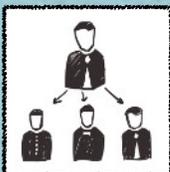


LOCAL DO'S

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF
JASON VITALE
MEPHAM H.S. SCIENCE TEACHER
1971 - 2019**



TEACHER TRIBUTES, PG. 2-3



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“MEPHAM MOURNS”

BY LINU CHACKO (MEPHAM H.S.),

LOCAL DO'S STAFF WRITER

On December 28, 2019, **Jason Vitale** tragically passed away while on a skiing vacation with his family. Jason taught **Earth Science** at Mepham for 20 years, and his dedication and his heart will very much be missed. We extend our deepest condolences to wife, Jennifer, and young daughter, Katherine, as well as extended family and friends.

The entire Bellmore-Merrick CHSD mourns this terrible loss and hundreds of them attended the services in Baldwin to pay final respects on January 2,3, and 4th. As evidenced by all the wonderful memories captured forever in pictures, Jason loved to travel with his family, loved his boat, and loved animals. He advised Mepham's **Environmental Interest Club** and posted pictures of pets needing homes on his class website. In lieu of flowers, donations were made to **Little Shelter Animal Rescue and Adoption Center** in Jason's honor.

Jason shared his passions with

his students and we are grateful to him for his commitment and service.



Jason Vitale was an active member of the Baldwin Civic Association.

Born in Brooklyn, Jason soon moved to Merrick, finally settling in Baldwin. Jason was involved in coaching **Baldwin Little League**, as well as the **Bellmore-Merrick Varsity Bulldogs**. **Baldwin Civic Association** remembered Jason as a “one-man crusade for improving conditions in Baldwin.” Jason was the longest standing Chair of the **Quality of Life Committee**, and his volunteerism for many events in Baldwin were remembered at his passing.

Faculty and staff at Mepham, as well as Jason's alma mater Calhoun, and the rest of the district are stunned by Jason's life cut far too short. Mepham was very grateful for the PPS staff from all

over the district rallying around us and Jason's students, as well as all of the food sent to show support. Special thanks to Calhoun's Staff Association for sending lunch over for Mepham's staff and paying respect to Jason in our shared loss.

“OUR FRIEND & COLLEAGUE”

ROB WALSH, BMUST PRESIDENT

Happy New Year! I know, sounds a bit strange saying it now, eh? I hope the holiday season was full of joy and happiness for you and your families. I would like to take a moment to remember my friend, our friend, and colleague Jason Vitale. Jason and I started together at Mepham in 1999. We were on the same team that year and, oddly enough, I still remember the day I met him. As anyone who knew or worked Jason will tell you, doing so was an experience. If your relationship with him was anything like mine, then it was probably filled with good times and laughter with a couple of moments of exasperation and dismay mixed in for good measure. He was quite the character for sure. Over the past 20 years we went through a great deal together, both personally and professionally. We even made a pilgrimage (two actually) to my family home in Ohio (with Pete Steckle) to visit Cedar Point, the roller coaster mecca of the world. Rest In Peace my friend, you'll be missed.

To the incredible faculty and staff who were, and continue to be there for us (the Mepham staff) and for one another - thank you. Words can not express the gratitude and appreciation of the Mepham community for your kindness and generosity. A special thank you goes to the PPS staff from across the district who greeted us on our return from break and helped us through an incredibly difficult day. Another goes to the Calhoun staff who provided lunch for us on the Friday of our return.

Finally, in going through this process as union president and working with Jason's family, I have been reminded of the importance of four documents that need to be up to date and on file with either the district, the state or BMUST. I will quickly explain the purpose of each, where it can be found and who should have it on file. All four documents can be found as an attachment to the email that delivered the Local Do's.

The first document, [Beneficiary Full Time Employee \(click here\)](#), allows the beneficiary to immediately receive whatever monies are due as a lump sum rather than having to wait for the estate to work it all out. The document can be found on the BMCHSD website and

should be forwarded to the Personnel Office once completed.

Next is [Designation of Beneficiary \(click here\)](#) for NYSTRS. I do not think I am overstating it when I say this is the single most important document you fill out as it pertains to your pension. With this document you determine the beneficiaries of your pension.

In all likelihood you have gone through some important life changes since you first filled out this form - a marriage, a divorce, births and deaths. Your current beneficiary(ies) can be found on the annual Benefit Profile you receive from NYSTRS. Looking at mine this year I realized that my wife's name was spelled incorrectly and that my brother, and not my sons, was the contingent beneficiary. This document can be found on the BMCHSD website is filed with NYSTRS.



**Rob Walsh,
President, BMUST**

“I would like to take a moment to remember my friend, our friend, and colleague Jason Vitale ... to the incredible faculty and staff who were, and continue to be there for us (the Mepham staff) and for one another - thank you.”

