

# CommunicAT

WINTER 2024



## REMEMBERING CARL PIERSON



**BRIAN GERSICH**  
*Superintendent,  
Waconia Public Schools*

On Friday, January 26, we lost a beloved teacher, colleague, friend, and coach when Waconia High School social studies teacher Carl Pierson passed away after

courageously fighting esophageal cancer for two years. Between his role as a teacher, as a basketball coach, and a city councilman, Carl touched a lot of lives in this community. I realize I'm fairly new to the district, and my relationship with Carl is perhaps not as deep as many of you, but I am glad I had a chance to know and interact with him briefly, as it was very memorable.

It's also been touching to hear and read some of the tributes and memories that people have expressed including on our social media pages.

One former student wrote, "I'm so thankful that I had him as a government teacher. He was fantastic at appreciating everyone for who they are and emphasized how important it is to be an active, informed citizen - and those are only two of the many life lessons he taught with his trademark sense of humor."

One of his former basketball players wrote, "He was the best coach and teacher I've ever had. He taught me more lessons than I can count, both on the basketball court and in life in general. He brought so much joy to me and my teammates and to say he will be missed is an understatement. I feel so extremely blessed to have been able to play for him during my high school basketball career. I hope to be even half the coach and person you were."

A Waconia parent shared, "I'm eternally grateful for the impact he had on my daughters, both in the classroom and on the court."

The world needs more people like Coach Pierson. He will never be forgotten."

I remember taking notice of Carl during my first fall in the district when Carl was recognized as one of the Accomplished Waconia Educators. In his speech, Carl jokingly reminded everyone, as he held his award, that "It's about time," noting he had been awesome for years. But he also had some words of inspiration for all of us in the room as a part of the public education system, encouraging us to never forget that we get to do the greatest job on earth every single day.

Carl exhibited talent and built relationships throughout our community. I want to express my gratitude and appreciation for everything he contributed to our school district, to our community, and especially to our students. He was a special human being and he will be greatly missed.



## WHS JUNIORS ELLA SCHLUCK AND LUKE KOSCHINSKA NAMED EXCEL AWARD RECIPIENTS



Waconia High School juniors Ella Schluck and Luke Koschinska have been named the school's 2024 recipients of the ExCEL Award. Sponsored by the Minnesota State High School League, ExCEL (Excellence in Community, Education and Leadership) is a unique recognition program designed exclusively for high school juniors. Students who are active in fine arts and/or athletic activities, who show leadership qualities, and who are model citizens are eligible

for the award. Schluck is in the middle of her third year on the varsity girls hockey team, where she is a captain and one of the team's leading scorers. During her high school career she has also participated in soccer, track and field, and softball. She is an accomplished pianist and teaches

lessons at the Waconia Music Studios. She played percussion in the Waconia Middle School Band and also plays the ukulele and harmonica. Schluck is a member of the National Honor Society, the WHS Student Council, and the Conservation Club. In the community, Schluck has volunteered for the Waconia Hockey Association, at the Ridgeview Pediatric Clinic and at New Perspectives Assisted Living/Memory Care. In the classroom, Ella takes a full slate of advanced placement and concurrent enrollment classes and currently has a 4.0 GPA.

"Ella portrays her positivity and leadership qualities by allowing others to feel heard," said Waconia High School teacher and assistant girls hockey coach Colleen Stanley. "She not only leads by example but also allows others to demonstrate their abilities. Ella is well-loved and admired by her peers. In the classroom, this is shown through collaboration with classmates. As a teammate, Ella encourages others to do their best and is selfless with her actions."

Koschinska is in the middle of his second year on the varsity boys hockey team, recently finished his second year participating in cross country running, and will play baseball this spring. He is a member of the National Honor Society, has taken a number of advanced placement courses, and maintains a 3.9 GPA. In the community, Koschinska has volunteered at Feed My Starving Children, at the community outdoor hockey rink, youth hockey camps, youth baseball tryouts, and has helped lead elementary faith formation classes at his church.

