

The Wildcat Chronicles

Durant High School

February 22, 2024

New display shows school's past

By Colby Gast

One of the final pieces of the puzzle to complete the recent renovations to the school commons is a touchscreen that displays Durant's school history.

The touchscreen was put up last fall and is operational with a few items, such as the calendar for Durant, a handful of yearbooks, and a small portion of the senior class composite photos, according to the leader of this operation, Athletic Director Matt Straube.

The historical website that the touchscreen will use can be accessed at this link: <https://durantwildcats.touchpros.com/>

If you have content such as historical photos or old records, you can email touchpro@durant.k12.ia.us to share what you have. You can also donate \$40 if you are interested in sponsoring a yearbook being

digitized.

Mr. Straube said compiling the data for the touchscreen is a work in progress, and its final form will provide much more information and background of Durant's school history.

"It will hold Durant's record books, yearbooks, composite photos, events, calendars, and many other things," said Mr. Straube.

The screen will also recognize the memorial hallway, the giving tree, NHS inductees, and the fine arts.

"The touchscreen is connected to a website that Durant alumni across the country will be able to access from their homes," said Mr. Straube.

This is a very tedious and long process for Mr. Straube, who is working on it alone, as there is so much information that is

intended to be displayed.

In turn, next school year there will be a new student group called "Durant History" that will be working on the project each day to assure its high quality and help get all the information wanted on there.

When the screen was put up, the original hard copy senior portraits that hung in flip-through frames were taken down, which has struck some community members the wrong way.

Mrs. Linda Bachus, who has lived in Durant since 1967 and had two sons graduate from the high school, understood the screen will essentially be replacing the hard copies, but as of now, it isn't running, so she is unable to flip through the classes.

"So many people came into the commons, students, teachers, and alumni, to
See TOUCHSCREEN, page 3

Robotics team qualifies for state meet

By Kaetlyn Hansell

The Durant robotics team, the Mechanicats, is traveling to state for the first time in its history. The state robotics



Photo by Nic Poston

Senior Cayden Eckhardt works on the competition robot for the Mechanicats.

meet will take place at the Xstream Arena in Coralville on March 1 and 2.

"I think it's pretty cool to see the team go to state in my first year," said junior Gavin Broussard. "I'm not the most confident, but I really hope we move on. There are 72 teams, and only the top two teams move on to worlds, and we came in fourth at the league meet."

The Mechanicats' most experienced member, senior Blake Thoma, has been a part of the Durant robotics team for four years.

"There was more help this year for the team, and people were more dedicated to becoming successful," said Thoma.

"There were also less requirements to make state, so it was easier to accomplish this year."

Durant math teacher Mr. Joey Kramer has been coaching the robotics team for eight years.

This is the first year the team has not had to compete in super qualifiers to advance to state. The Mechanicats qualified directly from their league tournament.

After six meets this season, the Mechanicats finished fourth in the league meet behind teams from Belle Plaine and Iowa City.

Each season, the robotics team is given a new challenge for its robot. This season, the robot places hexagonal objects onto a slanted easel to score points in a match.

Senior Cayden Eckhardt, project manager of the Mechanicats, has been on the team for two years. Eckhardt has a big impact on the team and has learned a lot from being a part of the Mechanicats.

"I've mostly been hopping around helping where needed, but my main job has been making sure everyone stays on task and being positive when everyone is tired and snippy," says Eckhardt.

"I thought engineering was cool! It still is, but I've learned that I'm more into the science behind making stuff instead of the machines in general. I'd say doing robotics definitely helped me learn what I do and don't like about science-related topics."

The tournament will start March 1 at 12 p.m. and March 2 at 8 a.m.

Durant's drama club to perform *Annie Jr.*

By Gavin Broussard

The Durant High School drama club will be performing the musical *Annie Jr.* on March 2 at 6 p.m. and March 3 at 2 p.m. The performances will be held in the auditorium, and tickets will be sold for \$5.

Annie Jr., a shorter version of the famous musical *Annie*, will include a total of 25 cast and crew members. Ms. Jeanine Link, high school vocal music teacher, is in charge of the cast, and Mrs. Cassandra Sickels, elementary art teacher, is in charge of the crew.

Junior Jada Jones plays the lead role of Annie, an 11-year-old orphan living during the Depression era, and junior Wyatt Richards plays Mr. Oliver Warbucks, the billionaire who adopts Annie.

Sophomore Ellasyn Clark plays Grace Farrell, the private secretary to Oliver Warbucks, and freshman Beck Lerma plays Miss Hannigan, the director of the orphanage where Annie lives at the beginning of the play.

Sophomore Carter Behal and freshman Chloe Devlin will play the supporting roles of Rooster and Lily respectively.

Since *Annie Jr.* is a musical, Ms.

Link was looking for the role of Annie to be filled by a student with strong singing capabilities.

"I have worked with most of these students in choir, and this helped me determine that Jada would be a great fit," said Ms. Link.

"Jada has a beautiful voice, and she also stood out to me during her audition. I knew she displayed the determination and

charm that the role requires. Jada gives Annie such a fresh and fun perspective that I think audiences will enjoy."

With the musical occurring during the flu season, Ms. Link has understudies for two key roles.

"I have one understudy for the role of Annie and one understudy for the role of Miss Hannigan," said Ms. Link. "I also think
See MUSICAL, page 2



Photo by Nic Poston

Sophomore Ellasyn Clark and junior Wyatt Richards run lines for the March musical.

Absence rates tied to COVID

By Royce Richman

The rate of chronic absenteeism in the Durant school district has more than doubled since the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2018-2019 school year, the year before COVID, the average rate of chronic absenteeism was 10 percent in Durant, according to statistics from the Iowa Department of Education. The statewide average was 12.7 percent.

In the 2021-2022 school year, the year after Durant stopped requiring COVID masks, the rate increased to 23.4 percent with the statewide average being 25.6 percent.

Almost a quarter of Durant students suffered from chronic absenteeism that year, which means that they missed at least 10 percent of the school year, around 17 days of school.

According to an 2023 Associated Press article, the national rates of chronic absence have also been on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"More than a quarter of students missed at least 10% of the 2021-22 school year, making them chronically absent, according to the most recent data available," the article said. "Before the pandemic, only 15% of students missed that much school."

Durant High School Principal Mr. Joel Diederichs agrees that COVID-19 may have affected absence rates.

"I believe the world has changed since the pandemic, and it definitely could be one of the factors that could be increasing this issue," he said.

Mr. Diederichs says the school will send up to three letters, based on the percentage of days absent, to parents of students who are chronically absent to help solve the issue.

If those letters do not improve a student's absent rate, the case is referred to the county attorney for a possible violation of the state's truancy laws.

According to Cedar County Attorney Adam Blank, the first thing he does when he is notified of a truancy case is have a "mediation meeting" with the parents of the student, the principal of the school, and the school counselor.

If the meetings are unsuccessful and the students don't fix their habits, the parents could face jail time, a fine, or community service.

"If it's a first offense, it's anywhere from no jail time up to 10 days in jail and a fine of up to \$100," said Mr. Blank.

A second offense could result in a fine up to \$500 and up to 20 days in jail, and a third offense could result in a maximum fine of \$1,000 and up to 30 days in jail.

In the last couple of years, Mr. Blank said that he has had two or three mediation meetings with parents of students at Durant High School, and no follow-up was required on his part.

One well-known struggle that teens face is a shift in their sleep patterns.

According to a website from Johns Hopkins Medicine, most teenagers need at least 9 hours of sleep to function

See ABSENCE, page 2