teacher Erin Derk for being a "well rounded student" and taking challenges "head on." Derk selected Gonzales to represent the UHS student body.

"We talked about things that can make Utica High School better and things we are doing outstanding on. One being how we are really good at coming together," Gonzales said. "I feel like we have a lot of opportunities we can all connect with each other, like our clubs

and sports. Overall, I think Utica High School is doing great and it feels good to be included and have my opinion validated."



Representing the Utica High School student body, senior Tanner Gonzales poses for a picture with Utica Community School's Board of Education Treasurer Steven R. Meyer and her fellow peers in the UCS district at the annual Board and Breakfast on Dec. 4. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

Hosting an event of high significance and with many attendees is not for the faint of heart. It takes many people to come together to bring UHS's best foot forward, like the Leadership class and Utica's Student Council.

"I tried to help the guests feel welcomed as I ushered them in. It was amazing to be a part of it," senior Christian Nesovski said. "It feels good because I can help out the school to work with the board to make the

school a better place."

Leadership and Student Council member, senior Delana Dickow proudly welcomed the attendees with a bright smile as she directed them to their seats. Later in an interview, she expands the idea that not only was this a significant event, but a duty for her associations to fulfill.

"Our job is to unify the student body and make the school a better place because generally nobody wants to go to school, but we try to make that environment and atmosphere just a little bit more enjoyable for everybody else," Dickow said. "I'm really proud of what I did here and glad to see other people appreciating it."

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning of Utica Community Schools Mark Dziatczak expressed the value of having an annual board breakfast.

"We are able to connect our dually elected Board of Education Trustees directly to our students and have a conversation of how our schools can be better," Dziatczak said. "We need to make sure that this event is always apart of UCS. It's been in the culture, the fabric of UCS for a very, very long period of time, and I see no reason why we should not continue in the future."

Overall, the annual Utica Community School's Board of Education Breakfast has been knitted into our school culture to not only hear about the great things happening in the district, but to discuss the issues to make UCS better.

**"The main opportunity of this event is for our Board of Education to be able to sit down with our students and look at a variety of different issues we can address and discuss."**



**- Superintendent of Utica Community Schools Robert Monroe**

PHOTO AND CUTOUT BY ANNA BROWN



Senior Christian Nesovski and junior Jada Austin greeting everyone with a smile as they usher in new arrivals to the Utica High School Media Center for the annual Board of Education Breakfast on Dec. 4. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Directing the attendees to their seats, senior Delana Dickow stands by the seating chart for the Breakfast. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Utica High School's Principal Timothy Youngblood, smiles for a photo before thanking all the attendees for coming to the annual Board of Education Breakfast. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Utica Community School's Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Mark Dziatczak, poses for a photo with his colleagues. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

# Model UN club passes first resolution

SOPIA CROOK  
COPY EDITOR



Ethiopia delegates juniors Ella Sam and Paige Brinkey stand up in front of their fellow delegates to share Ethiopia's position on access to primary and secondary education and find countries with similar goals during the moderated discussion portion of Utica's Model UN conference on Nov. 19. PHOTO BY SOPIA CROOK

Twenty-five students representing twelve different countries in Utica's Model UN club came together in advisor Collin Syler's classroom after school and successfully passed their first resolution on Nov. 19. Two weeks earlier, the students, grouped into partners, were tasked with researching their assigned country's current viewpoint on access to primary and secondary education to prepare for the second in-house conference of the year.

The goal for the student delegates was to pass a resolution supported by the majority of the delegates present that effectively expanded access to primary and

secondary education globally. If successful, the resolution would be enacted by all countries in the Model UN following the mock legislative process.

With these educational goals in mind, Estonia delegates seniors Ahmed Hussein and Robert Alvarez began researching Estonia's current position on the topic.

"I started by researching the topic broadly and then narrowing down what Estonia could offer to other countries," Hussien said. "Then, I found real-life UN resolutions that help education including UNICEF [United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund] and UPSHIFT [UNICEF Office of Innovation]."

Knowing Estonia needed more people to support their resolution, Alvarez and Hussein proceeded to partner with delegates representing Denmark, South Korea, and the United States.

"Once we got a group of people with similar goals of helping others, we each said what we want to contribute, how, and why, and made it all a cohesive idea," Hussien said. "Getting other delegates was simple, they either gained our educational support for mostly free or they got taxed."

After Hussein and the supporting delegates submitted their final resolution, they backed up their cause during an unmoderated discussion. They addressed the concern of proper funding as part of their resolution planned to send educational experts to underprivileged countries worldwide. They addressed the issue of bias and what was considered effective education and continued to answer clarifying questions for an hour.

