

Early Years funding likely will remain

Spanking comments part of upcoming meeting with Ontario Early Years and WECPCRC board

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

Funding for the West Elgin Community Parent Child Resource Centre is likely to stay in place, said Tom McCallum, executive director of Ontario Early Years, Elgin-Middlesex-London.

"The West Elgin Community Parent Child Resource Centre has had 25 years of quality programming and I think we want to carry on with that tradition," said McCallum Monday in response to concerns Ontario Early Years was going to pull its funding following comments about spanking WECPCRC program administrator Janet Pinder made in Feb. 12 issue of The Chronicle.

Parents and the Rodney community began reacting late last week to calls from parents seeking letters of support for Pinder because of fears the Ontario Early Years funding was going to be pulled out and possibly moved to the West Elgin Community Health Centre

in West Lorne. "It's a possibility Ontario Early Years wants to partner with the health centre where maybe there could be more funding," said Brad Bandeden, a



Tom McCallum

"THE WEST ELGIN PARENT COMMUNITY CHILD RESOURCE CENTRE HAS HAD 25 YEARS OF QUALITY PROGRAMMING AND I THINK WE WANT TO CARRY ON WITH THAT TRADITION."

parent whose children have attended WECPCRC off and on for seven years.

His wife, Sue is a former board member and Brad is a former West Elgin councillor who has been involved with the resource centre as both a parent and municipal representative.

"But who's the right person to deliver this service? I think in this community, it's Janet," said

Bandeden. Ontario Early Years began funding the existing day care centre in Rodney two years ago after Bandeden said the health centre lobbied for the funding as part of its community programming.

Sue said Pinder had already been offering services such as toy-lending libraries and parenting courses for years before the government launched its Ontario Early Years program with similar interests in supporting parents.

She said it was a logical match for the funding to come to WECPCRC where Pinder was having to work hard to expand the programming.

McCallum would not say how much money Ontario Early Years provides to WECPCRC but said it is reviewed annually when WECPCRC's contract for funding is renewed.

Pinder had commented on personal views of

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Lindsay Besley, left, catches the ball during a practice exercise at the Don Martin Winter Baseball School that has been running at West Elgin Secondary School Friday nights. She is among five local girls going to Florida on a ball school team.

Chronicle photo

Ball players heading to Florida

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

While droves of young Canadians spend their spring break on a beach in Florida, five area girls will be spending it on Florida baseball diamonds.

Through their participation in the Don Martin Winter Baseball School, the girls have qualified for positions on a team composed of students from Martin's schools across Ontario.

As the youngest team there, Daniyel Bint, a Dutton first baseman, said the high school age players from

Ontario compete against college-age players for seven days of baseball.

"That's a lot of ball," said Kendra Goos, a pitcher and third baseman from Rodney.

The team practices every day and plays in what amounts to a large ball tournament against other baseball schools.

"It's a lot of fun," said Jennifer Drummelsmith of Dutton. She plays first base and third and said this is her second time going to the tournament.

Participants in the school, which has taken place Friday nights through much

of the winter at West Elgin Secondary School, have to indicate they would like a shot at the school team.

Coaches watch how they perform as they participate and decide who makes the cut to join the team on the trip to CoCoa Beach.

At the school, they work on all their skills from fielding to batting before the heat gets turned up on the Florida diamonds.

They've all grown up playing ball and third, second and shortstop Lindsay Besley of West Lorne is going for her first time this year.

She said they've been practicing every Sunday leading up to the trip and adds it's a great opportunity to improve their skills in a game they've played all their lives.

Drummelsmith said the tournament also gives them a chance to meet a lot of new people.

The five-some, which also includes Caitlin Littlejohn of Highgate, leaves March 12 for seven days.

As the girls head south, Dutton Minor Ball is gearing up for its season with sign ups continuing place March 24 and 27.

SPORTS WESES honoured again with award for gym

WESES has won recognition for keeping students physically active from the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD).

The Diamond School Recognition Award recognizes schools that offer daily physical education to every student.

