



The ALL-STAR Newsletter

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Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities

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Superintendent's Message: Progress and Optimism

Happy Holidays!

I hope this message finds you doing well. If there are struggles, I hope you can find peace and blessings among the worries.

Reflecting on 2022, I am proud of our progress. Some highlights include a three-year accreditation by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, continued compliance and quality services in

Early Intervention, an increase in community employment services, the beginning of a Special Connections group, stabilized employment at Shaffer Plaza, academic growth and behavior improvements at the School of Bright Promise and an increase in community involvement with our program and those that we support.

I am looking forward to 2023

and the rollout of our updated strategic plan that will start in January 2023.

Thank you for your dedication to the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities and those that we support.

—Michael Zinno
JCBDD Superintendent

All-Stars Return on a New Home Court

The Jefferson County All-Stars basketball team kicked off a new season with a win away at Tuscarawas County, but they have a new home court for matchups at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Recreational Center in Steubenville.

The team scored a 38-23 win over the Shooting Stars in Uhrichsville on Dec. 6, but their first home game moved to the MLK Center on Dec. 13 in a rematch with the Tuscarawas County team.

The Jefferson County Special Olympics teamed up with the Steubenville Department of Parks and Recreation to establish the center as the site for all future games and a special gold stripe was being added to the blue and white hues on the hardwood to welcome the All-Stars. Special Olympics Coordinator Steve Forte, who also serves as activities coordinator for the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities, said the School of Bright Promise gym was not conducive for games, particularly during the COVID pandemic, and some were moved to local high school gyms instead. Forte said the rec center was the perfect option for a more permanent base and could accommodate the county athletes, visiting teams and spectators.

Coach Joe Thomas said he and his players were excited about their new location at 905 Market St.

"We played last season, and that was our first season since COVID," he said, agreeing that games had to be held at alternative sites. "Steve



The Jefferson County All-Stars basketball team kicked off a new season Dec. 6 with a win at Tuscarawas County, but their home matchups are on a new court at the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation Center in Steubenville. Pictured here at practice at the School of Bright Promise are, from left, Josh McAlpine, Jared Vojvodich, Brandon Filby, Coach Joe Thomas, Melissa Vargo, Tom Pitts and Thomas Huggins. Not pictured is Logan Briggs.

Forte let us know this season we'll have a place for our home games."

The team has held practice each Tuesday at the School of Bright Promise but has a full slate of home and away games through February. The tentative schedule includes the home game on Dec. 13 at the MLK Recreational Center at 6 p.m.; an away game on Dec. 20 in Belmont County at 6 p.m.; a home game against Belmont County on Jan. 3 at 6 p.m.; another home matchup against Guernsey County on Jan. 17 at 6 p.m.; an away game at Carroll County on Jan. 26 at 6 p.m.; and an

away game at Guernsey County on Feb. 14 at 6 p.m.

The seven-member team, which includes Logan Briggs, Josh McAlpine, Tom Pitts, Melissa Vargo, Thomas Huggins, Brandon Filby and Jared Vojvodich, were equally thrilled with the change.

"It's a nice place," said Briggs.

"It's all right," added Pitts. "It's a cool place to play and have some fun. It's a bigger court and it has more room."

"I like it," Vargo concluded. "I plan to win this year for my late dad."

Toronto Teen's Jewelry-Making Hobby is a Real Gem

A simple hobby has turned into a new venture for a Toronto teen with the formation of Amari's Gems.

Fifteen-year-old Amari Wilson, the son of Sara Ghene of Toronto and Mike Wilson of Myrtle Beach, N.C., began stringing beads into necklaces and bracelets as a pastime last year, but since then he has been selling his creations to family, friends and the general public. Each piece has a personal touch from school colors and charms to names and sells for \$5.

"He's always loved crafts and we'd get him kits," she said. "Some had beads in them and he made bracelets for the family."

Amari, a young man with autism, found his calling as an entrepreneur when he started making more at the suggestion of Ghene's boyfriend, Roger Collins, and began selling his wares online.

"We set up a Facebook group and invited people, and now there are almost 400 people."

Amari spends a few hours a day producing colorful jewelry with his mother's help and has sold them to customers in his hometown as well as at the School of Bright Promise, which he attended for six years and where his younger sister Carmen is now a student.



Fifteen-year-old Amari Wilson of Toronto has parlayed his crafting hobby into a new venture called Amari's Gems. He is pictured here with his mother, Sara Ghene. To order, go to the Amari's Gems Facebook page.

He has also crafted items befitting Toronto High School, where he is presently enrolled with his other sister, Gianna. His school interaction parlayed into an appearance at this year's Toronto Arts Festival, where he acted as a vendor and sold more items.

"They asked us to participate and a lot of

people came to see him," Ghene commented. He also took part in the Special Summer Bash in Richmond this past July and in the Trunk-or-Treat at JCBDD in October.

And work is nothing new to him since he has been active in the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Summer Youth Program.

"They stay in contact with him and continue to help him transition into society," she noted. "He has the potential to do something and they have remained involved, which I appreciate. Kids can be successful, but you need supportive people behind you."

Amari said he enjoys sharing his talents, and while some proceeds have helped maintain his inventory, other funds have been used to give back to the community. This summer, he hosted a pool party for special needs kids and his family has ideas to do more in the future.

"I like it," he said as he thanked his patrons. "It makes people happy."

"It's more of a hobby, but it definitely makes other people happy," Ghene agreed. "He knows a lot of people and they love him."

To make an order, go to the Amari's Gems Facebook page.

Getting to Know You...



Angela Goodrich



Angela Goodrich is definitely a people person.

From the individuals she assists as an employment specialist with the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Community Employment Services to even her own family, Goodrich keeps herself surrounded, and she loves every minute of it.

Goodrich, of Mingo Junction, grew up around the JCBDD community because of her uncle, Brian Dayton, who long served as director of the former Jeffco Workshop.

"I spent many different times in my life with the people he worked with, and it was a place where I felt very comfortable," she said, adding that it led her to her current career.

For the past 15 years, she has worked with hundreds of individuals—both youth and adults—through summer youth programs, transitional youth settings, job placement and other services, and she's enjoyed watching them gain their independence.

"I love when I'm able to help somebody who doesn't believe in themselves to get a job and make their dreams come true."

She also takes pride in her family, which includes William, her husband of 24 years, one son, two stepsons and one stepdaughter, six grandchildren and four chihuahuas.



Sha Chiles



Like everyone, Sha Chiles is just another person trying to make his way in the world.

He has been working towards his independence and is currently seeking employment through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

The 2014 Steubenville High School graduate enjoys connecting with his large family, which includes sisters Daija and Essence, brother Javon and nieces Jasmine, Jazyah and Jayden, as well as his friends.

"Spending time with them is very invigorating," he said.

When it comes to being active within the community, Chiles has taken part in the PALS program and had a unique opportunity to share his experience with Daija's class at East Garfield Elementary School.

He said the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities' Service and Support Administration (SSA) has really helped him as he reaches for his goals.

"My SSA is Ryan Wood," Chiles concluded. "He is pretty cool and a great listener, and I appreciate that. Because of my disability, most of the time people see me but do not hear me. I am happy with Ryan as my SSA."