Finally, Syler tallied the final votes.

Eleven out of twelve countries voted in favor of the resolution, and the delegates' first resolution successfully passed.

"It felt really awesome because I knew that we thought it out well," United States delegate sophomore Robert Gerich said. "I knew that if it were an actual United Nations meeting, that the countries would agree on the topics presented if what we attain from the actual government websites are true."

Many delegates agreed that the topic of access to primary and secondary education was an easier topic than the first conference topic of cybersecurity. This ultimately benefited the resolution's success. Syler agreed as well.

"I also knew that this topic, you guys would have had a stronger grasp on," Syler said. "I was excited."

The delegate's efforts to successfully pass the first resolution is one of the first milestones of many. With the current performance and passion of the students within Utica's Model UN club, Syler has expressed the possible attendance of a competitive regional conference with other schools in the future. If interested, Utica's Model UN club accepts new members monthly and allows spectators at each conference to be able to experience what it's like to be a part of the discussion.

# The safety of the microphone

MARY LUBIEN  
SOCIAL MEDIA & PAGE EDITOR

Two tiny buttons that have the ability to alert sirens seems alarming, but it is a sound device all UCS teachers received on Nov. 19. The only training was the "Audio Enhancement Quick Start Guide," so some teachers made an error when trying this new system. The object is a microphone to help students with hearing disabilities, but under that lies more.

Kyle Rojeski, the Microsoft Office, finance, and marketing teacher, discovered an unknown feature that serves an important purpose. While using the microphone, he unknowingly clicked the buttons which called for an emergency within the classroom.

"I accidentally called down to the main office. I apologized," Rojeski said, "but I don't really need a mic, I'm already loud."

This device includes an intercom button that calls the main office and if the buttons on both sides are held down, it will send a silent alarm to the office in case of an emergency.

Psychology and history teacher Steven Haley. Haley has used this new device in class but

has found the microphone is insignificant compared to its important emergency features.

"For me, the microphone is not very useful," Haley said. "I'm already obnoxiously loud. However, the safety ideas for it are phenomenal, it's good to have. I hope I will never have to use it, but the intercom button would be useful for if a student passes out."

Senior Andrew Boice has experienced a few teachers try the microphone, but none of his teachers use it on a daily-basis.

"I think the microphone is good for teachers who need it," Boice said. "It is also good for students that may have a hard time listening in class."

Though the device might seem like just a microphone, its capability provides more than just convenience. By giving teachers reliable communication in case of emergency, Utica takes a step towards increasing the safety of classrooms. If it ever must be used for its emergency features, it brings reassurance among staff.



Microphone given to all teachers at Utica High on Nov. 19.

PHOTO BY MARY LUBIEN  
CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE

"For me the microphone is a big deal because I had vocal cord surgery. It is a great resource while I teach."

-Teacher  
Tammy Hilliard



PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN  
CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE



# FEATURE

INTERESTING STUFF



FEATURE STORIES

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## Murder on the 518 keeps on the tracks

MADALYN POUGET AND CAMILA POTTER  
PAGE EDITOR & GRAPHIC EDITOR, & REPORTER

Theatre students performed their first show of the year: *Murder on the 518* from Nov. 20-22. The play is a murder mystery set on a train traveling to Los Angeles. The show was under the direction of the department's new producer, Samantha Ludwig, as well as student director senior Brendan Silver.

As student director, Silver played a big role in bringing the show to life. For three months, Silver worked diligently through every rehearsal alongside Ludwig to bring this murder mystery alive. He held the responsibility of positioning all the characters on stage and working with Ludwig to piece together the vision of the show. Silver goes on to explain the challenges he faced while working with a new director.

"A new challenge I learned was giving an idea of what you want the show to look like," said Silver. "It can look very different in two people's minds, but you can make compromises, absolutely."

Another key role in helping the play run smoothly was with the assistant stage manager, junior Grace Tuffy. Tuffy took the responsibility of keeping everyone organized and on task backstage alongside main stage manager, senior Amaya Kinsmen, while also navigating and learning the style of a new director. To help transition to a new director, Tuffy focused on accomplishing tasks they were already familiar with, while also allowing Ludwig to introduce new techniques.

"As a stage manager, I make sure everyone works together and there isn't any conflict," Tuffy said. "A challenge with the new director was making sure we were doing stuff we are already used to doing while also allowing her to do new things."

