



## At a Glance

- Page 2**  
Teachers honored
- Page 3**  
Budget overview
- Pages 4-5**  
Proud Of...
- Page 6**  
Deck the halls  
Election results
- Page 7**  
Career exploration
- Page 8**  
Teachers honored

## Key Dates

- December**
- 16...'Sounds of the Season' choir concert, 6 and 8 p.m.
  - 17.....Gr. 7 band/orchestra concert, 7:30 p.m.
  - 19....Gr. 6 band concert, 7:30 p.m.
  - 23-31.....Winter Break, no school
- January**
- 1.....Winter Break, no school
  - 3.....Two-hour early release day
  - 13....School board mtg., 4:30 p.m.
  - 20.....MLK Jr. Day, no school
  - 23.....Quest Info Night, 6:30 p.m.
  - 27.....DES Kindergarten lottery applications due, 3 p.m.
  - 30.....Quest Request for Assessment Due



**Career Exploration Day at BHS helped students focus on their future. See the story on Page 6.**



## Music in motion

**An ambitious fall musical at BHS, 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame,' featured intricate rhythms, an enormous set, and a challenging story. More than 85 students put on four mid-November shows, including Avery Russek as Esmeralda, above, and Ben Krinke as Quasimodo, at left.**



**Sue Lee**

## Lee earns all-state honor

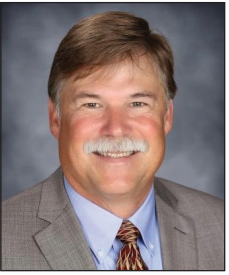
A surprise awaited BHM School Board member Sue Lee as the board finished recognizing students and staff members for various accomplishments during their meeting on Monday, Nov. 25. It was then that Lee learned she has been selected as one of just seven All-State School

**See Lee**  
Page 6

## From the Superintendent

# Construction planned for spring

Several bids for the Buffalo Community Middle School building bond improvements were approved at the November school board meeting. The approved bids will provide a new, more secure entry and improve the classroom and building environment. Construction of the new entry will begin late spring of 2025, and the work addressing the conversion



**Scott Thielman**

of steam to hot water boilers and a chilled water system will begin early summer. The district will benefit from the improved energy efficiency of the heating and cooling system, and the new access design will allow for a more secure and effective entry.

**New school board takes shape**  
This November two new members and two incumbents were elected to the BHM School Board. Adam Bjorklund and Amanda

**See Thielman**  
Page 3

## Four honored with annual distinction

Four teachers from Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools were recently honored for treating their work as “a calling that touches lives and shapes futures.”

Those words from Mark Schmitz, executive director of Resource Training & Solutions, summarized the positive impact made by select teachers invited to the annual Leadership in Educational Excellence Award banquet in St. Cloud on Wednesday, Oct. 30.

“Your passion and dedication create opportunities for growth, both inside and outside the classroom,” Schmitz added. “Your ability to connect, challenge, and uplift students sets you apart, and we are honored to recognize your achievements. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to excellence.”

Among the award-winning educators from 37 central Minnesota school districts were Parkside Elementary third-grade teacher Steve Bratulich, Hanover Elementary special education teacher Colleen Manninen, Buffalo Community Middle School art teacher Jill Post, and BCMS/BHS/Quest English teacher Ryan McCallum.

### **Steve Bratulich**

Bratulich has taught for 14 years in Buffalo, and 26 years overall.

“I was drawn to education because I had a passion for the sense of community, and seeing individuals and the community experience success,” he said. “Working with students and families, building relationships, watching progress, and increasing confidence is most rewarding for me.”



**Four BHM teachers were recently honored with Leadership in Educational Excellence Awards. From left are Hanover Elementary Principal Brad Koltes with special education teacher Colleen Manninen; Parkside Elementary Principal Jeanna Miller with third-grade teacher Steve Bratulich; BHS/BCMS/Quest English teacher Ryan McCallum with BHS Principal Mark Mischke; and BCMS art teacher Jill Post with BCMS Principal Matt Lubben.**

Parkside Principal Jeanna Miller said Bratulich is an outstanding leader who spearheads multiple committees, applies creativity to solve problems, and consistently maintains a “can-do” attitude.

“Known for his resilience and resourcefulness, he consistently seeks ways to overcome challenges while embracing new strategies and professional growth opportunities,” Miller said. “Steve’s unwavering dedication to his colleagues, students, and the educational field embodies the spirit of excellence at Parkside Elementary, making him a most deserving recipient of this honor.”

While the award is an individual distinction, Bratulich credited those around him with helping him achieve success in his field.