Only one per cent, 220 of 17,256, Canadian schools

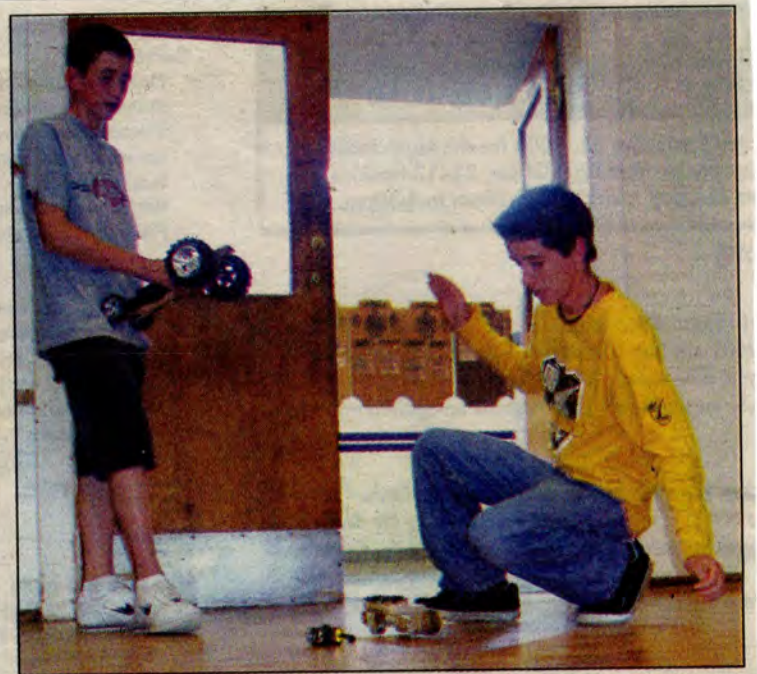
even qualified for the award and for the second year in a row WESES has been recognized.

"At the Diamond level, schools offering physical education will positively contribute to the health of children by providing them with knowledge and skills that they need to be physically active throughout their life," says Nick Forsberg, president of CAHPERD in a media release.



Lindsay Besley, Jennifer Drummelsmith, Kendra Goos and Daniyel Bint are on their way to Florida, joined by Caitlin Littlejohn, absent.

Chronicle photo



MOUSETRAP CAR RACES

Grade 9 technology student Kyle Carew (top left) makes some final preparations on his mousetrap car while Kyle Carlos (top, right) releases his car. Students in the class had to make cars that would be powered by mouse or rat traps. The cars were tested Monday to see how far they would be propelled in West Elgin Secondary School's cafeteria.

SCOTT HILGENDORFF/CHRONICLE

Elgin Wildcats win OFSAA volleyball

For The Chronicle

It's mission accomplished after the West Elgin Wildcats won the ultimate prize in high school sports.

The Wildcats captured the OFSAA A girls volleyball championship, reaching their season goal, defeating Sudbury Marymount 3-1 (14-25, 25-12, 25-22, 25-21) in the best-of-five final match last Thursday.

"It feels great," Cheri Hunter said. "Ten times better than silver."

A year ago the Wildcats lost in the provincial final to Penetanguishene Le Caron, leaving them with ambitions to return for the gold.

"The kids are on a definite high," said coach Lori Clinton after the Wildcats went 14-1 at the tournament.

"Collectively the whole team played well. It wasn't just a couple of standouts in the game."

Game one didn't look promising as the Wildcats were handily put away by Marymount for their first loss at OFSAA.

"Mentally they (Marymount) finished us in the first game. We lost it, we

melted (after leading the game by six points)," Clinton said.

"They dominated us the first game, psychologically and then we turned around and did the same thing to them."

Led by hitters Justina Campbell and Hunter on offence, the Wildcats rode on the momentum swing to a quick victory.

"Cheri hit really well. I couldn't tell you how many kills she had. She killed the ball," praised Clinton.

"Katie Lyon and Michelle Weber at middle, their blocking was huge for us in terms of defence."

Lindsay Lamb and captain Carolyn Tunks ran the offence as the team's setters.

West Elgin cruised through the round-robin with a 6-0 record, winning their games on average 25-10.

"We won our games quite handily," Clinton said. "The calibre of play was so poor (from opponents) it kind of surprised me. Today was totally different, we had to play harder."

In the quarter-finals the Wildcats still made quick

work of Kenora St. Thomas Aquinas 25-21, 25-16. Ditto for Kitchener Rockway in a semifinal, where the Wildcats won 25-10, 25-20, 25-14.