The performance received positive feedback from the audience. Recently retired producer Joel Kaczmarczyk felt proud to see what a success the show came to be, even with the obstacle of transitioning to a new director so quickly. By the time the school year started, the department was still searching for a replacement for Kaczmarczyk.

"It wasn't decided until the last minute what the production was going to be, or if there was going to be a production," Kaczmarczyk said. "They did a wonderful job in a limited amount of time."

Ludwig was honored to take over the program and make the production come to life. The cast and Crew of the production welcomed her with open arms and were grateful that Ludwig was able to keep this program so special to them running.

"Theatre students had to welcome a whole new director with a whole different style," Ludwig said. "They've been amazing."



Sophomores Abigail Gabridge, playing Rachel Knox, and Robert Gerich, playing Caleb Knox, enter the scene, excited for their honeymoon to Los Angeles.

PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



On Nov. 18, sophomore Samantha Rude playing Abby Wells and junior Lianna Stacey playing Lucy Blake look at senior Jade McKinny, playing Isabella Madison with great sadness from her death. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Senior Anna Stecker playing Sidney Bennett reads the newspaper before boarding the 518 train.

PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Sophomores Abigail Gabridge, playing Rachel Knox shields her husband, Robert Gerich, playing Caleb Knox. As senior Jade McKinny playing Isabella Madison struts by their table. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



Junior Alexia Thomas playing Elliot Williams, a novelist.

PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN  
CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE

# Paws and a purpose

PAIGE BRINKEY  
MANAGING EDITOR

Utica High School's students and staff proved that they have a soft spot for four-legged friends. The school's annual Charity Week was held Nov. 10-14 in support of Humane Society of Macomb. The week featured the Coin Stall that delays class until every coin is counted, the Money Grab race between grade-levels to collect the most donations, and club-made raffle baskets. Behind the planning and execution of events was Sophomore Class Adviser and teacher Andrea Solomon.

"I love animals, and we have a close connection because [teacher Suzanne] Greenfield volunteers at the shelter," Solomon said, "and I think it's extremely important to keep the money local."

In 2024, Utica was able to raise and donate \$2696.26 to HSOM. This year, Utica ran laps around their previous contribution; the school sent \$3,030 to the shelter. All proceeds will go towards toys, food, cleaning supplies, and fulfilling the animals' medical needs. On Dec. 4, Utica student council representatives went to HSOM to meet some of the furry friends, puppies Little Boy and Bitsy, that they've helped support.

"I care about all the dogs and cats because I have a dog myself," senior Gem Suhair said. "So, I feel bad for all the animals that don't have owners."

HSOM is always in search of a helping hand - or paw. Donations aren't just monetary; bringing in towels, blankets, collars, leashes, food, and cleaning supplies to the shelter are other ways to support the cause.

For people whose hearts and homes are open, the shelter always has cats and dogs in search of their fur-ever home. Some animals are still on the road to adoption; these are usually sick, elderly, or orphaned pets. For them, foster application forms can be found under the 'Get Involved' section of HSOM's website. Volunteer opportunities can be found under that tab as well.

"When you go to adopt, just know kind of what you're looking for," former UHS graduate and HSOM Marketing Coordinator Genesis Rabine said. "You can find anything you want in a rescue, any breed, any temperament, age. Just know that they want a lot of love. They want a lot of attention. They're going to beg for it."



Accepting the donations brought in from Charity Week, HSOM Executive Director Mike Wilkie expresses his gratitude toward Utica High School for their support. In the past five years, the Chieftains have brought in \$15,257.95 for HSOM. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

**Make a tail wag!**

Scan for HSOM's donation wish list.



Leaning out of her kennel, Trish reaches out for human affection. In 2024, HSOM gave 451 cats their forever families through pet adoption, the shelter hopes to add Trish and her friends to that number someday. PHOTO BY PAIGE BRINKEY



PHOTO BY PAIGE BRINKEY

"I love that all these animals know is love, and they just want to be loved. They want people's attention and they want that connection."

