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Love, time and patience: CASAs advocate for children in Wells County

By SYDNEY KENT
“This program would not happen without the volunteers,” Ginny Vogel said with a hand firmly over her heart. “They give so much love, time, and patience. They give so much of themselves for the kids they work with — it is really about their passion for youth in our county that this program is up and running.”
Vogel, the director of Wells County CASA, is referencing the volunteers who make up the program. A ‘CASA’ is a Court Appointed Special Advocate.
In chapters of CASA across the country, volunteers go through specific training before being sworn into the court. CASAs are then assigned to “Child in Need of Services” — or CHINS, for short — cases going through the court system. A child

may fall into this category after a report of neglect or abuse.
CASAs learn more about the child and who is involved in the child’s life, engage with people in the case, and make recommendations from this information. A CASA is there to communicate with the court what the child wants, as well as what they believe to be in the best interest of that child.
Vogel’s passion for serving children was a critical component of bringing the program to the county. She said that Judge Kenton Kiracofe shared a similar passion. The two worked together to bring the dream to fruition.
The Wells County CASA program became nationally certified in August 2020. The first five volunteers, along with Vogel, were sworn in four months later. Vogel was



Several of the 19 Wells County CASA volunteers pose with Vogel and the Wells Circuit Court Judge during the event to honor Vogel as volunteer of the year in November. Pictured from left to right are Lynne Niermeyer, Eric Blessing, Pam Blessing, Judge Kenton Kiracofe, Ginny Vogel, and Sherry Barnes. (Photo by Sydney Kent)

recognized for her outstanding efforts in November when she was named Volunteer of the Year.
Care And Special Attention

Lynne Niermeyer, a retired educator of over 34 years, said she first learned about the program during a conversation with
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Students of the Creative Arts Dance Company took a curtain call at the completion of their showcase performance Saturday afternoon at the Auditorium at 428 S. Oak St. (Photos by Barbara Barbieri)

Creative Arts Council holds annual Spring Showcase

By BARBARA BARBIERI
Students who take instruction in all levels of ballet, creative movement and tap dancing presented a Spring Showcase of their talents this past weekend at the Auditorium, 428 S. Oak St. in Bluffton.
Students from the modern dance classes included Izzi Curlless, Sophia Meeks, Ella Wheeler, Sephora Alfreus, Rayne Smith, Avery King and Camille Surbaugh.
Tap dancers included Jonah Bultemeier, Alexander Fuhrmann, Annabelle Fuhrmann, Ellie Surbaugh and Jude Wirgau while from the Foundations of Dance class the dancers were Jesse Bangs, Lia Kay Bangs and Maya Cerna.
The ballet students presented “Sleeping Beauty” and the cast included: Garland Waltz: Naomi Dailey, Madison Grover, Rayne Smith, Violetta Tarasova, Emma Wirgau, Sarah McFarren, Alexander Fuhrmann, Livia Daugherty, Jordyn Towne, Gianna Wirgau and Jonah Bultemeier.
Carabosse: Izzi Curlless; Queen: Emily Maggard; Fairies: Madison Grover, Violetta Taraova, Emma Wirgau, Naomi Dailey, Rayne Smith and Sophia Meeks.
White Sprites included Lexlie Anderson, Makayla Christman, Annabelle Fuhmann, Avery King, Clara Kipfer and Junia Kay Schnaars while Carabosse; Sprites were Katherine Wisenbaker, Elayna Marcuccilli and Delcie Roop.
Aurora was danced by Ella Wheeler and Prince Charming was portrayed by Grace Meeks. Blue birds included Lexie Anderson, Makayla Christman, Annabelle Fuhmann, Avery King, Clara Kipfer and Junia Kay



Creative Arts Executive Director and ballet instructor Janiece Lipsey, at left, honors Ella Wheeler as the only graduating senior from the Ballet School this year after taking lessons for 15 years.

Schnaars. The White Cat was Jordyn Towne and Puss in Boots was Jonah Bultemeier. Others included Sarah McFarren as Little Red Riding Hood, Alexander Fuhrmann as the Wolf, Livia Daugherty as Jack and Gianna Wirgau as Jill.
Instructors for the students were Davina Schnaars, Jeni Meeks, Kelly McCormick Bangs and Janiece Lipsey.
Sponsors for the showcase included: Emshwiller & Emshwiller, Erin Daugherty State Farm, W & W Anesthesia Associates, Family Ford of Bluffton, Daniel’s Jewelers Inc. and AdamsWells Internet.
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IU protests, police action draw criticism, defense

Governor tells students to ‘play by the rules’

