

May 2023

Community Connections

Within our growing, diverse community, we sow the seeds of opportunities to raise prepared, resilient students.



Gervais pageant continues tradition of philanthropy and fun

It's been 22 years since the first Mr. and Miss Gervais Pageant, and the pageant is once again looking to bring in enthusiasm and support from the community along with thousands of dollars to support Doernbecher Children's Hospital.

The May 6 pageant at Gervais High School is an annual tradition dedicated to the memory of Gervais student Jovita Reyes, who passed away from leukemia in 2000. In that time, the pageant has raised more than \$300,000.

This year's pageant features three male and four female seniors, all chosen by staff. This year's contestants are Huecheer Chang, Sofia Contreras, Natalie Gieselman, Noelia Elizarraras, Josie Schultz, Juan Esquivel and Abel Anaya.

While fundraising is part of the decision behind who is ultimately crowned Mr. and Miss Gervais at the end of the night, judges also look for effort, creativity and individuality as the youth participate in a Q&A, model various themed clothing, and participate



in a talent portion of the show.

Deb Holum, who has organized the pageant for many years, couldn't be as active this year, so event advisor Fenya Aman is stepping in. But Holum is still a valuable resource.

"She is a wonderful person who is helping behind the scenes, with everything from getting the stamps to send out letters to getting me the information so students can get their formal wear," Aman said. "She is a

Who: Eight Gervais High School Seniors

What: The Annual Mr. & Miss Gervais Pageant

When: Saturday, May 6 at 6 p.m.

Where: Gervais High School Cafeteria

Why: To raise money for Doernbecher Children's Hospital

How: Admission is \$5 for adults, \$4 for ages 5-17, and free for under 5.

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Gervais to get school-based health center next year

Gervais has had a fairly unique problem. Anyone wanting to visit a doctor or pick up a prescription has to do so outside of town - and often outside of work hours. Until now.

Gervais School District has found a way to solve this issue not just for students, but for much of the community.

Starting sometime in the 2023-24 school year, students and even many community members can stop at a school-based health center (SBHC) to receive care or medical advice from a nurse practitioner. Some services will even be available regardless of one's ability



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Translation tool one of a kind

Gervais School District has embraced being a multicultural community, but with an influx of immigrant and refugee students recently joining the district, more needed to be done.

"We have to give equitable access to education," said Dr. Creighton Helms, director of student services. "We're not just teaching one kind of student, but we aim to meet every student's needs."

While the district has teachers bilingual in Spanish, that wasn't enough for students who recently arrived in the district from other countries, like Ukraine.

Enter Pocketalk, a device that provides real-time translation. At the push of a button, the device the size of an iPhone can translate up to 82 languages.

"They're incredibly powerful simple tools," Helms said. "They can pass it back and forth and have a nearly seamless conversation."

The district used federal grant money to purchase 20 devices for the 20 students who need it the most. They check out a Pocketalk every morning at school and can carry them around throughout the day.