"I fondly remember Luke quickly establishing himself as a leader in my classroom," Waconia High School teacher Kathryn Kurtz said. "He immediately stood out to me as a great listener and thinker as he would answer questions readily and ask thoughtful questions that demonstrated independent thought and creativity. He is a positive leader in and out of the classroom. He is kind, responsible, friendly, and clearly has the inner drive to bring his best to everything he does."

## DOCK AND HEROLD NAMED AAA AWARD RECIPIENTS



Congratulations to Waconia High School seniors Carben Dock and Amelia Herold, who have been named the school's 2024 AAA Award recipients.



Established in 1988, the Academics, Arts and Athletics Award (Triple "A") is a unique recognition program sponsored by the MSHSL. The award goes to high school seniors who have at least a 3.0 or better grade point average and who are active in fine arts and athletic activities. The purpose of this program is to recognize and

honor high school seniors who have excelled in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in fine arts, as well as to elevate academic standards and create greater awareness of the value of high school activities.

Dock plays the trombone in the WHS Band, is a member of the Wildcat cross country and tennis teams, and takes a number of advanced placement courses while maintaining a 3.99 grade point

average. Dock is planning to attend the United States Air Force Academy to study mechanical engineering next year.

"Carben was enrolled in my AP World History course and during that time I got to know him as a student and an individual. It became clear to me early that Carben was an exceptional student with strong academic abilities, but great character as well," said WHS Teacher Joey Kretchman-Grande. "No matter who was in his class, what the subject of the lesson was, or how we were going about learning it, Carben's peers looked to him for guidance, collaboration, and support."

Herold has participated in the school's pep band, jazz band, marching band, and show band since ninth grade. Athletically, she participates on the Wildcat cross country and track and field teams. In the classroom she takes a number of advanced placement and concurrent enrollment classes while maintaining a 3.9 grade point average. Herold plans to study international business next year.

"There are few students that I have worked with in my career that serve as better role models than Amelia," WHS teacher and band director Nick Hansberry said. "She is conscientious in her

approach to her peers when providing feedback through her various leadership positions in the concert, marching, and jazz bands. She works to create lasting positive change in whatever activity or organization she is involved in. I cannot think of a student that is more humble, kind, and deserving of this award."

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## DECA State Qualifiers

Waconia High School students participated in the District 3 DECA competition on Sunday, Jan 7, at Bloomington Jefferson High School. More than 600 students participated from the southwest metro area and 16 Waconia students qualified to participate at the state DECA competition.

DECA is a competitive student organization that prepares emerging leaders for careers in entrepreneurship, marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. The Minnesota DECA State Career Development Conference will take place March 10-12 in Minneapolis.



Back row: Ryan Freitas, Nakia Abdel-Khaliq, Ellen Youngdahl, Brooke Scholla, Evie Tellers, Joel Buch, Jace Jager, Morgan Yager. Front row: Abigail Krcil, Svea Johnson, Bella Greer, Maretta Henriksen, Audrey Falkman, Katelyn Smith. Not pictured: Nick Geyen, Wyatt Breeden.

## Speech Team Performs Well at First Two Tournaments



Waconia High School's new competitive speech team competed in its first tournament on Jan. 20 at Orono High School. The team had one team member break through preliminaries into the varsity merit division finals, and an additional eight students break into the novice division finals.

Senior Landon Shaw advanced to the merit round finals in the Discussion event, where he took first place. Shaw backed up that result with another first place finish in the merit round finals at the Wayzata Trojan War Tournament on Jan. 27.

In the novice division finals at the Orono Tournament, third place finishes were recorded by junior Shane Zimmerman in Creative Expression, senior Hannah McCarthy in Extemporaneous Speaking, and Junior Gianna Klaphake in Prose Reading.

Fifth place finishes in the novice division finals included junior Leo Thayer in Extemporaneous Speaking, freshman Isabella Benson in Creative Expression, and senior Simon Peitersen in Discussion.

Senior Stella Atkinson placed sixth in Original Oratory and senior Mariah Port placed seventh in Discussion.

Other key novice results from the Wayzata Tournament included senior Mark Van Nurden's first place finish in Dramatic Interpretation, Atkinson's third place showing in Original Oratory, and Zimmerman's fourth place finish in Creative Expression.



