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Avon Grove High School, West Grove, Pa.

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NEW SCHOOL

GRAND OPENING!

Dignitaries officially open the new Avon Grove High School



-Photo by Nick LeClerc

School Board President Bonnie Wolff stands alongside community members, district administration, and state representatives as she cuts the ribbon to open up the new Avon Grove High School.

By
Jackson Morris
Senior Editor

While the new AGHS building has been open for 7 months, this month it was finally time to celebrate the new flagship of the district.

Avon Grove hosted a formal ribbon cutting ceremony on Thursday, April 13. Among those invited included community members, district officials, AGHS administration, past and present school board members, those who made the new building possible, and even local politicians.

Avon Grove School District Su-

perintendent Dr. Chris Marchese, along with many other Avon Grove faculty, described this event as a celebration for the district.

"This school is an important accomplishment for this school district, and we wanted to bring everyone together who played a vital role in making this accomplishment possible," said Marchese.

AGHS Principal Dr. Christie Snead says this new school wouldn't be possible without the help of the community.

"We know it's been a long project, but we are so grateful for your support and patience and are so happy to finally celebrate this proj-

ect and what it represents for the district."

Assistant Principal Ashely Penn described the new building as a "beacon for the community," also saying she feels proud to invite the future of Avon Grove to this state of the art learning facility.

"I love Avon Grove. I've been here my whole career. I think this building signifies the future of Avon Grove and I'm excited to continue to work here and help the next generation learn here," said Penn.

SEE NEW SCHOOL PAGE 2

MUSICAL

'Chicago' roars onto AG stage



-Photo courtesy of Barksdale Photography

Kalina Dolan (top), as murderess Velma Kelly, welcomes the audience to Avon Grove's rendition of Chicago: Teen Edition. Gage Walker (bottom), as lawyer Billy Flynn, discusses his plan to get Roxie Hart out of jail. Read more about Chicago: Teen Edition on page 4.

AG LIFE

Mental health days: The perfect solution or the perfect cover up?

By
Maddie Butler
Editor

"I don't feel prepared for my presentation in English class today, so I'll just stay home."

"I heard that the math test is really difficult, and I'll fail if I take it today."

"We're running the mile in gym class today and I just don't have it in me."

Everyone has heard these phrases be used to justify an absence from school, and many times the term "mental health day" is thrown in with them.

A mental health day, aside from the normal connotation, is "a day that a [student] takes off from [school] in order to relieve stress or renew vitality," according to the

Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Junior Farren Morrell shares how these days off from school allow for students to "catchup with [their] schoolwork" when it begins to accumulate.

Additionally, Child Mild Institute included within their website that mental health days can be a good way for people to recharge before entering back into an overwhelming environment such as school or work.

An article published by the Mayo Clinic lists a number of different benefits that one can receive from taking a day for themselves including an improved outlook on life, better mental stability, an increase in work ethic, and overall physical wellness.

Although these critical aspects of one's health may be clear to some, it is easy to forget about taking care of yourself when other factors are involved.

The expansive workload that students face combined with extracurricular activities are often the reason why junior Maggie Sullivan often looks to mental health days as a method of "balancing school with family and friends."

Sullivan explains that it can be really challenging juggling track, travel ice hockey, softball, and multiple clubs.

However, it is vital to make the most out of mental health days to ensure that they are constructive in relieving pressure.

Sullivan has found it helpful

to "spend [mental health days] doing the things that [she] hasn't had time to do and whatever is stressing [her] out," such as cleaning her room or doing schoolwork.

What works best for some, however, doesn't work for everyone.

As students, we don't typically have the time to do "whatever we feel like doing," so Morrell argues that "sometimes it feels better to just go with the flow, which mental health days make possible."

No matter what the day looks like, Mrs. Elaine Markowitz, a guidance counselor at AGHS, stresses the importance of having "a plan that addresses what your need is."

Markowitz also recommends

staying on top of the work that you miss so that you "don't fall into a bigger whole, which gets stressful and leads to the need of another mental health day."