“I work with great people who make me better every day,” he said. “My colleagues, students and family are what I appreciate most in my job. It is humbling to be acknowledged for the work

that we are all doing together.”

### **Colleen Manninen**

When students need some additional assistance they are well served by Manninen, who has an impressive track record across her 14 years of teaching at Hanover Elementary, 21 total years with BHM Schools and 29 years in education overall.

“She is someone who other staff members reach out to for ideas and strategies, as they have seen the success of students she helps support,” said Hanover Elementary Principal Brad Koltes. “She is someone who teachers and parents have recognized as making a positive difference in students’ lives.”

In that sense, Manninen continues to fulfill the mission she set for herself at the outset of her career.

“I became a special education teacher with the hope of helping students feel good about themselves,” she said. “I enjoy watching my students make progress

and working with multiple grade levels.”

Koltes said that Manninen’s effectiveness comes from providing students with consistent expectations, balanced by support and care. Manninen also is a member of the school’s student support team, and provides intervention ideas and resources to teachers in general education classrooms.

“She continues to look for new ideas and strategies that will help students find success both academically and behaviorally,” said Koltes.

### **Jill Post**

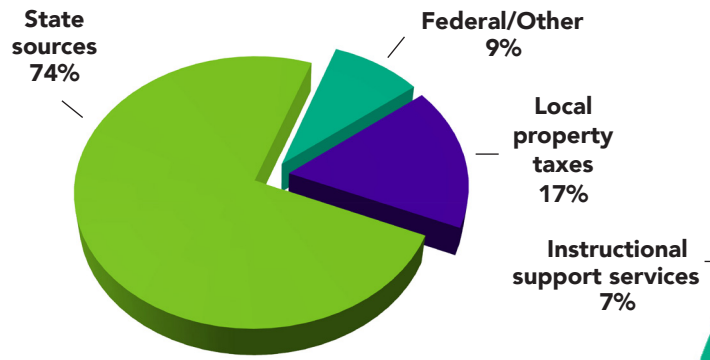
Since joining Buffalo Community Middle School as a mid-year substitute straight out of college just over 13 years ago, Post has become an essential fixture of the staff.

“Jill Post has been the cornerstone of our school Art Department, inspiring not only her students but all of us with her kindness,