## Show Choirs Excel and Look Forward to Star Power 2024

The Waconia High School Show Choirs have had a tremendous competition season thus far, garnering a number of impressive awards along the way.

At the group's first competition of the season in Holmen, Wisconsin on January 6, Power Company was named Grand Champions and also received Best Vocals, Best Choreography, and Best Closer Awards.

Two weeks later in Milton, Iowa, Power Company was once again named Grand Champions and also swept the Best Vocals, Best Choreography, Best Band, and Best Crew awards.

On January 27, Power Company was named first runner up at the Bloomington Gold competition.

Waconia Choirs are looking forward to hosting Star Power 2024 on Saturday, February 17 at the Waconia High School Performing Arts Center. Star Power is one of the premiere high school show choir events in the Midwest. Last year's competition featured performances by more than 20 choirs hailing from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

Tickets are \$18 for an all-day adult pass, \$15 for seniors (55+), \$10 for students (ages 6-18), and free for kids five and under. The fun will begin at 9 a.m. with finals in the Open Division scheduled to begin at 7:15 p.m.

Visit [www.waconiachoirs.org](http://www.waconiachoirs.org) to learn more.

## FALL ATHLETIC RECAP

Waconia High School winter sports teams are more than halfway through their seasons and there have been a number of noteworthy highlights so far.

### BOYS SWIMMING & DIVING

The boys swimming & diving team qualified for the State True Team Meet for the first time in program history, where they earned a 10th place finish. Junior Jack Hackler won the 100-yard breaststroke event at the meet. The team also captured its first ever Metro West Conference title on Feb. 1 by defeating Orono.

### LAKETTES DANCE TEAM

The Lakettes dance team was preparing to compete in the section 2AAA meet at Shakopee High School on Saturday, Feb. 3 when this edition of the *CommuniCAT* went to press. On Jan. 13, the team took first place in both the Jazz and Kick divisions at the Rosemount Invitational. On Jan. 20, at the much larger St. Michael-Albertville Invitational, the team took 6th in Kick and 7th in Jazz.

### BOYS BASKETBALL

The boys basketball team posted an 11-game win streak between December 15 and January 23, is ranked No. 9 in the latest Class 4A Minnesota Basketball News rankings, and is contention for the Metro West Conference title. Scoring leaders for the team so far this season include sophomore Will Kirsch and seniors Gavin Olson and Jackson Hayes.

### GIRLS BASKETBALL

The girls basketball team posted a five-game winning streak of its own between Jan. 11-23, posting victories over Sartell, St. Louis Park, New Prague, Bloomington Jefferson and Orono. Scoring leaders for the team this year include seniors Ashley Bryfczynski and Gabby Lauwagie

and sophomores Audrey Brown and Addison Bryfczynski.

### WRESTLING

The wrestling team has battled through a number of injuries this season to remain in top 10 state rankings, where they are currently No. 7 in class 3A. A number of individuals are also included in the latest state rankings including Carter Katherman (No. 7, 121 pounds), Bradee Dwinell (No. 10, 152 pounds), and Cooper Jahnke (No. 4, 215 pounds).

### GIRLS HOCKEY

The girls hockey team took a 10-13-1 record into their regular season finale against Benilde-St. Margaret's on Saturday, Feb. 3. The team will begin postseason play in Section 2AA on Friday, Feb. 9 with a quarterfinal game. Leading scorers for the team this season include seniors Annika Mielke and Mia Kelley, along with junior Ella Schluck.

### BOYS HOCKEY

The boys hockey team had a 5-13-1 record with five regular season games remaining when this edition of the *CommuniCAT* went to press. Senior forward Ayden Siddons is the team's leading scorer on the season with 10 goals and 12 assists. The team will begin postseason play in Section 2AA on Tuesday, Feb. 20.

### GYMNASTICS

The gymnastics team has secured dual meet victories over Bloomington Jefferson and St. Louis Park in recent weeks. The team is gearing up for the Section 2AA Meet on Friday, February 16 at Twin Oaks Middle School in Prior Lake.



ALL WACONIA ATHLETIC SCHEDULES ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [METROWESTCONFERENCE.ORG](http://METROWESTCONFERENCE.ORG).

GO WILDCATS!

