

## **Spring News from the United Teachers of Island Trees**

Article Submitted By: Brittany Lahti

Throughout the months of April and May, the teachers at Island Trees have been making learning memorable and fun for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Students have been attending field trips, participating in academic competitions, completing service learning projects, and participating in hands-on learning events that they will remember for years to come.

Students in kindergarten through twelfth grade enjoyed the solar eclipse on April 8th. The teachers of Island Trees thank the school administration for providing all students and staff members with solar eclipse glasses so all could safely view the eclipse and participate in a teachable moment. Students through the elementary schools, middle school, and high school convened outside to watch the beginning and middle of the eclipse. Many middle school students stayed at school for a viewing party that lasted until after the peak viewing time.

The teachers at J. Fred Sparke and Michael F. Stokes Elementary Schools made reading “out of this world” for students during PARP (Pick a Reading Partner) Week. Students in both elementary schools enjoyed the decorated space-themed buildings, as well as an in-house planetarium field trip funded by the PTA. Students tracked how many minutes they read across two weeks and had a friendly competition with their classmates across the grade level to see which class could read the most minutes. Collectively, the students at Stokes read more minutes during the 2023-2024 school year than they did in the 2022-2023 school year. As a surprise, the school principal, Mrs. Ackerman, “went to Mars” and transformed into a robot, which was created by the high school robotics team. Students had a blast!

The second-grade teachers at Stokes Elementary School have been working diligently to increase the use of technology in the classroom. Students showed off their math skills by participating in both the IXL and First in Math challenges. Students also began improving their typing skills while utilizing the new typing club app on their chromebooks. In reading and writing, students used technology to research and write on non-fiction topics. Students used Pebble Go and other online resources to take the first step in learning how to conduct research. The second graders look forward to taking another field trip this spring, as well as starting a science unit on plants. Students in third grade have begun a new unit in science, which focuses on the life cycle of plants and animals. As a culminating activity, students will be nurturing butterflies from larva through adulthood. Students enjoy watching their larvae daily, waiting for them to form their chrysalises. The third-grade teachers are hopeful to release over 200 butterflies in

early June. In Ms. Lahti and Ms. Radcliffe's third-grade class, students enjoyed their informational writing celebration. Students took a plane ride around the world, visiting countries such as Brazil, China, South Africa, and Italy. The classroom was decorated with country flags and tablecloths, and Ms. Lahti and Ms. Radcliffe were dressed as the flight attendants. Students listed facts that they learned about each country in their passport before they could receive a passport stamp. It was a memorable experience for all! Students in fourth grade have been creating cards for hospitalized children. These cards will be distributed to children in all 50 states who are in the hospital for an extended period or staying at the Ronald McDonald House.

At Island Trees Memorial Middle School, fifth-grade classes in advisories 142 and 143 participated in some Mad Libs fun! After being paired with a class in Sarahsville, Ohio, the classes set out to create their own Mad Libs containing some pop culture such as Taylor Swift and Roblox. Once the classes were ready, a date and time were set to meet virtually! Although the rural life in Ohio might be a tad different than that of life in Levittown, fifth-grade kids are still the every day ten & eleven-year-olds. The silly fun that mad libs bring to the table was evident and the learning experience was one to be remembered for quite some time. The three 8A Living Environment classes attended a field trip at the DNA Learning Center of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories. The students used restriction enzymes to cut DNA and then separated the fragments using a technique called gel electrophoresis. They were able to use their results to determine which unknown DNA sample each group had. The students were able to use sophisticated science research equipment and got great results! On April 18, the Middle School Debate Team traveled to Garden City to debate against their team. Although we didn't win overall, our three groups all did an amazing job at preparing and competing. Two more inter-school debate competitions are set to take place in May against Westbury and Bay Shore. While learning about the three branches of government, two fifth-grade classes were treated to a special guest visit from the Honorable Tovar. The interactive session on April 12th helped to further explain the role of the judicial branch. The kids asked intriguing, thought-provoking questions, and a mock trial was held. What a historical moment for all! We thank Mr. Tovar for taking the time to share his work and expertise with us.

Two of Island Trees Memorial Middle School's Science Enrichment teams have been recognized as Regional Finalists in the eCybermission STEM Competition. This means that these two teams are in the top three 1st Place Winning Teams in the 8th grade and in the Northeast region. Each student has been awarded a \$2,000 savings bond and has gained knowledge and experience in conducting scientific research and engineering design. In addition, our Psycho Cyclists have advanced to the National Competition where they will be competing with teams from all over the nation!

We also congratulate our Barrier Buddies who have received honorable mention for their impactful project. Below is information regarding each team and their creative ideas to solve a specific community issue:

**Psycho Cyclists:**

Team Members: Cooper Dyckman, Jaiden Mejer, Gavin Lucatorto, and Lucas Cifarelli

Project Description: The Psycho Cyclists tackled the very prevalent and important issue of bike safety. They created a heavy-duty helmet attached to a heavy-duty vest lined with shock-absorbing material and lights for visibility!

**Solar Scientists:**

Team Members: Joseph Barracato, Brandon Jamieson, Gregg Hirschberg, and Ari Rabanal

Project Description: The Solar Scientists aimed to make sure that you stay cool while playing in the sun. They created a cooling vest equipped with fans, ice packs, and a water pouch to ensure maximum comfort on hot days!

**Barrier Buddies:**

Team Members: Madeline Salvage, Bella Sobolow, Dean Lederer, and Andrew Battaglia

Project Description: The Barrier Buddies aimed to keep people safe while riding on a bus. They created a barrier with shock-absorbing material and extra padding to lessen the forward motion impact in the event of a bus accident.

At Island Trees High School, the National Honor Society collected eclipse glasses to recycle and send to be reused by other school districts in Latin America for the next viewing opportunity in the fall. The National Honor Society students are grateful for the donations that came from Sparke, Stokes, and the middle school. The Key Club and ITHS students created greeting cards for the *Cards for Hospitalized Kids* organization. This organization collects handmade holiday greeting cards to share with children living in or spending long periods in hospitals. The high school computer science program exploded with the announcement that one of its computer science students won the Amazon Future Engineering scholarship. Leepakshi Anand is one of 50 NYS seniors to receive this title. In addition to the \$10,000-a-year scholarship for her full undergraduate degree, Leepakshi will spend her summer interning at Amazon in its IT department. Leepakshi will be continuing her computer science education this fall at Cornell University. The Tri-M Music Honor Society students volunteered their time to work at our NYSSMA festival in April. Students greeted over 1,000 students from our Island Trees and surrounding districts, worked in the NYSSMA office, worked with the adjudicators, and were instrumental in the success of the event. The Chamber Orchestra will be performing for adjudication at the NYSSMA Large Ensemble Festival in May. We wish all of the students in the orchestra good luck! Finally, forensic students practiced their investigative skills and attended a field trip to Just Escape. They had

1-hour to work together as a team and solve clues in order to escape their rooms. Later this month, Nassau County Detective Joe Philbin will be meeting with our Forensic students who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. Students will be able to ask questions to help prepare them for their future.

The United Teachers of Island Trees thank the community for their continued support. We cannot wait to share the memorable experiences that are planned for the month of June.