The [Sun Life Insurance Beneficiary Form \(click here\)](#) designates the beneficiary(ies) of the contractual life insurance policy the district takes out

for our members. If you have any concerns at all about who you have designated as the beneficiary(ies), I have been asked to tell you to fill out a new form and send it to Renee Jones in personnel. This document can be found on the BMCHSD website.

Finally, BMUST has a \$2,500 death benefit that is paid to the family of a member who has passed while in service. We are in the process of updating that document on our website, so please use the document attachment to this email to designate your beneficiary(ies). This document should be forwarded to the BMUST office in care of Meg Hirsch.

Thank you all again for what you do for one another, the students and the BMCHSD community. You are remarkable.

***In Solidarity,
Rob***

“M IS FOR MEPHAM”

BY LINU CHACKO (MEPHAM H.S.),
LOCAL DO'S STAFF WRITER

M is for the **MANY** exciting happenings at Mepham! We continued the tradition of supporting families in need with this year's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Students and faculty bought oatmeal, tissue boxes and coffee to assemble seasonal bags. Thank you to Ms. Einbinder and the entire Social Studies department for this important effort to keep Dr. King's legacy alive!



Mepham makes its Mark at Hofstra! Future Business Leaders of America club competed at the LI Regional Conference January 17th, at Hofstra University. We brought home 13 awards, under the leadership of Ms. Frend and Mr. Slattery. Great job, Business department!

Manno on the Street is just the newest treat BMB staff have for us to enjoy each week for Friday morning announcements. Freshman Takeover, interviews, sports and weather are just some of the features these talented students put together, with the tireless guidance of Mr. Stein, Ms. Kalish and Mr. Russell.

MephACapella gets our last shout out for Ms. Dimitriou and Mr. Brandofino organizing a wonderful way to wrap up 2019, with a serenade for all students entering the front main entrance. Students and faculty alike loved the singing and the Wind Ensemble pieces echoing from the lobby for the last morning of classes before the holiday break.



Looking forward to even MORE! Mepham faculty are brushing up on their dance moves and other amazing talents for Faculty Follies, Thursday, Jan 30th, to benefit the Community Cupboard. And by February break, we'll be bringing back the bacon and pancakes for Spanish Honor Society's famous breakfast. Thank you, Ms. O'Neill for this tasty effort and for raising support for the earthquake victims in Puerto Rico.

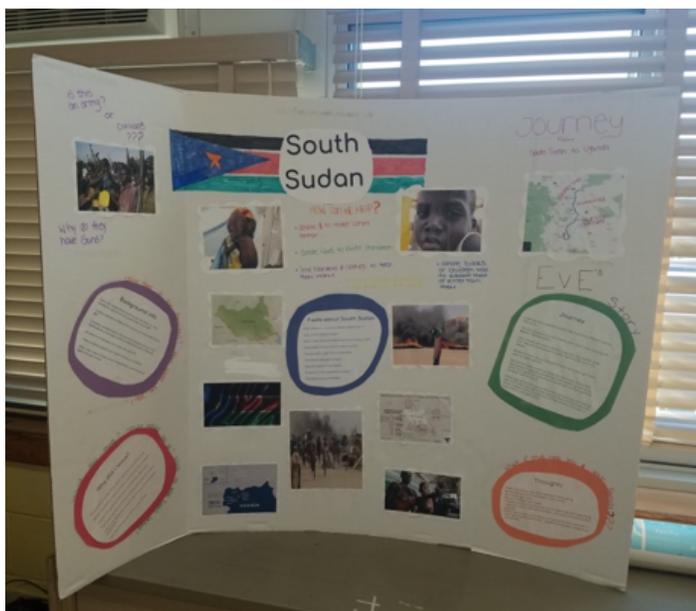
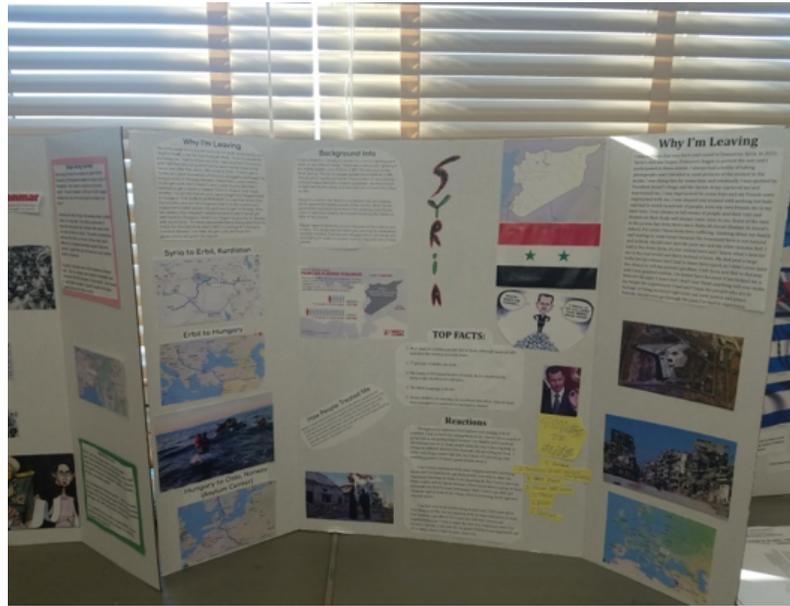
“CONFRONTING GLOBAL CONFLICTS!”

