



the Bulletin



January 2011

Ensuring opportunities for learning, personal growth & social responsibility

See new cost-saving Census Form inside

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The global economy comes to Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake

Will BH-BL students be ready for today's & tomorrow's careers?

Technology and globalization are changing the job market faster than ever and are making the need for a good education more critical than ever.

This is a message one can read almost daily in the national press. It's also a message that was repeated by five area business executives who spoke to BH-BL parents, students and staff at a community forum called "Tech Valley comes to BH-BL" at the middle school in November.

Board of Education members sponsored the forum to help local folks understand the impact of having the 21st century technology revolution right in our backyard, as it were, with the GlobalFoundries \$4.5 billion computer "chip fab" plant being built in Malta, only five miles from the north-east corner of Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake.

The coming of the chip fab plant has already attracted many new high-

tech businesses to the region, and many more are expected to relocate here in Tech Valley over the next decade, both to support GlobalFoundries and to take part in a regional semiconductor/nanotechnology revolution.

New job opportunities

"For years, we've been bemoaning the fact that our kids were going to other parts of the country for careers," said BH-BL superintendent Jim Schultz. "But what we're starting to see is a

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BH-BL seniors Walter Pfuntner (left) and Mike Deruscio examine one of the programmable atomic force microscope simulators that students in the high school's Principles of Engineering course use to learn about the challenges of working at the nanoscale.

\$30,000 grant for SEMI High Tech U

The semiconductor industry partners with BH-BL

Thanks to the efforts of BH-BL school board member Elizabeth Herkenham, our district has received a \$30,000 grant from the Saratoga County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to pilot a Saratoga County version of the SEMI Foundation's "High Tech U" for high school students.

High Tech U is a three-day interactive experience for

students that promotes math, science and engineering skills and exposes students to a broad range of careers in the semiconductor and high tech industries. The SEMI Foundation sponsors High Tech U at locations around the world in conjunction with local businesses and educational institutions. (See their seven-minute video at www.Semi.org/foundation)

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High school students' use of technology

Teacher Mike Mosall surveyed BH-BL high schoolers last spring about their personal use of technology and uncovered some interesting facts.

▶ 99% of pupils said they had access to a computer at home with internet access. 62% have their own desktop or laptop computer.

▶ 96% said they own a cell phone, and 27% indicated they send more than 100 text messages daily. (Presumably this is between classes or after school — right, kids? — since cell phone use in class is prohibited.)

▶ Students said on average they spend six hours a day using media for recreational and non-academic purposes (which is less than the national average of seven and a half hours).

What do today's employers look for when hiring?

At the “Tech Valley comes to BH-BL” forum in November, business leaders from four local high-tech industries and one community college agreed that parents and teachers can help prepare today's children for tomorrow's job market by encouraging them to concentrate on areas like math, science and technology. But people skills, communication skills, and passion are important too.

“We look for people who have a passion for what they do,” emphasized Theresa Thompson, manager of staffing and employee relations at Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. She spoke of the school years as an important time for teens to explore many areas so that they can find their passion: “When people pursue what they are passionate about, they will be successful.”

James Maughan, product service manager at GE Wind Energy; Tobi Saulnier, CEO of 1st Playable Productions; George Seymour, biotechnology project coordinator for Hudson Valley Community College; Mike Russo, director of government relations for GlobalFoundries; and Thompson all agreed that foreign competition for US jobs has increased, but that plenty of opportunities still exist for those who are prepared to grab them.

“It's no longer a case of the old saying ‘to the victor go the spoils,’” explained Seymour.



Though they represent different high tech industries, panel members Mike Russo (left), Tobi Saulnier, George Seymour, Theresa Thompson, and James Maughan had similar advice for today's students relative to crucial job skills.

“Now it's really a case of ‘to the educated go the spoils.’”

Maughan agreed: “If you have good skills, you can have a good job here in the US.” He stressed that understanding the fundamentals of a given field is more important than knowing the latest whiz-bang software. His team at GE looks for job candidates with an analytic mind and a deep understanding of fundamentals — people who can apply basic principles and knowledge to new situations.

Saulnier's 45-person firm makes computer games that are translated into six languages and marketed world-wide. Her biggest challenge, she says, is getting younger staff members to understand the intense competition facing 1st Playable Productions, particularly when staff in competing companies around the world are often willing to work twice as hard as Americans.

Saulnier looks for employees who know a second language and are strong in math. Even the

artists at 1st Playable use a lot of math in their jobs, she said.