HSOM Marketing Coordinator  
**Genesis Rabine**



HSOM Marketing Coordinator Genesis Rabine and teacher Suzanne Greenfield wrap Little Boy in a warm embrace, showing him all the adoration a puppy could ask for. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN



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**Who rescued who?**  
Adoptable cats and dogs

- 2-years-old
- Rottweiler-mix
- Male

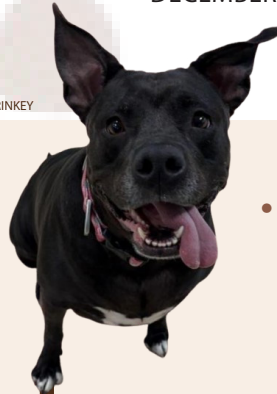
**Monty**



ALL GRAPHICS BY PAIGE BRINKEY

- 4-years-old
- Lab-mix
- Female

**Shadow**



PHOTOS BY HSOM STAFF

- 4-years-old
- Shorthair
- Female

**Marlee**



Nothing but smiles at the shelter as sophomore Leah Sleiman plays with Little Boy. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

**What is Black Dog Syndrome?**

Due to superstitions and lack of awareness, black cats and dogs have the lowest adoption rate. Meet **Cracklewood**, a three-year-old lab-mix whose spent the past four months in the shelter. She raised her three puppies in the care of HSOM and watched as they all got adopted. Cracklewood is still there. BDS could be the reason this lovable pup stays in the shelter system.

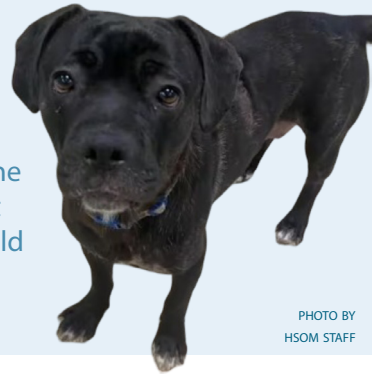


PHOTO BY HSOM STAFF

Bitsy's ears perk up to the sound of the room rustling with excitement. With her cozy sweater and precious face, Bitsy tugs at the heart strings of everyone around.

PHOTO BY PAIGE BRINKEY



As she pets Pinky, teacher Andrea Solomon's face says it all: there's a reason dogs are called man's best friend. PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

**Meet Pinky!**

Pinky is an 8-year-old Cane Corso/Mastiff Mix with a heart of gold. This gentle giant is in need of calm, loving foster parents to house him while he waits for his upcoming mass removal surgery. The cost of the procedure is estimated around \$1,500.

The donation money that Utica High School raised for the shelter will fund his surgery. Charity Week gives Pinky a reason to keep smiling.



PHOTO BY SUZANNE GREENFIELD



Taking all of his energy out on the colossal tennis ball, puppy Little Boy flips, flops, and runs around the room.

PHOTO BY ANNA BROWN

# Race against the wind

KARA BOICE  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The start of the Stuffing Strut 5k on Griswold and Ford St. on Nov. 27.  
PHOTO BY KARA BOICE

The roar of the crowd filled Griswold and Ford St on Thanksgiving morning, Nov. 27, creating an atmosphere unlike any other. In years past, teachers from Utica High School have participated in the annual Turkey Trot. This year, teacher Collin Syler ran the Stuffing Strut 5k in Detroit. Other races included the Strategic Staffing Solutions 10k and the Mashed Potato Mile (The Parade Company).

In Detroit, was where America's Thanksgiving Parade was founded in 1924, and the associated races began in 1979. The parade was most recently voted the number one parade in the country in 2024. Both the parade and races raise money for the Parade Company, a nonprofit supported by hundreds of volunteers.

Syler has running experience, but this was his first time ventured to Detroit, as his family uncle encouraged him to try the 5k on Thanksgiving Day.

"I decided to run the Turkey Trot this year because my uncle asked me to run it with him and I was thrilled to do it," Syler said. "I usually run three-four times a week, so I wasn't worried about it."

The exhilarating atmosphere and big crowds made for an exciting 5k race. The mile, 5k, and 10k drew over 17,000 people to Detroit.

"I have never ran the Turkey Trot before, so I was excited for the crowd and the environment," Syler said. "I was happy to race and get down Woodward Street."

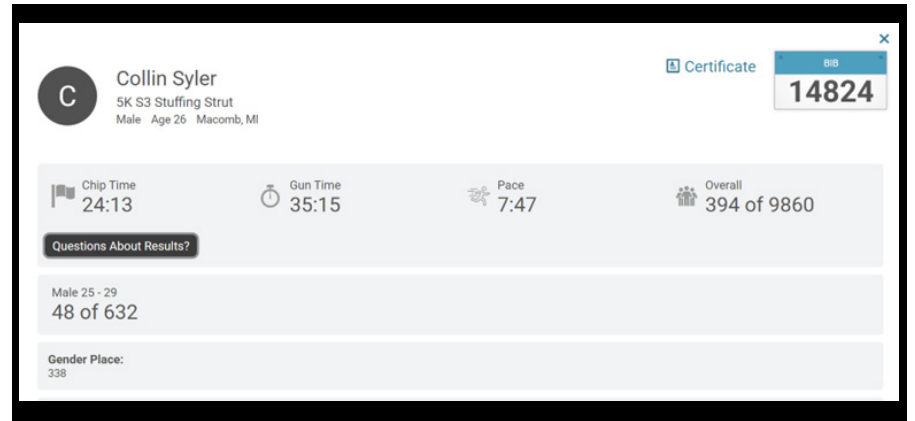
Race-day conditions were challenging: 30-degree temperatures and 13 miles per hour winds. Syler is familiar with bad weather conditions. While running for fun outside in previous winter seasons, he experienced frigid weather conditions.