By MARISSA MEADOR AND NIKI KELLY
Indiana Capital Chronicle
Tension between police and student protesters enveloped Indiana University’s Bloomington campus in recent days as arrests mounted along with distrust in IU leadership after a change to long-standing policy the day before the initial protest.
Gov. Eric Holcomb defended police action, in which Indiana State Police have taken a lead role, while Democrats in the legislature called out the administration for trampling on free speech rights.
“We are concerned for the safety of students, faculty and staff and for their ongoing rights to free speech. Students should be able to voice their views on campus in non-violent ways without fear of retribution. The First Amendment is one of the founding blocks to a successful democracy and this infringement on demonstration, in our opinion, is a violation of both state and federal constitutional rights,” said a statement from the Indiana Senate Democratic Caucus.

“What we are seeing on the news and hearing from firsthand accounts gives us great concern that First Amendment Rights and even personal safety could be at risk on the Indiana University Campus. While we understand this is a fluid situation we still worry about the sheer amount of police in riot gear, including snipers, called in to manage what has been reported as a peaceful protest.”
Police snipers were spotted on top of IU buildings at various times over the last four days.
The protesters disagree with continued bombing of Palestinian people across the Gaza strip and called for IU to sever financial ties with Israel. Counter-protesters supporting Israel have also been present.
IU’s actions have been highlighted in several national publications, including the New York Times and Washington Post.
‘Play by the rules’
But Holcomb told reporters Friday that the state police “will of course continue to
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Ukrainian-born Spartz votes against aid for homeland

By ISABELLA VOLMERT
Associated Press
SHERIDAN, Ind. (AP) — U.S. Rep. Victoria Spartz, the first and only Ukrainian-born member of Congress, emerged early on as a natural advocate for supporting her native country in its war with Russia. But when \$61 billion in additional support for the war effort came up for a vote in the House recently, she voted against it.
Instead she has called for better oversight of U.S. funds and opposed giving “blank checks” to the Ukrainian cause. She says U.S. border security should be a bigger priority.
That puts her more in line with conservative House Republicans and more notably with voters in her deeply conservative central Indiana congressional district. She’s locked in a tough reelection fight in the May 7 GOP primary, made all the more complicated by her public announcement more than a year ago that she wouldn’t seek another term, a decision she later reversed.
The aid package, part of a larger bill that also included assistance for Israel, Taiwan and other global hot spots, was approved by the House on April 20, the Senate on Tues-

day and signed into law by President Joe Biden on Wednesday.
Spartz said she is “kind of appalled” at the notion that her heritage should dictate support for the Ukrainian cause if she feels the money would be wasted.
“My responsibility is the protection of American people,” she said during a recent interview.
Spartz spoke at an event hosted by the Hamilton County GOP at a community center in Sheridan, Indiana, a town of a few thousand people. The event in a hall just off of the town’s main street was attended by eight of the nine GOP primary candidates, who were able to make their case to voters and county Republican officials one at a time during a meet-and-greet that also included short speeches by the candidates.
Mike Murphy, a former Indiana state representative and political commentator, said in a phone interview that funding for Ukraine isn’t much of a priority for Republican voters these days. Concern about the southern border is a greater catalyst for participation, which isn’t lost on candidates in the conservative district. Most of Spartz’s
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Outside

Sunny and warm today,
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Low 51 Low 55 Low 62
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CASA advocates

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Vogel. Her decision to join was propelled by the timing of the conversation. Though Niermeyer was approaching retirement, she was still working as an educator. There was a young girl in her school district that Niermeyer felt could have used a voice which amplified Niermeyer's passion.

Niermeyer joined the second training group in the county, accepting her first case several months later. She has since been a CASA for six families, 11 children in total. Though a CASA may choose to hold one case at a time, Niermeyer currently has three cases.

"Ginny let us know that the next time a case comes up," Niermeyer paused. "That she would have to tell the judge we were at capacity. If there was a case, I wanted any children to be represented by a CASA. I told her I would take it if another one came up."

Niermeyer said that the role of a CASA is to advocate for the best interest of the child, however, that process often involves championing that child's parents.

"There was a mother that failed a drug screen after so many clean screens," Niermeyer recounted. "She was crying in the meeting — she was disappointed in herself. The case has to take a backward step for the safety of this child. Everyone at the table went around and took turns highlighting something positive about her."

Niermeyer said that being a CASA has given her a greater purpose in her life. The experience has allowed her to stay connected to serving children in retirement. She also said the social aspect has been helpful, as well.

Niermeyer has even begun writing a book about her experience as a CASA while taking special care to protect the information of those involved. She said that Vogel's support has been incredible during her volunteering experience.