Several panel members promoted the value of attending a two-year college or a vocational or technical school after high school. Where once a high school diploma was enough to get a good job in many manufacturing or service fields, 21st century employers now look for at least a technical certificate or a two-year associate's degree. In fact, Russo cited figures showing the need for new hires with two-year degrees may exceed that of four-year degrees in a number of fields.

Strong communication skills are another must, all the panel members agreed, along with the ability to work with people of all cultures and backgrounds.

Russo also stressed the importance of businesses partnering with schools because “if we can get our daughters and sons excited about math and science, there will be careers down the road for them.” ♦

Keeping students successful in the 21st century job market

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rebirth of opportunity right here in the Capital District.”

GlobalFoundries is committed to creating more than 1,200 new jobs itself, and thousands more jobs are predicted in spin-off and support companies. Forum keynote speaker Mike Russo of GlobalFoundries described the new chip fab as an example of “the old adage that ‘a rising tide carries all boats.’ Everyone has to be successful for GlobalFoundries to succeed. ... Our goal is to make sure that as many of these jobs are filled with local people as possible.”

Russo and the other four business executives then answered questions about the skills young people need if they want to get jobs in Tech Valley or similar high-tech environments. *(See related story on left.)*

21st century skills at BH-BL

Forum attendees also received a copy of the school district’s own “21st Century Framework for Learning.” Assistant superintendent Rick Evans described how this list of 17 key skills and themes was created a year ago with input from staff, the community at large, and business and college representatives.

The goal was to create a written list of proficiencies students need to have to be successful in the 21st century — so that BH-BL teachers can incorporate these skills and themes into instruction across all subjects

Many of the 21st Century skills and themes are not new, Evans noted. But proficiencies like teamwork, productivity, adaptability, and media literacy have taken on a new urgency in the current era of increased in-

ternational competition for jobs.

Other skills have changed, such as the ability to manage, analyze and synthesize information. “In the internet age, finding information can be much easier for today’s students than it was for their parents and grandparents,” Evans said. “But what is much more challenging today is managing, evaluating and making sense of the huge body of information one can access with just a few clicks of the mouse.”

Russo and other panel members reinforced the importance of the BH-BL 21st Century Framework, saying that many of the traits listed were indeed skills that they sought in new staff members. The complete BH-BL list is available online at www.bhbl.org/District/news/BHBL_21stcentury_skills_themes.pdf ◆



Have you signed up for the BH-BL School News Notifier?

If not, look for the SNN logo at www.bhbl.org and click to learn all about it. The School News Notifier is a low-cost, opt-in, email alert system. Anyone can sign up to receive emails about the news that interests him or her. The district currently offers eight alerts. You can register to receive emails at whatever address(es) you wish about:

1. Unexpected School Closings & Delays (Also available as a cell phone text message)
2. Budget Development News
3. Charlton Heights School News
4. Pashley School News
5. Stevens School News
6. O'Rourke Middle School News
7. BH-BL High School News
8. Changes in sex offender residency within the district

SEMI High Tech U

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BH-BL will be able to send 20 high school students (probably 9th and 10th graders) to the program, and the Corinth and Stillwater high schools will each send 10 students to team with ours. The High Tech U classes will be held in May at local participating businesses and colleges.

Students build actual circuits, learn about the semiconductor and nanotech industry, discover the breadth of careers in these fields, and see first-hand how math and science are used to solve real world problems.

BH-BL teachers Marie DiCristofaro and Katie Zyskowski have previously attended SEMI High Tech U Teacher Edition and have shared what they learned with other staff and students at the O'Rourke Middle School. ◆



SPARTAN PRIDE!

Artwork by 12 BH-BL high school students was selected for the “Saratoga All-Stars” exhibition this month at the Saratoga Arts Center. Last November, 12 student musicians were chosen to participate in the Area All-State Music Festival.

See the Fine Arts page of the BH-BL website for photos and many more examples of our students’ accomplishments.

Way to go, Spartans!



SPARTAN PRIDE!

Did you know ...

that despite the budget cuts of the past two years, BH-BL students continue to out-perform, on average, their counterparts in most other Capital Region school districts? Below are just a couple of the reasons we have to be so proud of our hard-working students and staff.

BH-BL Academics = 5th in Capital Region

Once again for 2010, an analysis of state test scores and graduation results done by the (Albany) *Business Review* newspaper showed that BH-BL ranked as the 5th highest performing school district out of 85 districts in the Greater Capital Region. BH-BL is in the top 10 annually and was also 5th in 2009.

Other districts that rank in the top performing group every year along with BH-BL include Voorheesville, Bethlehem, Niskayuna and North Colonie.

See www2.bizjournals.com/albany/reports/schools/

BH-BL has top graduation rate in Suburban Council

BH-BL is currently tied with Niskayuna for having the highest cohort graduation rate among all 13 Suburban Council High Schools.

