

# TOGETHER

Winter 2025

## Listening, Learning and Leading: Tom Putnam's First 100 Days at BOCES 2

by Amanda Dedie

Dr. Thomas Putnam always knew he wanted to be an educator. Growing up in Burnt Hills, NY, he saw firsthand how teachers could create a safe, engaging environment where students could thrive.

His first and greatest teacher, his mother, Mary Ellen Putnam, instilled in him the values of compassion, listening and problem-solving — qualities that continue to shape his leadership today.

Putnam earned his bachelor's degree from SUNY Cortland, a master's in curriculum development and instructional technologies from University at Albany - SUNY, and a doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Rochester. Over two decades, he progressed from a fifth grade teacher to principal, then to superintendent of Penfield Central School District. Even at this level of his career, he found himself asking, "What's next?"

That question led him to BOCES 2. Long before his predecessor, BOCES 2 District Superintendent Jo Anne Antonacci, announced



her retirement, Putnam recognized the vital role BOCES 2 plays in supporting school districts. When the opportunity to lead this BOCES arose, he saw it as a way to apply his experience in new ways, helping shape education on a broader scale.

### A New Perspective on Leadership

Transitioning from a K-12 district superintendent to leading BOCES 2 has been an eye-opening experience for Putnam. Unlike a traditional school district, the BOCES is a network of specialized programs spread across multiple campuses and nine component districts. Each service operates with unique priorities and challenges.

"One of my goals is bringing people together," Putnam said. "We have a decentralized structure, and we often feel siloed. I want to build bridges between our departments, strengthen our shared mission, and ensure that everyone—from staff to students—feels connected and supported."

A key part of that mission is fostering open, two-way communication with component districts. Putnam meets regularly with district superintendents and board members to ensure transparency and collaboration. He sees the

BOCES model as a "thought partner," working alongside districts to navigate challenges, advocate for their needs and support their long-term goals.

### Navigating Challenges and Opportunities

Like any educational institution, BOCES 2 faces challenges, particularly around funding. District budgets are closely tied to the New York State education budget, which can create constraints. Putnam stresses the importance of strategic planning and adaptability, ensuring that programs evolve to meet student and community needs while remaining financially sustainable.

"It can't be business as usual," Putnam explained. "We must ask: Are we building and updating programs in ways that serve our students? Are we communicating the 'why' behind program costs? Are we staffing effectively to support learning?"

He sees these challenges as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles. "I look at all of them with rose-colored glasses," he admitted. "This is an incredible organization with a strong team. Every challenge is an opportunity to grow and improve."

*(continued on p. 3)*





# BOCES 2 Hosts Panel Discussion on STEM Careers

by Beth Nash

BOCES 2 hosted a panel discussion on careers in STEM on Jan. 24. Held in the Professional Development Center, the event brought together leadership from BOCES 2, Monroe One BOCES, the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce, and We Work For Health (WWFH).

“Workforce Readiness: Career Paths in STEM” featured Talent Strategy Partner for the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce Melanie Russo, Assistant Principal of Eastern Monroe Career Center (EMCC) Barry Tierney, BOCES 2 Director of the Center for Workforce Development Shawna Gareau-Kurtz and WWFH representative MarySol Rodriguez. Assemblyman Josh Jensen led the Q&A session with panel members from each organization, discussing the current and future workforce needs of Monroe County; efforts to support incoming STEM professionals and students interested in STEM careers; and programming offered to local students to prepare them for the workforce.

“I am honored to support this event that highlights how programs like those offered by BOCES are bridging critical workforce development gaps,” said Jensen (R, C-Greece). “Programs like BOCES are invaluable in preparing students for real-world opportunities, equipping them with the skills and training needed to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market.”

BOCES 2 students attended the event, where they learned that WWFH awarded the Monroe 2-Orleans Educational Foundation a \$5,000 STEM Talent Pipeline grant to support students in their STEM career and technical education programming. “STEM education goes beyond the classroom — it’s about fostering curiosity and resilience in our students,” said Gareau-Kurtz. “By engaging students with applied learning experiences and real-world applications, we’re opening doors to careers that will define the next generation and ensuring that students have the confidence to step through those doors. This grant will support these efforts and help students become successful members of the workforce.”

