

In our words

Good things

THE ISSUE

It's Friday, the day we take a few moments to highlight the good news in Lancaster County and the surrounding region. Some of these items are welcome developments on the economic front or for area neighborhoods. Others are local stories of achievement, perseverance, compassion and creativity that represent welcome points of light during the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic and with other bleak developments enveloping our nation and world. All of this uplifting news deserves a brighter spotlight.

As we've written in recent editorials, we believe that banning books is anti-democratic and an obstacle to a well-rounded education — one reason being that “books that explore more difficult realities can help children to understand their own realities.”

So we were heartened to see the story in Monday's edition of LNP | LancasterOnline about the Freedom Readers, a group of residents in the Elizabethtown Area School District who are taking a sensible, helpful approach to the alarming rise in attempts to ban books.

The Freedom Readers' strategy is straightforward, writes LNP | LancasterOnline's Ashley Stalnecker: “reading commonly challenged books and publicizing summaries that address concerns about content.”

The group, which now has more than 220 members on its Facebook page, was founded by longtime Elizabethtown resident Judi Grove. It includes retired principals and English teachers and is opposed to the push for “indiscriminate book bannings.”

We like that the group has positioned itself as non-partisan and will welcome members from anywhere on the political spectrum. Debate and discussion are a healthy part of any process, Grove believes, as do we.

“Grove said the goal of the group is to publish online summaries of frequently banned books, as well as information about the material often cited as objectionable and be ‘ready to defend and support’ the school district,” Stalnecker reported.

One book that has drawn scrutiny and some moral outrage in the Elizabethtown Area School District is “Me and Earl and the Dying Girl,” a 2012 novel by Jesse Andrews about two high school friends and a third friend who dies from leukemia.

Grove has read it and said, sensibly, that she would trust that the school district's librarians did their due diligence before placing it on the library's shelves, Stalnecker reported.

“I think if my child wanted to read this for all the right reasons, this does have a good story,” Grove said. “If they chose it and the librarians thought it was appropriate, I would not have any objection to that.”

“Me and Earl and the Dying Girl” is one of the books the Freedom Readers have read since January. Others include “The Hate U Give,” “The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian” and “All American Boys.”

We appreciate the work they're doing.

Stalnecker noted that there's at least one other local book club reviewing books that have been banned or come under the threat of bans.

Aaron's Books in Lititz “launched a new reading club, The Books Not Bans Reading Group, to read middle grade and young adult books being banned or challenged by parental and political groups nationally and locally,” Stalnecker wrote.

That group meets at 6 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Aaron's Books on 35 E. Main St., Lititz.

In other good things:

— Speaking of books, there's a creative idea coming down the pike in the Ephrata Area School District.

The Ephrata Area Education Foundation approved a venture grant for a book vending machine for students at Highland Elementary School, LNP | LancasterOnline correspondent Melissa Frost reported recently.

“Venture grants are awarded to teachers, departments and professional employees to fund projects designed to enhance and expand educational experiences and opportunities for students in the district,” Frost explained. “Highland's book vending machine will dispense books to students who have earned tokens for following the districtwide positive behavior system.”

Ephrata Superintendent Brian Troop called the idea of students using a special coin in the vending machine to get a book they've earned as a reward “innovative.”

We agree. It sounds a little magical, too.

— Earlier this week, Lampeter-Strasburg School District announced the return of its in-person High School Heroes program, a wonderful tradition.

The program saw nearly three dozen 12th graders visit third graders and offer stories, show-and-tell and some good cheer to the future Class of 2031.

“Each Hero sat down with a small group of third graders to discuss their high school lives, including future plans, hobbies, and personal best practices,” the district stated in a news release. “Heroes train to be mentors by participating in a series of lessons based on positive decision making and drug- and alcohol-free lifestyles.”

We applaud this Lampeter-Strasburg program, and ones like it in other school districts.

— Finally, here's something to take note of, if you're inclined to make some “good things” of your own happen: Monday is Pennsylvania's fourth annual 1-4-3 Day.

It began in 2019 as a statewide movement to honor Pittsburgh native Fred Rogers, longtime host of the television series “Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.”

“Rogers continuously demonstrated compassion and kindness, and embodied what it means to be a good neighbor,” Denise Johnson, the state's acting Secretary of Health, wrote in a news release. “Rogers used 1-4-3 as another way of saying ‘I love you’ with the numbers representing the number of letters in each word.”

Monday is the 143rd day of 2022.

We join those who are encouraging others to spread kindness and do good deeds Monday. As Johnson writes, it's easy to be weary, cynical and overwhelmed these days, “but we are all in this together, and it is in our power to commit to even just a single, simple positive gesture to work towards building a better world.”

You can find 1-4-3 Day ideas and activities through the state's Kindness Generator at pa.gov/143-day.

Let's all be each other's deliverers of good thing on Monday.