Data released by the State Education Department last spring shows that 93% of BH-BL and Niskayuna pupils who started high school in the fall of 2005 successfully graduated with a local, Regents, or better diploma by August 2009 — as opposed to pupils who, after four years, either are still in high school, received an IEP certificate, dropped out, or entered a GED program.

All 13 Suburban Council schools had cohort graduation rates significantly above the state average of 72%. But at 93%, Niskayuna and BH-BL were the best among Saratoga County and Suburban Council schools. See www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/PressRelease/20100309/home.html

Bob McGuire named state Physical Education Director of the Year

BH-BL athletic director Bob McGuire has been named the New York 2010 Physical Education Director of the Year for his statewide leadership in the field of school health and physical education. The award is made annually by the NY Council of Administrators of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance.

“This is a huge honor for Bob and for BH-BL,” says superintendent Jim Schultz. “To be selected by his peers, the people who truly understand the high pressure role he performs, says a tremendous amount about Bob’s leadership and dedication to our students and community.”

BH-BL Interscholastic Sports = 1st in NY State

The NY State Sportswriters Association has now awarded its “All-Sport Champions” crown to BH-BL for two years in a row. The Sportswriters’ ranking system gives points to public high schools of any size whose boys and girls varsity teams finish in the top eight places in State interscholastic sports tournaments.

BH-BL finished best among Class A schools and best among all schools in the state for both 2008-09 and 2009-10. Other Capital Region schools that were among the top five for their size statewide for 2009-10 were Saratoga, Queensbury and Mechanicville.

Recently BH-BL has had many more teams winning Sectional contests than most schools: 11 Sectional champs in 2008-09, 10 in 2009-10, and so far six during the fall season of 2010-11. This gives more BH-BL teams the opportunity to advance to State competitions. Not bad for a district with the fewest paid coaches per team and lowest interscholastic sports budget in the Suburban Council!

See www.newyorksportswriters.org/ascl/index.shtml





Schools feeling the pinch of budget reductions as uncertainty grows for 2011-12

Community participation needed at three Budget Forums

Balancing what students need, what taxpayers can afford, and what state laws require is never easy, but 2011 looks like it could be the toughest year in anyone's memory to create a school budget.

More community input and participation will be needed to help Board of Education members and administrators weigh community values and make the best of a very bad situation. Here are some of the factors and questions our schools are facing:

- 2011-12 will be the third year of New York's fiscal crisis. State aid to schools is expected to decline significantly because the state has a huge deficit and has now spent all the federal stimulus money it had to help pay aid to schools and towns, etc.
- Since BH-BL has cut more than 40 full-time-equivalent staff positions in the past two years, further staffing cuts will be difficult to make without serious impacts on our students.
- Will the Legislature support Gov. Cuomo's pledge to create a 2 percent property tax cap? If so, when would it take effect and exactly how would it work?
- Will the Governor's new "Mandate Relief Redesign Team" be able to bring about real mandate relief for schools in time to impact our 2011-12 budget?

Already a lean operation

District administrators are searching for new ways to address the continued loss of state aid, especially when schools could face a legal cap or limit on tax increases soon. The challenge is that so many reductions have been made already, plus so many of the things that drive school costs up (like higher pension payments) are caused by state laws and mandates.

"Lobbying the state for mandate relief needs to be a big part of this year's budget process," says superintendent Jim Schultz. "Give us new ways to control cost increases. How else can BH-BL continue to provide the kind of education our parents moved here to get for their children?"

Schultz also notes that a number of the changes and service cuts he sees other districts talking about are things BH-BL has already done or never had in the first place. For instance, while some districts are now considering reducing their fourth-level sports teams for middle school students, we already eliminated the few fourth-level teams we had back in 2009.

A few of the reduced or new delivery models that BH-BL has already instituted to increase efficiency and cut costs include:

- Raising staff health insurance co-pays and eliminating staff access to a more expensive health insurance plan.

Please join us to learn more & share your opinions! Public Budget Forums

Wed., Feb. 2 2011-12 Fiscal Realities

Thurs., March 3 The Preliminary BH-BL Budget

Tues., March 29 The Nearly Complete BH-BL Budget

All 3 forums will be held at 7:30 pm in the O'Rourke Middle School cafeteria, 173 Lakehill Road.

Attending in person is the best way to participate, but you are also welcome to "attend" and participate live ONLINE if you have a computer with highspeed internet access.