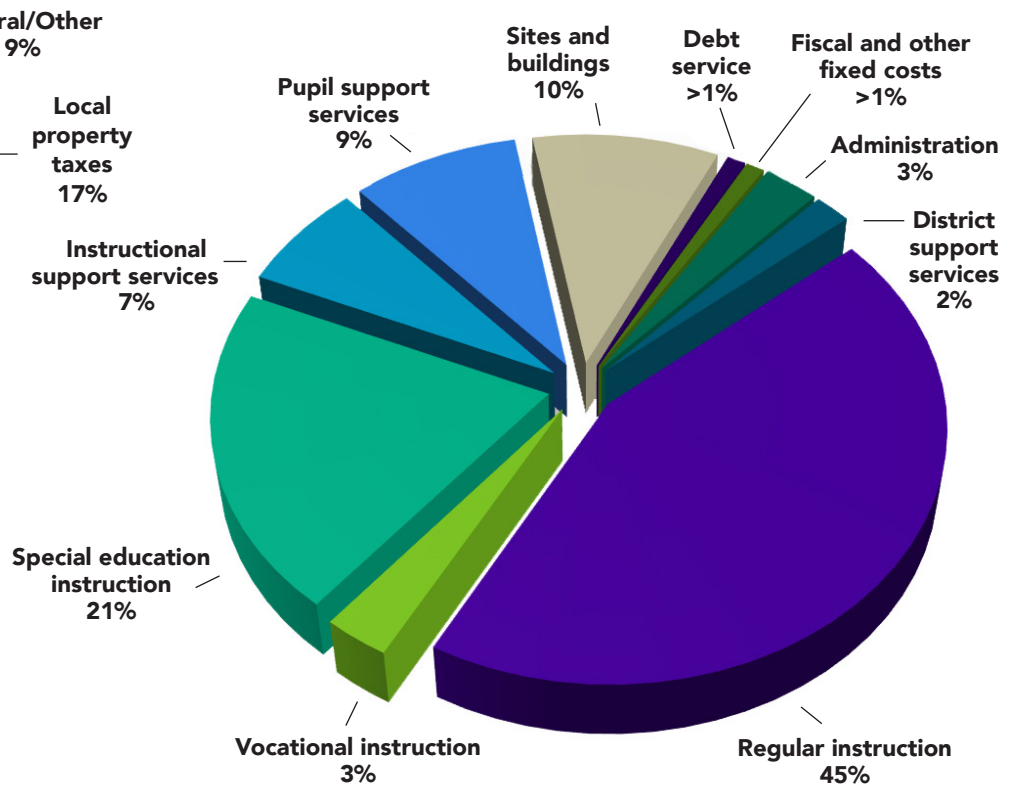
**See LEEA  
Page 8**

# Sources of funding and how it is spent

## 2024 General Fund Revenue



## 2024 General Fund Expenditures



This information is from the district's most recent annual independent audit presented by BerganKDV. In 2024 the district collected \$80,967,834 in general fund revenue and expended \$78,989,395 from the general fund. In 2023, the most recent year that statewide numbers were available for comparison, BHM general fund expenditures were \$14,000 per average daily membership served, compared to \$15,730 statewide.

## Thielman

from Page 1

Lawrence were re-elected, and we welcome Angie Greig and Mike Honsey to the board. The new terms take effect in January 2025 and are four-year terms.

It is wonderful to have individuals who are interested in and want to serve our schools. These school board members make decisions that will impact the educational experience of our students, making decisions based on what is best for all BHM students.

As we welcome new members and returning members, we are also saying goodbye to two long-term school board members, Melissa

Brings and Sue Lee. Ms. Lee began her service in BHM Schools as a teacher in 1970 and on the school board in 2006. Ms. Brings began in 2008. Both have served in the following positions: clerk, treasurer, vice-chair and chair. Don't miss the front page article about Lee's all-state honor in this edition.

We thank Melissa and Sue for their service, commitment and dedication to the students, staff and community.

### Audit information

The annual budget audit was conducted by Bergan-KDV and presented to the school board on Nov. 25. The audit was unmodified, which is the highest level that can be attained and

**76% of BHM Schools' expenditures go to instruction, while the state average is only 67%.**

means that none of the information presented to the auditors needed to be changed during the audit.

The goals of our Finance and Operations Department are to have an unmodified audit, to have at least 75% of the budget allocated to instructional expenditures, and to complete the fiscal year within a 2% variance for revenues and expenditures for the annual budget. All three

components were achieved in this year's budget.

There are 10 categories that are highlighted in the budget expenditures by the auditors (see chart above).

The auditors pointed out in their presentation to the school board that 76% of BHM Schools' expenditures go to instruction, while the state average for instructional expenditures is only 67%.

Additionally, our district receives less revenue than the state average and, in turn, spends less than the average district.

The district is proud of these audit results, which demonstrate our commitment to quality instruction that enables students to **dream, believe and achieve** their goals!

# Proud Of...

Those listed below were submitted by district staff and recognized by the BHM School Board for their special contributions and accomplishments.



The following athletes who qualified for the State Cross Country Meet: the boys team of Dexter Huss, Wesley Wistrom, Jacob Macheel, Kumail Akram, Tristan Lenton, Logan Kolasa and Justin Woodruff, along with Cady Macheel and Gabriella Broadhead, who qualified for the state girls race.

BHS girls swim team members who qualified for the state tournament: Avery Lowe in the 100 butterfly and Emily Larson in the 100 breaststroke.



**Halle Nichols**

**Lexi Zheng**

Halle Nichols and Lexi Zheng, BHS Tatanka Yearbook staff, who earned Gold Medals for Photo Illustration. The 2024 Tatanka Yearbook received Second Place Best of Show recognition.



BHS band students who were chosen to participate in the University of Minnesota-Duluth Honor Band: Jayde Hallman, Makayla Rademacher, Anna Wuollet, Olivia Kohls, Riley Johnson and Verne Wheeler.



BHS band students who were chosen to participate in the Wisconsin-Eau Claire Honor Band: Carli Delorenzo, Cayden Jacobs, Trenton Elletson, Cayden Kepke, Maggie Bertsch, Avy Weinhandl, Meg Reeves, Raya Chrissis and Lexi Burgess.



BHS band students who were chosen to participate in the Winona State University Honor Band: AJ Benzer, Erik Salhus, Pearl Haverkamp and Carter Robertson.



# Honoring service

Students and teachers observed Veterans Day in a variety of ways last month. Parkside Elementary hosted a program featuring representatives from the local Army recruiting office, songs by students, and more.



## Proud Of....

Those listed below were submitted by district staff and recognized by the BHM School Board for their special contributions and accomplishments.



Educational Support Staff Award winners Tess Teichert, Administrative Assistant to the Director of Teaching and Learning; Melissa Wycoff, Principal's Secretary at MES; Sue VanLith, Nutrition Services Food Manager at NES; and Tammy Otten, Education Support Professional at BHS. See the next edition of the Insider for profiles of these outstanding staff members.