Pam Blessing, a CASA in the same training group, wholeheartedly echoed this sentiment. Blessing is a retired Medical Technologist who concluded her career at Bluffton Regional Medical Center.

"Once you get involved, you realize the need that is there," Blessing said. "That is what inspires me now —

the kids that need the help. You might think that because you are in Bluffton, there's nothing very serious going on. But being from a small town does not preclude you from the uglier parts of things like child abuse."

Blessing also said that though multiple cases have started in Wells County, the children in them have had to move to Jay County or Muncie to find an available foster home. She continues to visit the children in their respective placements.

"You want to be the one to make a difference," Blessing said. "Once it is over you're not able to reach out to them. They can reach out to you, but you don't always know how it all turns out after time has passed."

Niermeyer expressed a similar sentiment. She said she received an unexpected text that gave her joy and peace long after a case had closed. The text was from the child's mother. It read, "365 Days SOBER!"

"Take the training," Blessing said to anyone considering becoming a CASA who may be uncertain. "Baby step your way into it. Someone more seasoned will help you along. Everyone has the same nerves and jitters when you write that first court report. Ginny is there every step of the way. You'll figure this out."

More men are needed

Vogel emphasized the need for more male CASA volunteers in the courtroom. She said that over half of the children in CHINS cases are male.

"While us women do a fine job in working with these boys and young men," Vogel said. "I feel like having a male role model in their lives is something they need and could learn from. I think that they also bring a different perspective to our group."

Jeff Kohrman, a grandfather of 23 and a Wells County CASA, agreed with Vogel's assessment.

"Last week, I was at a court hearing," Kohrman recounted. "It was me, the judge and about 15 ladies. That shows the disparity of the mix. There is a definite need for men to be involved in the CASA program. It is not a sacrifice or another obligation. It is fulfilling to make a big difference in the life of a little one."

Kohrman said the most rewarding

aspect has been witnessing a positive outcome to a case, whether that be reunification, adoption, or permanency with a foster family.

"It's knowing these children are in a safe place," Kohrman continued. "They are being nurtured (and) they are being loved and cared about. When you interact with them — they are innocence personified. It is our responsibility as adults to help take care of that part of our world that needs help and is defenseless in some ways. Children to me are such a vital part of our society. I love my grandkids and I thought — this is something I can help someone else's child with. That's why I do it."

Where CASA began

It was the plight of a voiceless three-year-old girl who sustained injuries — believed to be from child abuse — that ultimately gave birth to the CASA movement. As the late Seattle Juvenile Judge David W. Soukup looked around the courtroom, he did not see anyone there to represent her. The decision to permanently alter the trajectory of her life, without enough information, weighed heavily on him.

"There is no one else in that courtroom whose only function in that case is to provide a recommendation based on the child's needs," Soukup said in a video on the organization's website. "Everyone else has a role. No one else can do that but a volunteer CASA or a guardian ad litem."

Soukup also became a CASA after he retired, noting that it was one of the most rewarding experiences of his life.

Wells County CASAs have the option to meet weekly, as well as at a regular monthly luncheon. During that time, Vogel said the group can share experiences, ask for advice, and talk about things like compassion fatigue. During this time, CASAs also learn from a keynote speaker. The monthly meetings count towards the 12 hours of training that are required annually for a CASA.

Anyone with an interest in becoming a CASA volunteer or learning more information about the program should contact Director Ginny Vogel at 260-273-9877 or by email at ginnyvogel24@gmail.com.

sydney@news-banner.com

Weather

Tuesday, April 30, 2024

(24-hour observations at 10:11 p.m. Monday)
High: 75; Low: 63; Precipitation: 1.53 inches rain
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 3.51 feet at 8:45 p.m. Monday

Wells County forecast

Today: Mostly sunny, with a high near 73. Northwest wind 5 to 10 mph.

Tonight: Mostly clear, with a low around 51. Northwest wind around 5 mph becoming south after midnight.

Wednesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 78. Southwest wind 5 to 10 mph.

Wednesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 55. West wind around 5 mph becoming east after midnight.

Thursday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 82.

Thursday Night: A 20% chance of showers after 2 a.m. Partly cloudy, with a low around 62.

Friday: A chance of showers, with thunderstorms also possible after 2 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 76. Chance of precipitation is 50%.

Spartz

(Continued from Page 1)

opponents for the 5th district seat have said protecting the U.S.-Mexico border should be a bigger priority than sending money to Ukraine.