WWFH is a coalition of partners that collaborates with biopharmaceutical research companies, vaccine manufacturers, their employees, and local businesses to improve the health and well-being of patients. “WWFH’s STEM Talent Pipeline program was created to support existing and developing STEM initiatives nationwide,” said Rodriguez. “WWFH believes it’s critical for the innovation industry to actively support students’ passion for learning. Investments in STEM education are key to developing the next generation of STEM professionals. WWFH supports BOCES 2 and their commitment to offering students quality STEM education opportunities.”



*(continued from cover)*

# Listening, Learning and Leading: Tom Putnam's First 100 Days at BOCES 2

## Looking Forward

In his first 100 days, Putnam prioritized visiting every department and program to gain firsthand insight into the work being done. He has found that BOCES 2's greatest strength lies in its people—the educators, service providers and support staff who dedicate themselves to serving a diverse student population.

"Our students come from different backgrounds, with different strengths and needs," he said. "That's why our staff must be just as diverse and adaptable. Every time I visit a program, I see how we're uniquely positioned to support students in ways that traditional districts may not be able to."

As he looks to the future, Putnam remains focused on building connections, fostering innovation and ensuring that BOCES 2 remains a leader in educational services. He hopes that his tenure will be defined by approachability, thoughtful leadership and a commitment to collaboration.

"I hope people will say I truly care about this organization and the individuals within it," he said. "That I am open to listening, willing to answer questions, and dedicated to helping our staff, students and districts succeed."

Outside of work, Putnam enjoys spending time with his wife and three children. And for those wondering, after working in four pizza places across three states, he's still on the hunt for the best New York-style fold-over thin crust pizza in the area — suggestions are welcome!



## Thank You to Educational Foundation Sponsors

by Steve Dawe

The 2024 Monroe 2-Orleans Educational Foundation Celebration held on Nov. 16 was another huge fundraising success. Nearly 200 people attended the event that featured dinner, an online silent auction, a live auction and raffle. Two former Make All the Difference Scholarship recipients spoke: Riley Ball, a 2021 BOCES 2 CTE graduate, and Kiya Lupisella, a 2024 BOCES 2 CTE graduate. Attendees heard about the students' experiences and how scholarships helped them further their academic and career aspirations. The Foundation would like to thank this year's sponsors for their support:



From left, Joe Kelly, Riley Ball, Kiya Lupisella and Jo Anne Antonacci.

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## Leaving a Legacy

by Chris Klem

There's a wonderful new addition to the educational space at the Early Childhood Education Center (ECLC) — a handcrafted portable library, made with love by students in the Professional and Technical Prep (PTP) program. Named after longtime BOCES 2 Assistive Technology Specialist Leigh Nenni, "Leigh's Library" is available to students and their families, and it houses a variety of favorite books chosen for preschool readers.

The library, built by PTP students Brandon, Frederick, Joey and Josh with help from Career and Technical Education Teacher Matt Ackerman and Paraprofessional Doug Van Roo, features wheels and a waterproof top for easy mobility and lasting durability. A student-

engraved copper plate announcing "Made by PTP students 2025" is placed in a frame made from exotic purpleheart wood attached to the structure.

"We wanted to honor Leigh for her unwavering commitment to preschool and promotion of literacy over the years," said Supervisor of Special Education Heather Malone. Nenni is retiring this year after working for BOCES 2 for more than 35 years.

Leigh's Library is an especially appropriate tribute for Nenni, who helped establish the assistive technology department and created the multimillion-dollar Lending Loan Library to assist BOCES 2 districts with accessing educational assistive technologies.



PTP students unveil the new library unit at ECLC.



A proud Leigh Nenni with her namesake library.



The first of many young readers who will enjoy the new collection adds a book to Leigh's Library.

## Language Should Not Be a Barrier

by Chris Klem

Across New York State, there has been a growing need for more varied, interesting and inclusive student reading materials in languages other than English (LOTE). After a year of building partnerships with 24 other NY BOCES and Big 5 school districts, BOCES 2 School Library Systems (SLS) has led the way to a solution, with the launch of a new NY Reads LOTE Collection in Sora. Students in K-12 and their teachers in participating districts now have 24/7 access to more than 1,500 popular titles in 20 languages.

Readers at the elementary or secondary levels can find high-interest series, like Harry Potter, Wings of Fire, Wimpy Kid, and Dog Man in languages ranging from Albanian, Arabic and Chinese to Russian, Spanish and Ukrainian. Teachers can offer a selection of titles used in required NYS curricula to their LOTE learners. Each title includes all the familiar Sora accessibility features, like Text Appearance, Pronunciation, Read to Me and Definitions.



