



Class of 2024
Senior Profile

ZUZIM GARCIA

Walla Walla High School senior Zuzim Garcia dreams of one day being a neurosurgeon. Zuzim has enlisted in the Army to become a combat medic. After his military service, he will enroll at Eastern Washington University with plans to transfer to the University of Washington for medical school. He's been active at Walla Walla High School during his four-year career. Zuzim is the Battalion Commander, which is the highest ranking student in the JROTC. Wa-Hi's JROTC program was recently awarded the highest rating in JROTC by earning the Honor Unit with Distinction (HUD), Gold Star. Less than 10% of all JROTC programs qualify for the HUD status.

"I appreciate all of the JROTC instructors for motivating and pushing us to meet our potential," says Garcia. "They really push you to be better and to achieve what you might think you can't achieve."

Zuzim has also been involved in Latino Club all four years in high school, serving as vice president, secretary and the social media coordinator.

"I would like to thank our Senior Army Instructor CSM (R) Anthony Marrero, Bill Erickson, the Latino Club Advisor, and Shayna Hutchens for introducing me to the ASB," said Garcia. "All these great leaders have helped me become the person I am today."



HISTORIC SIGN CRAFTED BY MAC BLEDSOE FINDS FOREVER HOME ON WA-HI'S GYM ENTRANCE WALL

The Bledsoe connection to Walla Walla began before the family ever moved to the valley. Mac Bledsoe was teaching and coaching in the Kiona-Benton School District when Class of 1983 graduate Blaine Bennett, whose father "Shorty" Bennett was a longtime friend of Mac, called to inquire about a sign for the Class of 1983 senior project. Mac had a side business at his home in Benton City making redwood signs. He jokes he was making more money in the sign business in those days than he was teaching and coaching.

Blaine Bennett, and his buddy ASB President Scott Krivoshein, asked if Mac could make a Walla Walla High School sign to mount on campus. It didn't take long for Mac to agree to take the job on. Mac didn't have much to go on for a design for the sign, so he reached out to Shorty and picked up one of his Wa-Hi hats, which donned the iconic WW letters logo. The design for the massive 12' wide by 6' high redwood sign took off from there.

Mac's son Drew, who would go on to star at quarterback for Washington State University and in the National Football League, was a 6th grader when Mac began making the sign using a sandblaster to carve out the sign's image. Drew's job was to keep the industrial sandblaster full of sand.

"Drew takes great pride in that sign because he did a lot of work with me," said Mac, who was a fixture on the offensive line for the University of Washington football team from 1964-68. "That sign was a big old hummer. I could prop one end up and Drew would lift the other end.

We'd tip it and turn it and move it so that I could do the work on it that had to be done."

Once Mac and Drew finished the sign, they loaded it into Mac's truck and drove it down to Walla Walla where it became a landmark on the campus on the corner of Fern Ave and Abbott Road for nearly 40 years. During the recent bond construction project, the sign's original location made way for the school's expanded school bus lane. This winter the historic redwood sign was permanently mounted in the new entrance to the main gym where it will remain for everyone to enjoy.

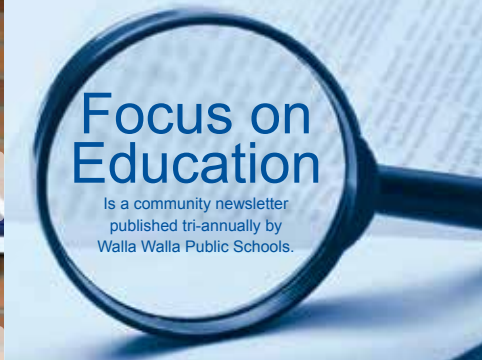
The Bledsoe family moved to Walla Walla where Mac and his wife Barbara would teach, coach and continue raising their family of two boys; Adam and Drew. Mac Bledsoe's life has always been full of adventure. He served as an officer in the Army, played professional football in the 1960s and has taught parenting classes in all 50 states. He's a natural storyteller. During a recent visit to Walla Walla High School to see the new location of his sign, he soon had a group of Wa-Hi softball players gathered around listening intently as he explained the importance of hard work and commitment to be successful in sports and life. He even remembered teaching some of the players' parents, noting specific examples of a classroom experience he had with them as if it happened just yesterday.

Mac Bledsoe is well revered in Walla Walla and the school sign he created four decades ago will be forever etched as an important chapter of Blue Devil history.

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Walla Walla Public Schools

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NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT
Walla Walla Public Schools does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following employees have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination:

- Title IX Coordinator & Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator
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364 S. Park Street
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Walla Walla Public Schools is an Equal Opportunity Employer and complies with all requirements of the ADA.

Where are they Now?

Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates

Since graduating from Walla Walla High School in 2012, US Navy Chief Petty Officer Jordan Heiser has been traveling the world serving her country. She is currently stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. When she is not on duty, Jordan keeps busy working on a Bachelor of Science degree where she is double-majoring in Software Design + Security and Web + Digital Design. Jordan coached a high school fastpitch softball travel team and enjoys making baked items for charity bake sales.



