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Cerda and Spence Awarded \$10K rootEd Scholarships

OCTOBER 08TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Cerda and Spence Awarded \$10K rootEd Scholarships

A pair of Poplar Bluff High School graduates of the Class of 2020 were recently awarded the rootEd Undergraduate Scholarships, valued at \$10,000 per year, renewable up to 10 semesters toward a bachelor's degree.

Award recipient Nayeli Cerda is pursuing a law degree from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, and Khelie Spence is majoring in health sciences with an emphasis in pre-dental at the University of Missouri in Columbia, according to PBHS counselor Sara Woodard.

“...Over the past two years, rootEd Alliance has provided dedicated support to students from rural areas and small towns across Missouri as they pursue their education beyond high school,” wrote program representative Lisa MacDougall in an announcement dated Monday, Sept. 28. “This year, in partnership with the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, rootEd will distribute over \$275,000 in ‘last-dollar’ scholarships to 31 undergraduate and transfer students from rural Missouri, filling critical gaps in students’ financial aid packages to help ensure they graduate debt-free.”

Administered by the Scholarship Foundation, the rootEd Alliance program was launched in 2018 to improve postsecondary education opportunities for high school seniors from 14 specific Missouri communities, according to its website. The mission of the philanthropic endeavor is to “clear a path to a stronger future for students in rural America.” The application for next year’s rootEd Alliance Scholarship will open in January.

Article and photo submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director,
Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Free School Meals for Children Through Fall

OCTOBER 04TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Free School Meals for Children Through Fall

Poplar Bluff, MO - The Poplar Bluff R-I School District, in partnership with Chartwells, is excited to announce that school meals will be free to all students through the end of the semester on Friday, Dec. 18, or longer, as Congressionally appropriated funding is made available.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture publicized the waiver extension for operators of the summer food service program on Monday, Aug. 31, in response to the public health

emergency.

“We appreciate the incredible efforts by our school food service professionals year in and year out, but this year we have an unprecedented situation,” stated U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue in a press release. “This extension of the summer program authority will employ summer program sponsors to ensure meals are reaching all children – whether they are learning in the classroom or virtually – so they are fed and ready to learn, even in new and ever-changing learning environments.”

Meals were previously available at no cost to students, grades pre-K through third, under the Community Eligibility Program. Now—funded through the federal nutrition assistance program—the Middle School, Junior High and High School students can also enjoy free school meals, including breakfast and lunch, and soon dinner to-go.

“These waivers will allow school nutrition professionals to focus on nourishing hungry children for success, rather than scrambling to process paperwork and verify eligibility in the midst of a pandemic,” added Reggie Ross, president of the School Nutrition Association.

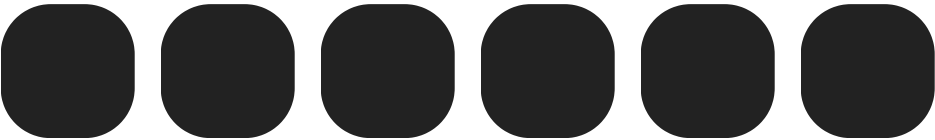
Reimbursements will be processed on student accounts for meals paid for out-of-pocket dating back to the beginning of the program this school year.

Article and photos by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Therapy Dogs Continue to be Utilized Throughout School System

SEPTEMBER 29TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

Therapy Dogs Continue to be Utilized Throughout School System

Poplar Bluff, MO - A chocolate Lab, certified as a professional therapy dog, recently served to help get apprehensive new students through the classroom door during the first day of school at the Poplar Bluff Early Childhood Center.

Handled by Michelle Caswell, who teaches 3-year-olds in an integrated classroom, Hope is the latest in a tradition of service animals that have been utilized in various ways throughout the R-I district to provide a calming effect on students.

Donated by dog breeders Dave and Rhonda Bishop of Ellsinore in mid-2018, Hope completed her obedience classes through K9 Biz in Dexter and later passed her public access test through SEMO Dog Trainers in Poplar Bluff.