BY LAURA SHERIDAN (M.A.P.), LOCAL DO'S STAFF WRITER

Greetings from Meadowbrook Road!

Tiffany Rzempoluch and Zachary Gosse (collaborative Social Studies teachers) have been bringing the realities of refugee-ism to life for their Participation in Government class. Seniors from that course recently completed their unit on "Understanding the Global Refugee Crisis."

Tiffany and Zach introduced the students to a number of regional crises and conflicts around the world that have contributed to the increase in refugees. The students were then tasked with selecting a conflict area and further investigating the situation. As a result, each student group created a poster displaying their conflict area and the facts related to the conflict, as well as detailing the journey of a refugee they researched. Finally, the students developed and acted in their own video representation of their refugee's escape from their home country in hopes of finding safety.



acted in their own video representation of their refugee's escape from their home country in hopes of finding safety.

For many of the students, it was an eye-opening experience, putting themselves "in the shoes" of a refugee. A number of students admitted they would not have been able to survive the journey and were impressed by the power of the human will and desire for safety.

*Best regards,
Laura*

“PRIDE @ MAMS”

BY LISA SHAPIRO (MERRICK AVE M.S.),
LOCAL DO'S WRITER

Merrick Avenue finished out 2019 with our second annual holiday door decorating contest. It's always nice to see to what our colleagues will come up with although a little inspiration from Pinterest doesn't hurt either. The fee for entry was \$5 per door and monies were donated to the Community Cupboard.



The MAMS PRIDE club invited staff and students to pose in our “mobile” Instagram page. The purchase of this was made possible by a \$1,000 grant awarded to PRIDE by the Sofia Valsamos Foundation. The mission of TSVF mirrors that of PRIDE, which is “to empower young people to take a stand against bullying, find support around challenges, and to embrace each other's differences.” To see some of the fun we had, check out the page and follow along with your team or club @mamspride. PRIDE and Natural Helpers, led by Lauren Beinert, will be teaming up for P.S. I Love You day on February 14th. Both clubs will be spreading love and kindness throughout the building by way of decorated hearts with positive messages hung in high traffic areas (the bathrooms!) throughout the building.



Dan Stiglitz, of the tech department, received a \$500 grant from Jovia for teachers to introduce new things to their classroom. Mr. Stiglitz was able to purchase 10 Sphero mini robots that his students will be able to code using ipads to travel around an obstacle course and other fun activities.

Our International Buddy Club joined forces with Calhoun's International Buddy Club, on December 10th to make gingerbread houses. Both groups spread some holiday cheer by donating the houses to the Senior Center which is housed in Bellmore-Merrick District building.

As part of their service learning project, the 8th grade FACS students raised \$104 that will be donated between The Best Friends Animal Society and Charity: Water.

Paula Pastor and Avidan Moont made the Honor Roll on the AMC 8 Math exam, making them two of the top middle school mathematicians in the entire country. ENTIRE COUNTRY!!!! Out of all test takers, Paula and Avidan both scored in the top 5%. Congratulations!

PAWS club had a bake sale and raised \$150 that will be donated to the Little Shelter in Huntington in memory of Jason Vitale.

As you can see, we have been pretty busy at MAMS. I don't see us slowing down anytime in the foreseeable future!

“GRAND HAPPENINGS”

BY STACI PEKUSIC (GRAND AVE M.S.),
LOCAL DO'S WRITER

In January, Grand Avenue Middle School held its annual Scripps Spelling Bee and its first annual Geography Bee, sponsored by National Geographic. Congratulations to Meghan Zambori-Dagger whose student, Christina Foufas, was crowned best speller and to Bridget Gumersell, whose student, Jaclyn Dobbs, won the GeoBee.

Grand Avenue Middle School also participated in a two-month long “Grand-a-Licious” food drive, which stretched from November to January. Students and faculty collected over 4,000 food items to benefit the Bellmore-Merrick Community Cupboard in honor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Social Studies teachers coordinated lessons on Dr. King's life and mission, then brought their classes to the auditorium in January to sort and package the donations. Two first-period teachers tied with the highest number of donations: Isabel Raphael and Matthew Moody. A bagel breakfast is planned for each of these dedicated teachers and their generous students.