"Within the first two weeks, we've already seen 57 check-outs in our districts alone," said SLS Coordinator Jim Belair, who was the project lead on the new initiative. "As our teachers, librarians and students become familiar with the resource, we expect usage to grow exponentially."

Currently, there are more than 1,100 LOTE students in BOCES 2 districts. As their usage of the collection increases, the number of available titles will grow, too. Additional copies can be purchased if needed, and users are encouraged to recommend new titles for consideration. Plus, each school district can customize their own collections.

"Last week, I was helping one of our librarians and her student navigate the collection over the phone," Belair said, "I could hear sounds of happiness and delight as the student explored the available books. We're hoping that delight is multiplied as more young readers discover the collection."



# Communications Wins 20 NYSPRA Awards

Members of the BOCES 2 Office of Communications were selected as winners in the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA) Communication Awards. The group won a total of 20 awards this year.

“I am incredibly proud of our remarkable team,” said BOCES 2 Communication Manager Steve Dawe. “Their relentless dedication, creativity and attention to detail set a high standard. To see their efforts recognized by experts in our field reinforces our belief in the work we do on behalf of our districts and our BOCES.”

Award winners include Assistant Communications Manager Jennifer Merkel; Communications Specialists Amanda Dedie, Christine Klem, Danielle Lorenzo, Nicole Mauro, Beth Nash, Abbey Noble and Gretchen Spittler; Communications Support Specialists Jada Atwood and Ashley Roys; and Graphic Designers Lisa Constantine and Allison Mason. Many of the publications that were honored in other school districts across the state were produced with the help of BOCES 2 Printing and Graphics Services.

NYSPRA accepts submissions in 13 distinct categories, and the entries are judged by communication professionals across the country. In 2024, 430 entries were received, with approximately 35% receiving awards. There are three levels of distinction: Excellence is the highest, followed by Honor and Merit, respectively.

The winning submissions and the **BOCES 2** staff involved are:

## Budget Newsletter

- *Excellence*, The Chronicle – Budget Issue (Kendall), **Amanda Dedie** and **Allison Mason**

## Community Newsletter

- *Excellence*, The Chronicle (Kendall), **Amanda Dedie** and **Allison Mason**
- *Honor*, Gates Chili CSD District Newsletter (Gates Chili), **Abbey Noble**, **Ashley Roys**, **Lisa Constantine**; Iva Petrosino, APR, Director of Communications

## Excellence in Writing

- *Honor*, Behind the Scenes in Preschool (BOCES 2), **Christine Klem**
- *Honor*, Byron-Bergen Drama Club Breathes New Life into a Tale as Old as Time (Byron-Bergen), **Gretchen Spittler**
- *Honor*, Staff Spotlight: From Big Rigs to Big Yellow Buses (Gates Chili), **Abbey Noble**
- *Merit*, A Fruitful Pair: CTE and Cornell Cooperative Extension (BOCES 2), **Jennifer Merkel**
- *Merit*, Byron-Bergen Basketball Coach Makes Section V History (Byron-Bergen), **Gretchen Spittler**
- *Merit*, Decker is Kendall's First Master Teacher (Kendall), **Beth Nash**

## Photograph

- *Excellence*, Roaring with Excitement (Kendall), **Amanda Dedie**
- *Honor*, Field Day Delights (East Rochester), **Danielle Lorenzo**
- *Honor*, Pre-K Students Turn 100? (East Rochester), **Danielle Lorenzo**
- *Honor*, A Warm Welcome (Kendall), **Amanda Dedie**
- *Merit*, Under Pressure (BOCES 2), **Jennifer Merkel**
- *Merit*, Hands-on Learning in Progress (Holley), **Nicole Mauro**
- *Merit*, Students Construct Barn (Holley), **Beth Nash**

## Poster

- *Excellence*, Cybersecurity Awareness (Gates Chili), **Jada Atwood**

## Social Media

- *Merit*, East Rochester Union Free School District Inside the Classroom Facebook Reels (East Rochester), **Danielle Lorenzo**