“In dog training, they train you and you train the dog,” Caswell explained. According to Caswell, Hope already helped forewarn of a seizure a student had suffered during a homebound visit before a hospice nurse was able to come to the boy’s aid. “That [act] alone was worth the two-year wait,” she noted.

Since the 2018/19 school year, Oak Grove Elementary has served as the second home of a Great Dane named Bailey, age 6, who resource teacher Holly Shupe has incorporated into her special education classroom. Beginning in 2012, Junior High counselor Luann Elledge also had a therapy dog named Creggan, an Irish setter now retired, and Lake Road counselor Valerie Duncan owned a Labrador retriever named Airial, who unfortunately died almost a year ago.

Jenn Nicolini, a Junior High teacher, is scheduled to travel with Elledge to Concordia, Kan., next week to pick up Creggan's successor from Canine Assistance Rehabilitation Education & Services. Several civic organizations, banks, veterinarian offices and other businesses contributed so Nicolini can obtain the weeklong training through the prison reform program, and cover the ancillary costs.

"My goal would be to see every school have a therapy dog to help kids dealing with trauma," Nicolini stated. She recently earned her psychological examiner certificate and specialist degree in counseling through Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau.

Earlier this month, Duncan was once again placed on the CARES waiting list, a process that can take one to two years. She has plans to fundraise to offset the training expense, as handlers are responsible for providing liability insurance, as well as food and veterinarian care for the pet. When Aerial passed away, Duncan said students flooded her office with letters and mementos paying tribute to the beloved dog.

"I didn't realize she meant so much until I saw all of that," recalled Duncan, adding that she felt 'overwhelmed' by the outpouring. "A lot of times kids would come into my office, and they didn't want to talk to me, they wanted to sit down and talk to her."

Back in 2004, Junior High counselor Cindy Jackson, then employed at Lake Road, had perhaps the district's first school dog—Eddie, a Bichon/poodle mix—before obtaining certification was required by the Board of Education, she said.

"Since the early 2000s, Poplar Bluff has been a school district that believes in creating a safe, welcoming place for children" through the use of office pets, Jackson commented. "Dogs lighten children's spirits, and provide that unconditional acceptance."

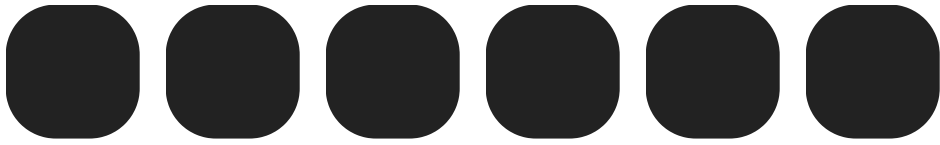
Pictured: Hope, a 2-year-old professional therapy dog, stands in the hallway greeting families on Wednesday, Aug. 26, at the Early Childhood Center.

Article and photos submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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PBMS Giving Closet Opens for Students in Need

SEPTEMBER 29TH 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

PBMS Giving Closet Opens for Students in Need

Poplar Bluff, MO - A sixth grade teacher working toward a counseling degree has realized her vision at the Poplar Bluff Middle School this school year, having opened a Giving Closet free for students in need.

With help from family and co-workers, Taytem Eudaley built shelving and racks, and organized inventory that includes clothing, personal hygiene items and school supplies in what once served as the boys' locker room next to E.T. Peters Gym.

Students are referred by teachers or counselors, then they present a voucher to Eudaley, who discreetly takes them 'shopping' at the start of the school day, she said.

"My first year teaching I saw a lot of kids didn't have the bare necessities, and just know you're starting your day at a disadvantage if you're struggling [outside]," Eudaley explained. "This allows us to give anonymously so kids can focus on school stuff instead of home stuff, and they don't have to bring with them that emotional backpack."

At the end of 2019, Eudaley was provided a small budget from administration to purchase bulk supplies such as body wash, and she began soliciting donations through her parish,

West Side Church of God, as well as reaching out to other school patrons.