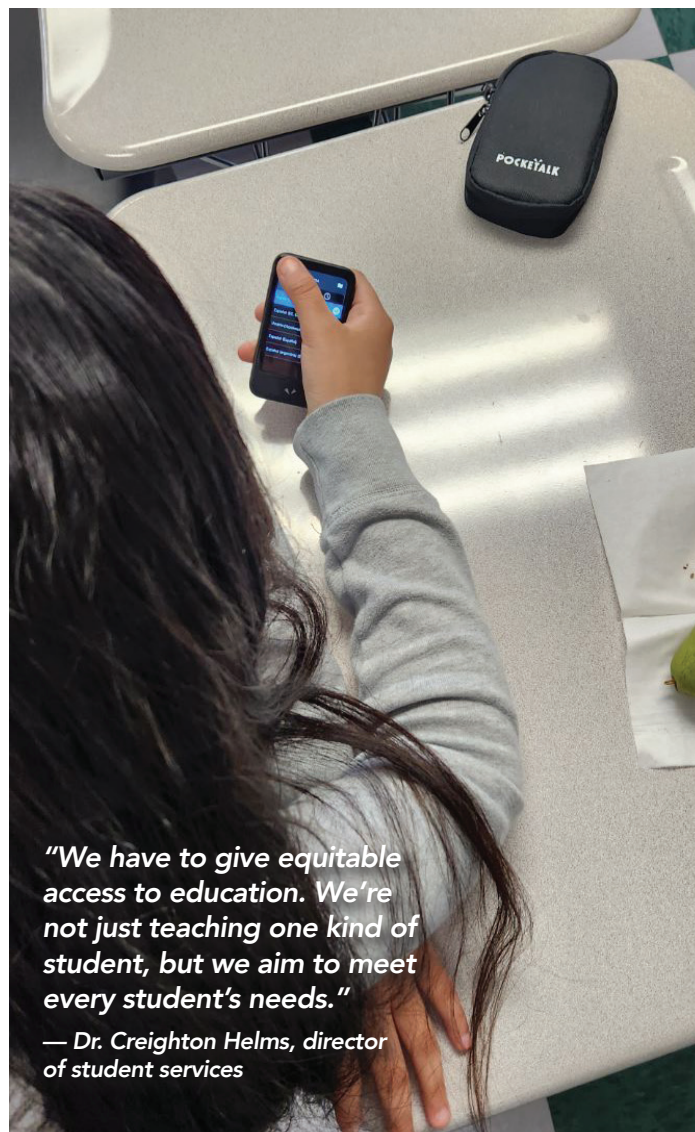
"If all you hear is English, you feel isolated," Helms said. "But they can use it their whole day at school, even at lunch." Pocketalk even has a camera function to take a picture of a worksheet or PowerPoint slide to overlay translated text for the student.

Additionally, classrooms have the use of Spf.io, a program that allows students to scan a QR code on their phone or Chromebook, and it gives subtitles in real time as the teacher gives the lesson.

"We don't know of any other districts using this," Helms said, noting it's typically used for government translation services.

The program has been successful so far, so the district is purchasing more Pocketalk devices, this time for administrators and office staff at all the district's buildings.

"If someone walks into an office and they don't speak English, the office staff has to call someone else in the district to translate," Helms said. "We're looking at giving these to key staff members so they don't have to do that."



"We have to give equitable access to education. We're not just teaching one kind of student, but we aim to meet every student's needs."

— Dr. Creighton Helms, director of student services

Helms said it's important to note that the Pocketalk devices are not meant to be used long-term by the same individuals.

"We have to give (students) resources that are commensurate with their needs," he said. "They'll learn English and as they develop their language skills, we can wean them off of the devices over time."

Mental Health Awareness Fair planned for May 11th

The Gervais School District will host a Mental Health Awareness Fair on May 11. The event, which runs from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at Gervais High School and coincides with Mental Health Awareness Month, will feature a discussion on mental health and social media, a student panel on mental health and services from mental, physical and dental health providers. The event will also feature vendors, food trucks, free haircuts and even bingo.

Dr. Creighton Helms, special services director for the district, said the idea for having a mental health fair stemmed from when the district was seeking input from the community

regarding the need for a school-based health center. "Beyond just the need for physical health support, a lot of the feedback from the community was that they needed more support around mental health," he said, noting that issues such as anxiety, lack of sleep and the influence of social media are some of the burning topics confronting citizens.

While the SBHC will certainly offer mental health resources to anyone seeking help, this health fair will hopefully be a good starting off point for finding appropriate resources.

The event is made possible through a partnership with the Willamette Health Council.



School Board UPDATE

May 2023

\$24.49M bond could bring long-awaited improvements to Gervais schools



Concept drawing for Gervais Middle School.

