



# THE Powell G•R•O•W•L

VOLUME 2  
ISSUE 3

The source for Powell Middle School news, sports, and more.

Est. 2021

## Powell chorus duo shines on big stage

By Cadi Perry  
G•R•O•W•L Assistant Editor

Last month the Chorus Department at Powell Middle School took part in the Florida American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) Ensemble in Orlando.

The Florida chapter of the ACDA is an organization for boys in grades 6 through 9 from all over the state who audition to be a part of the honor choir.

Only 85 boys were selected to participate in the concert and two of them attend Powell, seventh graders Brandon Guzman and Hunter Naskrent.

Guzman, who is a tenor, was one of the two boys selected for this prestigious opportunity.

"My parents got me into singing when I was young," Brandon said. "I've always loved it."

All students who auditioned were required to record themselves singing an a cappella version of the first verse of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" in the appropriate key.

For the concert, the students had to follow the ACDA dress code, wearing black and white colors and semi-formal attire. If students chose to wear black pants with a white shirt, then the dress code required that they paired it with a long, dark tie.

Mr. Pletincks, the Powell Chorus Director, introduced the students to the ACDA and encouraged them to audition.

"I think it is awesome that students want to audition," Mr. Pletincks said. "We have had kids participate every year for the last 15 years."

That level of excellence is something that Mr. Pletincks is very proud of, and rightfully so. He heads up one of the most decorated middle school choirs in the state, and the success of Brandon and Hunter are more evidence of the ability that Powell students possess.

Dr. Kelly Miller, the President of the ACDA, directed the concert herself along with two other choir co-directors. Dr. Gary Packwood and Dr. Jace Saplan assist Miller throughout the year with various concert activities.

Seventh grader Hunter Naskrent, who is a bass, was also selected to take part in the concert.

"I wasn't really nervous to perform," Hunter said. "I have been in musicals before like 'Dear Edwina.'"

During the concert, students had to sing many songs, including "Oh Mary, Don't You Weep," "Ayo Mama," and "I Remember."

Every year the ACDA concert is held in a different city around the country. Plans for the next honor choir conference are already underway. Next year, the concert will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Powell choral director Mr. Pletincks with Hunter Naskrent and Brandon Guzman following their performance. [Courtesy of Mr. Pletincks]



## Panthers impress at Best of the Bay Spirit Championships



Powell Cheer performs their routine for the judges at the Best of the Bay Spirit Championships. [Courtesy of Tara Boyd]

By Tara Boyd  
G•R•O•W•L Sports Staff

The Powell Middle School cheer squad earned its first competitive victory in October at the Best of the Bay Spirit Championships at Wiregrass Ranch High School in Wesley Chapel.

Sanctioned by the U.S. All-Star Federation, the cheer competition featured some of the top cheer squads around the state.

On Oct. 6, teams from all over Florida competed in multiple divisions, with Powell taking home the first-place trophy for middle school at the event.

"They have absolutely nailed their cheer," Powell coach Alex Graves said. "The girls remembered everything and had no flaws."

In recent years, Powell has increasingly pushed toward competitive cheer, much like the teams in high school do. This competition marked the start of a new era for the Panthers.

Coach Alex and members of the squad felt confident after their competition. Members of opposing teams even made comments about Powell's ability and skill level.

Cheerleaders can sometimes be considered the second spotlight athletically because they are in the background cheering at football and basketball games. Coach Alex pushed for competing in Best of

the Bay because it gave the girls an opportunity to be up front for once.

It gave the cheerleaders a reason to outshine themselves and prove that they are some of the best in the area.

Although she is only in her first year as the cheer coach at Powell, Coach Alex has a passion for the sport that traces back to when she very young. She started at age 6 and continued all the way through high school.

When the cheer team was looking for a new coach, she jumped at the opportunity. After training with the girls on stunts and technical aspects of cheer, she was one of the most excited people to find out the team had won. The Panthers are full of cheerleaders who had never competed in cheer before, which made the victory even more satisfying and impressive.

