

## ERHS Violinist Cecilia Hass Plays in All State Orchestra

Cecilia Hass, a freshman at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, performed with the Junior Maryland All State Orchestra on March 10 at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center on the campus of the University of Maryland, College Park, along with 116 other 7th, 8th and 9th graders from across the state. Sponsored by the Maryland Music Educators Association (MMEA), admittance for the performance was by audition. Hass was the only student from Prince George's County who was accepted to participate.



PHOTO BY INGRID COWAN HASS

Cecilia Hass

Rehearsal occupied 16 hours on the weekend of the concert with guest conductor Ann Smith from Fort Worth, Texas, resulting in a high-quality and well-polished performance.

"Through their participation in music performing ensembles and intentional development of their

technical and expressive tools," MMEA believes, "students develop critical thinking, self-reflection and problem-solving skills which will serve them in their future life pursuits, whether or not those pursuits are musical."

## Meet Teen Author Jordan Owens

Jordan Owens has published a supernatural thriller at age 15. (See ad on page 7.) The News Review interviewed him with the assistance of his mother, Lissa Owens, who recorded his responses to our questions:



PHOTO COURTESY LISSA OWENS

Fifteen-year-old author Jordan Owens

Q: When did you first realize that you wanted to write a book and what was your inspiration? A: When I first saw the great creative works out there and famous writers. Inspiration? I had a lot of ideas in my head that I could create and I wanted to put them on paper.

Q: What advice would you give to a writer working on their first book? A: Even if it feels like you don't want to do it, because of how much time and effort it takes to put into crafting it, you should try your best to keep going and complete it.

Q: If you could spend a day with another popular au-

thor, whom would you choose? A: Stephen King.

Q: What would you like your readers to know about you? A: I like to learn new things.

Q: Are you currently working on any new projects? A: Yes. (He smiled, but gave no further details.)

### Women in Greenbelt

## Erin D. Butler Is Finalist For America's Favorite Teacher

by Madeleine Jepsen

Erin Dougherty Butler, a Greenbelt resident and an English teacher in Gaithersburg Middle School's special education program, is among 25 finalists for the America's Favorite Teacher contest. The winner of the nationwide contest, chosen through weekly voting, will appear in Reader's Digest and win a \$25,000 prize and a trip to Hawaii.

Butler has taught in special education for eight years, six of which were at Gaithersburg Middle School's Bridge Program for students with social and emotional needs. Through the Bridge Program, these students are able to stay in a self-contained suite of small classes with other Bridge Program students and learn from the same set of teachers throughout middle school.

"We work heavily on choosing healthy coping strategies for when we feel those big feelings, and helping students out of crisis – that's really the bread and butter of this program," Butler said.

She embraces what she calls "kooky learning," or creative ways of getting students to connect with the books she's reading with the class. Although she's an English teacher, Butler has incorporated STEM principles, outdoor activities and art projects to immerse her students in the books.

In one of her first classes in the Bridge Program, Butler noticed a student who kept his head down and didn't interact much. But the student "came alive" during a project that involved building a house out of popsicle sticks.

"It was a culminating activity done for finishing the book, and all of a sudden, he was sitting up and listening and paying attention. The boy worked on this project for months. It was not meant to be a month's project, but then I started trading hot glue sticks for assignments – and it was contagious. The other kids



PHOTO COURTESY ERIN BUTLER

Erin Butler poses at school with her dog, Bellatrix (or Bella). On her first day as a teacher in 2016, Butler adopted Bella and took Bella with her to set up her new classroom that same day.

started joining in," Butler said.

Using glue sticks as a makeshift currency for completing assignments, the class used recycled cardboard and other scrap materials during "tinker time," a creative outlet that extended past that book's project. Although that class has since graduated, Butler keeps projects displayed in her classroom.

"This year, my kids are not so into cardboard, but they're very into drawing and designing. Okay, so now that's the new thing. We read Percy Jackson last week, and so they started drawing new Greek gods, and we have posters everywhere," said Butler.

The students from that "tinkering" class, now high schoolers, recently returned to Gaithersburg Middle School to mentor current middle school students in the Bridge Program and help prepare them for the transition to high school.

Teaching special education requires Butler to wear many hats – for example interpreting the legal language in the specialized learning plans for students with disabilities.

Butler said many life experiences converged to set her on this path, including mentoring her younger brother with autism, teaching dance classes and coaching teams in national competitions. Growing up, she wanted to be an engineer, until she found

the special education program as an undergraduate student.

Butler was inspired by some of her own teachers, including a fourth-grade teacher who took a hands-on approach to teaching STEM. She has almost finished her master's in educational leadership and aspires to earn a doctorate degree in educational policy, which she would use the \$25,000 in prize money toward, she said.

"It is a teacher's nature to not want the spotlight or to be recognized, because that's not why we're here," Butler said. "We're here to serve and support students, not for a popularity contest. A lot of us don't want to be recognized, but we have to, in order to get the support our students need."

Voting for the contest, which begins March 25 and continues weekly, is open to anyone through the QR code or at [americasfavteacher.org/2024/erin-butler](http://americasfavteacher.org/2024/erin-butler).



## Ukulele Ladies Perform



PHOTO BY LISA MEYER

From left, JoEllen Sarff, Li'l Dan Celdran, Tamara Alexander, Kathy Bartolomeo and Mary Moien

Members of the Ukulele Ladies performed for students of Greenbelt Nursery School on Tuesday, March 12 in celebration of St. Patrick's Day. The program included Irish songs such as I'm Looking over a Four-Leaf Clover and Molly Malone, plus age-appropriate

fingerplays and poems. The musicians wore costumes such as green hats and glasses and used cockle shells, shamrocks and pictures of sea creatures and leprechauns in their performance which prompted questions and comments from the young audi-

ence. Children were fascinated by the various sights and sounds of the ukuleles, especially Tamara's bass ukulele which intrigued the listeners with its very low sounds. As emcee Mary Moien reminded the attendees, everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day.



PHOTO BY KEN LOO

Four eagles, one mature and three young, soar over Greenbelt.