

Illinois Valley News

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Giving it your all



(Photo by Michelle Binker, Illinois Valley News)

Senior forward No. 23 Dane Alvarez gives all he has in the Friday Dec. 15, home victory against Days Creek. Read all about in on A-3.

IVHS has a plan to improve

“There are kids who come here, and school and learning is down the list a little bit. They’re here because it’s warm. They’re here because they get fed. They’re here because they know I love them. ... I will never be able to do enough to feel like, ‘Oh, we’re satisfied.’ That’s why I wake up at 4 in the morning.”

Tanner Smith, Illinois Valley High School Principal

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Fifth generation educator Tanner Smith, now in his second year as Illinois Valley High School (IVHS) principal, brings enthusiasm and a spirit of innovation to a school that, realistically, has many challenges to overcome. A look at the school’s 2016 - 2017 report card, issued by the state, reveals the extent of those challenges.

School-wide performance in language arts, as measured by the standard Smarter Balanced test, shows a lackluster performance: Only 59.4 percent of students met the standards for school and district accountability - compared to 71.1 percent for the state as a whole, and 68.6 percent for “like schools,” with similar student demographics.

And, unfortunately, math scores were what can only be described as abysmal: Only 16.2 percent met the accountability standards - compared with

35.3 for all Oregon schools and 30.9 for like schools.

Just as concerning, student improvement in academic achievement from one year to the next rated the lowest score possible: just a one on a scale of one to five.

However, one score that appeared to be showing improvement was the percent of students who continue their education within 16 months of graduation, whether through enrollment in a community college or four-year school. In the three years encompassing 2011 - 2012 through 2013 - 2014, that statistic rose from 39.5 percent to 52.1 percent.

When speaking about the math scores, Principal Smith said: “What I wanted to look at when I got the job was not make a bunch of changes without evaluating first and being reflective. We as a school need to look in the mirror and see what we are. And numbers don’t lie.”

To bolster math achievement, Smith has hired three new math teachers. And recognizing that students move at

different rates through math curricula from algebra 1 through advanced placement math, he has grouped students into classes according to their achievement level: lower, middle or upper.

Smith noted that often kids arrive from middle school, unprepared for high school math. And indeed, Lorna Byrne Middle School typically passes students on to high school even when they have failed the key subjects of math and language arts. Smith noted, also, that kids lose knowledge over the long summer vacation. For both those reasons, he has instituted testing of incoming students in both of those subject areas.

For those in the community who have expressed concerns about “teaching to the test,” Smith gave an example of how his teachers’ peer learning community comes together to learn how to encourage imagination and creativity.

SEE IVHS ON A-3

Schmelzer claims pot industry is bad for economy

Jason McMillen
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Community Development Director Julie Schmelzer, speaking on the county’s side of cannabis in an *Illinois Valley News* interview, laid out how the industry has affected the area. Schmelzer reports that the county’s workload has substantially increased since legalization and although there are no official statistics on the topic, she says that cannabis is inundating the system for very little reward. The county recently received its first state level cannabis tax dollar payout, but, according to Schmelzer, it’s simply not enough to cover the cost.

The next distribution of cannabis tax dollars has the potential to be more substantial because it’ll be based entirely on a new formula which appears to be more considerate of cannabis growing counties. However, the county has not been informed as to what future installments may look like.

“I have a concern about ‘abandonment’ and the impact that will have on our economy,” Schmelzer said. “Many people came here with big dreams of getting wealthy fast and they didn’t account for competition and the impact it would have on the price of the product.” Denise Fry and Paul Cox, managers of Bud Junction and PAPA respectively, both reported that the price of wholesale cannabis has fallen 20 percent on average since last year. Cox further added that he’s seen outdoor grown cannabis, in some situations, selling as low as 50 percent of last year’s price.

With the market value of cannabis falling alongside sweeping changes to the cannabis industry next season with Senate Bill 1057, House Bill 2198 and Josephine County’s Ordinance No. 2017-002, property values could plummet and cannabis industry jobs could disappear. Ordinance No. 2017-002 prohibits the growth of commercial cannabis on Rural Residential (RR) properties five acres and less while severely reducing the size of grow sites for RR properties larger than five acres. Anyone who wishes to grow more than 12 mature plants at a time, with the now mostly disassembled Oregon Medical Marijuana Program, is affected by the ordinance.

SEE CLAIMS ON A-5

IVFD gets new hires from levy

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The Illinois Valley Fire District’s (IVFD) four new career firefighter EMTs, paid for with money from the levy which passed during the May special election, recently finished up the department’s two week orientation process before being deployed Monday, Dec. 18. The levy, and subsequently the new team members, aim to bolster the district’s manpower resources following a chronic and longstanding shortage of volunteers for which it relied on

almost exclusively for many years.

“We’re glad to have them on board,” Fire Chief Dennis Hoke said, “I think we’ve made a great decision and they’re excited to be out here. It’s going to be a definite improvement in our ability to respond to calls in the Illinois Valley.”

Two of the new firefighters were volunteers within the district while the second two were working for Jackson County Fire District No. 5 as part of Rogue Community College’s Fire Science program.

SEE IVFD ON A-5

Letters to Santa from Evergreen Elementary K - 2 students
Starting on A-2



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