Adeslyn Gonzalez-Bauta, a seventh grader in her second season cheering for Powell, was thrilled when she found out the team took first place.

"It was so important for us to win first place because it gave our team a push," Adeslyn said. "It got us to believe that we were good."

The Powell cheer team still has a lot to learn, but overall, they did a spectacular job at Best of the Bay. The victory will serve as motivation for them to continue their hard work, training for important cheer competitions.

## Winterfest Art Contest

2nd Place  
Felicity Maxfield  
7th Grade



3rd Place  
Chloe Artt  
7th Grade



1st Place  
Ireland Bazares  
7th Grade





# Curriculum Corner



with Coach Alise



♦ Physical Education Fundraiser ♦

By Emma Ortiz  
G•R•O•W•L News Staff

In November Powell Middle School hosted its annual Physical Education Fundraiser to help raise money for new gym equipment.

The fundraiser is organized by Powell's motivated PE coaches, Coach Alise, Coach Francisco, Coach Blackwell, and Coach Dixon.

The fundraiser was promoted to all students as the school pushed to help create a better environment for all students in class. Any student was capable of donating.

To donate students went through an online platform called Snap! Raise. Accessed by internet, Snap! Raise is a digital fundraising tool used for substantial amounts of money that go towards schools, teams, and other groups.

Last year, the fundraising was very successful, raising over \$6,800 for the PE program.

"We are trying to reach \$10,000 dollars this year," Coach Alise said. "As of now, we are at \$2,445."

There are many benefits for this event, with the money going into equipment that is used daily, such as basketballs and volleyballs. It is a crucial part of the success of physical education. This provides a good amount of money for the coaches to spend on their students.

"We need to buy new equipment," Coach Alise said, "and the school doesn't have a lot of money to purchase it."

Sometimes students think about equipment as unnecessary because they do not believe that it is important. However, Coach Alise points out that the items the PE department is trying to purchase are exactly what the students want.

"By doing fundraisers, we can buy new things

such as soccer balls, basketballs, the nine squares, and gaga balls, what the kids like to play with," he said.

Last year, the money went to buying new nets for volleyball and the nine square. The gaga ball pit has already been replaced, and it was the money from the fundraiser that helped this happen.

Coach Alise also plans to purchase new gym equipment such as weights, so students can get work out during class.

Through participation in the fundraiser, students are also able to earn prizes for their donations. They can earn T-shirts, party days, and free mile passes. These passes will allow students to be able to skip running the mile for one day.

On the last day of the fundraiser, students that made at least one donation are invited to a pizza party. The party took place on Nov. 29.

In the two years that the PE fundraiser has been active at Powell, the school has raised over \$9,000. The money has made Physical Education for Panthers more enjoyable with a sizable number of activities to choose from every day.



Students enjoy equipment that the fundraiser for physical education helps provide. [Falyn Dorsey]

## Red Ribbon Week a hit all over campus

By Kylee Kosanke  
G•R•O•W•L News Staff

Powell Middle School participated in the nationwide anti-drug initiative, Red Ribbon Week, in late October.

The purpose of Red Ribbon Week is to promote awareness among students about the danger and harms of drugs and alcohol in a way that is educational yet still fun for students.

Red Ribbon Week is organized on campus by Coach Francisco, school counselor Mrs. LaBelle, and the Impact Club. The Impact Club is an after-school program made up of students that are motivated to work against drugs, bullying, and other harmful things that can occur at school.

For Red Ribbon Week, students participate in the daily themes and are rewarded with various prizes, such as lanyards or sunglasses that promote drug free circumstances. Students who participate are also guaranteed a raffle ticket that is called out at the end of the week.

Like Spirit Week, Red Ribbon Week also has a different theme for each day. The first day of Red Ribbon Week was labeled "Crazy to do Drugs." The theme encouraged students and staff members to wear crazy hats, socks, or similar accessories.