BHS orchestra students who were chosen to participate in the Concordia College Honor String Orchestra: Isaac Gustafson, Lucy Anderson, Emmett Elletson, Mitchell Friesz, Ellette Gustafson, Kiran Zitzloff and Kaylee Anderson.

The Buffalo/Monticello/St. Michael-Albertville Coyotes Adapted Soccer Team, which qualified for the state tournament.

*Photo by Lommel Photography*



## Four elected on Nov. 7

Seven candidates ran for four available seats in the November General Election, and when voting was complete two incumbents and two newcomers were elected to the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School Board.



**Adam Bjorklund**



**Angela Greig**

Incumbents Adam Bjorklund (8,475) and Amanda Lawrence (7,362) retained their seats by earning the most votes in the contest.



**Mike Honsey**



**Amanda Lawrence**

In addition, Mike Honsey (6,836) and Angela Greig (6,755) also earned seats on the board for the first time.

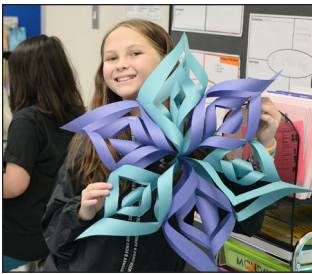
All four will serve four-year terms on the board beginning in January of 2025.

Long-time board members Melissa Brings and Sue Lee did not seek re-election this fall.



## Deck the halls

Montrose Elementary School of Innovation students and staff spent the afternoon before Thanksgiving Break decorating their school for the holiday season while learning about cultural celebrations from around the world. From elaborate snowflakes to artwork hung on lockers, the event made for a festive day.



## Lee

from Page 1

Board members out of nearly 2,400 board members statewide. Superintendent Scott Thielman announced her selection by the Minnesota School Boards Association, and shared excerpts from a number of nominations submitted on her behalf.

Other board members, school staff and the audience members present responded to the news by giving Lee a standing ovation.

"I should be thanking all of you, because it's a blessing to do this," Lee said.

Lee, who did not seek re-election this fall, was elected to the board in 2005 immediately after a 35-year teaching career with BHM Schools that began in 1970.

The award puts an exclamation mark on 54 continuous years of service to the BHM community.

"Ms. Susan Lee is a truly exceptional leader whose contributions as a teach-

er, board member, and advocate for public education have had a profound impact on our district," Thielman wrote in his nomination statement. "Her leadership roles on the board, her commitment to professional development, and her advocacy efforts to ensure students have the best opportunities possible make her a worthy candidate for the All-State School Board award."

"Sue Lee embodies the very best qualities of school board leadership," wrote Board Chair Melissa Brings in a separate nomination letter. "Her dedication, mentorship, and caring nature have made a lasting impact on me, our fellow board members, and the entire district."

The All-State School Board award is the most prestigious distinction bestowed on board members by the Minnesota School Boards Association.

According to MSBA, two former BHM School Board members have

received the honor since it began in 1971: Robert Harri in 2008 and Rolf Mohwinkel in 2012.

"The All-State School Board represents the highest example of board service. These are school board members who are committed to student achievement, determined to build

support for their local schools and unwavering in their pursuit of what's best for students," MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind said.

Criteria for the award includes MSBA training, strong leadership; excellence in boardsmanship; communication skills; visionary thinking; demonstration of concern

for students, staff and taxpayers; and support for the nomination from stakeholders.

Lee will accept the award at the annual MSBA Leadership Conference in January.

**'Sue Lee embodies the very best qualities of school board leadership.'**

**Melissa Brings**  
BHM School Board Chair

# Future Ready

## Career Exploration Day illuminates options

Shortly after receiving their diploma, most Buffalo High School graduates will choose one of three pathways: they will be employed, enrolled, or enlisted.

Setting the course of one's life can be daunting for a young person, but the decision process is made easier when students are well informed about the options available to them.

Providing some of that insight was the focus of Buffalo High School's Career Exploration Day on Nov. 18. More than 75 speakers from a wide variety of fields visited the school in the morning, and a Career Fair for juniors and seniors followed in the afternoon.

Students were given information about each presenter prior to the event, and were able to sign up to hear from those in career fields they were most interested in.