"I was scared that we would be relaxed when we went in (to the final), thinking that we've played good so far and wouldn't have to work," Hunter said. "We pulled it together. We stepped up when we had to. I knew we would come back. It (loss) was just a fluke."

West Elgin becomes the first school to win three "A" girls volleyball titles and joins a short list of eight schools (any class) to win three or more provincial crowns. The Wildcats also won in 1997 and 1998.

Veterans Hunter and Tunks have seen the ascension back to the top, starting in 2002 that ended in the quarterfinals. The Wildcats are 32-9 in games at OFSAA during that span.

"We went three years in a row," Hunter said. "It has been great."



TALKING SCIENCE

Danielle McGill, left, and Tricia Reis at St. Mary's School, mix some compounds together to study chemical reactions as part of a Let's Talk Science program. Senior students studied forensic sciences and covered topics including fingerprinting and handwriting analysis.

Chronicle photo

School fight could be taken to Kennedy

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

The fight to keep rural schools open continues to build as members of the Citizens' Group for Rural Education look to taking their concerns directly to Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy.

"We're trying to mobilize community support," said Grace McGartland. She helped lead two public forums held last Wednesday at the West Lorne Complex to generate public input and support into campaigns the committee is spearheading.

The group is in its second phase of a letter writing campaign.

After months of research, the group has generated an updated package of letters that targets several key components to the issue of rural education from its funding formula to how programming is provided.

They are trying to get as many groups,

organizations and individuals as possible to forward letters to the Ministry of Education and other leaders of the fight.

The Citizens' Group has prepared copies of letters targeting the different issues and used them as discussion points during the forum.

'WE'RE TRYING TO MOBILIZE COMMUNITY SUPPORT.'

— Grace McGartland

Those letters were given to people at the forums and McGartland said they are encouraging people to either send those letters or their own versions.

She said they want to hit the ministry with as much input from as many people as possible to make sure their recommendations get noticed.

In the end, she said even if one recommendation is adopted, it would be worthwhile.

The Citizens' Group is feeling a sense of urgency to act quickly because Kennedy has announced new school closing guidelines are being announced at the end of the month.

Since being appointed education minister in the fall, Kennedy put a moratorium in place on any school closures and has repeatedly acknowledged the current funding formula discriminates against rural schools.

A suggestion came out of the meeting to have Kennedy come to West Elgin and meet with the Citizens' Group and community.

Don Watterworth, who attended the forum, suggested Kennedy ride a school bus at 7:30 a.m. to see first-hand the distances students already travel to school.

McGartland asked if Kennedy isn't able to come, how many people would be willing to go to

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OFSAA CHAMPIONS...

The West Elgin Secondary School Wildcats were OFSAA A girls volleyball champions. The team includes: back, left, Coach Becky Creigorshek, Manager Ann Wrobel, Taryn Clements, Michelle Webber, Justina Campbell, coach Lori Clinton, front, left, Lyndsay Lamb, Co-Cpt. Carolyn Tunts, Co-Cpt. Cheri Hunter, Katie Lyons, Rachel Kalita and Amanda Leonordes (absent but represented by the mascot bear.)

43 Contributed photo



ANGELIC CAUSE...

Snow Angels Spreading Hope was the name of the event that took place across the Catholic School board Monday. In West Lorne, 221 students and staff joined schools across the board in making snow angels at 2 p.m. The goal was to set a Guinness World Record while also prayerfully giving support to the board's Supervisor of Recreation Programs and Resources, Hans Janssen. The 26-year employee is battling cancer.

Chronicle photo



Norma Schnekenburger, Tracy Grant and Ebba Schmid are among the community leaders working within and outside the Thames Valley District School Board to help save rural schools. The information they are collecting is building as they prepare arguments to support a case for keeping rural schools open.

Chronicle photo

School battle rages on

Citizens' group, Grant continue advocating for rural schools

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

While the provincial government reviews its school funding issues, the battle to ensure rural schools can be saved is far from over and representatives of the Citizens' Group for Rural Education is continuing its speaking tour of local clubs and municipalities.

Most recently, the group was joined by Tracy Grant, a local representative on the accommodation study committee, at West Elgin

Council for council's Feb. 12 meeting to discuss new initiatives and seek more support.