May 16 is a pivotal day for the Gervais School District. It could mean lots of positive physical changes to the buildings, or it could mean an uncertain future. That's because May 16 is a special election for which voters are being asked whether to issue a \$24.49 million bond for upgrades to the Gervais School District facilities. The bond tax rate will be over 25 years and is estimated at \$1.97 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Based on information from the Marion County Assessor's office, the average assessed value of property in town is \$145,188 which translates to an average property tax increase of \$286 per year, or about \$24 a month. Outside the Gervais city limits, the average assessed value is \$174,178 which translates to an increase of \$343 per year, or about \$29 a month.

Additionally, the district will be awarded a \$4 million grant from the state, contingent on passage of the bond. The bond money will target safety, security and technology additions and upgrades, furnishings and equipment for all buildings. Specifically, the middle school will receive:

- Improvements to its existing building, including expanding undersized classroom spaces
- Secure entry and expansion of drop-off and parking zones for safety
- Walkways
- Fencing to enclose campus
- A new multipurpose building to use as a cafeteria (students currently have to get their lunch at the high school), kitchen, performing arts area, library, media center, and classroom space. (The middle school, which is made up of two prefabricated modular buildings, does not currently have any common areas.)

At the high school, which was built in 1963 and has had minimal renovations over the years, improvements include:

- Career and STEM classroom upgrades
- Upgrades to the plumbing, electrical and ventilation of systems of the existing science labs
- Restrooms and locker rooms
- Seismic upgrades
- Safety & Security Upgrades: new secure vestibule entry, door hardware, security fencing, cameras
- ADA accessibility upgrade at gym mezzanine
- Exterior improvements including window and door replacement, roofing and paint
- Upgrade the existing student locker rooms and restrooms to meet current code
- Replace ceiling, flooring, walls and paint in interior



At the elementary school, built in 1934 with some remodeling over the years, improvements will be made to:

- Replace the HVAC system (using COVID-19 funds as well)
- Secure entries
- Improve campus-wide security
- Improve ADA accessibility

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- Improve exteriors including window replacement, roofing and paint
- Upgrade student restrooms with new fixtures and finishes
- Replace ceilings, flooring, walls and paint the interior

If there is still money left over, that will go toward additional HVAC at the high school and outdoor student gathering structures for elementary and middle school students would be added.

The school district failed to pass a bond in the May 2022 election, prompting the pre-bond planning committee to seek additional citizen feedback to guide future action. As a result, the election committee was able to whittle down the project list from last year's bond proposal of \$35 million to the current proposal.

If the bond passes, a community oversight committee will be formed and charged with ensuring the monies spent align with the bond as described on the ballot measure.

The Gervais Education Association has come out in support of the bond measure, noting that it's important to foster learning rather than create obstacles to learning.

"Our students deserve windows and roofs that hold out the rain and weather, heating systems that provide adequate airflow and comfort, spaces that foster 21st century learning and collaboration and athletic facilities that they can be proud

of," the association wrote in a support statement. "Gervais is one of the only districts in the Willamette Valley without bond dollars supporting improvements in our buildings and it is very apparent. We ask that you consider helping us to instill community pride and a renewed enthusiasm in our schools."

SIDEBAR: Gervais Bond Tax Assistant Grant

If you support improving Gervais school buildings but are worried it could hurt you financially, the school district has proposed a Bond Tax Assistance Grant to help property owners and renters who qualify.

"When we asked voters in May 2022 to consider a bond, it was defeated, and many voters said one reason for voting no was because they could not afford additional increases in property taxes," Superintendent Dandy Stevens said.

The school board is allocating a \$10,000 fund for this first-of-its-kind grant opportunity. The funds are from district facility rentals to outside groups, such as a traveling circus and K-9 training events.

Anyone who is considered low income and experiences increased costs to rent or property taxes due to the passage of the bond can submit an application to a committee every year.

Learn more about the grant on the district website under the "Bond Measure" tab - there's also a proposed tax calculator for residents to see how the bond would affect that, plus renderings and other bond materials.

School Board Spotlight: Maria Contreras

How long have you been on the board?