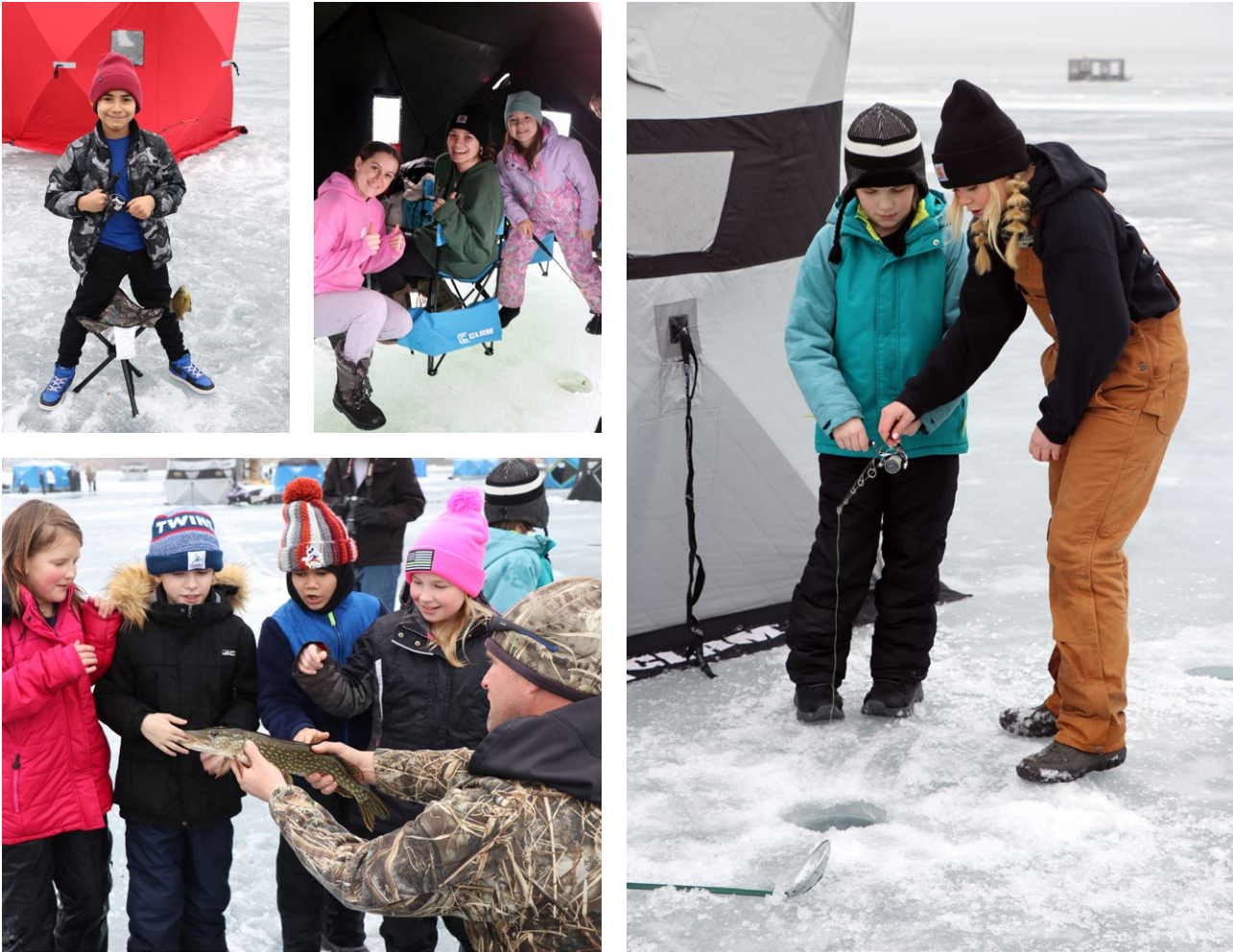


ICE FISHING ADVENTURE UNITES FIFTH GRADERS

Fifth graders from Bayview, Laketown and Southview elementary schools joined Waconia High School Conservation Club members out on the ice of Lake Waconia on Friday, January 26 for a day of ice fishing.