One of the teachers that participated in the "Crazy to do Drugs" theme on Monday was Ms. Hart, the ISS teacher. She wore a crazy hat that had Powell's school colors, red and black. She participated because she believes in a drug-free campus and wanted to encourage more students to take part.

"I want more people to be aware of what the dangers of drugs are," she said.

Sixth grader Zephaniah Arenas took part in

Tuesday's theme, "Tune Out Drugs." This theme advised students to wear a band or music-related shirt. Zephaniah wore a shirt with the famous rapper on it, The Notorious B.I.G. Zephaniah wore the shirt because it is her parents' favorite rap artist, and she also wanted to promote the anti-drug message.

"I think it's horrible to do drugs," Zephaniah said.

Throughout the week, various encouraging themes were presented to Powell students. Another of these was Dream Profession Day, where students dressed up in their dream job. Eight grader Hailey Pritchard dressed up as a singer.

When Red Ribbon Week wrapped up on that Friday, the message was clear to students and faculty. Powell Middle School is dedicated to maintaining a drug-free environment for its students, and so many people on campus were motivated for the cause.



Eighth grade students Paul Kymer, Dillon Olding, and Braydon Cook sport their baseball jerseys to show what they want to grow up to be for Dream Profession Day during Red Ribbon Week. [Rose Carpenter]

## Signing the Pledge



[Rose Carpenter]

During November's Veteran's Day Celebration at Powell Middle School, sixth grader Connor Jensen translated the Pledge of Allegiance in American Sign Language for the audience. Connor is a deaf student on campus who has taken an interest in helping other students understand how he communicates. Mr. Carlson has spearheaded an effort to spread ASL through the Sign Language Club that meets after school weekly. Many students have already joined.

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• Special Thanks •  
Powell Administration,  
Ms. Michaela Danner  
& Ms. Toni Pastore

For helping every step of the way.

## Veterans honored at Powell event



Powell dancers perform "God Bless the U.S.A." at the Veteran's Day Celebration last month.

[Rose Carpenter]

By Yadier Morales  
G•R•O•W•L News Staff

Despite a slight delay due to Hurricane Nicole, Powell Middle School hosted its yearly Veteran's Day Celebration for those who served in the community.

Students invited relatives and friends who served in the military to watch a performance by the Powell Performing Arts department, including dance, band, and chorus programs. Teachers who served in the Armed Forces were also invited.

Originally scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 10, the event took place on Tuesday, Nov. 15 because of school cancellation from Hurricane Nicole.

The ceremony opened with Powell principal Mr. Dye giving a warm welcome to those in attendance and thanking them for their service. After the greeting, Central High School's Navy Air Force Junior ROTC presented the colors for the veterans, while the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The Performing Arts programs then showed their gratitude one at a time. Powell's symphonic band performed the national anthem. The Powell chorus sang a medley of the various Armed Forces service songs. Dance 2, the most advanced dance class at Powell, performed a choreographed piece to "God Bless the U.S.A." by Lee Greenwood.

Ross Lamoreaux, who served in the U.S. Army for 13 years, enjoyed meeting people with varied backgrounds.

"The band surprised me with how well (the

band) played the national anthem," Ross said.

After the performances, sixth grade student Connor Jensen recited the Pledge of Allegiance in sign language. Connor is a founding member of the Sign Language Club on campus and helps other students learn American Sign Language to help better communicate with the deaf and hard of hearing students at Powell like himself.

Once the program in the gymnasium was complete, the veterans and students were escorted to the cafeteria where they were able to enjoy breakfast catered by The Breakfast Station. Powell Student Government arranged this part of the event, led by SGA sponsor Mrs. Kusnierczak.

Ms. Vega is an ESE teacher at Powell who served in the U.S. Army.

"I loved the fact that Connor did the pledge in sign language," she said. "I thought that was beautiful."

SGA also provided keepsake gifts for the veterans on hand, handing out tile coasters painted in red, white, and blue tie-dye with an appreciative message attached. The students wanted to thank the veterans for their sacrifice.