During her childhood, Jordan attended Sharpstein Elementary School and Garrison Middle School. She was a 12-season award student-athlete in volleyball, cross country, basketball and softball and was named First-Team All-Conference in softball her senior year. She also competed on travel softball and volleyball teams outside of school. Jordan participated on the JROTC Rifle Team where she advanced to the Junior Olympics. Garrison Middle School Science teacher Sue Parrish was one of her most inspirational staff members. Jordan recalls how Mrs. Parrish always had a bright, cheery demeanor and was passionate about their education. Jordan's father Bill retired from the school district where he served as a custodian and maintenance employee. Her mother Ginger is the Head Secretary at Walla Walla High School. She has a younger brother Cayd as well. Jordan plans to finish her bachelor's degree, become a contractor for the military in Information Technology and continue traveling the world.



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Focus on Education

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THANK YOU WALLA WALLA!

Outdoor Athletic and Activity Levy Improvements Ahead of Schedule

Walla Walla Public Schools is pleased to announce that many of the outdoor athletic and activity facilities projects, included in the Outdoor Capital Levy approved by voters in February, are ahead of schedule. In partnership with Hellas Construction, one of the nation's leading sports field construction companies, the district has its sights set on completing many of the improvements this summer. A number of local contractors will be tapped by Hellas to assist in the significant civil, electrical and site

CONTINUED INSIDE...



VOTER-APPROVED CAPITAL LEVY IMPROVEMENTS

- Replacing the 60-year-old tennis courts at Wa-Hi
- Installing an all-weather track at Pioneer MS
- Repairing the 43-year-old Garrison tennis courts and resurfacing the 20-year-old track
- Installing high quality artificial turf playing surfaces and field lighting at both Wa-Hi fields
- Installing outdoor lighting at the varsity baseball/softball fields
- Installing elevated bleachers with ADA access at Klicker Field
- Providing adequate access to restrooms and changing rooms
- Constructing a JROTC "Raider" obstacle course for student, first responder and community use

APPROVED

“ Superintendent’s Message ”



Walla Walla Public Schools mails the Focus on Education newsletter to the homes of residents three times per year. This publication serves as a platform to keep our community informed and connected to the school district.

We appreciate your involvement and support. The Board of Directors and I value your input and welcome your ideas as we strive to "Develop Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates."

Dr. Wade Smith
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Developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates >>

>> As we near the final chapter on another school year at Walla Walla Public Schools, it's important to reflect on our progress towards the ambitious goals set forth in our Vision 2030 Strategic Plan. With a commitment towards developing Washington's Most Sought-After Graduates, this year has been pivotal in turning this aspirational vision into reality.

One of the foundational strategies in Vision 2030 is to capitalize on partnerships with families and our community. To that end, we have implemented our new Volunteer in Person (VIP) Program, where 450 school volunteers have already logged nearly 4,000 volunteer hours across all 12 campuses. From guest speakers and field trip chaperones to classroom helpers and event support, each of these volunteers has helped enrich the lives of our students through their service.

Another key element in Vision 2030's Plan focuses our efforts towards elementary literacy. We recognize that strong foundational reading skills are essential to academic success. To that end, dozens of our elementary teachers have been working hard piloting new literacy programs and expanding

their expertise around the Science of Reading. Thanks to our school board's investment, teachers will have access to vastly improved curriculum, tools and instructional strategies to help meet our goal where every child is reading at grade level by third grade.

Additionally, our commitment to providing relevant and rigorous educational experiences that meet the needs of our diverse student body continues to pay dividends. With an eye towards ensuring every student graduates with a post-secondary plan, we continue to enhance our program pathways and opportunities. As a result, we are exposing more students to college campus visitations, career and technical experiences, job shadow opportunities and internships. Whether college, career or military bound, we are committed to ensuring WWPS students gain the critical 21st Century Skills for lifelong success.

Looking to the future, we are excited about the continued implementation of our Vision 2030 Strategic Plan as we build upon our 167-year legacy of excellence and innovation. On behalf of our School Board, faculty, students and families, thank you for an outstanding year! <<

WA-HI SITE LAYOUT

Key areas labeled: JROTC Raider Course, Field Lights, Replacement Tennis Courts, Restroom & Changing Room, Ticket, Concessions, Restroom & Changing Rooms, Safer Throwing Events Area, Field Lights, Walla Walla Track & Field, V Soccer, V Football, PE, Marching Band, Community, Visitor Bleachers w/ADA Access, Existing Klicker Track, Bleachers w/ADA Access, Parking Lot 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

DELIVERING ON OUR PROMISE

CONTINUED FROM COVER... improvements associated with the turf fields, track improvements and lighting upgrades. "Hellas' Matrix Helix Turf fields with all-natural infills, and their epiQ Tracks® surface represent the safest, fastest and most durable systems in the industry," said Superintendent Dr. Wade Smith. "Additionally, the state-of-the-art, low-spill/low-glare LED Ephesus field lighting is considered to be the most neighbor-friendly sports lighting system on the market."

