



TROJAN TODAY

YOUR SCHOOL TOWN OF HIGHLAND SOURCE FOR NEWS AND EVENTS | DECEMBER 2025-JANUARY 2026

The Gift of Giving

ALUMNUS DONATES \$10,000 TO HIGHLAND EDUCATION FOUNDATION

When Kelley J. Kinsella, Regional Executive Officer for Chubb Insurance Midwest Region, was recognized with the 2025 IICF Midwest Trailblazer Award for philanthropic and industry leadership, it came with \$10,000 the 1980 Highland High School Alum had the option of donating to the 501(c)(3) of her choosing.

For Kinsella, there was no hesitation: The money would be donated to the School Town of Highland.

"The money has been used to purchase nets for the volleyball team and new benches for the tennis venue engraved with Mr. Mazur's name. Southridge is still deciding on the programs where their \$4,000 allocation will be used," she said. "Jerry Mazur was a great tennis coach, but he was so much more," she said. "Mr. Mazur urged us to do our best and helped us every way he could. He cared about every student and wanted us to achieve. The life I have enjoyed all these years is a result of what he did for us."

FOUNDATION DONATIONS

The Insurance Industry Charitable Trust gift was a first for the Highland Education Foundation. "Every dollar donated is used for the betterment of our students," Treasurer Stephanie Turner said.

INFO: To learn more, visit www.highlandef.org or email Turner at treasurer@highlandef.org.

HALL OF FAME HONORS MAZUR

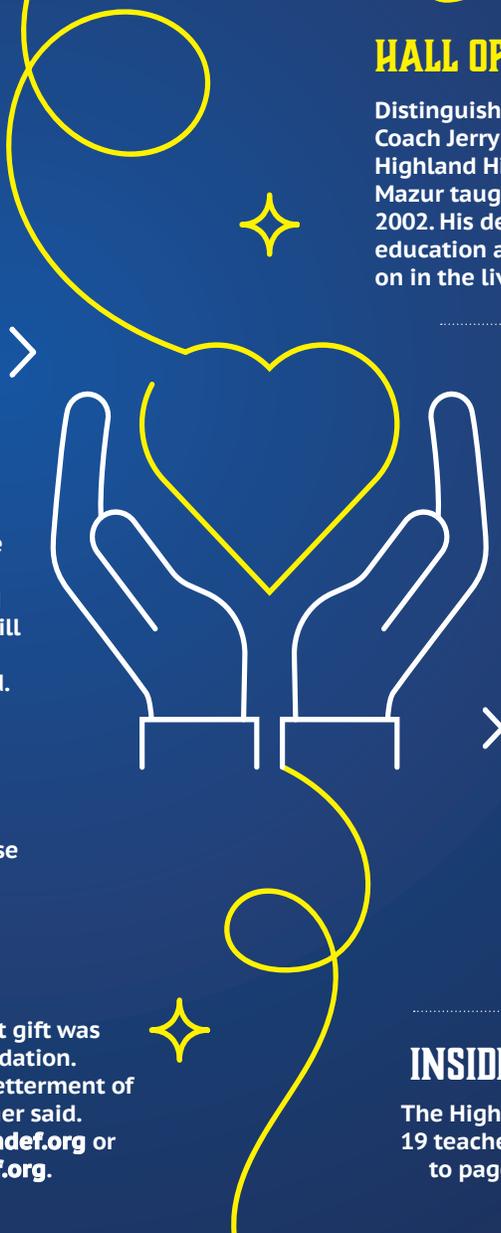
Distinguished HHS Teacher and beloved Tennis Coach Jerry Mazur has been inducted into the Highland High School Athletic Hall of Fame. Mazur taught and coached at HHS from 1976-2002. His devotion to the highest ideals of education and character left a legacy that lives on in the lives of former students today.

STUDENTS MAKING SEASON BRIGHTER

In the spirit of the season, students and families at Merkley Elementary made Thanksgiving brighter for three dozen local families. PTC President Patty Torres said it began with food donations brought to school. The PTC purchased 10 turkeys and Merkley families purchased another 26 to make the meal complete. "We created an assembly line and the kids packed everything so that each family had a complete meal," Torres said. "It was an amazing effort from our Merkley family. The church was overwhelmed by their kindness."

INSIDE: 2026 TEACHER GRANTS

The Highland Education Foundation awarded 19 teacher grants, totaling nearly \$13,000. Turn to page 3 to learn more about the projects.



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SCHOOL BOARD

Patrick Krull, President
Robert Kuva, Vice President
Erica Smith-Gomez, Secretary
Victor A. Garcia, member
Richard Alyea, member

The school board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. in the Administration Building, 9145 Kennedy Avenue, Highland.

INFO: Visit highland.k12.in.us for the latest information, including meeting agendas, school policies, board mission, beliefs and values.

Celebrating 200 career wins!



Girls basketball coach reaches incredible milestone: Lady Trojans Head Basketball Coach Eric Kundich reached a new career milestone at the Culver Shootout Nov. 22 when his team notched a “W” cementing 200 wins in his prep basketball career during the start of his second season at Highland. During his first season at Highland High School, Kundich coached his team to a semi-state berth. “A huge congratulations to Coach Kundich,” Athletic Director Ryan Harrington said. “We knew Eric was the right pick to lead this talented, girl’s team – and we were right. Two hundred wins is an incredible career! He’s not done yet, and neither is this team.” [photo provided]

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

“Special thank you to our alums, students, families who bring extra meaning to this season of giving”

This school year began with unexpected blessings that keep on giving.