"I really enjoy thanking the veterans," Mrs. Kusnierczak said. "I think it's important for us to be thankful for the people who fight for our freedom."

The Veteran's Day Celebration is a tradition that Powell has become committed to every year, and with the rewarding success of the event, it should continue to honor our veterans for years to come.

## "Thriller" has become a Powell tradition

By Gabriella Esposito  
G•R•O•W•L Features Staff

The Powell Middle School dance program held their traditional Thriller performance at Nature Coast Technical High School to rounds of cheers at halftime of the Panthers football game on Oct. 18.

While the football team was dominating Challenger K-8 on the field, the dancers for Powell were preparing for their big opportunity. Dancers chosen from different classes and grades came together to put on a show for the crowd.

Using the iconic "Thriller" by Michael Jackson, Powell dance director Mrs. Young choreographed the halftime show over a decade ago. Using some parts of the music video for the song and her own flare, Mrs. Young brought together different groups of dancers each year.

"My students have been performing this dance for since the beginning of 2012," Mrs. Young said.

Luis Sierra served the role of flier in the dance. His part was paramount to the dance's success.

"My favorite part of 'Thriller' is when they flip me," he said. "It's fun and a great experience."

Thriller takes a lot of hard work and dedication from all involved. Cartwheels, back flips, front flips, and so much more are involved with the choreography. It is a combination of many dances into one amazing show.

Aiden Cruz has been part of the Thriller show multiple times in his Powell career, and the experience never gets old.

"The most challenging part of Thriller is the group choreography," Aiden said. "Sometimes it is hard to do things that people haven't used."

Many people are counted on in this dance to pull off complex moves. As new dancers, rehearsals, and tricks come together, they strive to be perfect.

The Thriller dance left many onlookers in awe. The students were almost as impressed with each other as the parents and fans were with them. No matter how many times it is performed, the experience is rewarding.



Dance students show off their creative costumes and well-rehearsed moves for the Thriller halftime show.

[Rose Carpenter]

## ONE-ON-ONE with Coach Davis

By Kamryn Ross  
G•R•O•W•L Features Editor

Coach Benjamin Davis is an excellent athletics coach who assists with multiple sports and supports Powell Middle School passionately in as many ways as he possibly can.

As the lead assistant coach on the football staff, Coach Davis was crucial reason why the Panthers were able to finish the regular season undefeated and finish as the Hernando County runners up. His knowledge of the game helped create strong offensive and defensive line play for Powell, but his focus is now turning to girls' basketball as he assists with that Powell program.

"It's all about the growth and development each individual player makes," Davis said.

While his mindset is focused on winning, his heart for his players' development. He has a fiery passion for both sports and loves every detail about them.

The result of his passion is the effect he has on his students. He has been extremely helpful and successful with his players. He shows them improvements to make them a better person on the field, but he also makes a point to do the same in school. His connection is obvious as athletes around campus go to Coach Davis for advice and try to help him whenever possible.

"I've learned so much from my players," Davis said. "They have made me into a better person."

A major positive for Coach Davis is that he lets his players communicate with him freely which makes the team open for growth. Coach Davis and his players get to know each other and create communication throughout the season to help each other learn.

Coach Davis is important on campus during the day in his role as a one-on-one educational support teacher to eighth grader Anthony Johnson. Coach is quick to point out that Anthony has changed his life. They have a strong bond.

"Anthony has impacted and changed my life," Davis said. "Working day to day, he is just a fantastic person."

His relationship with Anthony has also helped him to form a strong bond with Anthony's family, including his parents and brother Frank, who is also an eighth grader on campus. His connection with Anthony and Frank is an example of how he relates to all the students he comes across every day.

Coach Davis appreciates the Powell staff welcoming him with so many new opportunities. He loves to experience new challenges that are being afforded to him as a member of the Powell family.