For all the details, go to:

www.bhbl.org/District/Board/onlineforuminfo.htm

- Creating a new in-district program for suspended pupils that saved \$35,000.
- Creating our own Spectrum class for autistic pupils, at a major savings compared to their former BOCES class.
- Cutting administrative staffing by creating a joint math & science department head.
- Eliminating elementary library clerks and relying more on parent volunteers.
- Applying for more grants to help offset budget reductions. For instance, currently seven BH-BL teachers are using *DonorsChoose.org* to solicit support for their classroom projects.

"It's vital that we have thoughtful deliberation and community participation in creating the 2011-12 budget," says Schultz. "I hope many residents will attend budget events or at least follow the process via the internet and share their values with us." ♦

Reminder

You can follow the budget process via the district website at www.bhbl.org

A complete list of budget meetings, objectives, and deadlines is posted there. Announcements will be added as the process unfolds.

You can also sign up on the website to receive a "School News Notifier" email whenever budget news is announced. Click the large "SNN" logo for details.



Legislature passes Dignity for All Students Act

Anti-bullying efforts to be stepped up

At a time when national surveys say more than 50% of secondary students report having been bullied at school and when cyber-bullying on social networks like Facebook has increased significantly, New York State has stepped forward to insure all school districts do more to prevent bullying.

Having a strong character education program, clear and consistent Codes of Conduct for each school, and almost no incidents of school violence or

crime — as BH-BL has — is not enough.

Under the Dignity for All Students Act, by July 2012 all school districts need to have improved anti-bullying policies and procedures, including training for all staff, plus spokespeople in each school for students to access in times of need.

Chain reaction of respect

Proactive measures to promote a positive environment of trust and respect are already growing at BH-BL. In December the high school presented an inspirational assembly called Rachel's Challenge to all students.

Rachel's Challenge focuses on the positive actions and ideals of Rachel Scott, a high school senior who was the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999. This moving presentation encouraged BH-BL high schoolers to start a chain reaction of kindness, respect and acceptance. After watching it, over 300 of them stepped forward to be actively engaged in promoting Rachel's message of reaching out in kindness to others.

O'Rourke Middle School students participated in Show of Love assemblies in December, which stressed the importance of listening with respect to others and of putting themselves in others' shoes. BH-BL elementary students also discuss respect for each other in a number of character education activities. For

example, Stevens Elementary is using "Respect 360" as a year-long theme and focus of many activities.

Getting started now

BH-BL is not waiting for the State Education Dept. (SED) to announce new detailed regulations under the Dignity for All Students Act later this year.

A new Anti-Bullying Committee of teachers, social workers, psychologists, and administrators has already been formed to start researching this topic and make recommendations to superintendent Jim Schultz. Specifically, the committee is charged to:

- Review current district efforts to combat bullying.
- Research additional proactive programs and practices to prevent bullying.
- Make recommendations for training as required by SED.
- Recommend ways to improve how our schools respond to bullying incidents.
- Recommend guidelines for handling cyber-bullying.

The Anti-Bullying Committee will meet with students to learn about their experiences at BH-BL. It will examine ways to insure students' safety when bullying occurs, as well as ways to encourage bystanders to be courageous and speak up or seek help when they witness bullying — in other words, ways to change our school climate for the better. ♦



Middle school has new principal

Colleen Kane has been hired as the new principal of the O'Rourke Middle School. One of her first duties upon joining the school in mid-December was to thank all the students who participated in this year's Marine Corp. Toys for Tots fundraiser.

8th graders in Rocco Montesano's homeroom raised the most money and were honored by a visit from Marine Sergeant Ellsworth Bucey, who also commended Benjamin Calabrese (above) for being the highest individual Toys for Tots fundraiser.

Information on Kane's background and experience is available at www.bhbl.org via the Middle School's homepage.





FOR SALE
Hostetter Building

Board of Education selling former elementary school

The Hostetter Building has served several functions during its 53 years of life. It opened as the Glenhaven Elementary School in 1958, when schools were being built throughout the region to handle the baby boom. In 1981 when enrollment declines meant a fourth BH-BL elementary school was no longer needed, it became a cost-saving home to the district offices and several rent-paying tenants.

Now, thanks to changing patterns of community development and a major flood in 2008, the structure we call the Hostetter Building is on the market, waiting for a new owner to decide on its third incarnation.

Hostetter and its 38 acres of land are listed with Tracy Metzger of Hunt Commercial with an asking price of \$1,395,000. In fact, as this newsletter goes to press, the

school board is considering an option to purchase it for \$1.1 million, contingent upon the buyer's getting town approval for his plans.

Long-standing question

"District committees and board members have been studying the question of what to do with the Hostetter Building for more than a decade," says superintendent Jim Schultz. "Many residents seem pleased that the Board made the decision to sell the property last summer, rather than investing any more money into this old building."

