

# Make the Connection



## LEGENDARY PARALYMPIAN INSPIRES VALLEY STREAM 24 SIXTH GRADERS



No one's journey in life is easy. We all face obstacles and challenges on our paths. Few people, however, have faced them like Rohan Murphy, who overcame the loss of his legs at birth to become one of the most decorated wrestlers in Long Island history. This school year, Mr. Murphy visited Valley Stream 24 to share his incredible story with our district sixth graders.

Mr. Murphy's message to our students focused on resolve in the face of challenges—a powerful message for all young people to hear. Drawing on his own experiences defying the odds and building a successful career, ultimately competing as a wrestler at Penn State University, he enthralled all listeners and engaged students in conversations about the importance of inclusivity, effective goal setting, and the resilience needed to conquer life's adversities.

*"Mr. Murphy epitomizes Valley Stream 24 School District's commitment to instilling confidence, perseverance and tolerance in all our students. His engaging and inspirational message resonated profoundly with our students, serving as a powerful testament to achieving success through determination."*

- Superintendent of Schools Unal Karakas

## GENEROSITY IS THE TRUE MEANING OF THE HOLIDAYS

In December, Valley Stream 24 School District joined forces with Gap as part of the 2023 Adopt-A-School Donation Drive. In preparation for the holiday recess, a team of Gap representatives, referred to as "Gap Elves," paid a visit to the district to deliver a generous assortment of winter attire, including sweatshirts, sweatpants, hoodies, and other outerwear.

The key figures facilitating this collaboration from Gap were Andrew Rizzo and Tamika Goodridge, responsible for overseeing the Long Island and Downtown Brooklyn areas. The initiative involved rallying Gap stores in Bellport, Deer Park, Riverhead, Woodbury, Oceanside, and Westbury to contribute to the Valley Stream 24 District community. The district's staff provided a wish list of essential items, which were thoughtfully packaged, labeled, and personally delivered by Gap elves just before the holiday break. Thanks to this clothing drive, the district was able to provide warm clothing for the winter to more than 30 children and families in need.



## AROUND THE DISTRICT

### Student Council Elections at VS24 Spotlight Leaders of Tomorrow

This school year, as adults across New York took to the polls to vote for their elected officials, students at Brooklyn Avenue, William L. Buck Elementary, and Robert W. Carbonaro elementary schools in Valley Stream 24 School District did the same, casting their votes for the student council. Candidates for secretary, treasurer, vice president, and president gave speeches, making their cases to their classmates as to why they would be the best (young) person to lead the district.

Students in grades four through six running for student council delivered heartfelt speeches and captivated the attention of the audience, which included supportive families, students, staff, administrators, the Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Unal Karakas, and Board of Education Trustees.



### The Harlem Wizards B-Ball Team Take on Their Toughest Challenge Yet—the Staff of Valley Stream 24!

*Good-natured competition raised money  
for charity.*

More than 300 students and staff from Valley Stream 24 School District gathered at the high school with families and local community members to take in the crazy excitement of a Harlem Wizards PTA fundraiser basketball game. They were all there to witness a basketball contest for the ages: The Harlem Wizards vs. the determined staff of Valley Stream 24 showcasing their basketball skills! The collaborative effort of the three district schools' PTAs played a pivotal role in making this event a success, exemplifying the district's theme of "Make the Connection."