## Strategic Campaign

- *Excellence*, Phishing Awareness (Gates Chili), **Jada Atwood**

## Video

- *Honor*, Cadet Cornerstones (Hilton), **Amanda Dedie**



Winning photo by Amanda Dedie, Excellence



Winning photo by Danielle Lorenzo, Honor



Winning photo by Beth Nash, Merit



Winning photo by Amanda Dedie, Honor



Winning photo by Danielle Lorenzo, Honor



Winning photo by Jennifer Merkel, Merit



Winning photo by Nicole Mauro, Merit



# Celebrating You Award Recipients

Staff reaching milestones of 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years of service were recognized at our annual Celebrating You employee recognition event on Dec. 4 in the Professional Development Center. This year, we honored 75 employees who have achieved a combined 1,130 years of service. The event also featured appetizers and desserts prepared by students in the Career and Technical Education culinary programs.



**10 years of service:** Front row, from left, Tina Bonfiglio, Brianna Fox, Michelle Gallinger, Julie Frenz, Wendy Klapp, Beth Nash, Carol Lupisella and Kimberly Spagnola. Back row, from left, David Liesegang, Karen McJury, Sara Missell, Darlene Mikulski, Dimitrios Kokkinis, Margarita Rodeman, Ellen Rossetti and Robert Williams.

**Not pictured:** Carol Beaty, Allison Boehm, Megan Carroll, Jacqueline Chase, Thomas Cliff, Richard Colosi, Eric Driscoll, Nicole Gaudu, Catherine Jackson, Heather Malone, Thomas Merring, Megan Miller, Julie Olix, Casey Olson, Lori Olson, Jean Rowley, Amy Sassenhausen, David Sedore and Julie Wilson.



**15 years of service:** Front row, from left, Jacqueline Kurcoba, Maria Siracusa and Rebecca Spence. Back row, from left, Michael May and Heather Lee.

**Not pictured:** Marilyn Bohan, Laura Cadregari, Shay Dettorre, Gina Gates, Inis Mahmutspahic, Tamra Maier, Darlene McKee, Lisa Palumbo, Deborah Parker, Melissa Pound, Mark Straub, Amy Jean Sweeney, Paul Valenti and Martha Willis.



**20 years of service:** Front row, from left, Linda Crist, Alicia Granville and Marcia Podgers. Back row, from left, Brandilyn-Kelly Steves, Richard Muscarella and Corinne Smith.

**Not pictured:** Michael Auble, Thomas Carpenter, Sandra Loveridge, Danielle Manetta, David Shalke and Brian Walczak.



**25 years of service:** From left, Donald Messmer, Tanya Metras and Michael Strassenburgh.

**Not pictured:** Lien Dang and Regina Rollins.

**30 years of service:**  
Not pictured: John Abbott and Lynda VanCoske-Levine.



**35 years of service:** From left, Sherri Harrington and Rhonda Fauci.



## More Than Words

### Communications Leader Dawe Honored with Crystal Apple Award

by Jennifer Merkel

Excellence in leadership isn't about being in the spotlight; it's about making others shine.

Since becoming the BOCES 2 communications manager in 2012, Steve Dawe has quietly shaped the success of the Office of Communications. At the core of the

department's reputation for reliability, creativity and high quality is Dawe's leadership. His contributions are quiet no longer, as he was honored as the 2024 Crystal Apple winner.

"Steve's leadership style is centered around trust, patience, a genuine understanding of each individual, mentorship, open-mindedness, humor and a true desire to see everyone succeed," said BOCES 2 Communications Specialist Chris Klem.

Dawe is intertwined into the fabric of BOCES 2 while flying under the radar. He leads his skilled team, coordinates organizational events, manages internal and external messaging, mentors staff and ensures smooth operations behind the scenes to support the mission and values of the organization.

"Steve's dedication, humor and ability to lead with kindness have created an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered," said BOCES 2 Graphic Designer Betsy Martin.

In addition to leading his team, Dawe plays a critical role in supporting component districts and superintendents. During crises, he is readily available and leverages his decades of media experience to provide insight and recommendations, serving as a level-headed navigator during difficult times.

Dawe received heartfelt nominations from colleagues, long-time employees and newer staff members. He also received nominations from former team members who now lead communications efforts across the region, a testament to his mentorship.

"There is a powerful and interconnected local ecosystem of motivated, well-equipped school communicators in districts across the area—and Steve is the reason," said Lindsey Reddig, a department alumna and the current Fairport Central School District communication specialist and community liaison.