Finally, the month leading up to Valentine's Day marks the SADD “Mugs of Love” event. Under the guidance of Pia Santodonato, students will collect unused mugs and fill them with packets of coffee, tea, cocoa, and soup mixes. The mugs will then be donated to a local food pantry during the second week of February.

“MAKING AN IMPACT”

BY WENDY PERISA, (CALHOUN H.S.), LOCAL DO'S WRITER

Calhoun Girls Basketball Hosts Youth Clinic

The Calhoun High School varsity girl's basketball and Coach Magnuson and Coach Catapano ran a youth basketball clinic over the holiday break at Calhoun High School. Students from local elementary schools and from Merrick Avenue Middle School attended.



Calhoun's Environmental Club Hosts Thrift Shop

Calhoun's newly created Environmental Club students laid out many goals for this year, including a thrift shop, where students could donate old Calhoun gear to be sold and therefore repurposed.



“Upon these goals are

improving recycling in our school, doing community and beach clean ups, planting trees, and purchasing non-plastic utensils for students to use around Earth Day,” said Daniel Maksimowicz, a special education teacher who co-advises the Environmental Club, along with teacher Christopher Vogel.

They collectively decided that a thrift shop would be the greatest way they could meet their goal and the thrift shop was born.



MLK Day of Service

Our spirit of giving continues! The Bellmore-Merrick Central High School District prepared for the **MLK Day of Service** which will take place on Friday, January 17th. This year, Calhoun collected **toiletries** to package for a variety of local organizations.

The first ever Bellmore-Merrick Business Challenge was held at Brookside. Groups competed in a variety of events in a DECA-inspired role play scenario. In addition, local colleges like Hofstra, LIU Post, Adelphi, SUNY Farmingdale, and Molloy set up tables for students to learn about opportunities at the colleges. Local businessmen and women, along with central administration judged the students for impartiality. Winners from Calhoun included **Julia Oladipo** in Hospitality and Tourism, **Allison Flynn** in Finance, **Olivia Perrone** in Entrepreneurship, **Alyssa Formisano** in Marketing/ Not-for-Profit Fundraising, and **Max Unlu** in Sports and Entertainment Marketing. Congratulations to all who participated!

“COMPETING FOR EXCELLENCE AT KENNEDY”

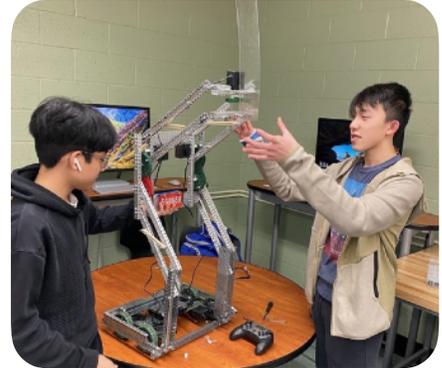
BY BRUCE REED, (JFK H.S.), LOCAL DO'S EDITOR

Kennedy Hosts VEX Robotics Tournament

For the first time, Kennedy High School hosted the VEX Robotics VRC Tournament on Jan. 25. Deanna Ocampo and Helmut Schleith advised the team and worked tirelessly for the past few months to plan the tournament, coordinate judges and volunteers, and overseeing the tournament activities.

“During the competition matches, all district teams advanced successfully through the morning qualifier rounds,” said Robert Soel, a science chairperson at Kennedy and districtwide STEM Education chair.

The Kennedy Team B ranked no. 6 in the tournament going into the afternoon elimination matches. Advancing to the quarterfinals, the Kennedy Team A ultimately placed no. 6 at the conclusion of the competition.



“The dedication of the Kennedy teams has been amazing,” said Ocampo. “This season, they spent many late nights and off-periods, building, testing and redesigning their robots to make them better and better for competition. I am so proud of their performance at the tournament and their complex robot designs this season.”

Kennedy Host Middle School Band Workshop

Mr. Avellaneda, along with Mr. Brandofino (Mephram), invited the 8th grade band to Kennedy high school for an interactive experience. Throughout their morning session, high school students from JFK and Mephram discussed their musical repertoires via Skype with the 8th graders before engaging in their rehearsal for the upcoming Spring concert. All students were able to ask questions, share stories, and demonstrate their musical abilities. The seniors then conducted a performance with the wind ensemble, receiving high praise from the younger middle schoolers..

Mandarin Students Celebrate Lunar New Year

On Friday, January 17, Ms. Qiu’s Mandarin 2H and 3H classes got together to celebrate Chinese New Year, the Year of the Rat, which officially begins on January 25, 2020. Together, students created a dragon craft to commemorate the occasion. Students also made progress on a research project which involves investigating Chinese provinces, exploring the local culture, and presenting their findings to the class.

Happy New Year to all!





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Jan/Feb '20