Border security has been hammered in the campaign by state Rep. Chuck Goodrich, the most well-funded of Spartz's eight challengers. He has attacked Spartz on her original support to Ukraine, saying she puts "Ukraine first."

Goodrich, who attended the Sheridan event, acknowledged that Indiana is far from Mexico but said illegal drugs such as fentanyl enter the U.S. through the southern border and pose a threat deep in the heartland.

Spartz beat a crowded 2020 primary field, winning nearly 40% of the vote and receiving former President Donald Trump's general election endorsement. She ran unopposed in the 2022 primary.

Spartz made things harder for herself when she announced in early 2023 that she would not run again, citing fatigue with Washington politics and her desire to spend more time with her family. She also threatened to resign if the national debt was not addressed.

Campaign finance reports show Spartz trailing Goodrich in campaign funds, in part because Goodrich has put up \$2.6 million of his own money. Goodrich, who represents the wealthy Indianapolis suburb of Hamilton County in the state legislature, outspent Spartz by \$1.9 million in the first three months of 2024 and has loaned his campaign a total of \$4.6 million, according to reports.

Spartz entered the final weeks before the primary with \$134,000 of cash on hand compared to Goodrich's \$1.3 million.

IU protests draw criticism

(Continued from Page 1)

do their job. And that is to serve and protect all and make sure that protests can occur and the freedom to speak out for and against issues that may be emotional in nature. But there will be law and order."

"We can peacefully protest and you can express your emotionally charged opinion but you're not going to infringe on other people's rights. And you're not going to deter people from getting a good education," he said.

When asked where to draw the line on police involvement during a peaceful protest he said, "The locals establish those local rules ... So I would say play by the rules like everybody else has to or they will be administered and enforced."

It is those local rules that have drawn criticism. The day before the IU Divestment Coalition began their planned protest on April 25, IU updated a longstanding policy to forbid the use of structures like tents in Dunn Meadow without prior approval. They posted the new policy to their website the morning of April 25, writing that the original policy allowed them to create an ad hoc committee to make changes to policy.

The original policy, which was created in 1969 and allowed temporary structures in Dunn Meadow during the day without approval, recommended the provost create a committee with a member of the IU Student Association, the Bloomington Faculty Council and a member appointed by the provost to advise policy changes and review denials of permission for overnight structures. However, IU Student Government, previously called IUSA, said the provost did not ask faculty or students to join the committee.

In an email to faculty Thursday, IU President Pamela Whitten said the last-minute policy change was made to bal-

ance safety and free speech.

"Our university must create a space for meaningful dialogue, while ensuring that our campus is safe and welcoming to all, and that peaceful protest, as many experienced today, symbolizes our steadfastness to the free expression of ideas," Whitten wrote.

After several warnings from police to remove tents on Thursday, Indiana State Police arrived to disperse the crowd. As ISP troopers pushed against the protesters, dragging people out of tents and detaining them, a large crowd of nonparticipating students and faculty looked on from the surrounding sides of the meadow. Some looked shocked and horrified, while others cheered and clapped for the arrests.

Police ultimately arrested 33 people, most of them IU students or faculty, for charges ranging from criminal trespass to resisting arrest and battery, and loaded them onto IU campus buses to the Harry Gladstein Fieldhouse. After processing the protesters, they took them to the county jail, though almost all were released that day with future court dates. Many received notices from the IU Police Department banning them from IU property for a year for allegedly trespassing in Dunn Meadow.

On Friday, faculty led a protest in front of Bryan Hall, IU's administration building. Protesters stayed overnight in tents with no police intervention, but an additional 23 people were arrested Saturday afternoon. More bans were handed out, including a student who was banned from campus for five years. Nearly all students can appeal their bans, an IU spokesman said.

Protests continued on Sunday.

Faculty disapproves

Throughout the protests, several faculty and administrators condemned the university's actions. Executive dean of the College of Arts and Sci-

ences Rick Van Kooten wrote he had expressed "deep concern" to IU leadership while some leadership at the Luddy School of Informatics, Computing and Engineering offered support to students who had received a ban from campus. Faculty at the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs overwhelmingly voted to recommend the immediate withdrawal of the new IU policy.


The overwhelming temperature on campus remains high and distrust in IU leadership seems to have sunk to an all-time low. Earlier this month, over 800 faculty voted they had no confidence in IU's president, provost and vice provost for faculty and academic affairs, citing a more than a semester of turmoil. Concerns about First Amendment violations given the last-minute policy change have been echoed by lawyers, including Josh Bleisch, an attorney for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

"To us that really raises the specter of viewpoint discrimination in this case," he said.