Whether it's expertly juggling a multitude of tasks, building a supportive culture, mentoring the next generation of professionals or guiding districts through challenging times, Dawe's contributions have made a lasting impact on individuals, both professionally and personally.



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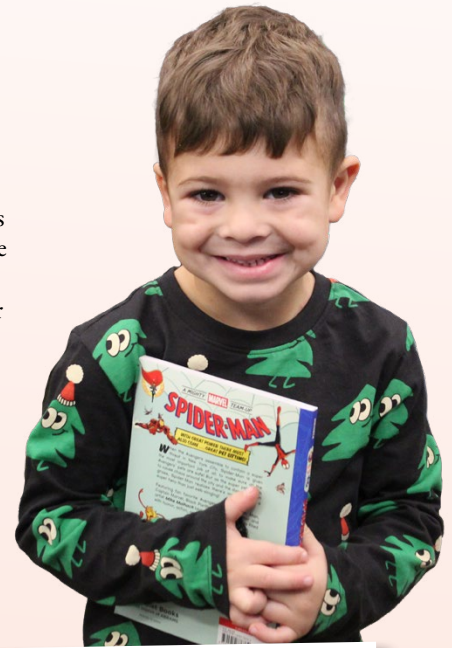


# A Beloved Tradition: the SEPTO Holiday Celebration

by Chris Klem

This year's Holiday Celebration, presented by SEPTO in partnership with the Rochester West Central Kiwanis, made wonderful lasting memories for many BOCES 2 families and friends. More than 180 folks attended, with approximately 20 Kiwanians, 18 SEPTO volunteers, and five BOCES staff members at the event. Festivities were expanded from the usual breakfast, music, and a visit with Santa, to opportunities to learn and complete activities about Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Winter Solstice. The Scholastic book fair and holiday decoration sale were also popular stops for families.

A special thanks to the talented students in the Community and Career Readiness Program, Professional and Technical Prep Program, and the Career Exploration Center for making and donating the beautiful seasonal items that were sold to benefit SEPTO. The morning was filled with lots of smiles, laughter and the best kind of fun!





# Transition Students' Musical Talents on Display in Holiday Cabaret

by Beth Nash

BOCES 2 students in the Transition programs at Roberts Wesleyan University and Village Plaza hosted a Holiday Cabaret on Dec. 6 at the college. Family and friends were invited to the event, which consisted of more than 20 vocal and instrumental performances. All kinds of music, from holiday tunes to pop songs, were performed. Students performed solos, or in duets, trios and small groups. BOCES 2 Music Therapist Chris Gold accompanied many student performances, along with his interns, Courtney Grey and Baleigh McClaren. Audience response was positive and enthusiastic, with many spectators nodding, dancing or clapping along to the music.

A slideshow of student artwork by Anna Weider was also shown at intermission.

This event did a wonderful job of highlighting the artistic and musical talents of students!



# Project SEARCH Spreads Joy for the Holidays

by Chris Klem

Project SEARCH interns were busy making the holidays brighter and happier for others! They gave back to their community by bell ringing for the Salvation Army, and donating holiday cards and toiletry items to local soldiers who were deployed during the holidays. After all their hard work, they ended the season with some well-deserved festivities at their holiday work party.



# CTE Honors 2024 NTHS Inductees

by Ashley Roys

Fifty-four students were honored for their career and technical education (CTE) achievements during the BOCES 2 CTE National Technical Honor Society (NTHS) Induction Ceremony on Nov. 14.

As members of NTHS, students are empowered and developed in areas essential to their success in the future, known as the Core 4 Objectives: Career Development, Leadership, Service and Recognition.

Chapter criteria includes: an 85% or above average in their CTE program; an excellent attendance record; a high standard of personal conduct in their home school and at CTE; a CTE teacher recommendation; and being on track to complete both their CTE program and graduate from high school at the end of the second year of their CTE program.