1-1/2 years

Occupation:

Vice President, Agricultural Field & Collateral Department; Team Lead for Rabo Diversified Services (A subsidiary of Rabobank). Vice President, Regional Credit

Officer- Rabo AgriFinance; Senior Relationship Analyst with Rabo AgriFinance; Senior Credit Officer with Northwest Farm Credit Services; and Agricultural Representative with AgriFrozen Foods/Agripac Inc.

Other public service positions and/or volunteer activity:

Previous Sacred Heart School Advisory Committee Board member; current Gervais School Board member, District #1.

Why did you decide to join the board?

Investing in our youth and public service workers. Plus, community is important to me. Both my children graduated from Gervais High School, and I want to give back to the community. I've been a Gervais resident for more than 25 years and believe it's important for the community to help support our schools to help ensure high-quality education for ALL students. It's imperative that we teach our children the necessary skills to help them succeed, whether in pursuit of higher education or a trade.

What are the biggest challenges facing the district and what solutions can the board take to help solve these issues?

It's imperative that our community pass the upcoming Gervais school bond. Without it, we will continue to struggle to provide the necessary resources and facilities that our students, teachers, and administration desperately need.

What are you most proud of about serving on the school board?

I am excited about the direction the district is heading, especially its strong focus on school attendance, family/community engagement, and preparing students for their futures.

What would you like readers to know?

Our small district functions like a family, and I want to support the progress and success that our district has already achieved. It is important to me that we keep the education, safety and wellbeing of each student at the forefront of our decisions. For the past year and a half, I have worked as an appointed school board member, and I have seen the many needs of our small school district.



Gervais Elementary STEAMs ahead with spring activities



Four years after Gervais Elementary School was designated a STEM Transformation School, the school is going strong with using STEAM (the school adds art to the acronym for science, technology, engineering and math) to increase 21st century learning and student engagement.

Being a STEM Transformation School, Gervais Elementary works with the South Metro STEM Partnership (SSMP) to create engaging events, including Family Code Night back on Feb. 28. SSMP led families through engaging coding games and challenges, with STEAM kits given away as prizes.

March 17 was STEAM Night at the school, with students participating in a variety of hands-on activities: scratch coding, stop-motion videos, Lego engineering, watercolor, leprechaun traps, Ozobots, tallest tower, strongest bridge, and cardboard construction. Many families attended and were engaged alongside the students.

April 4 was another busy STEAM day in Gervais. While the fourth- and fifth-graders got an exciting STEAM education experience by visiting OMSI in Portland, the rest of the school participated in a school assembly featuring the Mobile Ed Sky Dome. This was a large inflatable planetarium that was housed in the gym. Inside, students learned about the stars and planets in the solar system and galaxy.

In mid-April, newcomers to the school and English language learners in the school visited Silver Creek Falls on an experiential learning field trip. The trip provided an opportunity to build community, as participants were allowed to invite a few friends. Through a variety of engaging activities and hikes, students not only practiced vocabulary, but they made connections between the classroom and the real world. As an exciting side note, the English Language Department has worked hard with these students, who just recently completed the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) with an unprecedented 100% participation rate.



Career fair inspires youth to 'pursue their passion'



Gervais Middle School recently hosted its annual career fair, featuring 14 presenters. On April 5, organizers set up classrooms with six sessions so that students in all three grades could meet professionals representing a variety of fields. Presenters included college representatives, financial planners, real estate agents, a makeup artist, a pastor, an architect, a geotechnical engineer, a computer engineer, a programmer, and even the school nurse and school counselor.

"They loved getting to hear from so many different people," said teacher Liz Lopez, who helped organize the event.

She said the annual career fair has definitely had an impact. She knows of one student who enjoyed a presentation from police officers so much, he is now enrolled at Chemeketa Community College and plans to graduate from its police science program in a year.

"We know it is a good thing to continue to offer to our students," Lopez said. "Presenters reminded students to look for things they were interested in and pursue their passion. That's a message we hope to continue to send."



Health Center

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to pay, insurance and legal identification.