He said banning students from campus raise concerns that the university may be engaging in prior restraint by creating fear that students' protests won't be considered protected speech. He said the last-minute change made it nearly impossible for students to ensure their protest abided by policy.

"Practically speaking, it seems like there was no way even if the students did want to comply with policy there's no way for them to get permission before their plan was set to go off," he said.

While the events of the past few days have rattled the campus, students have continued pre-graduation festivities, popping champagne, taking photos and crowding downtown bars. As of publication, the protesters and their tents remain in Dunn Meadow.



Senior Citizens Expo

Thursday, May 9, 2024
9 am - 2 pm
Wells County 4-H Community Building
1240 4-H Road, Bluffton, IN

- **The Expo is Open to the Public**
- **There will be over 60 vendors**
- **Free Breakfast provided by Adams Health Network from 9-10 am**
- **Free Lunch provided by River Terrace Retirement Community from 11:30 am-12:30 pm**

Look for more detail in May 7th News Banner
Advertising Available - Deadline: May 2



MAY 4 - 9 a.m. - Multiple consignors. 6632 N. 500 W., Decatur. Personal property: Vehicles, jewelry (gold, silver, costume), toys, collectables, furniture, household, antiques, tools, appliances. Preview May 3, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. *Wiegmann Auctioneers*, 260-447-4311, wiegmannauctioneers.com.

BIDDING ENDS MAY 5 - (Online Only Auction) - Various consignors, sellers. Over 4,000+ older and newer comic books, sports trading cards, vintage toys including Cabbage Patch dolls, vintage toys, 45 records, much more. Preview: April 30 and May 2 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 118 E. Craig St., Ossian. Rod Fetters, sale manager, *The Steffen Group, Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

BIDDING NOW OPEN & STARTS CLOSING MAY 5 - 6 p.m. - James Koons, owner. Online only personal property auction! 100+ lots that include general household items, glassware, furniture, Samsung washer, Basset bedroom suite, solid oak table, garden items, Stihl chainsaw, Yard Machine snow blower & much more! Pick up May 6, 2-6 p.m., 808 N. Jefferson St., Ossian. *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, kjauction.com.

MAY 9 & 10 - 9 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners. Two day truck & equipment auction. Day 1 online bidding only: 100+ various skid loader attachments, tool boxes, workbenches, iron gates, chains & binders, 1 trip 40' high side shipping container w/side doors, dome shelter containers, various truck take off parts, plumbing, electrical and mechanical surplus including urinals, toilets, electrical components, more! Day 2 onsite and online bidding offering 700+ lots! 100+/- municipal units! Cars, SUV, 1/2 ton & 3/4 ton pickups, cargo & passenger vans, large group of Chevy Impalas, Tahoes & Dodge Chargers, Harley-Davidson motorcycles, dump trucks, 2012-2014 Freightliner M2106 box trucks, day cabs, sleepers, utility trucks, bucket trucks, utility & semi trailers, SUV's, pickups, 100+ various skid steer attachments, more! *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, kjauction.com.

MAY 12-MAY 19 - (Online Only Auction) - Phyllis Montgomery, Seller. Major auction of fine antiques and collectables. "An Auction of the Year." Extensive cast iron skillet collection, early candy scales, primitives, salesman samples, early rare gum dispenser, De Laval signs, beer signs, firearms, butter churns, large Westmorland glass collection, much more. Preview: May 9 and 16 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 1556 Shadow Run Trail, Bluffton. *Steffen Group*, www.steffengrp.com, 824-3006, Pat Carter, sale manager.

MAY 19 - 4 p.m. - Multiple consignors, owners. Online only consignment auction. 1,000+ lots! Furniture, oak kitchen table, large assortment of household items, tools, 100+ lots of collectible glass including Fostoria, Fenton, Candlewick, Pyrex and much more! Preview May 16, 3-5 p.m., 812 Elm Street, Decatur. Pick up May 20, 1-6 p.m. & May 21, 9 a.m.-noon. *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, kjauction.com.

MAY 21 - 6 p.m. EST - Patricia Mossburg & Joyce Shady, owners. Wells County 4H Park, 1240 4-H Road, Bluffton. Property location: 100S & 200W, Bluffton. 90+/-A, tillable & wooded land, Zoned Agricultural, Liberty Township, Wells County. To be sold in individual tracts or any combination. Tract 1: 54+/-A tillable, frontage on CR 100S. Tract 2: 12+/-A, 8+/-A tillable, 4+/-A woods, frontage on 100S & 200W. Tract 3: 24+/-A, mostly woods, 6+/-A tillable, frontage on CR 200W. *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, kjauction.com.

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