## The 2024 CTE NTHS Inductees are:

### Brockport

Bella Bruno (Nurse Assisting and Associated Health Careers), Tyler Curtis (Computer Technology), Kyle Felice (Carpentry), Hailey Miller (Cosmetology), Grace Rowley (Nurse Assisting and Associated Health Careers), Noah Ryan (Exercise Science), Ryan Williams (Heavy Equipment Operation and Maintenance), Chloe Wilson (Dental Assisting)

### Churchville-Chili

Ryan Amico (Carpentry), Alexi Finnigan (Welding), Quinlan Hickey (Carpentry), George Gaffney (Medical Laboratory Assisting and Phlebotomy), Payal Gajmer (Dental Assisting), Nathanael George (Heavy Equipment Operation and Maintenance), Natalie Lindsay (Cosmetology), Calyse Russell (Medical Laboratory Assisting and Phlebotomy), Paul Sesnie (Residential and Commercial Electrical), Michael St. Denis (Carpentry), Emily Stanes (Cosmetology), Alexander Wojtylak (Welding)

### Gates Chili

Mark Leistman II (Residential and Commercial Electrical), Luna Luan (Computer Technology), Emma Pachla (Cosmetology), Elijah Torres (Welding), Ariel Travis (Criminal Justice)

### Greece

Carrie Kurtz (Cosmetology), Henry Laraby (Culinary Arts), Giovanni Maldonado (HVAC), Josia Pritchett (Residential and Commercial Electrical), Luciana Ramos (Cosmetology), Nina Tomlinson (Cosmetology)

### Hilton

Ashlee Ahern (Cosmetology), Ariyanna Contrino (Cosmetology), Nicholas Coon (Heavy Equipment Operation and Maintenance), Jonathan Cudzilo (Heavy Equipment Operation and Maintenance), Kamryn Diabo (Dental Assisting), Nicholas Green (Carpentry), Renee Jorgensen (Cosmetology), Aiden Keable (Heavy Equipment Operation and Maintenance), Taylor Kowalski (Cosmetology), Hailey McConnell (Exercise Science), Adam Root (Culinary Arts), Melana Tobin (Dental Assisting)

### Kendall

Layla Rasmusson (Child and Family Development)

### Spencerport

Lia Bivone (Cosmetology), Jamison Brown (Residential and Commercial Electrical), Audrey Gelfuso (Criminal Justice), James Lewis (Advanced Manufacturing), Caz Lupiani (HVAC), Erin Newton (Digital and Visual Communication), Matthew Ryan (Criminal Justice), Michael Soto (Carpentry), Savannah Wehner (Medical Laboratory Assisting and Phlebotomy)

### Wheatland-Chili

Julia Burkhardt (Cosmetology)

***Congratulations  
to all inductees!***





# Celebrating the Season at Westview

by Chris Klem

A favorite tradition for students is the **Holiday Shop at Westview**. Decorated with lights and tinsel, and filled with donated gifts appropriate for all ages, the Holiday Shop is a special destination. Each student browsed the shop and chose thoughtful gifts for all their family members. This year, students had their gifts expertly wrapped by staff volunteers. The Holiday Shop was coordinated by Santa's Elves (aka Transition Specialists Mica Venturo and Sarah Vollmer). Such a great idea for spreading holiday cheer!

Westview also recognized outstanding students in December with their **Pancake Breakfast Celebration**. Teachers and staff made pancakes with maple syrup and other delicious breakfast treats and served them to students who achieved perfect attendance and honor roll during the first half of the school year. These students set an example for their peers, showing the results of hard work and dedication to reaching academic and attendance goals. Celebrations like this create positive memories for students that reinforce the Westview principle that everyone belongs and all are respected at the school.



## Sharing Smiles with Little Ones

by Chris Klem

Santa's Helpers from the high school Communications & Social Skills (CaSS) class visited young learners in the 12:1:2 class at TJ Connor Elementary School in December. Acting as fantastic role models, they made presents for the younger students and read them festive holiday books. These wonderful CaSS students demonstrate kindness and patience in mentoring the next generation!



**Condolences to:** The family of **Ruth Poore** (retiree).

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## Mission

We provide quality, cost-effective educational services in partnership with school districts and the community in a manner that supports excellence and equity for all learners. We are committed to customer satisfaction, continuous improvement, and personal and professional growth.

## Vision

Monroe 2–Orleans BOCES is the educational partner of choice. We strive for continuous improvement in serving the diverse needs of our community, helping all students achieve their full potential.

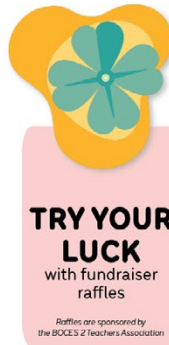
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# 2025 BOCES 2 CTE SKILLSUSA CRAFT AND VENDOR SHOW FUNDRAISER

**Saturday, March 22, 2025 • 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**  
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