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Girls' Cross Country Team: A Season of Firsts and Lifelong Memories

By Ava Taylor, OJR High School

The greatest high school memories, I'm told, are forever vivid. Last fall, the varsity Owen J. Roberts cross country team painted a canvas of memories together that will be everlasting.

Our journey started last summer. We were high school runners practicing together, early mornings in the hot and beaming sun, but with optimism that the upcoming season would be something special. From the beginning, there were lofty expectations - a tiered combination of first-time achievements at OJR High School.

My teammates and I wanted to win not only another Pioneer Athletic Conference (PAC) championship, we also wanted to win the district championship - something OJR girls had never accomplished in its history, and then challenge ourselves to win a position on the podium at the state championship.

Our journey would require many miles and many hours of training, but we knew we could achieve these heights if we stayed together and stayed healthy.

Like golf, cross country races are determined by the lowest score. The placement of the top five girls from each team in a 5K (3.1 mile) race are added together. To win, a team must have five strong runners. We were confident we had that, now we just needed to prove it.

Our season started strongly in August and then continued into the school months. We won our dual meets, as well as winning the Hoka Oakbourne Relays. "That was when I felt we could start placing high or even winning the bigger

meets," said Tim Marcoe, who has been the head of the cross country/track teams since 2018 and credited for leading a dynasty.

After Hoka Oakbourne, we defended our title successfully at the Unionville Invitational. From there, we participated in the Paul Short Invitational, where 40 of the best teams from the tri-state area (and hundreds of runners) competed. In the face of this stiff competition, we secured first place for the Paul Short event of our division. Truly an unimaginable moment became a reality.

The regular season ended and we turned our efforts to the PAC championship. We had finished second the year before and there were many other strong teams. We ran well and won the title by a nice margin. While this was wonderful, the PAC was something OJR girls had won before. Our next goal, the district cross-country championships, was uncharted and something that OJR girls had never won.

In what felt like the blink of an eye, we were competing at districts. I'm proud to say that everyone on our team pushed one another, picked each other up, and during this very difficult race, our teamwork proved to be invaluable.

When the final results were in, we had achieved another goal - the first ever OJR girls' cross country district championship title!

When we arrived at the state championships, there was nervousness. The year before there was no pressure, but this year we felt like we had a good chance to win. The race, it turned out was

torturous. It was an extremely hot and humid day for November, like a brutal mid-August sweltering, only worse because we were not used to it. Unprepared, runners from other schools did not finish and many more struggled. I watched one girl collapse and then bravely crawl across the finish line. Despite how rocky it was for the majority of everyone running, all of us from OJR finished!



When the results were in, we finished fifth in the state. Though we were initially very disappointed with our struggles, our spirits lifted upon hearing how high we finished. Despite finishing slightly shy of our own expectations, this was another great feat for us. Not only were we the first OJR girls' cross country team to place in the top five at states, but we were the first girls' team in school history to ever place at all!

Despite numerous gains and few losses, the cross country team developed close friendships that I know will be with us always. As a team we trained hard, lifted one another and accomplished achievements only previously unimaginable. I will always treasure it. The hugs were always real and the memories will last a lifetime!

East Vincent Celebrates Connectedness, Community

East Vincent Elementary students and their families donated more than one hundred coats during the student council's winter coat drive. The proceeds were shared with some of our very own EV students, as well as donated to Project Outreach in Spring City in order to support the local community around us.

East Vincent celebrated the return of the connectedness that the school wide assembly brings to our culture and community! Chorus students displayed their hard work and dedication as they performed their Holiday Concert for students and staff in December.

Student representatives from each homeroom in Grades 4, 5, and 6 will participate in the school's Spelling Bee on January 30. The primary grades will attend this school wide event to support their peers and learn about the spelling bee. The winner will advance to the Chester County Spelling Bee on February 7.

East Vincent STEAM classes programmed their Dash robots to help clean off all the snow from the roads so they could get home safely! Knowledge and skills obtained in STEAM go beyond the classroom! During Hour of Code, 5th graders learned about 5-bit binary numbers and created binary bracelets using their initials.