Powell's faculty members have a positive attitude and have great bonds with each other. Both students and staff learn new things each day together which makes Powell a good place to work and learn. This is something the Coach Davis enjoys about being a Panther.

Even though he has only been at Powell for two years, he has made dramatic changes to Powell and an impact to those around him. He finds a way to educate his players and students, and along the way, he learns more about himself.



Coach Davis has a laugh with Anthony Johnson during class.

[Courtesy of Mr. Pletinck]

# SPORTS

## Kyla Deeley finds peace in horseriding

By Jaelyn Barror-Flores  
G•R•O•W•L Sports Staff

Kyla Deeley is an eighth grader at Powell Middle School, but her passion is training and riding her horse, Winnie.

Kyla began her lessons with Winnie at the beginning of this year. It was not her first experience on a horse. She used to ride when she was only 5 for therapy, but when she moved to Florida in 2018, she stopped.

After a long break, finally getting back on a horse was exceedingly difficult for Kyla.

"When I first started back up, it was stressful but still very freeing," she said. "I couldn't really get anything right, but now, I can do so much better."

Kyla and her horse can jump as high as two feet, three inches thanks to practice. She has riding lessons once a week, and she leases a horse so she can ride her three times a week. Within the past 10 months, Kyla has improved a lot, and she believes that will continue.

Horse riding is a great form of therapy for many people, one of those being Kyla. Riding helps her take her mind off all the daily stresses in their lives, and as a result, it calms them down and can reduce anxiety.

Riding can also help with focus and coordination. When someone rides, it can make them feel as though everything bad just does not matter anymore. It is their solace. The horses listen to all the people's problems because they cannot do much else. They are like personal therapists to riders.

Kyla has always loved animals and loves being around them. That is one of the main reasons she went back to riding after so many years of being away from it. It makes her feel free. At this point, she would never even think about giving it up again.

Kyla has made some good friends at the stables, where she and Winnie train. She always looks forward to her visits to the stables, and she uses it as a getaway from school.

"It's somewhere and something away from the immature drama, and I have friends [at the stables] who are so supportive," Kyla said. "Even my trainers, they always get me through whatever it is I'm dealing with, and they give the best advice."

Given that Kyla is still in middle school, drama is sure to entail, but at the stables, she is completely free of all the problems in her life.

Kyla loves riding, and she really loves her horse. She plans to compete next season with Winnie.

Hopefully, Kyla will win many awards in the future for her riding, but for now, she just continues to train and ride every single week, getting better and better.



[Courtesy of Kyla Deeley]

Kyla Deeley takes uses the time she has away from school to train with her horse Winnie.

## Girls hoops focused on the court

By Logan Kepner  
G•R•O•W•L Sports Staff

The season has officially started for the Powell Middle School girls' basketball team, and the hopes for the players and coaches are high.

The Panthers kicked off the schedule by hosting Fox Chapel Middle School last month, and despite losing both the varsity and junior varsity games in close fashion, Powell coaches feel like the team is headed in the right direction.

After winning the Hernando County Middle School Championship last season, the players and coaches are focused on matching that same intensity.

Intensity and hard work are things that Coach LaRiviere stresses in practice to prepare the girls.

"It's one of those sports where if you truly put in the work, you can be good," LaRiviere said. "You don't have to be the most talented team to win the championship."

The combination of new talent and more experienced players is going to be the key.

Coach LaRiviere, the Powell leader of the varsity team, has coached for 12 years, including three years at Powell. He coached the JV team the past two years and assisted on varsity last season. His JV teams went 4-2 the past two years.

Many players on the current varsity team were at Powell on JV. This is a huge step for these players to take, and the group will face multiple challenges to be ready for the jump in competition.

One of these players is eighth grader Kylie Rivero. The guard was voted team captain last year on JV and was again given the honor this time around. With motivation from her family, Kylie has become passionate about the sport.

"My goal is to win every game," she said. "It would be nice to go undefeated this season and score in every game."