"It's an extremely difficult and time consuming job. I do appreciate the proactive nature of the council in speaking out for rural education and these communities," said Grant.

Her committee is tasked with reviewing accommodation issues at high schools in West Lorne, Glencoe, Strathroy and Parkhill. It is often the first step in a process

that leads to the closure of at least one of the schools in the group being studied.

Glencoe District High School was identified as a potential target for closure by the Thames Valley District School Board and has been one of the focuses of the committee's monthly meetings since the middle of last year.

The new provincial government has given a reprieve to schools facing closure while it examines a

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Jazz trio

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

None of West Elgin Secondary School's jazz trio expected to be taking paid gigs and looking at making some recordings when music teacher Spiro Grima pulled them together to play at a luncheon in a pinch last school year.

"We were sort of thrown together," said Mike Bennett, who plays saxophone for the trio.

"It just ended up clicking, just through the jazz nature. Everything clicked," said Bennett.

Bennett said the trio, including Jen Pinder on drums and Mark Godfrey on bass, instinctively knew how to play together and were a surprising match up.

"We can communicate with each other while playing. We know what the other is going to do before they do it," said Bennett.

Godfrey said much of what they play starts out with a written selection but ends up moving into improvisation as their styles of playing and thinking blend together.

"It's evolved into something pretty good," said Pinder.

She was compared to famous drummer Buddy Rich by an adjudicator at a school competition last year.

She said Grima began getting the trio some gigs after he saw what they were capable of when he first asked them to help him out.

She said they originally represented the school, but with Bennett away at university now, they consider themselves more on their own, although proudly support and play for the school.

Now, Bennett said they will play any chance they get and recently performed at a private business conference in Niagara Falls.

Godfrey, who started playing bass when he was in Grade 7 said their growing successes has them thinking about putting a recording together, possibly focussing on improvised work.

"It's what we want, but we weren't expecting this," said Bennett.

Bennett is currently in his first year at the University of Western Ontario, working on a four-year theory and composing degree.

He's back to playing clarinet, an instrument he picked up when he was in Grade 7, at the same time he started saxophone, following up on starting to play piano when he was a five-year-old.

He said he kept playing and taking lessons and eventually wants to go to Humber College to study jazz.

"I personally thought it would be better for me if I got a classical background first," said Bennett who is set on pursuing a career as a professional jazz musician.

Godfrey entered high school planning to get into computer programming.

He had learned to play bass when he was in Grade 7 but never expected to be pursuing a career in music like he plans to now.

"Music was fun but I didn't think I had any potential," said the Grade 11 student.

But Grima saw it differently and let Godfrey, a junior at the time, play in the senior jazz band. "I've decided this is what I want to do with my life," he said.

Pinder is looking at going to Humber College next year to study percussion performance and wants to see the trio stay together.

She said it's been harder with Bennett being away at school this year and, she leaves for school in the fall, added, "Next year will be hard but we're going to try to keep it together."

The Chronicle



CHATEAU LA ROACH...

Members of West Elgin Secondary School's Wildcat Theatre presented the dramatic comedy, "Chateau La Roach". A dinner was offered to the public before the Friday night performance. The production was also run during the week for students to enjoy.

Chronicle photo

County continues to seek distinction between rural and urban school areas

For The Chronicle

Unhappy with a previous response from the Ernie Eves administration the County of Elgin has fired off another resolution to the Ontario government which makes a case for asking for a review of school board boundaries to reflect the differences between urban and rural areas.

The resolution on the size and composition of the Thames Valley District School Board is

the same one the county submitted last year.

Administrator Mark McDonald said the county was not happy with the way the resolution was treated by the Eves' Progressive Conservative administration and is prepared to submit it again.

The resolution, composed by Malahide Mayor John Wilson, points out the TVDSB is the fourth largest board in Ontario, serves both

urban and rural communities, but has not had a boundary review in five years.

The resolution makes the key point that has been argued by Wilson, who has fought hard to defend rural schools, that while they have been targeted for closure, there are significant social and economic concerns that outweigh

"containment concerns." Instead, the resolution suggests, geographic-circumstances grants

should be offered to small schools in recognition of their value to rural areas.

The resolution suggests separating out Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex counties from the Thames boundaries and creating a separate boards for those areas.