The custodial staff originally built a coat rack, and then over the summer Eudaley completed the layout with assistance from loved ones. There is a separate space that she uses to sort items as they come in. Previously the school had stored some supplies in the nurse’s office, according to Eudaley, but the collection was not on display for students to browse

“It was a bit of a mess before with donations lying around, and she basically washed all the clothes and built the shelves over the summer as a project for her master’s program,” said Dr. Josh Teeter, Middle School principal. “The main purpose is to provide clothing for kids who don’t have the means available.”

Some items on the current needs list include toothbrushes and toothpaste, clothing hangers, gently-used backpacks and young adult books, according to Eudaley. She is eventually looking to secure a washer and dryer once a hookup is installed.

The Middle School Giving Closet is modeled in part after a similar operation that runs out of the High School library. Both accept items through the main office of the respective school buildings.

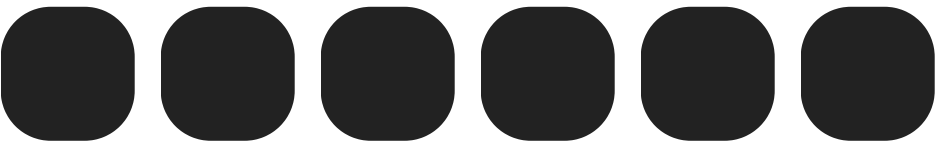
Pictured: Teacher Taytem Eudaley stands next to a Mules display section in the PBMS Giving Closet.

Article and photo submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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\$5K Awarded Toward Remodel of 80+ Year-Old Gym

SEPTEMBER 23RD 2020 BY DEE LOFLIN

\$5K Awarded Toward Remodel of 80+ Year-Old Gym

Poplar Bluff, MO - The final touches of a facelift have been placed on the Poplar Bluff Junior High gymnasium, the very oldest building in the district, with its construction dating back to 1937.

Custom window coverings reading P-B-J-H-S M-U-L-E-S across the top of the facility were installed on Wednesday, Sept. 2, by Southeast Signs & Graphics.

Work over the course of several months through a \$5,000 Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant and matching district funds has included a fresh coat of paint, new basketball hoops, wall-mounted padding, scoreboards and an entire bathroom renovation in the gym lobby featuring updated flooring, countertops, commodes and sinks.

"With your support, this project will foster growth, pride and quality improvement at our school for years to come," wrote instructional coach Keri Jameson in the grant application approved last year by the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation. "We have an extraordinary vision for what we can do with our building; we only need the funds to make it happen!"

The gym is the entry point of the school for students each day. The building is also utilized for basketball and volleyball games, by travel sports, youth leagues as well as the Poplar Bluff Parks Department. The restroom facilities are additionally opened up to the public during football games at the adjacent Morrow Stadium.

“Candace [Warren, principal], has been very proactive in making improvements in her building and I value that, and knew there was a need,” explained Dr. Amy Jackson, R-I assistant superintendent of business. “In conjunction with maintenance and our custodial staff, we were able to make these renovations within the current approved budget, without having to pass an amendment.”

Once other high priority projects such as roof replacements are completed across campus as the district cautiously navigates the current economic crisis, noted Jackson, she looks forward to revisiting the long-range plan with committee members and perhaps directing more renovation work at the historic building.

“Out of anything, I am most proud of what we were able to accomplish here with help from Dr. Jackson and the Maintenance Department,” Warren stated. “She promised and she delivered, giving the space a contemporary look and new energy. It had good bones, and now basically looks like a brand-new facility.”

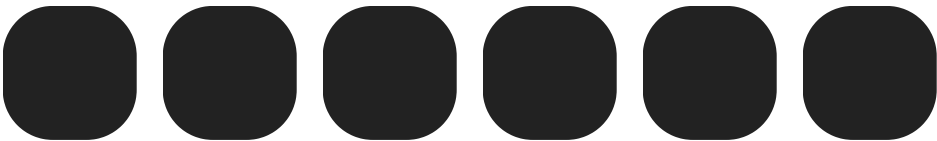
Pictured: The PBJHS gymnasium is pictured last week with new banners, paint and basketball hoops as part of an overall remodel.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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