

THE OHS PRESS

United in Social Progress teams mobilize, help sustain scholastic balance

Sophie Parks

Copy Editor

“We’re just making sure that everyone has an enjoyable experience in high school, and touch on anything that kids feel are unfair or any social problems that we have so that everyone feels safe and welcome here,” Loreta Prenaj (10) said.

Prenaj is a member of United in Social Progress (UISP) on their ‘Positive Culture’ team. The other teams this year include: power of words, diversity, mental health and healthy relationships.

UISP was formed from an Ingham Intermediate School District (ISD) initiative a few years ago focused on improving the way differences and diversity are handled within schools.

Rachel Freeman-Baldwin (English) explained how the group formed, as well as where some of their broad goals stemmed from.

“The goal was to have each school become more inclusive, more respectful of diversity and really making the schools more appreciative — not [just] tolerant, but *appreciative* — of differences. So for a year we went to

all these meetings with all the different Ingham schools and we met and planned. Okemos was the only school, I think, to actually continue the program,” Freeman-Baldwin said. In addition to the group’s broad focus on acceptance and diversity, each section has its own specific goals.

Freeman-Baldwin’s team, mental health, is focusing on individual issues.

“We’re looking at body image, depression, eating disorders. All sorts of different things. Our goal is to increase awareness and also to let them know they’re not alone. That’s the biggest thing, to say ‘you’re not alone, there is help,’” Freeman-Baldwin said.

The mental health team has made an impact on the school in the past. One concept that is still around are the awareness ribbons distributed two years ago.

Cori Akers (Guidance) remarked on the continued power of the ribbons.

“Two years ago, the mental health [team] wanted to start doing the awareness ribbons and they did that again last year. I’ve seen the ribbons still on people’s backpacks and things like that, which I think is amazing,” Akers said.

Positive culture, a new team this

year, is focused on improving a few different aspects of the school culture.

“[The positive culture team] was really excited about promoting positivity throughout the school,” Akers said. “One of the ways was to really

Chloe Majzel (12), added that the positive culture group doesn’t just focus on how students treat other students.

“We want to improve on teacher appreciation. A lot of students don’t

they’re saying.

Akers explained where the group’s ideas came from.

“[Their goal was to] let students know about the impact their words can make. They chose to have four



United in Social Progress’ power of words team gathers to discuss the impact of certain words in our school. Left to right, back to front: Laya Hartman (11), Richard Smith (9), Siddharth Murthy (12), Jordan Henry (12), Praneeth Jamalpur (10), Kelsey Henry (10), Luis Borrero (12).

make a point of announcing all the achievements, not just athletic but art, music, clubs and academics, really making a point of all the great things that all of the students are doing.”

realize how much they actually do for us,” Majzel said.

One of the other returning groups, ‘power of words,’ is focusing on helping people really think about what

different focuses,” Akers said. “The first week is political openness, how to talk about your views without offending others and having respectful conversations. Then there’s a focus on

Meridian Township hosts holiday party to fund gifts for families in need

Maddie Suhrheinrich

Business Manager

After a successful Non-Fiction bake sale, funds are now being sent to help support Officer Mankowski’s holiday party. Each year, Mankowski hosts an event for local children who typically do not receive any presents for the holidays. At this event, the kids are served dinner and receive presents. This year, the party was held

on December 16, making it the 27th annual event.

The party started in 1991 after Mankowski realized the need many children in his local community had.

“I was a young police officer and I was assigned to two giant trailer parks,” Mankowski said. “The kids didn’t have a whole lot so I reached out to my dad and he helped me fund the first couple of ones.”

This year, Murphy Elementary in Haslett hosted the party; however, it is year-by-year. Former Okemos locations include Central Elementary and Wardcliff Elementary.

For well over ten years, Rachel Freeman-Baldwin (English) helped provide some funding for through her annual Non-Fiction bake sale. In addition to funding, students in the past volunteered to shop for gifts, wrap the

gifts and set up for the party.

Freeman-Baldwin became involved with the party while volunteering and believes it is an important aspect is that all gifts are given to children within the township.

“I think there’s this idea that Okemos has only rich kids, and that’s not the case at all,” Freeman-Baldwin said. “We have a lot of students who need assistance, love and help.”