North Coventry Team Member Retires

On Friday, January 6, Holly Ham retired as a North Coventry paraprofessional. Holly worked for the Owen J. Roberts School District for nearly 33 years. Holly was beloved by all who had the privilege of working with her. Holly loved working with children and it showed. She always had a smile on her face and worked to create connections with every child she had the chance to work with. The first week of January was set aside at North Coventry to celebrate Holly. Members of the staff hosted a breakfast, students wrote cards of appreciation and the entire staff wore Eagles attire, as Holly is a huge Eagles fan. In fact, Holly was even gifted an Eagles shirt with her last

name across the back. In retirement Holly is looking forward to spending time with her grandchildren.

Field trips are back! This fall third grade students visited Cherry Crest Farms, a yearly tradition that all were happy to see return following the pandemic. Second graders at North visited the Da Vinci Science Center in Allentown in December. Students had a chance to explore exhibits and see live science shows that enhanced their science studies. Other grades are organizing field trips for later this year and are looking forward to getting off campus while growing their learning in a different environment.



East Coventry KKids Make a Difference

Service learning is important for all students to experience during their early years of development. The East Coventry KKids, led by 4th grade teacher Ms. Kristen Cole, encourages students to seek ways of helping others. Students in grades 4 and 5 have frequent opportunities to develop service projects to help not only the school community, but the greater good as well. The club's biggest initiative has been collecting warm clothing items as part of the Cradles to Crayons initiative. Other projects have included creating holiday cards for the staff, letters of encouragement to local nursing homes, and a donation of pet supplies for the Main Line Animal Rescue.

The school club, which has been in place for many years, is supported by the local Pottstown Kiwanis International club. KKids is the largest service organization for elementary school students with more than 1,200 clubs in schools around the world. Students who participate in the organization learn the importance of helping others, develop self esteem, as well as leadership skills. Students who begin their experience with service learning have opportunities to continue in middle school with similar service learning clubs. The EC club is a great group of students who have hopeful and helpful



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A Season of Celebration at OJR High School

The Owen J. Roberts High School Band/Orchestra Winter Concert took place on Dec. 21 in front of a packed house.

Students enjoyed Book and a Blanket Day on Dec. 20. Students stopped by the library to enjoy some reading time, work on school assignments and enjoy a nice, hot cup of cocoa!

DECA chapter members competed against 330 competitors from public and private schools in the surrounding area for the change to move onto the state competition. Students began the competition with a marketing career related test and then presented a solution to the assigned event role-play (case study) scenario to a judge.

Choir wasn't going to let a little bad weather stand between them and a masterful performance at the 2022 Winter Choral Concert on Dec. 15.

This December, 74 students were inducted into the National English Honor Society. Congratulations to all of tonight's inductees and their families!

Horticulture students in Mrs. Mowrer's class visited historical Welkinweir to decorate for their annual

Holiday Open House, and ring in the season by making beautiful wreath that they sold to the community.



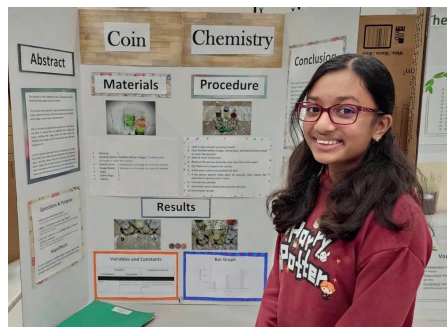
West Vincent Students Aim to Reduce Car Idling

West Vincent Elementary School, in partnership with West Vincent Township's Clean Energy Transition Team, is supporting an EPA idling reduction campaign.

As part of the campaign, community members are encouraged to help reduce students' exposure to air toxins that are emitted from idling vehicles and cut down on the community's carbon footprint by turning off their vehicles while waiting to pick-up and drop-off students.

WVES science fair was a huge success. A tremendous amount of thanks goes out to Mrs. Flexner for all her time and effort in creating such an exciting event! A big thanks also goes out to the judges who volunteered to meet with students and provide helpful feedback on all of the projects.