"I have run outside in the cold before, so I wasn't too worried about the temperature during the race," Syler said. "I wore a Star Wars Christmas hat, which helped me keep warm."

Syler closed the race out with a time of 24:13, averaging a 7:47 pace. Despite being chilly, the temperature didn't impact his pace.

"The race was windy, but the buildings helped block some of it," Syler said. "It was a great experience, and I'd definitely run it again."

Despite the frigid temperatures and the wind, Syler made the most of race day. Finding joy and accomplishment in completing the 5k.



Collin Syler's results from the Stuffing Strut 5k. (Parade Company)



Teacher Collin Syler takes a photo with his aunt and uncle after the Stuffing Strut 5k. PHOTO BY COLLIN SYLER



Medal from Stuffing Strut 5k in Detroit, Michigan on Nov. 27. PHOTO AND CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE



Teacher Collin Syler poses with his Stuffing Strut 5k medal. PHOTO BY COLLIN SYLER



Clowny, the face of America's Thanksgiving Day Parade. PHOTO BY COLLIN SYLER AND CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE

# Cooking a way to friendship



**CAMILLA POTTER**  
REPORTER

The aroma of a new cooking club spread along the halls of Utica High School. On Nov. 11, the cooking club hosted an informational meeting in Life Skills teacher Amy Merlo's classroom, room 215. The cooking club made its debut at Utica High School on Dec. 2 with Merlo, President sophomore Paris Karcho, and Vice-President sophomore Sophia Lenders in charge.

Having a background in cooking is beneficial but not required. The meeting was packed with students who were interested in joining the club. All the flyers around the school and the announcements over the speakers encouraged students to attend the meeting. Karcho and Lenders collaborated

to figure out how to advertise the club.

"My friend [Karcho] came up with the idea of a cooking club, because she wanted to start something new," Lenders said. "We want our classmates to have the opportunity to show their creativity, bond over cooking, and make new friends."

"I was inspired by my friend Ashley who does not go to Utica to create a cooking club," Karcho said. "I want to teach others culinary skills."

Even though cooking is not for everyone, every student can join. The club is not limited to cooks or professional bakers. Students of all ages are encouraged to participate in their first official event.

"People can make new friends," Karcho said, "and connect with other people who share the same interest of cooking."

"I think it will inspire people to learn how to cook. It may give people the courage to participate in the cooking club," Lenders said. "After a while, people will get more comfortable with cooking and find that they want to test their new cooking abilities by themselves."

No one said cooking is easy, but making the learning process fun is always an option when people are surrounded by other cooks who want to get better at it.

## Contact information

Arrow

Utica High School  
47255 Shelby Road  
Utica, MI 48317

phone: 586.797.2305

fax: 586.797.2201

e-mail: uticapublications@gmail.com

website: uhsarrow.org

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Letters to the Editor are welcomed and must be signed; however, names will be withheld for valid reasons. Letters may be dropped off in room 205, and electronic submissions will be verified. All contributions are subject for restrictions of libel, defamation, slander and obscenity. Arrow staff reserves the right to edit letters without changing the meaning, and also reserves the right to reject letters for reasons of limited space, untimely material, or unbalanced coverage.

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As interested students funnel in, club members wait for the informational meeting on Nov. 11 to begin. PHOTO BY SOPHIA LENDERS



Seniors Reese Nida, Alexa Dawod, and Jonathan McCabe show off their festively decorated holiday cookies. PHOTO BY SOPHIA LENDERS



Intently listening, members are delivered instructions by the club presidents for the Christmas cookie meeting on Dec. 2. PHOTO BY SOPHIA LENDERS



Juniors Paola Rodriguez Casas and Jesslyn David gather cookie decorating supplies for their winter treats. PHOTO BY SOPHIA LENDERS



DRAWING BY  
PAIGE BRINKEY



Follow **@uhscookingclub09** on Instagram for updates and club content

# Winter band concert celebrates the season

NOLAN DARGA AND HUNTER LIEBZEIT  
REPORTERS

Utica High School bands had their first concert for the 2025-26 school year at 7 p.m. in the auditorium Dec. 8. Teacher Brett Bays conducted the bands' performances.