With the rise of mental health days, the debate over their effectiveness has grown as well.

Even Sullivan, who has taken mental health days off in the past, shares that "more often than not, taking a day off from school is more stressful than intended." Skipping a day "makes you feel like you are weeks behind."

Markowitz agreed with this viewpoint in that they often "feel better in the short term," but can make it "that much harder to come the next day."

SEE HEALTH PAGE 2

AG LIFE

Dignitaries celebrate new high school



-Photo courtesy of Barksdale Photography
Senior Class President Carlos Ochoa-Martin presents the time capsule at the grand opening event.

NEW SCHOOL FROM PAGE 1
Fellow Assistant Principal Gary Bennasutti, who has been working with Avon Grove since 1999, says this new building has been a long time coming.
“There’s been chatter about a new building for decades now, and it’s so nice to get to see our teachers and students enjoy what we’ve been working on for a while now.”
Bennasutti also said the new high school’s cutting edge technology and environment is the type of place that just overall “improves the quality of education.”
Students in the Avon Grove chapter of the National Honors Society were in attendance to give tours to the community members of the brand new building. Senior Class President Carlos Ochoa-Martin was also in attendance as a representative of student government.
Sofia Trone and Ochoa-Martin are two seniors who had the opportunity to attend both the old school and the new high school. For them, the one feeling that comes to mind is gratitude.
“I think this school is a great opportunity to learn about change. This new school provides new opportunities and also just a different

vibe and atmosphere to our education,” says Ochoa-Martin.
“I feel like this new school encapsulates community. We as Avon Grove had to unite together to get this school to where it is today, and I am so grateful for a chance to learn here, even if it just for my last year,” says Trone.
Representatives from both state and the federal government were in attendance at the ribbon cutting ceremony as well. These representatives included State Representative John Lawrence, State Senator Carolyn Comitta, State Senator John Kane, and Sue Walker, a representative of the office of Congresswoman Chrissy Houlahan.
Before Sue Walker began her work as district director for the offices of Representative Houlahan, she taught in Avon Grove for nine years. For her, this new building is a harbinger of success for the future Avon Grove graduates.
“It’s really exciting to see this building open up and see all of this hard work come to fruition,” says Walker.
Senator Carolyn Comitta and Senator John Kane had a similar message for the community: capitalize on this opportunity the new school brings.

“The number one thing we do in the Pennsylvania Legislature is make sure our children are educated and that they get a quality education, and a beautiful school like this one creates a wonderful opportunity for the children here and the children that will come here,” said Comitta.
“When I was walking around earlier today, I kept saying to myself, ‘This feels like a college campus.’ This is just awesome to see, and it’s clear to me that this is the best place to get an education in Avon Grove,” said Kane.
The evening concluded with speeches from Dr. Marchese, Dr. Snead, and School Board President Bonnie Wolff, along with a formal ribbon cutting in the new high school auditorium.
State Representative John Lawrence said he felt honored to be invited to the ceremony and left the community these words of wisdom.
“Strong families build strong communities, and strong communities build a strong state. This district is blessed to have this new school, and the opportunities that will stem from here will not just better this community, but the commonwealth as a whole.”

AG LIFE

AP exam season starts May 1

By
Jaime Trautman
Staff Writer
It’s time.
What we have been preparing for since the beginning of the year has come.
The dreaded AP tests.
They go from May 1 to May 12. 10 whole days of testing.
It seems very stressful, because it is. But there are steps you can take to prepare yourself for the upcoming AP test.
About a month leading up to the test, students should start to revisit the course contents. If the class did outlines, go back and re-read them.
You might want to begin taking practice tests or working on writ-

ing LEQs (Long Essay Questions) or FRQs (Free Response Questions). These practice tests will help you with both content and timing, as the AP tests are timed.
Another tip is to watch the course videos on AP Classroom. They’re made by master AP teachers who are well informed about their class.
Now, when it comes to a couple days before, start to de-stress. Maybe go for a walk, treat yourself to a coffee or sweet, or take a ‘me’ day.
It’s important to not put so much pressure on yourself so close to the tests. A bit of nervousness is good but high levels of exam stress has been seen to reduce memory and interfere with attention while studying.

