

# THE VISION

## **MARIE MURPHY SCHOOL'S SCIENCE OLYMPIAD TEAM WINS 1<sup>ST</sup> AT STATE & 5<sup>TH</sup> IN THE NATION**

Marie Murphy School's varsity team won first place in the Illinois State Science Olympiad competition held on Saturday, April 10, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This was the fifth time in the past six years that the middle school's varsity team finished first at the state competition. After winning first at state, the varsity team qualified to compete in the national competition and went on to place fifth in the nation on May 22 at the University of Illinois – the varsity team's highest ever finish. The fifth place finish at the nationals is even more impressive, considering that most of the schools in the tournament are much larger than Marie Murphy School, and their middle schools consist of 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders.



(L to R: Marie Murphy School's Science Olympiad coaches Darren Persino, Shannon Wright, James Gravagna and Peter Ogden pictured with the varsity team's two trophies.)

The four coaches, who always seemed to inspire the very best from their students, were James Gravagna, Darren Persino, Peter Ogden, and Shannon Wright. Mr. Gravagna said, "This has been a team of overachievers all season, and I am so proud of what this group accomplished." He adds, "Every day for six months, they gave 100% in each practice, never took a day off and went above and beyond."

Marie Murphy School Principal Dr. Deanna Reed said, "This was a very proud moment for everyone in the Avoca community, and the achievement will forever be etched into the annals of Avoca history." She adds, "We had a winning formula in place: Gifted, visionary, passionate and self-sacrificing science teachers; hard-working, disciplined, poised and extremely bright students; caring, giving,

dedicated and highly-talented parents; and a new corporate-backing from a local company." This year, parental support led to an exciting school/business partnership. Inspired by Marie Murphy School's efforts to stimulate interest in science among children at a young age and pave the way for future scientists, Lundbeck Inc., a pharmaceutical company based in Deerfield, made a \$5,000 base contribution to support the students' trip to the national competition and added another \$1,000 to match funds the kids raised through a carwash. Prior to the national championship, scientists from Lundbeck Inc. presented the check to the team and talked to them about how studies in science can lead to careers in science, particularly at a company like Lundbeck Inc. that focuses on developing drugs for complex disorders like epilepsy where the need for new therapies is significant.

Marie Murphy School's fifteen-member varsity team included Adam Eggert, Andy Feis, Michael Gobeli, Shannon He, Katherine Ho, Vivian Jou, Elizabeth Lee, Mike Knippen, Emile Motta de Castro, Amanda Newmark, Mel Racenstein, Mick Riordan, Leah Rivkin, Ari Wolfe and Sean Ye.

Also attending this year's national competition was the eighteen-member junior varsity team, which included Danny Belknap, Sahar Bhai, Alexander Chen, Rene Chen, Stephanie Chen, Allison Gomez, Jessica Jeon, Aiyappa Kodendera, Jamie Knippen, Lauren Newmark, Josh Park, Solena Rizzato, Andrew Wei, Ethan Wirth, Jonah Wolfe, Clara Yam, David Yan and Samantha Yang.



(Marie Murphy School Science Olympiad team and coaches pictured with their 5<sup>th</sup> place trophy at the May 22 national competition held at the University of Illinois.)



(The final results displayed at the National Science Olympiad competition show that J.C. Booth Middle School placed fourth over Marie Murphy School by only one point.)

### **2009-2010: AN AMAZING YEAR**

As the 2009-2010 school year winds to a close, it is important to reflect on the many highlights. Excellence was achieved on many fronts, including academics, athletics, technology, and community connections. We thank the Avoca school community for its strong and consistent support of our schools.

#### Academics

- Avoca ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the state and 1<sup>st</sup> in the township on overall student achievement as measured by the 2009 ISAT scores.
- Both Avoca West and Marie Murphy schools earned the Academic Excellence Award from the State of Illinois. The criteria for this recognition is having over 90% of the students meet and exceed state standards for three consecutive years.
- The Marie Murphy School Science Olympiad team won first in the state and fifth in the nation.
- Three Avoca West students won individual awards in a national competition for producing video book reviews, while another Avoca West student won a national award for a traditional book report.

#### Technology

- Marie Murphy School was awarded the Apple Distinguished School Award. There are only 54 schools in the nation that earned this distinction.
- Avoca West Elementary School was awarded the Apple Exemplary Program Award and is one of only 38 elementary schools in the nation to earn this recognition.
- Marie Murphy School Technology Coordinator Christopher Brown was named the 2010 Outstanding Technology Using Educator of the Year by the Illinois Computing Educators (ICE) organization.
- In April, Avoca was one of three school districts in North America to host a technology site visit sponsored by the National School Boards Association (NSBA). Over 100 educators visited

Avoca's exemplary programs in both schools during the two-day program.

#### Athletics

Five athletic teams from Marie Murphy School won first place in the North Shore Independent Conference in their respective sport seasons.

- Co-ed junior varsity soccer team, with a season record of 8 wins, 0 losses and 1 tie
- Girls' junior varsity volleyball team, with a season record of 11 wins and 2 losses
- Girls' junior varsity basketball team, with a season record of 15 wins and 0 losses
- Boys' varsity basketball team, with a season record of 20 wins and 3 losses
- Boys' varsity volleyball team, with a season record of 10 wins and 3 losses

#### Community Connectedness

- The District Community Outreach Committee worked all year, and their efforts culminated in a comprehensive report and specific recommendations. In the next two to three years, enhancements will be made in the following areas: Communications, volunteerism, community servicing, financial education and school-business partnerships.
- The District Diversity Committee also spent the year researching ways to use Avoca's rich diversity as a strength, including curricular enhancements, increased participation from all community members, and various diversity outreach efforts.
- The free technology classes offered to all Avoca adult residents were very well received and set all-time enrollment records this year.

Clearly, Avoca is a dynamic learning community focused on reaching and sustaining excellence in all areas. The 2009-2010 school year exemplified what is possible when the entire school community strives toward the same mission: "The mission of Avoca School District 37 is to maximize the unique potential of each child we serve."

In an effort to respect the environment and set a good example for our students, *The Vision* is "going green." We have switched from the high gloss paper we were using in past editions of the newsletter to a more earth-friendly, recycled paper. Also, starting with the first edition of *The Vision* for the 2010-2011 school year, we will outline a simple process for all community members interested in receiving *The Vision* electronically, saving both postage and paper. Details will be shared in the August edition.