Congratulations to all of the students who participated and thanks to all of their families who supported the learning that took place at home!



OJR Middle School Celebrates Spirit Day & More

On December 9, the middle school held their first 7th and 8th grade dance in partnership with the PTA. These dances are always fun for the students and help provide a great night of entertainment for our students.

Students and staff were invited to take part in a month long spirit day event throughout December. Each day had a different dress up theme and students and staff enjoyed wearing ugly sweaters, comfy clothes, head gear and dressing as twins. We had goodies for the staff and some contests along the way.

Congratulations to art teacher, Mrs. Ingrid Fake and her students for being selected as "PAEA's Art Room of the Month!" by the Pennsylvania Art Education Association. Mrs. Fake shares, "After discovering at the age of 18, that a paintbrush and a smile has the power to transform a frown into a grin, I knew that I was destined to become an art teacher."



The Great Kindness Challenge Takes Place at French Creek Elementary

Sixth grade students in Mrs. Pettyjohn's class had a unique opportunity at French Creek this December in the STEAM Lab! These students participated in two lessons involving Tello Drones where they learned about how drones work, real-life applications, safety and operations using coding blocks. The students were successful with coding drones in the classroom to navigate various challenges. We also had a special guest, Michael Shelgren, Director of Facilities, who brought in the district drone. The students were able to witness a large drone fly over French Creek and follow its path through video surveillance on an Ipad. We look forward to continuing to enhance 21st century skills with our K-6 students.

During the week of January 23, French Creek students and staff participated in the 2003 Great Kindness Challenge. The Great Kindness Challenge is a proactive and positive bullying prevention program that improves school climate and increases student engagement. The goal of the challenge is for the entire school community to perform as many acts of kindness as possible. In addition to completing a kindness checklist, teachers carefully select children's literature and design instructional activities that promote kindness. Favorite titles include The Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister and Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña.

The challenge also includes theme days to add a bit of fun and excitement throughout the week. Students may "score points by helping others" while wearing their favorite team shirt or jersey, or students may "share the spirit of kindness" another day by wearing French Creek or Owen J. Roberts spirit wear. At the conclusion of the week, French Creek will earn the status of becoming a Kindness Certified School.



OJR Recognitions

OJR Steam is the recipient of an \$11,500 grant from the OJR Education Foundation to supplement the existing Lego Spike kits utilized by the district, allowing students to engage in additional STEAM-related learning projects and to reduce the number of students sharing one kit/increase the number of individualized projects. Thank you OJR Education Foundation for this incredibly helpful donation!



In November, OJR opened its new District Service Center. Created from the former East Coventry Elementary School, the facility enables OJR's facility maintenance and housekeeping departments to operate from a single location for the first time since the district's inception, more than 65 years ago. If you couldn't make OJR's open house event, you can join us for a virtual on our YouTube channel - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kF9Epcifj54>



Connie Porter celebrated 50 years of driving a school bus for the district. A resident of the district, whose children attended OJR schools, Porter started driving for Owen J. Roberts back in 1972 back when Richard Nixon was President of the United States and Milton Schapp was Pennsylvania's governor. Porter has transported more than 600,000 students over a distance of more than 1 million miles, for a duration of driving time in excess of 18,000 hours — and she continues to drive her daily route.



The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) recently recognized Owen J. Roberts School District for excellence in budget presentation with the Meritorious Budget Award (MBA) for fiscal year 2022-2023.



Owen J. Roberts High School student Catarina Bicalho is a semifinalist for the 2023 class of the Coca-Cola Scholars Program, moving to the next round of the selection process to become a Coca-Cola Scholar and receive a \$20,000 college scholarship. Bicalho is one of only 1,557 semifinalists nationwide.

Kindergarten Registration Opens February 1

All children who live within the OJR School District, and who will attain the age of five on or before September 1, are eligible to attend school for the 2023-24 school year.

Starting on February 1, 2023, at 9 a.m., the Skyward online registration system will be available for families of students to begin the process of registering for the 2023-2024 school year. Families can visit the registration website for the latest information about [kindergarten registration](#) and to register their child online. At the end of the online registration process, families will be prompted to make an appointment to complete the registration process at their child's school on either March 1 or March 2, 2023.