Through the bake sale committee, Chynna Pomaes (12) coordinated the funds with Mankowski.

“We communicated with him to see if he needed the money and the funds for it, and then we kept up with him,” Pomaes said. “He came over to the bake sale to watch it happen.”

Like Freeman-Baldwin, students were excited to help provide funds for the party.

“It’s a really good cause for children in our community who can’t afford presents,” Pomaes said.

In addition to the Non-Fiction bake sale, various community members help contribute funds. According to Mankowski, other methods of fundraising include a Go Fund Me page, a Pig Roast, Facebook pages, soliciting done by officers, kids raising money through coin drives, donations from various organizations and much more. This year, around \$15,000 was raised to support this event. The most money in the history of the event. However, fundraising was not always as easy.

In the beginning, Mankowski said the department didn’t do much fundraising.

Now funded through the Meridian Township account, officers and

some students (both from Freeman-Baldwin’s Non-Fiction classes and Hilarie Krumm Christian Preschool Academy) go shopping for the presents.

“The best part of it is the shopping,” Mankowski said. “It is a blast.”

To help support the cause, Target agreed to give the shoppers 10% off storewide.

Everything purchased is presented at the party.

In addition to receiving presents, children attending partake in other holiday traditions, such as meeting Santa after he arrives on a firetruck. Olive Garden volunteered to cater the event for the first time this year.

“Officer Mankowski pulls out all the bleachers in the gym and they’re lined with all of these magnificent

toys and coats and gifts,” Freeman-Baldwin said. “You see the kids’ excitement when they walk in and see those gifts and you realize this is what it’s all about.”

One unique thing about the party is the lack of media attention on the day of the event.

“We don’t publicize it, so that’s why a lot of people don’t know about it outside of the community,” Mankowski said. “I don’t want to embarrass kids by having them on TV.”

Mankowski has stuck to this idea from the beginning, and plans on continuing this in the future.

“As long as I’m going to have an event that has my last name on it, it’s not going to happen,” Mankowski said.

Mankowski said, “People contribute what they can and it just comes together.”



Detroit’s unique soul is found beyond stereotypes

Luis Borrero

Editor-in-Chief

When Okemos students think of Detroit, many think of Eminem, bankruptcy or inordinate crime. Detroit, in reality, is approaching a metropolitan renaissance.

The region gathered in the simple yet proud Campus Martius Park to light the 60-foot-tall Michigan-grown Norway Spruce centered downtown, signifying the juncture from Thanksgiving festivities to jolly old Christmas time.

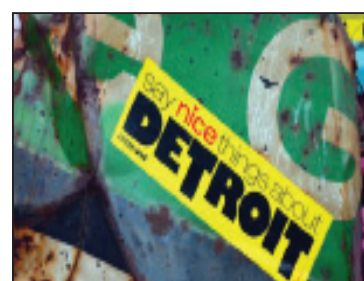
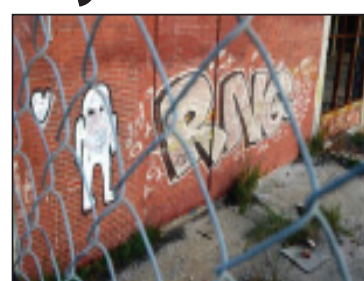
A jaunty scene like so likely sketches a serene picture fitting Detroit’s personality—if so, it’s only right to add a little bit more to that depiction to properly match the city’s reality.

Starting from downtown Detroit and moving outward will present some actuality; walking nearly a mile from Campus Martius Park reveals dismal building debris and pitiful urban decay, inhabited by Detroit’s impoverished and forgotten.

Urban blight contributes to many factors which prevent a city from reaching its full potential, such as boosted crime rates, poor employment, feeble health and poverty—all of which plague Detroit.

What became of the once booming, innovative and prosperous city that stood properly as the heart of the Great Lakes state?