Kylie is a leader for the Panthers, motivating her team and doing her best every time she is on the court.

Erica Randazzo is another player who has stood out early on for Powell's varsity. The seventh grader made the squad after transferring over the summer from Hernando Christian Academy in Brooksville. She plays guard, and even has some high school varsity experience after playing for the private school.

She was confident, and that attitude helped her

not only make the team but impress teammates and coaches as she was named co-captain on varsity.

"When you are trying to do something that you want badly, you're going to be nervous," Erica said, "and if you're trying out because you really want to make it, failure is scary."

Erica and Kylie are joined on varsity by eighth graders Kaitlynn Miller, Isabelle Miller, Breonna Lorentsen, Yulianette Gonzalez DeJesus, Daniella Torres, Brooke Smith, Da'Niya Gill, and sixth grader Paeyton Crum.

The JV head coach this year is Coach Duncan, a fixture on the sidelines at Powell because of his success in multiple sports, including boys' basketball and golf. He was the coach last year for varsity when the Panthers won their championship.

Duncan is joined on the bench by assistant Coach Davis. Davis helped down the stretch last season and makes an impact as an assistant in football as well.

The JV team is looking solid again this year, although the roster does not have any players with middle school experience. The team is made up of seventh graders Savannah Inmon and Laylanie Vega, and sixth graders Yoselin Nodarse Garcia, Emily Flood, Carlie Pack, Cirsten Spann, Katanna Rodriguez, Lydia McCue, Kaylie Tapia, Jaelle Bergmann, Aliah Bello, and Avarie Corbett.

Girls' basketball is one of the school's most successful sports in recent years, and if early looks are any indication, students could be in store for another great season from the Panthers on the court.



Erica Randazzo drives toward a Fox Chapel defender as teammates Kylie Rivero and Breonna Lorentsen look on.

[Jaelyn Beato Rosario]

## Students test new skills in Taekwondo

By Elisa Bethke  
G•R•O•W•L Sports Staff

Mr. Carrasquillo has taught Taekwondo at Powell Middle School for over almost 20 years.

Although he started as a reading teacher on campus, Mr. C, as his students call him, eventually took over Taekwondo when the previous instructor left. He also has taught the sport outside of Powell at his own school, Dragon's Dojo.

"I can't narrow down the years of how long I have been teaching," Mr. Carrasquillo said, "but I slowly transitioned to just teaching our students Taekwondo."

This year alone, 198 students attend Mr. Carrasquillo's classes as an elective. Based on that and his work outside of Powell, the number of athletes to learn about martial arts from Mr. C now numbers in the thousands. The students learn about belt rankings, testing, sparring, and at the end of the year, they prepare for the school's tournament.

Many students enjoy Taekwondo because they get to learn self-defense, self-discipline, and proper technique. These are characteristics that middle school students can especially be proud of as they prepare for high school and adulthood.

"My favorite part of Taekwondo is sparring and feeling yourself improving over time," seventh grader

Michal Kurylo said.

During the tournament at the end of the school year, all students weigh in and are classified by weight and belt rank to compete against each other. All Taekwondo students meet in the gymnasium on campus, and they fight when they are called upon.

Everyone competes until one person wins the division, and the winner receives a trophy or medal to take home. To many, it is the highlight of their journey, where they can show parents what they have learned.

"I have done Taekwondo since I was in fifth grade, and I really like it," seventh grader Jaxon Smith said. "When I saw that they had Taekwondo as an option for an elective at Powell, I wanted to sign up."

In Taekwondo, there are 10 belt levels split into colors: white, gold, yellow, orange, purple, blue, red, brown, green, and black. Yellow, white, gold, and orange are the beginner belts. Green, purple, and blue are the intermediate belts. Red and brown are advanced. The black belt is the highest color belt anyone can earn.

Taekwondo has become a cornerstone of the physical education electives at Powell. Many students base much of their activities in and out of school on what they learn from Mr. Carrasquillo and his class. His dedication has turned into an asset for the community.