County council, through the resolution, is asking for a review of the size and composition of the Thames Valley board, to more adequately recognize urban and rural areas.

FACS funding will have huge impact

For The Chronicle

Sixty-four million dollars is what's making the difference for many Children's Aid Societies across Ontario after the provincial government recently announced additional funding.

Which means Family and Children's Services (FACS) of St. Thomas and Elgin will be able to handle its budget of \$8.6 million quite nicely.

"The budget will be covered for this year," said Rod Potgieter, executive director.

"That's very good."

"It's definitely a huge impact. We are very pleased with this."

The province will also spend more than \$1 billion in 2003-04 on services for more than 30,000 children in need of protection against abuse or neglect.

"It's very important we get the funds so we can fulfill our mandate," Potgieter said.

Premier Dalton McGuinty created the new Ministry of Children's Services to

ensure children's issues are a top priority. The ministry aims to give children a good start in life through quality early-childhood services, making it easier for families to access these services and helping youth become productive adults. Which means all children's services will be covered under one ministry.

"We applaud this new direction in this ministry in focusing on children and we look forward to building partnerships and

in developing strategic directions," Potgieter said.

Unfortunately Family and Children's Services does have an outstanding deficit of \$255,000 for 2002-03, and Potgieter said it's uncertain whether this amount will be covered as well.

And Potgieter said to get a confirmation of what they had predicted in terms of funding is nothing short of soothing. "It's a relief."

Outdated science labs receive much-needed facelift

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

Two labs at West Elgin Secondary School are receiving a major facelift.

"The interior is being replaced and the systems upgraded," said Vice Principal Bill Miskiman.

"It's part of the board's initiative to upgrade the science classrooms across the board," he said.

Miskiman said the upgrades will give the students a better learning environment and includes improved ventilation and new lab spaces and equipment.

The two classrooms were left unscheduled this semester to allow the work, which began two weeks ago.

The work is part of \$5 million

being spent during the next five years across the Thames Valley District School Board.

Each renovated lab is expected to cost \$100,000 and will be gutted and rebuilt with lab stations set up around the perimeter of the room and desks in the centre for note taking and instruction.

Two WESS labs were renovated about seven years ago, leaving two more facing the work now.

It's the first time work has been done on these two labs in 30 years.

Work is expected to be finished by the summer with the new classrooms in use this September.

"It's going to enhance the program delivery to the students," said Miskiman.



Matt Flanagan of Seaforth prepares one of the science labs for work. He is working for Smith Construction.
Chronicle photo

The Chronicle



SUBMITTED

Back row, left to right: Miss Ostrom (coach), Dylan Weselowski (co-captain), Michael Godfrey (co-captain), Andrew McWilliam, and Allan Percival (manager). Front row: Adam Sutton, Troy Cook, Josh Dionne, and John Gregory Drummelsmith. (Missing was David McWilliam, assistant coach)

WESES win board championship

The WESES Grade 8 Boys Volleyball team continued their winning ways on Dec. 11 at the TVDSB Championship Finals at Lucas S.S. in London. The boys dominated in the round robin and finished first in their pool. After a hesitant start, the team charged back to easily defeat Homedale in the semi-finals 13-25, 25-14, 15-7. In the finals, the WESES Eagles overpowered and outplayed Westmount P.S. They played phenomenal volleyball and went on to win in two straight games 25-20, 25-21, to claim the Gold Medal. Congratulations to the WESES Grade 8 Boys Volleyball team — Thames Valley District AAA Champions.



HATS OFF - THEY'RE DONE HIGH SCHOOL

JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

Ashley Keane, Cheri Hunter, Stacey Oliveira, Carla Oliveira and Carolyn Tunks tossed their graduation hats into the air after West Elgin Secondary School's 2003-2004 commencement in the gym Oct. 30. Many of the graduating students returned to West Lorne from work or post secondary schooling for the ceremony.



JINGLE BELLS ON A TIMPANI

Nicole Miller, left, Ryan Alderton, Ben Gormley and Kelsy Fratscher performed Jingle Bells on Timpanis with the Grade 4s at APS Dec. 16

The Chronicle



JUNIOR BOYS WIN WOSSAA

FOR THE CHRONICLE

West Elgin Wildcats, Thames Valley Region Athletic Association junior boys "A" volleyball champions, WOSSA A and TVRAA South Division winners, from left, are; front row (holding plaques) - Shawn Zimmerman, Aaron Cowell; middle row - Joe Peternel, Jon Dietrich, Adam Almeida, back row - assistant coach Dan Kajan, Dave Dryfhout, Harrison Oake, Will Drummelsmith, Zach Dionne, Dan Dutton, head coach Mike Van Dyk, Jeremy Koscik, assistant coach Pete Soos.