So, to ward off extreme pressure, take some time for yourself and decompress.
It would be good to look over your outlines or basic course content the day or two before the test. And maybe if you’re a procrastinator, start watching videos and studying outlines. It is important to sleep well the night before and have a good breakfast.
Once you get into the exam, take a deep breath and relax. You’ve been preparing for this; you can handle it.
Now that you’re fully prepared, just think about the benefits of taking the AP test.
It will make you more prepared for college. According to AP Classroom, students that score 3 or higher are ready for college

AG LIFE

Conflicting views on mental health days

HEALTH FROM PAGE 1
Those who play sports also can have a hard time utilizing mental health days as a way to deal with stress because they already miss so much school due to tournaments or games.
Eden Veenema, who plays soccer for the Olympic Developmental Program and Penn Fusion, shares that she already misses a lot of school, so mental health days aren’t plausible.
When Veenema returns to school from absences due to soccer, she explains that “learning [the content] secondhand” can be frustrating as “eventually it builds up,” which is likely very similar to the problem faced by those who take days off for mental health.
One possible alternative to taking mental health days is “having something to look forward to,” according to Markowitz. Luckily Avon Grove has “all kinds of opportunities if students are willing to look for them.”
A variety of different options exist from joining clubs, hanging out with friends, or even just spending time outdoors that can help students cope with the stresses in their life.
The school guidance counselors are also always available to talk when needed, and Mrs. Markowitz wants to remind students that “no one has to feel alone in this.”
Rather than missing a whole day, students could also consider taking mental health breaks by just stepping away from stress momentarily, suggests Markowitz.
With so many students taking mental health days, however, it may raise red flags about the learning environment within schools.
For most students in high school, they experienced a period of online learning at one point in which it was “hard for teachers to gauge how long works takes you,” meaning that oftentimes students like Sullivan were doing school assignments from the “time class started till 9:00p.m. or 10:00p.m.”
Although this allowed for students to enhance their endurance, Sullivan thinks that much of this ability is “starting to wear off” and has led to an increase in burnout among students.

“One thing that causes me to get behind is when I stay up late to do all my homework and then I go to school the next day, and by that night it’s a struggle to do my homework,” says Morrell.
Which is why he believes that a possible solution is a later start time for schools to open due to the amount of homework that students are expected to get done on their own time.
Late start times also have the potential to increase the amount of energy that students have to do their assignments while at school, which would leave them with less to do once they get home.
Just as Morrell suggested, mental health days may not be a big enough bandaid for the underlying conflict in which students have begun to see the feeling of exhaustion as a permanent condition rather than a momentary issue.
Aside from the implication surrounding the need for mental health days, it appears that many states have begun to recognize them as a valid reason of absence.
In fact, twelve states have already have made that an excused absence from schools: Washington, California, Illinois, Virginia, Maine, Connecticut, Oregon, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Kentucky, and Colorado, according to CNBC.
The sweeping phenomenon of mental health days may seem appealing, but it is important to remember that everyone’s life is unique.
Therefore, it is hard to say exactly whether mental health days are beneficial or not, so be mindful of your own stressors the next time you have the urge to pull up the covers and turn off your alarm.



HERALD SPORTS

● **April 29**
Baseball
vs. Penncrest, Senior Night
11:00am
Boys Volleyball
vs. Council Rock North
2:30 p.m.

● **May 2**
Boys Volleyball
vs. Spring-Ford, Senior Night
6:15pm
Boys Lacrosse
vs. Bishop Shanahan, Senior
Night 7:00 p.m.