"You can be a community member without kids enrolled in the district and still access the center," said Director of Special Services Dr. Creighton Helms. "The center will be there at the very least for anyone to just walk in and ask questions about their physical or mental health without fear or stigma for themselves or their children."

Decisions made around who can receive care and advice would not be made by the district but rather medical professionals, following state laws and mandates.

Funding for the SBHC is made possible through a contract with a medical service provider and Oregon Health Authority, which has helped many other SBHCs open up in locations across the state. The partnership with OHA started in January 2022, when the district created an assessment of the community to determine the need of a SBHC in Gervais. The district surveyed students, staff, parents and focus groups to collect data about the health needs of Gervais.

"Data overwhelmingly came back that a clinic in Gervais would be very much desired," Helms said. "If you want anything more than Advil at Dollar General, you are likely not getting it in Gervais."

He noted the difficulties of getting sports physicals, required vaccinations and prescriptions, all of which require trips out of town and often result in parents having to take time off work.

"For people here those are obstacles to overcome," Helms said. "Having a clinic in Gervais would meet significant needs not just for students but for community members."

He illustrated with an example of a school nurse who suspects a student who is struggling academically has vision issues. The nurse might call the parents and advise them to schedule an appointment with their doctor, who would then refer the family to an ophthalmologist if the student indeed has vision issues.

"So you can imagine how cumbersome that would be for the family," Helms said. "They would probably have to take multiple days off work, plus navigate insurance."

Under a SBHC model, the nurse could call parents for authorization to send the student straight to the nurse practitioner during the school day, get a test and then refer them to an ophthalmologist.

A nurse practitioner would also be able to teleconference with a parent during an appointment and could write a prescription to be delivered to the SBHC and stored securely until the student or parent can pick it up.

Some advocacy groups and parents around the country have claimed the schools are overstepping their bounds by creating a divide between parents and children (in Oregon, ages 15 and up don't require parental consent for medical services). Helms pointed out the purpose is to create a resource for families, not a barrier.

"We want to make sure that this school-based health center meets the needs of our students and community, and if parents have a concern, then they have the absolute

freedom to raise those concerns and we would help them navigate that with their child," Helms said. "There seems to be this national rally cry that these centers provide access to pregnancy-related services or health care relating to gender transitioning. That is a myth and serves to strike fear into parents that schools are going to be inserting themselves into the parent/child relationship. Gervais School District does not do that nor would we want to put the district in that role."

Now in Phase 2, the district is working on identifying the medical provider for the space and finding the physical location itself, not to mention prepping the future SBHC with supplies and capital improvements, funded almost completely by the OHA grant money. OHA also provides annual grant funds to keep the SBHC doors open.

"We'd leverage grant resources to ensure it stays open indefinitely," Helms said.

Once the medical sponsor is secured, that health company would employ the nurse practitioner and run the Gervais SBHC like one of their existing clinics.

"They keep the building open, and we keep the water running and the lights on," Helms said.

The Gervais school-based health center will likely be housed in a modular building that was formerly Samuel Brown Academy. The location is ideal because it's within steps of Gervais High School, is visible enough so it's accessible to the public, but has a discreet parking area so there is some level of patient confidentiality.

Along with Woodburn School District, which also plans to open an SBHC in the fall, this will be the first SBHC in Marion County, apart from one at Chemawa Indian School, which serves a limited population.

"We have the same pockets of socioeconomic families (as Woodburn), but with no options in town," Helms said. "'You can say there are a lot of health needs that are not addressed here in Gervais. If you can address it, you're improving the general quality of life of the community. A rising tide lifts all boats. This is something that will be so special - a clinic for all of Gervais.'"

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blessing to our district."

Aman said that while there are eight seniors onstage, there are a lot of students involved behind the scenes to make the event happen.

"This is a big team effort so when the community shows up it feels like they are part of that effort," Aman said. "We have been longtime partners with Doernbecher and when the community comes out to support our students and their hard work and dedication, they feel seen. It feels good for the whole community and makes you feel proud to be from Gervais!"