"All the students are doing really well practicing, and we have been since the second week of school, so it should be well received by the audience," Bays said. "It's hard to pick a favorite piece, but for jazz band, I would say 'Stolen Moments.' For Symphonic, I'll say 'Joyance.' For the wind ensemble, it's a piece called 'A Show Stopping Christmas.'"

The band has been practicing for the concert over the past twelve weeks and among the students, senior Robert Alvarez has put in a lot of work by attending sectionals (practices for a specific section to make sure that portion of the band is doing well).

"I like the pieces we're playing for the concert. They are well written, and we play them amazingly. I am going to attend sectionals with the other percussionists as well as practice at home," Alvarez said. "I really like this piece called 'A Show Stopping Christmas' that we're playing in wind ensemble. I think that we are in the best spot possible in terms of practice. There are definitely a couple things to fix when it comes to small excerpts, but for the most part, I think that this concert is going to go very well for the wind ensemble."

Due to the concert being in December, senior Jonathan Sopko has had a lot of time to practice and pick his favorite song.

"I feel the music is strong this year—nothing popular but good all around, I'm preparing for the concert by practicing and going to my private lessons," Sopko said. "My favorite piece of music is 'Birdland' because it makes me feel pretty good that we're on a good track."

Junior Sydney Wheeler practices using two instruments for the concert that are a bassoon for wind ensemble and an alto sax for jazz band.

"I think it's a good level of difficulty for what we're all ready for in each class, I'm practicing both my instruments every day after school," Wheeler said. "Practicing makes me feel prepared for the concert, and learning a second instrument is more difficult than learning my first instrument to me."

Having a lot of time to practice, junior Nathan Seigert feels like the concert is going to be without issues.

"I'm excited about the music being performed. I think everything's pretty interesting to listen to. For one of the bands, we have after school rehearsals and then just a lot in class," Seigert said. "My favorite piece of music being performed is 'Stolen Moments' because it's pretty fun to play. I think we're going to do really well. The way we've been rehearsing has been going really well."

With the preparations nearly complete and the concert date approaching, this year's concert is set to show the talent and hard work the band has done, and they hope the concert will be a success and will bring the audience joy on Dec 8.



HHS community service event, making yarn hat ornaments.

PHOTO BY EMMA ST. JOHN  
CUTOUT BY KARA BOICE

## HHS brings holiday cheer to local nursing homes

EMMA ST. JOHN  
REPORTER

For the past three years, Rachel Schornak's AVID class has participated in a community service project that has been very successful. This year, AVID's are doing it differently by opening it up to the HHS academy as well as HOSA. The project is to make miniature snow hat ornaments. Once completed, students plan to send them to local nursing homes.

Schornak decided to do this project in the hope of bringing the community together and spreading some cheer to those around her.

"I can't give myself all the credit," Schornak said. "It was my idea, but I have been doing it in my AVID class for some time, and I decided to open it up to all of my medical classes."

Junior Lucy Zakens and a member of the HHS academy participated in the project this year with the help of making string snow hat ornaments.

"It looked like a fun thing to do during class," Zakens said, "and they were very easy to make."

Melissa Rice, the head teacher for the HHS academy, has also been a huge advocate for this project. She opened up the project to all her classes as well.

"I thought it would be a good idea to participate in this project," Rice said. "I have done many community service projects with my classes in the past, so I thought I should join in."

This project has been successful with many ornaments made so far. The medical teachers have brought this project to life, bringing together the school community with one goal in mind; to spread Christmas cheer to local nursing home communities.



Sophomore Alissa Wilson playing her saxophone solo in the piece "Joyance" in the band room at Utica High School.

PHOTO BY NOLAN DARGA



# SPORTS

ATHLETES, COACHES, FANS, AND MORE



In an intense battle on the mat for the win, Utica women's wrestler senior Ashly Ritter entangles herself in between her opponent to keep their shoulders pinned as the referee closely observes the match. PHOTO BY GRACE EALY

## Ashly Ritter: advocating for women's wrestling

SOFIA CROOK  
COPY EDITOR

"I remember sitting on the sidelines, kind of like, freaking out a little bit," Utica High School women's wrestler senior Ashly Ritter said. "Am I really about to do this?"

It was only three years ago when Ritter, Utica's only senior female wrestler, competed in her first match against a male wrestler in Armada.