Detroit’s anguish, in short, roots from a number of constrictions: deindustrialization of the dependent automobile industry after the indus-



Left to right, top to bottom: “Nothing Stops Detroit” sign outside of downtown store, The Heidelberg Project, graffiti found in an alley near Detroit’s Eastern Market, Campus Martius Park festival tree and holiday lights, example of urban blight and “Say Nice Things About Detroit” sticker.

try’s boom in the 1920s, the rise of suburbs and departure of jobs and the economic and social fallout of the 1967 riots, which tainted the city’s semblance.

In more modern times, the national media’s depiction of Detroit has only continuously stirred more animosity towards the city, highlighting crime as an abundant feature while limiting outsider openness.

Detroit local Destiny Walken shares her insider perspective on the general attitude of Detroit natives.

“I feel that people from Detroit have the type attitude where they feel they can survive anywhere,” Walken said.

Not only does Walken hold a valued angle as a local, Walken is also a sales representative at the in-city Detroit vs. Everybody store, an organization named after the hip-hop medley composed by local rappers Eminem, Royce da 5’9”, Big Sean, Danny Brown, Dej Loaf and Trick-Trick. DvE embodies the roughly independent spirit that gives Detroit its special nature, and directs the sense that Detroit’s worth is undermined through their slogan onto apparel and

accessories.

“I think Detroit vs. Everybody helps city morale simply because the saying,” Walken said. “DvE is such a powerful phrase especially when people don’t know anything about the company. I could wear the shirt on any given day and it sparks conversation; people even say it out loud, ‘Detroit versus everybody.’”

The energy that DvE builds upon is something that is important for a city digging its way out of recession, providing a common attitude among the population and securing growth in commerce.

Considering the notability of the automobile industry in Detroit, it’s no surprise that architecture and engineering show such a prominent increase, since the inclination of such jobs has always been a strong feature. But the other industries are vital for the city, especially if it has any intent to prosper.

Construction and extraction is and will be a heavy factor in the revitalization of the city until it can resolve conspicuous issues with urban decay.

Richard Karp, experienced Detroit realtor and unit of Crain’s “Top

50 Names to Know: Real Estate, Detroit,” has spent 26 years in commercial real estate and is credited with the redevelopment of the former United Way building, the Farwell Building and the Capitol Park Building.

“Since the conviction of the corrupt mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and the municipal bankruptcy filing in 2013, that low point, culminating over 40 years of decline, has been followed by some of the steepest rises in property values and rental rates,” Karp wrote.

Gentrification, the process of renovating and improving a house or district so that it conforms to middle-class taste, is a key component to Detroit’s reprise.

Karp detailed gentrification’s role in the city’s identity, highlighting stigmas and patterns that follow.

“The word ‘gentrification’ largely ceased to be used by the redevelopment community in the 1980s due to both the negative stigma it acquired and its literal definition,” Karp wrote. “Many of the new residents and workers coming in to the 7.2 square miles comprised of downtown, Midtown, and New Center, are indeed whiter and wealthier than those who have

been “displaced” by rising rental prices. Understandably, this has caused some friction. The term urban industry has used since the early 1990s is ‘revitalization.’”

Gentrification shifts commercial scenery to adapt to a changing population, making way for high end lofts, clubs, restaurants and other commodities.

According to Art Detroit Now, there are 55 leading art galleries/projects, with a number of minuscule studios and art developments throughout the city, central and outward.

Arts, design, entertainment, sports and media are essential to a city’s character.

Local artist Steven Busker specializes in music and artwork through graphic design for the Prop Art studio in Detroit, and moved to the city from Western Michigan to pursue his career of arts.

“There’s so many people moving to Detroit in such great quantity that part of the problem is the surplus without proper catering for the people who reside there,” Busker said. “When I came, so much stuff was happening, there are just so many good music venues and things happening and it’s really positive,” Busker said.

As an artist, Busker appreciates the way Detroit understands and cherishes various art forms, whether it be sculpture, design, or Busker’s favorite: techno music.

“I realized that so much of techno was transformed and originated in some ways from Detroit, and it’s amazing because if I were to make music, I would want it to be understood by the people around, so I’ve been enjoying it, and representing Detroit in anything is very exciting,” Busker said.

Another Detroit artist, Tyree Guyton, handles urban decay in his city in a perfectly unconventional method, combining deteriorated housing with his eccentric vision of old toys, parts and trash in his internationally recognized Heidelberg project.

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