At Walla Walla High School, a groundbreaking ceremony was held to mark the beginning of this historic work. Slated to be completed by early fall on the Wa-Hi campus are the 8 new tennis courts, JROTC "Raider" obstacle course, both artificial turf fields and field lights. The Klicker Track at Wa-Hi will be resurfaced and the safer track throwing events area will be developed north of the existing track. The new track at Pioneer Middle School is also scheduled to be completed by September, along with the repair and resurfacing of the Garrison Middle School track. Lights at both the softball and baseball fields at Murr Sports Park are estimated to be finished by winter. The Wa-Hi football team will play at Borleske Stadium this upcoming season for the last time

before transitioning to the Wa-Hi campus in the Fall 2025, a year prior to earlier projections. "Once we complete the bulk of the field, court and track improvements we will begin transitioning into the second phase of the projects, focusing on bleachers,

restrooms and other site improvements," noted Superintendent Smith. "Our improved construction phasing will have us wrapping up all of the voter-approved projects by fall of 2025, one full school year ahead of original schedule."

CAPITAL LEVY CONSTRUCTION SCHEDULE			
PROJECTS	SCOPE	START	FINISH
Wa-Hi Tennis	8 New Tennis Courts	June 2024	Oct 2024
Wa-Hi JROTC	JROTC "Raider" Obstacle Course	June 2024	Sept 2024
Wa-Hi Varsity Field	Artificial Turf, New Track Throwing Area, Resurface Existing Track and Install Field Lights	June 2024	Oct 2024
	Bleachers, Outbuildings and Final Site Amenities	Nov 2024	Sept 2025
Wa-Hi JV Field	Artificial Turf and Install Field Lights	June 2024	Sept 2024
	Field House Outbuilding	Nov 2024	April 2025
Pioneer MS	All-Weather Track	June 2024	Oct 2024
	Baseball/Softball Improvements	June 2025	Aug 2025
Garrison MS	Track Repair and Resurfacing	July 2024	Aug 2024
	Tennis Court Improvements	June 2025	Sept 2025
Murr Sports Park	Install Baseball/Softball Field Lights	June 2024	Oct 2024

READING WHISPERER
Melissa Carter
makes teaching reading her life's mission

Helping students learn to read is personal for district Literacy Specialist Melissa Carter. As a child growing up in Beaverton, Oregon just outside of Portland, reading was difficult for Melissa. She was a non-reader until the end of third grade. These struggles with reading made her physically ill and anxious as a child. Sometimes she would refuse to go to school and found no delight in reading for pleasure. Fortunately, her parents found her a reading specialist and she slowly improved her skills.

"College was difficult for me and reading aloud in public still gives me challenges," said Carter, who now holds two master's degrees and a bachelor's degree. "I've made it my life's mission to help students learn to read so they don't face the same challenges I have experienced throughout my life."

"Parents often ask what they can do to help their child learn to read," says Carter. "I encourage them to have back and forth conversations with their child because reading is connected to sounds. In the primary years, it's important to read with the child and ask them simple questions, point to pictures and sound out the words for the child."

Melissa Carter smiles when being referred to as the "Reading Whisperer," knowing her life's mission to help students learn to read is making a difference on campuses across the district.



CIVICS BEE CHAMPION

When Garrison Middle School 8th grader Athena Strickler learned only approximately 30 percent of Washingtonians vote on a regular basis, she decided to address the issue in her essay in the inaugural Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce Civics Bee competition. The competitors were asked to identify a problem in their community and find solutions. The Civics Bee competition also required the participants to answer questions on the foundations and principles of the Constitution. Athena says her Social Studies teacher Beth Clearman was a big help in this area by bringing students in after school to prep and quiz them on questions they might get during the live stage session at Walla Walla Community College. Athena shined in all aspects of the Civics Bee to take first-place. She walked away with \$500, a tablet computer and a guaranteed spot at the statewide Civics Bee competition in Olympia in June.

2024 GRADUATES OF DISTINCTION

- Doug Gwinn – Class of 1932
- Karen Hedine – Class of 1972
- Bill Fleenor – Class of 1969
- Tricia Copeland Lubach – Class of 1985
- Dean Lodmell – Class of 1952



NEWS ALERT

US News honors Wa-Hi

Walla Walla High School earned high national and state rankings in 2024 Best High Schools, which U.S. News released this spring. Ranking factors include college readiness, access to college-level curriculum, state assessment proficiency and graduation rates.

"We are so pleased to learn that Wa-Hi again earned recognition as a U.S. News Best High School," said Walla Walla High School Principal John Schumacher. "We ranked in the top 1/3 of all high schools in the state and nation, boasting especially high marks on our college readiness and breadth index, in addition to our strong graduation rates, and reading and science scores."

By earning a national ranking in the top 40%, Walla Walla High School achieved status as a U.S. News Best High School and gained eligibility to display a U.S. News-trademarked 2024 Best High Schools award. Wa-Hi's ranking landed them as one of the top-rated high schools in the entire region.