This unique and rewarding experience for our students is made possible by a number of individuals and organizations including the Waconia High School Conservation Club students and their advisors Wayne Trapp and Michael Jensen, who do an amazing job working with the fifth graders.

Thank you to the In Towne Marina which provides access to the lake and all of the bait for the day. Thank you also to our partners from the Minnesota DNR, the Carver County Sheriff’s Department, the Waconia Fire Department, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.



ECFE OFFERS POP-IN AND PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

Area parents with kids ages 1-5 are invited to join us for Pop-In and Play, a Waconia Community Education ECFE offering, from 9-11 a.m. on various dates this spring.

Come at the beginning and stay until the end, or pop in and out when it is convenient for you. Sensory and art experiences will vary at each session.

Families can make social connections in a casual, fun setting. ECFE teachers will be on hand to join in on the fun and answer any child development questions you may have.

The cost is \$5 per child. No pre-registration is necessary. The Waconia Early Childhood Center is located at 520 Industrial Blvd., Waconia.

**Questions about Pop-In and Play?**  
Give us a call at 952-442-0613.

**Upcoming Pop-In and Play Dates:**

- February 16      • April 5
- April 19         • May 17



ECFE POP-IN AND PLAY

Join Us!  
Feb. 16  
9-11 a.m.



WILDCAT PRESCHOOL REGISTRATION AND OPEN HOUSE

Calling all future Wildcats! Wildcat Preschool, an early childhood program through Waconia Community Education, offers a.m., p.m., extended day and full-day options.

Our 4-Star Parent Aware rated program uses a combination of Creative Curriculum, Second Step, and Foundations to create a well-rounded educational experience for our youngest learners. Wildcat Preschool features innovative classrooms where creativity and imagination flourish. It is also the only preschool program where the curriculum aligns with ISD 110 K-12 curriculum. We have an experienced and caring staff ready to prepare your child for Kindergarten!

Important upcoming dates for those considering Wildcat Preschool for the Fall of 2024:

- **February 20**  
Registration opens for current families
- **February 22**  
Wildcat Preschool Open House | 5-7 p.m.
- **March 19**  
Registration opens for new families

Join us for Open House on February 22 from 5-7 p.m. at our Early Childhood Center, located at 520 Industrial Blvd. in Waconia. Meet the preschool staff, see inside a preschool classroom, and ask questions to learn more about Wildcat Preschool.

Days	Time	Ages	Location	Fees
Tuesday/Thursday AM 2 sessions	8:30–11:00 AM	3, early 4	Early Childhood Family Center	\$132 Monthly Tuition \$80 one time supply fee
Mon/Wed/Fri AM 2 session	8:30–11:00 AM	3 and 4	Early Childhood Family Center	\$186 Monthly Tuition \$105 one time supply fee
Tuesday/Thursday Extended Day 1 Session	8:30 AM – 1:30 PM	4 and up	Early Childhood Family Center	\$234 Monthly Tuition \$130 one time supply fee
Mon/Wed/Fri Extended Day 1 Session	8:30 AM – 1:30 PM	4 and up	Early Childhood Family Center	\$354 Monthly Tuition \$150 one time supply fee
Monday thru Thursday PM 2 sessions	12–2:30 PM	4 and up	Early Childhood Family Center	\$234 Monthly Tuition \$130 one time supply fee
Monday thru Friday AM 1 session	8:30–11:00 AM	4 and up	Early Childhood Family Center	\$300 Monthly Tuition \$140 one time supply fee
Monday thru Friday PM 1 session	12–2:30 PM	4 and up	Early Childhood Family Center	\$300 Monthly Tuition \$140 one time supply fee
Monday thru Friday Full Day 1 session	7:55 AM – 2:30 PM	4 and up Planning to enter Kindergarten Fall 2025	Laketown Elementary	\$715 Monthly Tuition \$200 one time supply fee