PHOTO SUBMITTED

The Journey of Love

St. Mary's School held the Journey of Love the night of Dec. 16 in the schoolyard. Open to the community, visitors were greeted by their "family head" guide and together they traveled the journey that Mary and Joseph took to the Birth of Jesus. Students from JK to Grade 8 participated as guides, soldiers, shepherds, inn keepers, tax collectors, angels, beggars, lepers, market vendors, prophets, Wise Men and as Mary and Joseph.

ST. MARY'S CELEBRATE JESUS

St. Mary's School discovered the magic Christmas bells in the Polar Express performed by the Grade 5 students at the Christmas Concert Dec. 15 at St. Mary's Parish Hall. Many performances were about Jesus.





PAINFUL LESSON

SCOTT HILGENDORFF/CHRONICLE

Students look over a collection of material from Eva Olsson, a 79-year-old Holocaust survivor who shared with West Elgin Secondary School a message of tolerance toward others.

Holocaust survivor teaches tolerance

SCOTT HILGENDORFF

staff

Eva Olsson knows what it's like to be a teenager and bullied.

Only the bullies she refers to were Nazis she faced as she fought for survival against the horrors of a German concentration camp during World War II.

Reliving the horrors she experienced for students at West Elgin Secondary School, the 79-year-old Holocaust survivor simply wants students to accept each other

for their differences.

"If you want peace, you must have respect and tolerance for your brothers and sisters. Tolerance is an absolute necessity," she said.

As a Hasidic Jew when Germany invaded Hungary where she was growing up at the beginning of the 1940s, Olsson knows what it's like to be hated for her differences.

Because she was Jewish, her entire family was loaded into box cars and sent by train to a concentration camp where Olsson

survived more than four years of once unspeakable horrors.

She was silent about her experiences for 50 years but now speaks internationally about her experiences, urging people to obey just one rule: do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.

She's even spoken at the United Nations but was in West Lorne Monday through part of the Thames Valley District School Board's "safe schools initiatives".

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WHITE CHRISTMAS AT ALDBOROUGH

JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

King Michael Lewinsky and queen Megan Dennahower watch as snowflakes Bryan Johnston, centre, and Mackenzie Dick bring a White Christmas to Aldborough Public School on Dec. 17.



WESES RINGS IN WINTER

JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

Nicole Carew, left and Alana Maclean perform a flute duet during the West Elgin Senior Elementary School Winter Concert Dec. 9.

Choosing not to hate most important choice, Nazi death camp survivor tells students

From Page 1

Board's "safe schools initiatives".

"I've made it my mission to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves," said Olsson, who lost almost her whole family to hatred.

Her family was forced to live in two rooms with a total of 19 people as Germany occupied Hungary not long after taking over Poland in 1939. They moved Jewish families into her city and crowded them all together.

But Olsson said she was fine because she was with her family. "But not for long," she said.

Soon after, they were all being shipped to Germany to work as slave labour in brick factories; or that's what they thought.

They were marched 7 km to rail yards where Olsson said, "What we saw were endless rows of box cars. We couldn't see the engine," she said.

With her family, she was packed into a car with about 90 other people forced to make the trip to Germany standing in human waste that piled up in unbearable heat, with no water.

As a child, to encourage good behaviour, she was raised thinking if she did wrong, she would go to hell.

"I was often threatened I would go to hell. I did. I went to hell and back," she said to the gymnasium full of quiet students.

They arrived at the

concentration camp where Olsson said, "Anyone asking for water was clubbed by the guards, by the Nazi bullies."

Surrounded by armed guards and electric fences.

It wasn't a brick factory, "It was a killing factory," she said.

She was separated from all but one sister as 90 per cent of the people, most of her family, were led away to await death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Olsson and her sister were detained as prisoners and made to work in the camp, their head shaved, the hair used to make socks for German U-boat crews.