"I had watched everybody else's matches go one period and mine went all three periods," Ritter said. "It was a struggle till the last second for a point."

Sweating and panting, Ritter walked off the mat after a prolonged and unyielding battle against her opponent.

"I remember when I walked off the mat, I was breathing super heavy," Ritter said. "Coach Davis came up to me, and he said, 'You know you

won, right?'"

Acknowledging that her hand was held high by a referee, Ritter felt a sense of accomplishment that encouraged her to continue the season and to push through the hard work.

"It actually gave me a little bit of a confidence boost," Ritter said. "Going from, 'Oh, I'm a girl—I'll never beat a guy, to I actually did.'"

To understand the reasoning behind her confidence boost, Ritter expresses the differences between male and female wrestlers. From biological processes to more mundane activities, like being unable to get her nails done, Ritter remains an advocate for fellow women who wrestle.

"It's a lot harder for women to gain muscle over time," Ritter said. "It takes a lot more effort from us to see the same results that the guys are seeing."

To continue to spread awareness and represent the few female wrestlers currently competing at Utica High School, Ritter created and manages the Utica women's wrestling page on Instagram.

In an Instagram post uploaded on Jul. 21, Ritter captions the post with the following statement:

"Did you know that the way women's hormone fluctuate can actually make them more prone to ligament and tendon damage? This is important to remember in sports, especially high drive contact sports," Ritter said. "This for my ladies who wrestle, I see you, I understand."

As she enters the 2025-2026 wrestling season, Ritter continues to work hard and encourages aspiring female wrestlers to do the same.

"Don't be afraid to just get in the room and try it," Ritter said. "It's going to suck for the first little bit and

sometimes it still sucks, but overall, it's worth it."

In the end, Ritter serves as an inspirational figure to fellow female wrestlers. To stay updated with the lifestyles and performances of Ritter and her teammates, visit @utica\_womens\_wrestling on Instagram.



Following a long difficult match, wrestler senior Ashly Ritter breathes a sigh of relief and accomplishment as she receives feedback on her performance from Coach Clinton Davis. PHOTO BY BRANDY RITTER

Having fun during practice, wrestler junior Grace Ealy sits on senior Ashly Ritter's shoulders as they both smile for the camera.

PHOTO BY  
BRANDY  
RITTER



## Where the dice decides

PAIGE BRINKEY  
MANAGING EDITOR



The road ahead looks rough, but sophomore Liam Pappas and juniors Carter Stricklen, Rachel Brodi, Adam Hickman, and Alijah Downey trudge on. Meanwhile, behind the divider, junior Lilly McNair ushers the adventurers through battle during the club meeting.

PHOTO BY PAIGE BRINKEY

Magic doesn't always need spells or witches' brew, sometimes it just needs a table, a map, and a handful of dice. That magic comes alive as players step into the worlds that they've built together.

Dungeons & Dragons is a group role-playing game where individuals design characters and complete quests, rolling dice to see how the story will unfold. The Dungeon Master narrates the players' moves, bringing the tales of mystical worlds to life. The game requires strategy, imagination, but most crucially, community.

"I had a few friends who had played Dungeons & Dragons before and from what they told me it sounded pretty fun," junior Rachel Brodi said. "I never had a group to play it with until I joined the club. It gave me an opportunity to actually try out the game."

The club meets in room 209 at 2:30p.m. every Thursday. For such a time-consuming, intense game, students can begin their storyline without the stress of trying to coordinate plans outside of school. That consistency is what inspired teacher Collin Syler to take on the role of club adviser.

"I wanted to pick up the club because Dungeons & Dragons is something I do with my friends," Syler said. "I know how important it is to our groups and the bonds we have, and I have so much fun with it. I want to give other people that opportunity."

For many members, the club isn't just about fantasy maps or character sheets, it's about the bonds they can form. Students who may not see or speak to each other during the school day find themselves working as a team. That connection is exactly how the club first formed.

"The club got started because trying to set up Dungeons & Dragons outside of school is near impossible," senior Ahmed Hussein said. "The ability to have a few hours every week, when everyone can do it is amazing."

After club founder Nicole Barents graduated in 2025, Hussein took over as club president. Stepping into this role meant keeping the vision for this club alive.

"I like to think of the club as a success," Hussein said.

"When I took over, it definitely felt like the club was dying. I wanted to preserve it as best I could."

Now, the club is hoping to grow even more and bring in students with big imaginations and even bigger desires for adventure.



With ascendancy, President senior Ahmed Hussein leads his group through a quest as the table Dungeon Master during a club meeting.

