

The Learning Curve

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Your weekly guide to students, schools, teachers and triumphs in Bibb County's Public Schools

Howard Middle brings home soccer championships Girls' and boys' teams both add to list of school's first-year accomplishments

In its first year, Howard Middle School made quite the name for themselves in several areas of competition: the cheerleading team brought home the school's first trophy, then the Academic and Math teams became County Champions, the baseball team had a 6-1 record, the show choir took top state awards, the school won the system's Cleanest School Award, and now both the boys' and girls' soccer teams have brought home championships.

"We played together as a team; we helped each other out," says 7th grader Amelia Etheridge, who started playing when she was three years old. "That's how we won our games."

The girls team went undefeated this year, making them the County and League Champions, and the boys team went 5-1-2, making them County Champions. The only game they lost within the county was their very first game, and it was a tie to Miller Middle.

"All the time we spent [practicing] this year really paid off," says 8th grader Elizabeth Weaver, who just started playing soccer again after a few years off. "When we went undefeated, I was very surprised because I didn't think we'd be that successful our first year."

"It was exciting with Howard being a first-year school," agrees girls' coach Kim Clements.

Teams practiced five days a week for two hours after school. Coaches had them practicing drills, playing scrimmages, sprinting up and down the field, and running laps before each practice. "[The coaches] wanted to make sure we could last the whole game," says Etheridge. "It got easier the further along we went."

"And it shows," remarks Kim Clements. "They were in the best shape of the other teams out there."

With no playoffs or championship game, the champions were determined by a team's win percentage. Each team played every middle school in the county for the county championship and teams from other counties

like Henderson Middle, Monroe County Middle, Oak Hill Middle, and Byron Middle for the league championship.

According to Clements, the girls won their first couple of games by large margins. When they started traveling around the league is when they really had to step up their performance. Even the boys had a tough time in the league, sustaining their only loss and one of their ties. "The league games were our toughest and closest games."

Starting a new team halfway through the school year for a three-month season - tryouts and practices beginning in February, the first game in March, and the final game at the end of April - the coaches had their work cut out for them. Some of the students had previous soccer experience, but some were playing for the first time. "We had to evaluate where they were with their skills," says Clements.

Preston Markert joined the team "for the fun of it, why else?" Never having played soccer before, he says it was definitely a great experience, and he - along with Weaver - will be trying out for Westside's team next year. "All the time we spent this year really paid off, and I made a lot of friends. I hope the team is as close next year."

7th grader John Ewing has played since he was four years old but had "never played for a school before, and I wanted to." Knowing a few people on the team who already had experience, he "thought we'd do pretty well."

The teams are already looking to next year in the hopes of being just as successful. Clements says about half the players on the team will be returning next year.

"They played really well as a team, and they were very aggressive," she adds. "These kids were real fun to work with and watch improve."

"It felt good [to do so well] because we had just come together to play and have a good time," says Etheridge.



(above) Howard's girl's soccer team were County and League Champions this past year.

(below) Howard's boys soccer team were County Champions this past year.



Vineville Academy brings art to the community

Offers classes to senior citizens and hosts a silent auction of student, faculty, and community work

"We've always wanted to open our school up to the community," says Mae Thurston, Vineville Academy's Arts Liaison for the Community, "and this is a good start."

As part of an ongoing vision to have Vineville become a cultural and artistic center in the community, the school is taking every opportunity to bring people not normally associated with the school in and expose them to the fine arts; whether it is offering free art classes to seniors or having a silent auction on student, faculty, and community work.

During March and April, the school offered its first art classes to the retirement communities in the area. Residents were invited to spend March learning about form, how light works, colors, drawing basics, and perspective and April learning about more advanced painting techniques. A grant from MaconArts helped pay for the supplies. The classes were free, ran for two hours every Thursday night, and Vineville staff volunteered to teach them.

"We felt they needed some basics in drawing before they painted," says Vineville Special Education teacher Connie Williams, whose degree is in Fine Arts and helped teach the class. She says they "did exceptionally well," especially since "you'd usually cover these topics in several months. Some of them came in with talent already."

The end of the class was marked with an art show featuring work from the retirees as well as the instructor. Teachers and students had such a great time, Thurston will



(above) Teachers and community members admire the artwork done by the class for senior citizens.

(below) Student, faculty, and community artwork up for auction dominated Vineville's front hallway as well as the media center.



be re-applying for the grant so classes can be set up in the fall. "So we can invite more people in [to the school]," she says.

The same week as the community art show, student, faculty, and community artists were also given the opportunity to showcase their masterpieces at the school's 3rd Annual Art Auction. Works were placed along the school's entry hall and throughout the media center.

The community was invited to come to the school during the course of several days to place bids on the more than 300 pieces available. According to art teacher Eric Cooper, all money from the sales goes straight into the art department's budget. "This allows us to buy real art materials and allow our students to work with mediums they might not have until middle or high school."

Student artwork is submitted throughout the year to be picked for the auction. "[The students] beg to have things in the auction," says Cooper. After picking out the selections, he goes to them to ask permission to try and sell it. "They never say no," he says with a chuckle.

Any kind of artwork will do, pointing out renditions of older masterpieces, sketches, paintings, and craft projects. "There's quite a wide variety of styles and mediums."

"There's a lot of pride in selling a piece of your artwork"