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WINTER 2024

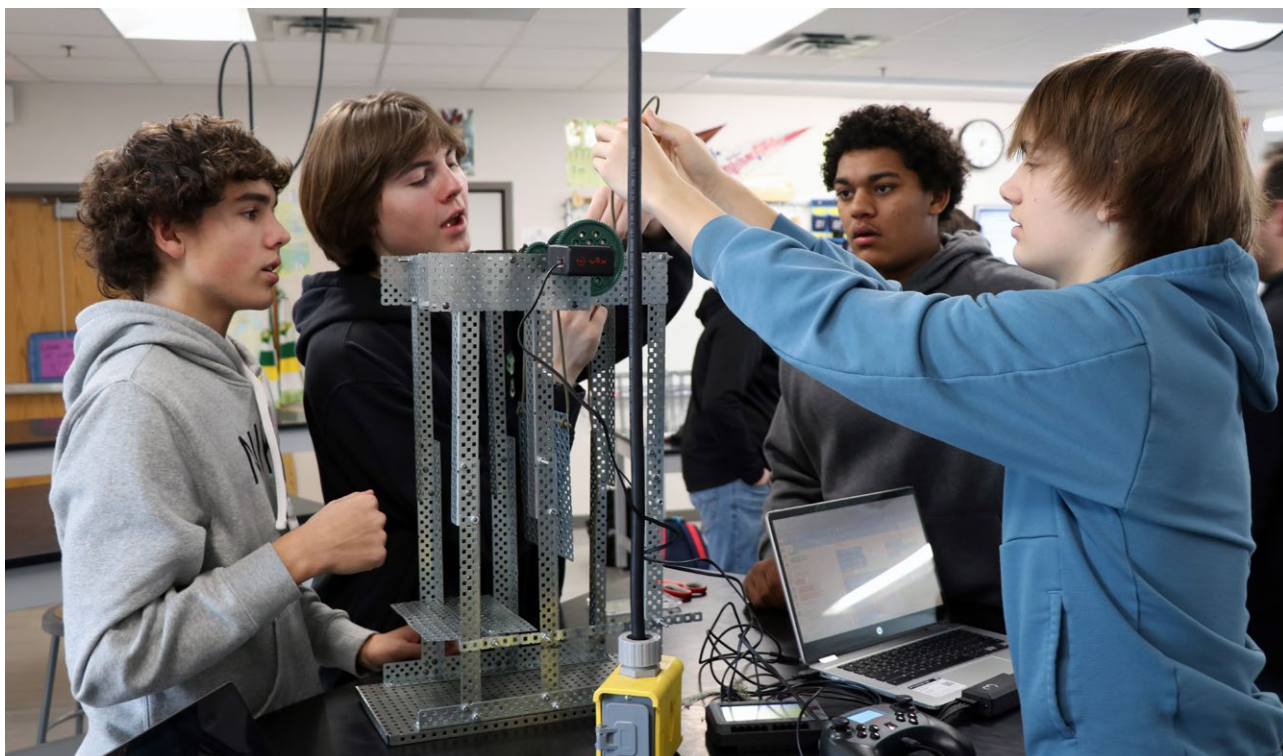


## WACONIA HIGH SCHOOL'S PRINCIPLES OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS PARTNER WITH SACKETT WACONIA FOR REAL-WORLD DESIGN CHALLENGE

Many classes at Waconia High School provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. One of those classes is Principles of Engineering.

The class partnered with local business Sackett Waconia to create a Design Challenge for students. Students were asked to plan, design, and engineer a prototype manufacturing system that would efficiently move one of Sackett Waconia's Rotary Blenders through the different processes in the facility. Representatives from Sackett Waconia were at the High School today to interact with students, see their designs, and talk about future job opportunities in manufacturing and the trades.

Principles of Engineering is a course in Waconia High School's Project Lead the Way (PLTW) sequence. It is a project-based course that introduces students to the professions of engineering and engineering technology, by exploring various technologies related to manufacturing processes, and engineering systems.



## EIGHTH GRADER CREATES MURAL AT WMS

Waconia Middle School eighth grader Hazel Lyons is an aspiring artist and her work is now featured on the walls of Waconia Middle School forever.

Lyons illustrated and painted the mural pictured below which features six important historical figures including Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass, George Washington, Amelia Earhart and Rosa Parks.

"I wanted to do this piece because it was an opportunity to get my art out there and get outside my art comfort zone," Lyons said. "So many historical events are tragic, but so many more events are inspirational. We look back on history to achieve great things in the future."



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