PHOTO BY PAIGE BRINKEY



President  
**Ahmed Hussein**

"Dungeons and Dragons started as a way for me to connect with my friends from my old school. Most of my closest friends played Dungeons and Dragons with me at one point or another, so I guess that says something."



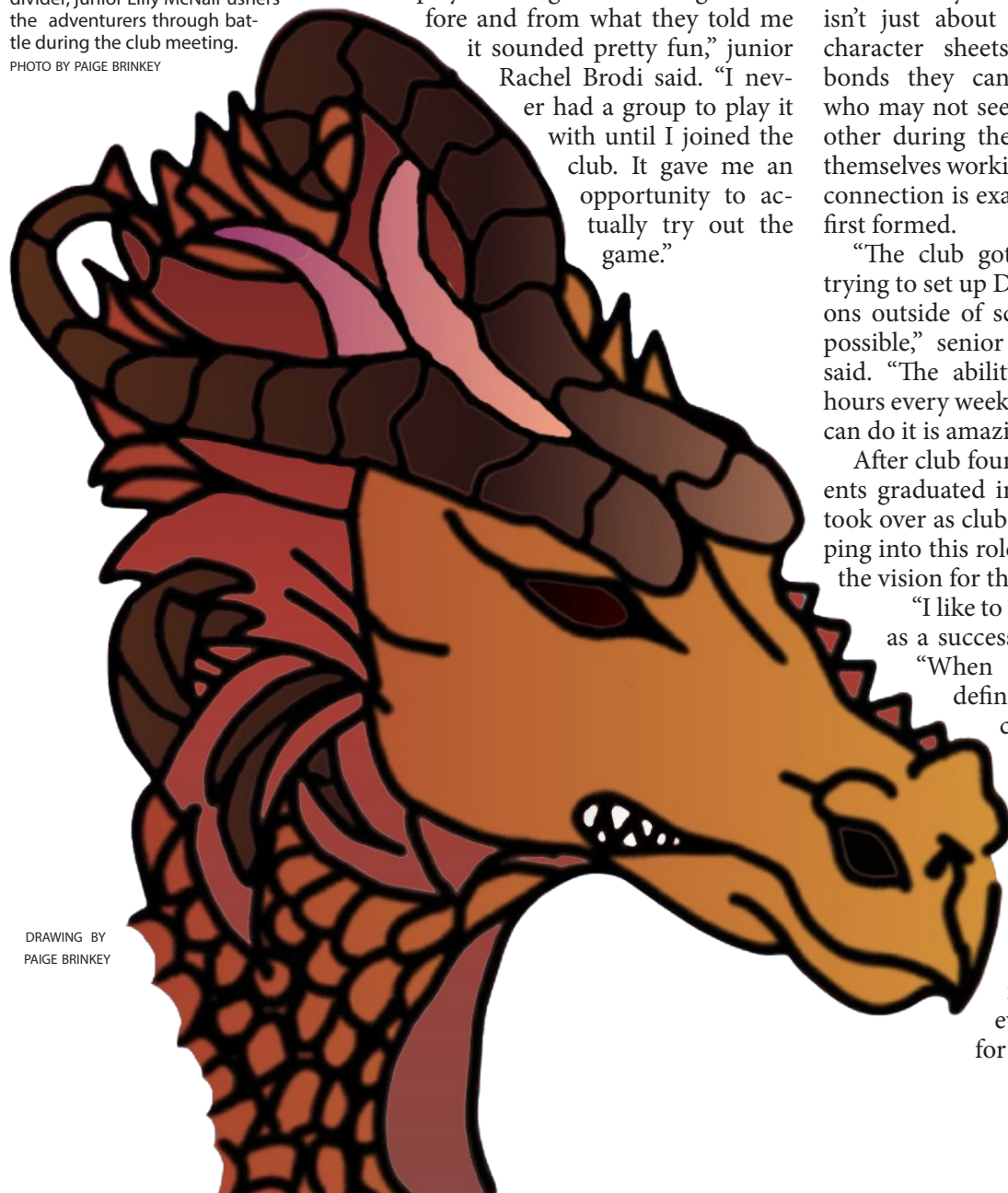
Member  
**Rachel Brodi**

"I started playing Dungeons and Dragons last year. What I love most about the game is just how different it is every time you play. No one game is the same and it keeps things fun and interesting."



Adviser  
**Collin Syler**

"I started playing Dungeons and Dragons when I was a junior in high school over Christmas break, and what I love about it is that you get to create new characters and showcase completely different sides of yourself."



DRAWING BY  
PAIGE BRINKEY