To speak directly with your child's school, please reach out to the following staff members:

- East Coventry Elementary School: Sue Hansen– 610-469-5707
- East Vincent Elementary School: Karen Hydutsky – 610-469-5714
- French Creek Elementary School: Alexandra Lewis – 610-469-5710
- North Coventry Elementary School: Chris Ficca – 610-469-5709
- West Vincent Elementary School: Janine Brownley – 610-469-1402



If you are new to the school district or unsure of your child's school, OJR's school locator is available at on the district's website at <https://www.ojrsd.com/domain/930>

Town Hall Meetings Scheduled for March 9 & April 27

Mark your calendars - OJR just scheduled additional town hall meetings for the community to share opinions, feedback, ideas and questions with members of the OJR Board of School Directors and district administrators.

The first town hall meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 9, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the OJR District Service Center, 932 Sanatoga Rd., Pottstown, PA 19465.

The second town hall meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 27, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., at the Owen J. Roberts School District Warwick Building, 3650 St Peters Rd., Elverson, PA 19520.

While the district will provide updates on its initiatives and share important information about our community's schools, both meetings are free-form - meaning the topics being discussed are decided by attendees.

We look forward to meeting with you and discussing the topics that are important to our school community.

OJRHS Student Named Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Ambassador

Owen J. Roberts High School 11th grade student Naomi Tzoanos, was accepted to the Young Ambassadors Program organized by Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful.

Naomi is one of 35 students selected across the state. In collaboration with several peers across the state, she will be looking into a research project to positively impact her community. To learn more, please visit the Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful website at <https://bit.ly/3ZPX6Ro>



OJR Student Earns 3rd Place in Auto Refinishing Competition

Congratulations to Owen J. Roberts High School student Matt Chintalin, who earned 3rd place in the Auto Refinishing competition at the SkillsUSA PA District 4 Competition at Berks County Technical College on December 20.

Matt competed with students from 11 other technical high schools on his way to earning a scholarship to Automotive Training Center in Exton!



Superintendent's Notebook

It seems like only yesterday we were celebrating the first day of school. However, as you enjoy this latest issue of the Advocate newsletter, we're quickly approaching the halfway point of the academic year.

Winter is one of my favorite times of the year because as superintendent I have the opportunity to attend a variety of important school-community events, ranging from student concerts to listening sessions, where we discuss the topics that are most important to our families and staff members.

In the wake of unique challenges faced by our schools, now more than ever it's vital that we continue to collaborate on a path forward for Owen J. Roberts. I appreciate the opportunity to once again have more of our community engagement events in-person. It's important that we find the time to come together and focus on what our school district is doing well, in addition to what we know we can do better for students. I've always believed those conversations are most productive when they take place face-to-face.

As I continue to visit each of our seven school campuses every week, I am amazed to see how our teachers, administrators and staff are working hard to transition students back to in-person classroom instruction. I have yet to walk into an OJR school building that accepts academic results that are "good enough." Instead, I listen to educators share with me how they're striving for classroom excellence by thinking outside of the box, adjusting to the evolving needs of students and embracing the best instructional practices to foster success in the classroom. They consider it a privilege to help our children learn and grow, and so do I.

Our students have also approached this school year with a renewed sense of excitement and motivation. Over the last several months I've seen our performing arts students participate in concerts and productions that can rival the skill of many professional ensembles. I've also seen our athletic teams achieve victories and embark on journeys that represent all-time firsts in our district. In fact, you can read about one of those journeys in this issue. Our students are back doing what they love, and it shows.

We have a lot to look forward to as we transition into the second half of the school year. In the coming weeks and months we invite the community to participate in our annual budget process, to join us at our upcoming community town hall meetings on March 9 and April 27, and to continue to support our students in their springtime activities. I hope you can join us.

Once again, thank you for your unwavering support of OJR students! Owen J. All the way!

Sincerely,

Dr. Will Stout
Superintendent



Owen J. Roberts School District

Inspiring Each Student for Success Today and Greatness Tomorrow

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