● **May 4**
Boys Tennis
PIAA District 1 Tournament
Girls Lacrosse
vs. Great Valley
5:30pm

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BASEBALL

Red Devils start their season off strong

By
Gaby Bellaver
Senior Editor

The 80 degree weather. The blazing sun. The crisp ping of the bat all make for a wonderful baseball season

Halfway through the 2023 season, the Avon Grove baseball team find themselves at 8-2 and in first place in the Ches-Mont National Division (as of April 23).

There have been some easier wins, such as their Sun Valley game where the team recorded an astonishing 20 hits in their 17-6 victory.

And there have been some grueling games. Against rival Henderson, the Devils were able to squeak by after 13 innings in a 1-0 victory.

"The last 2 times we played Henderson, we played a combined 27 innings and we've each scored 3 runs," said Head Coach John Bellaver.

"That game is always intense. We've done a very good job staying focused and within ourselves offensively, making us very hard to beat."

Their only losses to date come from 3-2 defeats to Unionville and Coatesville. But the Red Devils aren't dwelling on that.

"The game's over. Don't think about it," said Bellaver. "Just go to the next game. Everything is about what's in front of us, not what previously occurred."

How is this team winning?

They're hitting well. They're playing defense well. And they're

pitching well.

While only one run determines who wins and who loses, the Devils have tried to prevent close games. They scored 9 runs against a competitive Garnet Valley team. They tallied 11 against both Rustin and Kennett and 6 against West Chester East, Bishop Shanahan, and Downingtown East.

Helping fuel all of these runs are junior Trevor Dosenbach, a University of Richmond commit, and sophomore Kenny Askin. Both currently have 2 home runs and put the ball out of the park at the right time to give the Red Devils the edge over their competitor.

Junior Trent Dosenbach and Askin are tied for the lead in team RBIs with 10 a piece. Nathan

Schwing is right on their tail with 9.

Of course, hitting isn't everything. Avon Grove also have a deep pitching staff.

"We've done a really good job as a pitching staff. We are winning the first pitch of the at bat around 65% of the time," said Bellaver.

Junior Brayden Gregg has been a large part in many of the wins. The West Virginia University commit has a total of 43 strikeouts and has a remarkable ERA of 0.53. Gregg is currently ranked as 21st in strikeouts and 11th in ERA in the state of Pennsylvania according to MaxPreps.

"The younger guys are also stepping up," said Bellaver. "Grady O'Rourke is a sophomore pitcher who currently has a 10:1

strikeout to walk ratio. He commands the strike zone with his fastball and the ability to throw his curveball for strikes has helped us win battles."

Narrowing down this remarkable team was not easy. Over 50 kids tried out for the baseball team this spring. Unfortunately, there are not enough spots to roster this many kids, so cuts had to be made.

"There's been a lot of interest in the program," said Bellaver. "It would be great if we could have a freshman team, but we do not. There's a good mix of freshmen and sophomores on the JV team."

There's still work to be done, but the boys don't seem to be hitting the breaks anytime soon.



Grady O'Rourke delivers the pitch.



-Photo by Jack Calio
Kenny Askin helps the Red Devils maintain the lead with sharp defense.



-Photo courtesy of Jack Calio

MUSICAL

Avon Grove rocks ‘Chicago: Teen Edition’

By
Riley Wiercinski
Editor

The not-so-subtle art of murder, giving the jury the ol’ razzle dazzle, reveling in newfound fame, playing puppet master, and all that other jazz that’s typical to 1920s life in Chicago came to life on the Avon Grove stage with the rendition of *Chicago: Teen Edition*.

“I think the show was a bit of a learning curve for all of us,” says sophomore Ripley Wodsinski, who plays murderess Mona Lipshitz. “We all got to play characters we aren’t really familiar with.”

Chicago posed a more mature storyline than usual for the theater department as the show follows the downward spiral of Roxie Hart’s life after she murders Fred Casely, whom she was having an affair with. Roxie goes on to make headlines and rise to fame while simultaneously dragging down the reputation of fellow murderess Velma Kelly, who committed a double homicide of her sister and husband.