In life at the camp, she gradually accepted the unthinkable; that the smoke from the chimneys in another part of the camp and the horrible smell that filled the air was that of thousands of Jewish people who had been killed in gas chambers and burned.

She can remember the screams and moans of people lead into the gas chambers.

She remembers 20 minutes of screaming and then silence, as people she knew became part of the more than 11 million who died in Auschwitz and some 300 other similar concentration camps.

She said she'll never know what went through her family's minds as they died horrible deaths before being taken to the ovens, their bodies destroyed.

"That's what we smelled day and night; our families' flesh burning," she said.



POWERFUL STORY

SCOTT HILGENDORFF/CHRONICLE

Students listen intently to the stories of Eva Olsson. Her story of survival in World War II concentration camps was used to encourage students not to hate.

She watched people starve to death, saw people tortured, even sewn together in medical experiments or given injections of tuberculosis and left to suffer.

She saw bodies and living people stacked together on trucks like firewood and remembers the cries of one man asking over and over again, "Where is God?"

The closer the Russians and Allied forces got to the concentration camp, the higher the flames got in the ovens as the Germans rushed to destroy as many Jewish people as they could.

"Those flames could be seen for miles and miles."

Olsson witnessed all of this and was rescued just days before she would have died herself

from starvation and typhoid fever before Allied forces liberated her and her sister.

She encouraged the students to take from her story of survival the importance of learning not to hate or judge someone for differences, whether it be religion or skin colour.

"Children take into the street what they hear in their own environment ... Racism is a learned attitude. The most important choice you will ever make is to choose your attitude. How you treat your brothers and sisters, that will determine your success," she said.

She also said a child who learns to hate can't be blamed.

"He had a good teacher," she said.



WESES DANCE

Shandi Bondi, left, Christy Hentz and Ariel Whalen performed a skit from the Lion King musical at West Elgin Senior Elementary School's Winter Concert Dec. 9. The girls choreographed and produced the skit on their own for the show. The WESES Jazz Band played afterwards.

High school collects thousands of food donations

JEFF KEMPENAAR
staff

Students at West Elgin Secondary School have stepped up and collected more than 6,000 cans of food in this year's holiday food drive.

"It's a lot of cans. The kids have really stepped up this year," said organizer, and physical education coordinator Lori Clinton.

Students went door to door Dec. 2 collecting about 1,000 cans in Dutton, Wallacetown, West Lorne and Rodney.

That night food was brought to the Daffodil Society in Dutton and the

next morning students brought food to the West Elgin Community Health Centre in West Lorne and Calvary United Church in Rodney.

All of the food will stay in the area, going to clients or people using local drop-in facilities.

During the collections cans, boxed food and other non-perishables were piled up in the front foyer of the school.

Campaigns within the school raised 3,700 cans and students were given the option to buy their way out of class Dec. 2, which helped raise another 1,400 food arti-

cles. If students spent \$5 on food for the needy at the West Lorne IGA, they were allowed to get out of class for the day.

Extra money raised in the "buy out of class" campaign went toward hygiene products like toothpaste, soap and shampoo.

Students tried to collect 100 cans a day at the school and on the last day of the two-week campaign 2,000 cans were brought in.

Clinton said teachers at the school provided incentives and challenged students to bring in more and more food.



FOOD DRIVE A SUCCESS

JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

Robin Cowan, left, Chris Knight, Jessica Kalita, Shawn Longe and Jan Kool were among the students who helped Lori Clinton and Dave Burk (crouching teachers) organize West Elgin Secondary School's annual food drive. Over 6,000 items were collected.



Veterans share stories

JEFF KEMPENAAR/THE CHRONICLE

Cliff Cooper, of Rodney shares some stories about his experience with the British Royal Air Forces from 1949-54 to Adam Clark and Dustin Cook, students taking part in a Year of the Veteran assignment June 2. History teacher Wayne Dibbitts listens while the students take notes. About 22 veterans have been found for a book hoped to be published this summer.

WESES Grade 8 volleyball team undefeated

The WESES Grade 8 Boys Volleyball team has had an amazing season so far. In fact, they have won every tournament that they've entered. They started off the year by easily defeating Homedale in the finals of their home tournament on Oct. 23. The following weekend, they competed in the St. Thomas Aquinas Tournament in London.