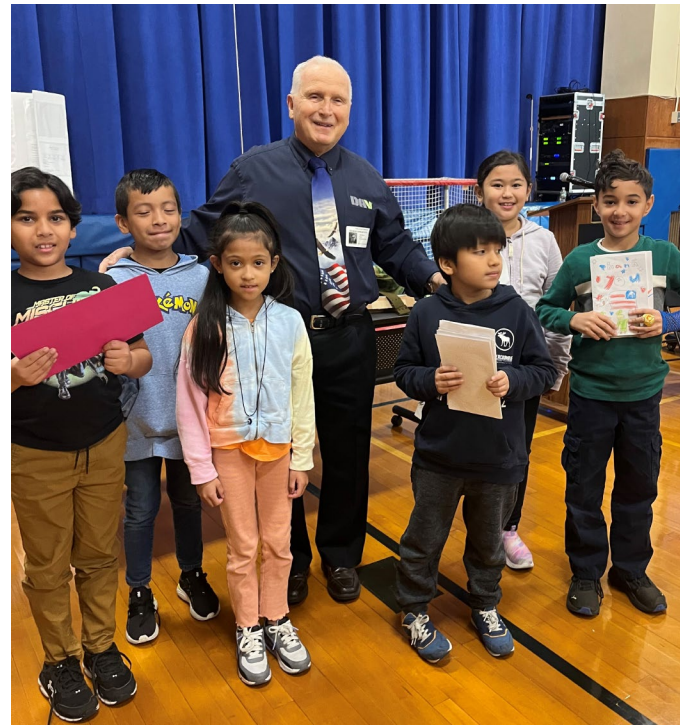
Known for their prowess in basketball, entertainment, team building, and humor, the Harlem Wizards collaborated with Valley Stream 24 to create an unforgettable event that transcended the basketball court. This memorable evening, marked by laughter, cheers, and friendly competition, underscored the powerful connections that thrive within the Valley Stream 24 School District. It served as a testament to the community's dedication to fostering a positive and supportive environment for students, where educational initiatives and shared experiences continue to strengthen the ties that bind the community together. The Harlem Wizards Game stands as a shining example of the district's commitment to providing exceptional and memorable experiences that resonate with students, families, and staff alike.

## A Visit from a Hero: William L. Buck Students Hear from Local Veteran

William L. Buck Elementary School students recently listened to a moving presentation by George Catalanotto, a Vietnam veteran and esteemed resident of Valley Stream. Transporting students back in time through his powerful tale of military heroism, Mr. Catalanotto provided a powerful lesson of service and selflessness to our students.

A prominent figure in the community, Mr. Catalanotto was honored as the 2022 Valley Stream Herald Person of the Year. His active involvement in various boards and committees for the Village of Valley Stream, coupled with his membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), underscores his commitment to service beyond his military years.

During the presentation, Mr. Catalanotto engaged the students by inviting them to participate actively. Students were also presented with special pins as a token of appreciation. Post-assembly, Valley Stream students had the chance to engage with Mr. Catalanotto, asking him questions about his experiences and presenting him with heartfelt cards expressing their appreciation.



## Illuminating Cultural Lessons During the Festival of Lights

In November, during Diwali, students in the Valley Stream 24 School District had the opportunity to explore the rich cultural activities and customs associated with the Festival of Lights. Diwali, primarily celebrated by Hindus, is a six-day festival that encompasses various traditions, emphasizing the values of goodness and knowledge.

In our district, students had diverse experiences to learn about Diwali. At Robert W. Carbonaro School, students watched an informative video to learn more about Diwali. Meanwhile, at William L. Buck School, students enjoyed traditional sweet treats, a customary part of Diwali celebrations. Third and fourth-grade students even had the chance to make peda cookies, a milk-based delicacy that doesn't require baking. At Brooklyn Avenue School, students delved into the holiday's essence by engaging in activities like coloring paper diyas and crafting various Diwali-themed creations.



At Valley Stream 24, our commitment to cultural understanding is unwavering. We are incredibly fortunate to be part of such a diverse community, where we actively strive to learn from and celebrate each other's traditions and heritage.

*"Diwali is a festival that symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, signifying communities coming together to embrace goodness and knowledge. As part of our commitment to promoting diversity and fostering cultural understanding, our students engaged in a variety of activities to learn more about the customs and traditions of Diwali celebrated in India and across the globe."*

- Superintendent of Schools  
Unal Karakas

# *Tis the Season for Beautiful Music*

**Question: What's better than listening to music around the holidays?**

**Answer: When it's being played by the immensely talented student musicians at Valley Stream 24 School District!**

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The holidays and great music go together like cookies and milk. Certainly that was the case this past holiday season at Valley Stream 24, when our schools were filled with the festive sounds of holiday concerts. These heartwarming performances featured the musical talents of students from the chorus, band, and orchestra programs, captivating their families and our community.

William L. Buck School, Robert W. Carbonaro School, and Brooklyn Avenue School each had their own holiday performances, presenting a mix of timeless classics and holiday favorites. Congrats, all, and thank you for the holiday memories!