“I’ve only performed in three musicals and all of my characters have been wildly different,” says Gage Walker. “I had the opportunity to play such diverse roles which allowed me to further grow as an actor, but going from a love-sick teenager in *Addams* to lawyer Billy Flynn was a challenge.”

Sophomore Jameson Williams had to learn a whole other lan-

guage to portray Hungarian murderess Hunyak.

“To this day, I have no idea what I said, and trying to meet the correct pronunciation for my monologue was awful,” noted Williams.

The musical also broke some ensemble members into lead roles.

“I’m a freshman and I’ve been in the ensemble my entire life, so *Chicago* opened a whole new side of theater to me. It helped me gain so much confidence in my singing and acting,” says Kate McBride, who played reporter Mary Sunshine.

The leading lady, Kaylee Ardinger, only participated in one other musical in Avon Grove history.

“I played Chiffon in *Little Shop of Horrors* two years ago, but I only had one or two lines. It was a big jump from that to Roxie, but they both have that sassiness and spunk needed to draw the audience to them.”

Ardinger took some time off from theater to discover her interest in sports. She was a member of the girls’ varsity golf team all throughout high school and had dreams of going to college for lacrosse as a freshman.

“I did a lot of acting when I was little. I did a lot of the Disney stories like *The Lion King*, *Snow White*, *Alice and Wonderland*, and

all those other Disney classics,” says Ardinger. “But once I heard that we were doing *Chicago*, I knew I wanted to come back.”

Cast relationships were the highlight of the spring production.

“We did so much pretending in scenes we weren’t even a part of,” noted Ruby Queen, who played June, or as she’s better known as Squish from Cell Block Tango. “I kept acting really mad at Nick [D’Onofrio] during ‘Funny Honey’ and channeled all of that anger into our partner work in ‘Cell Block.’”

“I think that since my freshman year, the program has clicked a lot more. I thought the seniors were very exclusive and wouldn’t really talk to the rest of us, but we have an extremely open and fluid environment now,” says Kalina Dolan, otherwise known as Velma Kelly on the *Chicago* stage.

“In the past, I felt the different segments of the show were very clique-like; cast with cast, crew with crew, pit with pit, and very little interaction between them,” said Tucker Eckman, who plays Roxie’s husband, Amos. “But now, we meld so much more than we used to and I think we act so much more like a team.”

But, no production is complete without its challenges.

“Jason [Klein] and I got into quite a few quarrels throughout rehearsals, so it was fun to channel that into brutally murdering him,” said Wodsinski with a laugh.

“Brady [Fox] and I couldn’t even dance together for a solid month because of his leg injury, so we were left scrambling with choreography for a little bit,” says Mary Kate D’Ambrosio, who



-Photo courtesy of Barksdale Photography

Roxie Hart, played by Kaylee Ardinger (center), rewrites her life with the help of Gage Walker’s Billy Flynn (center) to gain sympathy from reporters.

portrayed Liz, also known as Pop from Cell Block Tango.

The stage managers and crew also had problems with the prop-heavy show.

“We had quite a few instances of cast members being on the wrong side of the stage while we were trying to move some of our bigger set pieces around, like the bed and the judge’s stand,” said assistant stage manager Rae Gray.

“There are also so many moving props that we need to keep track of,” noted Gavin Skinner, the head stage manager. “Every cast member has a notepad for ‘We Both Reached For The Gun’ and a cane for ‘Razzle Dazzle,’ while some have top hats and fans and gold wraps and fake microphones for between songs.”

Skinner and Gray have been working together since *The Addams Family* and have smoothly managed two different productions since.

“The lighting was a completely different thing to work with, as well. There were about 112 lighting cues in *Addams* and over 200 in this show, with double the cast members set up with mics,” says Gray. “This year we split the stage with Gavin on stage right and me on stage left, so I get to deal with all the bigger pieces and he has more cast members to account for.”

“We also got a new set of lights a week and a half ago that rest in the corners of the stage, just barely off in the wings. Maneuvering around those and the stairs that rest in the back of the stage were

probably our biggest technical challenge,” said Skinner. “We are also currently putting in LEDs on the side stairs, which are a constant battle for our crew.”