Located at the end of Cypress Drive, Glenville, in the southwestern corner of the school district, the building has worked well as office and storage space. But with no students in it since 1981, repairs and renovations were not eligible for state building aid (which normally pays for 75 percent of repairs done to our schools). Hence, only minimal

maintenance has been done since 1981.

2008 flood is turning point

In 2008, an overnight water main break flooded most of the building, causing extensive damage. Approximately \$400,000 of the \$1.2 million insurance settlement for this incident was spent on flood-related costs. The remaining \$800,000 was put in a special reserve fund for eventual relocation of the district offices.

In the current market, selling the property could take years. "You never have all the answers," says Schultz. "But we have to move forward, and it no longer makes economic sense to hold onto an aging, damaged building in the southwestern corner of the district when clearly most housing growth and development will continue to be in the northern half of BH-BL in Saratoga County." ♦

Kindergarten registration process starts March 7

In February registration packets will be mailed to all BH-BL households with a child old enough to start kindergarten this fall. Children must be five years old by December 1 of the year they start kindergarten.

The challenge for school administrators is knowing who those children are and where they live — which is

why it's so important that families with infants and preschoolers send in the census form included in this newsletter.

Parents will be invited to an informational meeting on Monday, March 7, from 7:00 - 8:00 pm at Pashley Elementary to learn about BH-BL's kindergarten program and services.

Actual registration takes place the following week on

March 14 and 15. Registration is done by appointment to reduce waiting time. It includes showing proof of residency and inoculations, a brief vision and hearing screening, and an opportunity to sign up for YMCA-sponsored child care if desired. As a treat at the end, both parent and child get a bus safety lesson, then go for a ride on a big yellow school bus. ♦

SPARTAN PRIDE!

This fall **all eleven** interscholastic sports teams achieved Scholar-Athlete status with the required percentage of varsity team members earning a grade point average of 90% or better in their first quarter classes. Team GPAs ranged from 91.5% to an amazing 95.8% for field hockey.

Way to go, Spartans!

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Produced in cooperation with the Capital
Region BOCES Communications Service

MORE SPARTAN PRIDE!

Business practices earn BH-BL a higher Standard & Poor's rating

Will save more than \$1 million in interest over the next 15 years

No cash flow borrowing saves \$140,000 in interest

School districts usually borrow money for a few months to get them through the cash flow challenge of the summer — when a new fiscal year has started but income from state aid and property taxes has not yet arrived.

But for the first time in many years, BH-BL did not need to borrow during the summer of 2010, and saved \$140,000 that had been budgeted for interest payments.

Avoiding cash-flow borrowing has long been a goal of assistant superintendent Jacqueline St. Onge. "I'd credit this to more aggressive efforts to manage our cash flow, to tighten up spending on routine expenses week to week, to temporarily invest funds when possible, and to gradually increase our reserve," she says. "We got through 2009-10 with fewer surprises, but budget managers are also looking for every possible way to simply spend less money."

Over the months, those small savings added up to a larger than expected fund balance by June 2010, which was enough to carry the district through the summer without borrowing. ♦

Assistant superintendent Jacqueline St. Onge spent weeks preparing materials for the interviews, and in the end, it was worth it.

After a couple grueling sessions with evaluators from Standard & Poor's, she walked away with a higher bond rating that will mean major savings for the school district.

Standard & Poor's has raised the district's short term borrowing rating to SP-1+, the highest possible level, and our long term borrowing rating to AA, one of the highest possible ratings. St. Onge estimates this will result in roughly one percent lower interest rates when the district borrows money to replace buses or complete capital renovation projects authorized by the voters.

For instance, work on the \$12.5 million in energy-conservation projects approved by the voters in Dec. 2009 is ongoing. When the district converts that \$12.5 million from short term to long term bonds, St. Onge estimates that a one percent lower interest rate will save more

than \$1 million over the 15-year amortization period of that loan.

Factors in the higher rating

How did BH-BL earn a higher rating at a time when many organizations are seeing their S&P ratings fall? Part of the answer is that the NY Capital Region economy looks healthier to S&P evaluators than many other areas of the country.

But the primary reasons for the improved rating were specific to BH-BL. S&P evaluators cited evidence of the district's sound fiscal management (which includes more than 20 years of clean external audits and a recent state comptroller's audit). They noted business office efforts to build the annual fund balance and to plan for long term needs, as evident in our structuring of long term debt and capital project timeline.

Other factors in S&P's improved rating of BH-BL include its low comparative per student cost, very low number of tax certioraris, and excellent bus safety and overall safety records. ♦