The boys went undefeated in this tournament up until the final match when Jack Chambers took a game from them. However, the Eagles bounced back in the third game and ended up winning their second Championship of the year.

On Nov. 6, the boys played in the huge 24-team Forest City Tournament at Fanshawe College. The WESES Eagles once again

played exceptional volleyball and once again defeated Homedale PS in the finals to win the gold. Throughout the day, the tournament organizers and other coaches commented on the team's high quality of play, sportsmanlike conduct and teamwork. A huge congratulations goes out to Michael Godfrey who was chosen as the tournament Most Valuable Player and Dylan Weselowski who received an Award of Excellence.

The boys were back in action on Nov. 26 at the White Oaks tournament in London. After losing to Westmount PS (last year's TVDSB Champions), the team rallied together in the second round of the playoffs. They played with heart and determination, and they crushed Wilton

Grove PS to win the tournament and claim their fourth championship. This time congratulations goes out to Troy Cook who was chosen as team MVP. This, the team's most difficult win, was a total team effort! Andrew McWilliam was unstoppable offensively; Adam Sutton and John-Greg Drummelsmith were consistently strong defensively; and Josh Dionne and Travis Kalita served, passed and blocked for key points.

On Dec. 7, the boys will go for the gold at the Southwest Regional Tournament, which will be held at WESS and WESES. After that, they'll set their sights on dethroning Westmount PS and winning the TVDSB Championship on Dec. 11. Go Eagles.

Literacy testing results improving at West Elgin, most local high schools

FOR THE CHRONICLE

Each of Thames Valley school district's five high schools in St. Thomas and Elgin recorded improved Grade 10 literacy test scores following the October, 2003 provincial exam.

Thames Valley District School Board released school-level results for the exam last Friday.

Local TVDSB test results (with previous year's score in parentheses):

- West Elgin 79 (77)
- Arthur Voaden 61 (52)
- Central Elgin 90 (82)
- East Elgin 56 (66)
- Parkside 71 (70)

Across the Thames Valley district, 68 per

cent of students passed both the reading and writing components of the test, the same number as October, 2002.

London schools recorded the highest and lowest scores — 96 and 11 per cent, respectively. The lowest score was recorded by a school with programs for special students.

The provincial average for the test was 70 per cent, compared to 67 per cent the year before.

Meanwhile, Grade 10 students at St. Joseph's High School in St. Thomas scored 82 per cent last fall, up from 77 per cent a year earlier.

Across the London District Catholic School board, 79 per cent of students passed, compared to 72 per cent in October, 2002.

Citizens' Group pleased with meeting with Kennedy staff

The West Elgin Citizens' Group for Rural Education met with some of the Minister of Education's key advisors to discuss proposals to keep rural schools like West Elgin Secondary School open.

The purpose of the April 29 meeting was to address significant issues that are impacting rural schools and to come up with a solution that falls under the Excellence for All education plan.

The group is proposing:

- Development and implementation of a more comprehensive set of Provincial Guidelines for School Closings that incorporate a balanced view of the value and significance

of rural schools.

Expansion of the Grant Structure Overview/Student-Focused Funding Formula to include grants that ensure a fair and equitable level of funding for all Ontario students, addressing the needs of students from rural areas.

Mario Nigro, and Mary Ng, both policy advisors for the Minister, say they recognize the significant needs of rural schools and the negative effect school closures has on the education of the students, say the citizen's group in a media release following their successful meeting.

Concerned citizen, Norma Schneckeburger says she is

encouraged to hear that the minister shares some of the same beliefs. She also says that she is pleased to hear that the policy advisors are open to explore ways to keep the school open.

Tracy Grant, Chair of the School Advisory Council is also pleased with the outcome of the meeting.

"We were encouraged by the policy advisors' invitation to work with them to further develop the ideas we presented during our meeting to turn them into actionable solutions," explains Grant in a press release.

A follow-up meeting has been set for June to further discuss the proposals.



JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

FAIRY TALES TOLD AT APS

Crack reporters Abbey Fleming, right and Hillary Jones, left, get the Big Bad Wolf's side of the story at Aldborough Dec. 17.



JEFF KEMPENAAR/CHRONICLE

Jen Ford sings Berl Ives' Silver and Gold at West Elgin Secondary School's Coffee House on Dec. 10