

# BUFFALO PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER



## BUFFALO BILLS INVITE HIGHGATE & WESTMINSTER TO NEW ERA

Before the Buffalo Bills headed to the playoffs, thanks to the generosity of the Buffalo Bills Foundation, the flag football teams from Westminster Community Charter School and Highgate Heights were invited to watch them play against the Jets. The teams and coaches traveled to New Era Stadium and suited up in their best Buffalo Bills gear. Just before the game began, the kids headed through the tunnel, and onto the field!

Prior to kickoff, the student athletes watched the players warm up from the sidelines. Once the players were announced and the national anthem had been sung, they headed off to their seats to watch the game. They received a special surprise—their photos being shown on the Jumbotron!

We are so proud of our Bills, and grateful for the once in a lifetime opportunity to watch them from the sidelines. We are excited to start flag football season at Westminster and Highgate and we can't wait to see what next year brings for our hometown team—Go Bills!



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## ABOUT BPN

- ◆ Buffalo Promise Neighborhood is an education initiative aimed at supporting our children from cradle to college and beyond.
- ◆ Buffalo Promise Neighborhood in partnership with M&T Bank also includes community residents and numerous community based organizations as part of our team.
- ◆ We are committed to providing children with access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support.

## SCHOOL COMMUNITY EVENTS



### Author Visit—Lulu Delacre

Thanks to a generous donation from Wegmans, author and illustrator, Lulu Delacre came to visit students at Westminster Community Charter School and Highgate Heights. Lulu has written over 40 books that speak to her Latino heritage, celebrating the vibrant culture through language, music and more! Students enjoyed listening to her read a few of her books and learning about her passion for illustration.

### Silent Auction at Highgate

Every year during the month of December, the students at Highgate Heights earn raffle tickets as a reward for exhibiting positive behaviors. Prior to

departing for the holiday break, students used those tickets to enter a silent auction where they had the chance to win exciting prizes. This year, teachers and staff donated over 100 gifts for the students to choose from and most students in every grade went home with a gift. Thank you to all the teachers and staff for making this day so special!

### Coat Drive

Thanks to Macy's, Clothes 4 Souls and Strong Community Schools, we were able to provide 200 brand new coats to our families during the November and December Saturday Academies at Westminster Community Charter School and Highgate Heights Elementary.

## VOLUNTEER MENTOR SPOTLIGHT—MINDY ERNLE

January is National Mentor Month and at Buffalo Promise Neighborhood, we recognize that the impact of a personal relationship between a mentor and their mentees is truly immeasurable. Relationships like these can develop through experiences when least expected. Mindy Ernle, an M&T volunteer in our afterschool program at Westminster Community Charter School has experienced the bond of mentorship with a group of third graders that she has been working with for three years now!

"I decided to get involved with Westminster Community Charter School after following the school (through communication from M&T Bank) and hearing about all the great developments that were happening. My oldest child had left for college and I really wanted to spend some of my free time volunteering. I missed being around younger children and thought this would be a great opportunity to give back. Honestly, the kids give me way more than I think I give them.



It has been so rewarding for me to spend an hour a week with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and now 3<sup>rd</sup> graders (yes, I've stayed with the same original group of kids because I just adore them). To watch them grow and learn and be inquisitive makes my day. I've met other M&T employees and forged friendships through the program which has been fun.

The biggest change I've seen with the kids is their maturity level and it's been delightful to witness. We have some very open conversations and while at times the topics are difficult to navigate (loss of a family member, etc.) I hope in some small way I'm making their days brighter and adding different perspectives. I know they sure do that for me!

Volunteering for the Reading Superheroes program and now the Craft Club is honestly the favorite part of my week!"



## 2019 PROJECT OF THE YEAR—PMI BUFFALO

The Enterprise Transformation Execution Office at M&T Bank was awarded the 2019 Project of the Year award from the Project Management Institute of Buffalo!

When the team was asked what they wanted to do with their award proceeds—like true community partners—they chose to donate the proceeds to our Buffalo Promise Neighborhood!

It was truly unexpected and appreciated! Our congratulations go out to this dedicated team at M&T Bank.



## PARENT ACHIEVEMENT ZONE HOLIDAY CELEBRATION



PAZ Café offers a variety of events for families with children enrolled at the BPN Children's Academy, Gerard Place Children's Academy, Highgate Heights Elementary and Westminster Community Charter School.

Our December event took place at Westminster where our PAZ families were treated to a holiday feast with all the trimmings served by a group of dedicated M&T volunteers.

Following dinner, families participated in games, crafts and cookie decorating. The children even had a visit from the big guy himself, Santa Claus. Families, staff and volunteers shared in the entertainment and laughs were had by all!

## LITERACY SUPERHEROES & STEAM NIGHT



Recognizing the importance of literacy and the sciences in childhood education, we were excited to host two evening events at Westminster Community Charter School focused on these themes.

**Literacy Superhero Night:** Students, their families and community members had the opportunity to visit multiple superhero literacy themed stations. At the various stations, students designed their own comics, decorated masks, created their own superhero, and more. Each student left with a brand-new book to take home! Thanks to the Buffalo Zoo and the SPCA, families were able to read with different animals including bunnies, birds, bats and bugs! The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library was on-site, and students were able to sign up for their very own library card!

**STEAM Night:** The annual science fair competition has a new name "STEAM Night". Fifty-five students in grades K-8 completed science projects for the event. The tri-fold projects were displayed in the Gym complete with demonstrations and spills! The

choir and band performed in the atrium and art projects were showcased throughout the school. Families were able to learn about school offerings such as M&T Bank's Coding Club, play with a cubetto robot, practice using balance, experiment with dry ice and engineer a tin foil boat to hold pennies. The University of Buffalo Engineering Club also gave kids a wild ride on their hoverboard! Trophies were awarded to the most creative scientists in grades K-4 and 5-8. Congratulations to all of our winners!



## HOLIDAY FOOD BASKET DRIVE

For over a decade, the BPN Community Council has hosted an annual Holiday Food Basket Giveaway.

Thanks to the hard work of our students at Westminster, Highgate Heights, BPN Children's Academies, community members and sponsors, this year we were able to provide 170 food baskets to include a turkey or ham, and all the festive holiday dinner fixings. Baskets were distributed to our neighborhood community families in need.

Out thanks go out to Wegmans, Buffalo Fire Department, M&T Bank Mortgage Department, National PanHellenic Council and United Healthcare for their generosity.

## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT—UB DENTAL



The UB School of Dental Medicine (UBSDM) Gateway Program, a school-based health care dental program serving Buffalo Public School children, began in 2012. The program offers exams, cleanings, x-rays,

fluoride treatments, sealants and fillings. Students are brought to the Squire Pediatric Clinic for oral health exams and continue to have appointments until their treatment is completed. The Gateway program currently helps elementary school aged children from Pre-K – 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Julie Caizza, who serves as their Program Coordinator facilitating the dental care services of each and every child. Dental Assistant Karen Spates runs the pediatric clinic and works with dentists, residents and dental students ensuring each child receives the highest quality care.

When asked about her proudest career accomplishment, she spoke about her recent activity with the Lafayette/Newcomer Academy - an all refugee population. The need was beyond anything she had ever experienced but the students were so wonderful, grateful and respectful!

It's very clear that Julie loves working with children – she says, “There is something very rewarding about helping children and relieving them of discomfort, showing them how to take care of their teeth and letting them know that a trip to the dentist can be a lot of fun!” Further, she knows that families depend on these services and she is proud to work for the UBSDM Gateway Program, an important safety net for thousands of children in our neighborhood.



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