Despite all of these setbacks, *Chicago: Teen Edition* was a huge success.

“One of the only reasons I wanted *Chicago* so badly was to choreograph ‘Cell Block Tango,’” noted co-director, Ms. Cali Heath. “I was like, ‘This is my baby, it will be perfect and I’m going to pull out all the shi-bang on it to make it amazing,’ because I was just so obsessed with it.”

“The energy of the crowd was so amazing and I think that we might have brought in more people than we did for *Addams*,” said Queen. “I just really hope that it draws more interest to our program and that students want to get involved with the great things we’re doing here.”

Unfortunately, there has not been a play or musical picked out for next year. The directors are holding an elimination countdown on TikTok of famous Broadway shows to choose from.

“It’s extremely difficult to pick a musical, especially when we are so desperate for more boys to be involved in the program,” says co-director Mrs. Helen Whitehouse.

If you are interested in performing next year, stay tuned for the announcement of next year’s shows on TikTok (@aghs_theater).



-Photo courtesy of Barksdale Photography

Cast members strike a pose around Kalina Dolan (center) as Velma Kelly after singing the show’s opening number “All That Jazz.”

PROM

Prepare to dazzle at “Starry Night” proms

By
Ella Bartnik
Staff Writer

It’s hard for most students to think of anything to look forward to in what is now the final stretch of the school year.

It is a period of AP exams, finals, and that typical end of the year stress to make sure you’ve done everything in your power to end yet another academic year with the achievements you’ve been working towards.

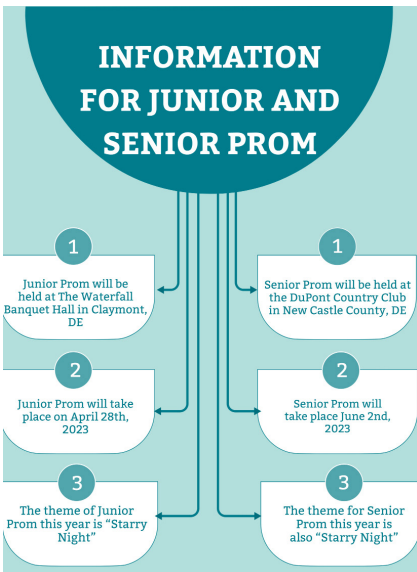
Throughout that end of year stress though, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

The glimmering light of sparkling dresses, shiny shoes, vibrant and

freshly manicured nails, and of course, the flashing lights of the DJ.

According to Meredeith C. Lee, a reporter for *The Pirateer*, prom has been an American tradition in high schools for over 90 years, and the original custom of a “promenade,” (a formality bringing together teenagers in order to show off their newly acquired skills and manners) has been around for even longer, starting in the early 1800s.

At first the idea of a ‘promenade’ began as an event that could best be compared to a tea-party, where boys were encouraged to wear their “Sunday best,” and girls dressed in outfits



handed down from their mothers.

Obviously, prom has evolved a lot since then, transforming into a high school dance where students and faculty can dress up, dine out, and have fun.

For many students, prom is the first chance to do your best and socialize with friends and classmates, giving them the opportunity to make memories that will last a lifetime!

Whether it’s finding that perfect outfit, or planning the night out with friends, prom provides high school students with a break from their stressful school schedules and a chance to unwind.

Although our ancestors might be shocked to see some of the

dresses or dance styles that accompany prom today, the initial spirit of the promenade has lived on and stayed relevant to its initial purpose of bringing people together.

So if you are looking to immerse yourself in the spirit of promenade and attend either the junior or senior prom, here are the details:

The Avon Grove Junior Prom will be held at the Waterfall in Claymont, Delaware on April 28 from 5:30p.m.-9:00p.m. and the theme will be ‘Starry Night.’

The Avon Grove Senior Prom will also be held at the DuPont Country Club on June 2 from 6:00p.m.-10:00p.m. and the theme will also be “Starry Night.”