"The ultimate goal is for students to be aware of all the career opportunities out there, as well as training, education and (job) satisfaction," said Natasha Leach, BHS On-the-Job Training Teacher and Minnesota Transfer Coordinator, who was the primary organizer of the event. "A Career Exploration Day can get them exploring, learning, and in-



**At top, Andrew Schmidt tries on a lift assisting apparatus at the Stonewerk Career Fair location. At left, Shalaine Brown hammers a nail at the Ram Buildings booth. Above, pediatrician and school board member Matt Hoffman shares about medical careers.**

vested. This is valuable for all students because they can start planning for the future. They may find a path they

didn't even know existed or was possible for them."

From the trades to careers in medicine, and from opportunities in the military to business and manufacturing, students expanded their horizons through the presentations, opportunities to ask questions, and other information presented at the career fair.

"It's a very nice event," said Anne Brader of Thrifty White Health, who served as one of the morning session speakers. "Your students are

lucky to have this opportunity."

The BHM Portrait of a Graduate emphasizes Rigorous Academics, along with the development of Opportunity Knowledge and Student Agency.

Career Exploration Day helped students see the connections between each part of the Portrait: the way their daily classroom work at present is building skills they can eventually apply in an area of interest and a career of their choosing.



**Dirk Foster, a former submarine officer, answers a question about the U.S. Naval Academy.**

\*\*\*\*\*ECRWSS\*\*  
RESIDENT DISTRICT 877

# LEEA

from Page 2

patience, and unwavering dedication," said BCMS Principal Matt Lubben. "She consistently goes above and beyond, putting her students and the growth of our art program ahead of her own needs. Ms. Post's flexibility and willingness to adapt to every challenge make her an invaluable member of our school family."

Post said she became a teacher in order to apply her artistic talent in a way that made a difference.

"I was seeking a rewarding career and teaching felt like a good fit," she said. "I continue to enjoy spending my days with young people who are eager to learn and try new things in the art room. It's gratifying to provide new artmaking experiences for my students. Watching children find joy and pride in what they create energizes me."

Post added that the award is simply another highlight in what has already been a very rewarding career.

"I genuinely love what I do and receive so much in return from my teaching experiences," she said.

That disposition is one that Lubben said exemplifies a good teacher.

"This award is a testament to her passion and tireless work, and we are beyond lucky to have her guiding and enriching the lives of our students," he said.

## Ryan McCallum

Ask any BHS student which teachers have had the biggest influence on their learning, and McCallum's name is likely to come up before long.

"Some people just naturally have more of an ability to influence the culture of a building than others, and Ryan McCallum is certainly one of those people," said BHS Principal Mark Mischke.

For his part, McCallum said he is simply following in the footsteps of teachers who inspired him when he was a student at BHS.

"I've always wanted to be a teacher. It's a way to be creative and focus on helping people without ulterior motives," McCallum said.

"However, what cemented my decision was the impact the amazing teachers in my life had on me as I grew up. Teachers like Myrna Magandy, Jim Wilcox, Joel Squadroni, Charley Keifenheim, Carlton Urdahl, Vicki Cary, Leanne Turnquist, Tracy Hagstrom Durant, and countless others changed the trajectory of my life. Getting the opportunity to work along-



## SCHOOL BOARD

- Melissa Brings.....Chairperson
- Bob Sansevere.....Vice Chairperson
- Adam Bjorklund.....Clerk
- Amanda Lawrence .....Treasurer
- Sue Lee.....Acting Clerk/Treasurer
- Sheila Smude.....Director
- Matt Hoffman .....Director
- Scott Thielman.....Superintendent
- Lucas Lawrence .....Student Representative

side many of them has been an honor."

McCallum has taught for 24 years, all in Buffalo. In addition to his classroom calling, he has "especially cherished" his work with The Hoofprint newspaper, Tatanka Yearbook, and the Knowledge Bowl program.

Current yearbook advisor Sydney Driver credited McCallum, who won the 2011 Minnesota Journalism Educator of the Year in 2011, with turning the yearbook program into one of the best in Minnesota during his years of leadership.

"He just made it outstanding," Driver said in a January 2024 article about the yearbook's perennial success. "He was able to instill this creative side in every kid who started to take (the yearbook class). And then it started to become a class that everybody wanted to take. He was able to create this yearbook culture that has been there ever since,

and people are still wanting to get into the class."

McCallum said his favorite part of the job is working with remarkable people on a daily basis.

"I get to see my students and colleagues shine and be at their creative best every day," he said. "I get to ask big questions and continually be surprised and impressed by my students' responses."

Ultimately, McCallum said the award is far more than an individual honor.

"I'm grateful. I owe a lot to the leaders who mentored me throughout my career," he said. "It's nice to have the opportunity to give back to my department and my incredible colleagues."

See the next  
Insider for profiles of  
our Education Support  
Staff Award winners.