It started with a resurgence in students who opted into marching band, which provided a big boost to Friday night football half-time shows.

Within weeks, we learned that 1980 Highland High School alum Kelly Cada Kinsella was donating \$10,000 to the School Town of Highland. Her requests were simple: a donation of durable benches for the tennis courts dedicated to long-time coach Jerry Mazur, who she credits with changing her life; volleyball equipment and the creation of an account available to Southridge to purchase items that would be value-added to the elementary school.

It was our great honor to welcome Kelly to the festivities that took place and thank her for what she had done.

As it turned out, it was her gratitude to Highland schools and the community, which had made a lasting impression on this wonderful woman, 45 years after she graduated.

She has left a lasting impression on us.

Speaking of alumni, Highland High School alum Jalen Strietelmeier, long considered one of Highland’s best cross country runners of all time, was inducted into the HHS Athletic Hall of Fame in November. Congratulations!

During this season of giving, I want to thank each of you for all you do that makes the School Town of Highland a wonderful place to educate children in lessons that last a lifetime.



Brian Smith
Superintendent
School Town of Highland

2025 TEACHER GRANTS

FOUNDATION AWARDS NEARLY \$13,000 IN GRANTS

The Highland Education Foundation has announced its successful funding of 19 teacher grants for the 2025-2026 academic school year. It's the largest number of grants in the history of the program.

From a grant for middle school students to spend a day experiencing campus life at Purdue Northwest to creating a reading garden oasis at Southridge Elementary and the launch of a Principal's Book Club at Warren Elementary, Foundation Treasurer Stephanie Turner said the board was thrilled with the variety and quality of this year's request for grant funds.

"We were able to find \$12,000+ for our teachers to bring their dreams that enhance education to life," Turner said. "Every year, we see our teachers embrace the grant-writing as a way to fund programs we never could otherwise."

2026 TRIVIA NIGHT

Join the Highland Education Foundation **Saturday, February 21** for a night of trivia, silent auction, raffles – and fun for a great cause! All proceeds go to innovative educational teacher grants – like these – to enhance learning and achievement. Cost per team (eight people) is \$320. Doors open at 5 p.m. Trivia starts at 6 p.m.

RSVP: info@highlandef.org

DONATIONS: We are seeking sponsorships as well as raffle items. If you would like to support Highland teachers and students, please consider donating. Call (219) 741-5014 for more information.

SCHOOL PROJECTS & RECIPIENTS

From books and technology to immersions and programs, the Highland Education Foundation awarded 19 grants this year.

Reading Garden

Southridge Elementary
Regan Colglazier
\$1,123.35

Classroom Novels & Novel Study

Merkley Elementary
Ali Ross
\$500

SEL Communication and Expression

Johnston Elementary
Rachel Jennings, Kat Bailey,
Val Nappi, Mark De'Leon
\$654.16

Tech Organization for Littles

Warren Elementary
Sharon Konopasek, Kylie Bugajski
\$564.69

Challenge Novels

Southridge Elementary
Carolyn Anderson, Tricia Pedraza,
Meaghan Ehler
\$500

Principal's Book Club

Warren Elementary
Christina Davis
\$1,000

Easel-y Organization

Merkley Elementary
Kelly Geffert
\$205.06

Scientific Calculators

High School
Dave Cotner
\$1,261.46

Emotional Support Items

Merkley Elementary
Suzanne Rodriguez, Ali Ross
\$219.13 + shipping

The Language of Us

Highland High School
Brittney Delariva
\$327.25

Wildlife Connections:

Humane Indiana Classroom Visit
Southridge Elementary
Beth Harwood, Becky Raycroft,
Hailey Rudloff
\$125



Connecting Classroom Learning with PNW Campus Experience

Highland Middle School
Rose Vis, Donna Scheidt,
Siobhan Fagen
\$334.60

Van de Graaff Generator: Electric Charge in Action

High School
Abigail Kraupner, Dylan Marich, Lauren Makarauskas, Barathi Chintamani
\$983.64

Climbing Higher: Building Student Success through Robotics

High School
Rodney Glenn
\$860 plus shipping

Sensory Needs

Merkley Elementary
Mary Gallagher
\$224.03

Pickleball For All, Y'All

Johnston Elementary
Joe Tolliver, Amy Harrington
\$1,500

Library Cover One Book Repair Machine

Merkley Elementary
Jill Kreis
\$1,000

Hatchet STEM Activities

Merkley Elementary
Alexa Reyes, Lisa Vega
\$71.75

One School, One Book

Johnston Elementary
Stacy Steele, Melissa Allison
\$1,500





MARIACHI MAGIC

HIGHLAND'S NEWEST INSTRUMENTAL PROGRAM BRINGS TRADITIONAL, CONTEMPORARY LATIN MUSIC TO LIFE

Just one year after its creation, the Highland High School Mariachi Band is taking its traditional and contemporary Latin music on the road.

Director Benjamin Leonard-White said the group embraces the tradition of mariachi, which began in the 18th century in Jalisco, Mexico, but also puts its own spin on contemporary Latin music with the addition of instruments beyond the tradition of mariachi.

Most recently, the 20 members of the troupe played to a packed house at Emilio's Restaurant & Cantina in Highland. The members perform (above) dressed in black with blue and gold moños – the bow tie worn by mariachi musicians.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Visit facebook.com/highlandmariachi for the latest performance schedule or more information about the group.

"The reception we receive exceeds any expectation we have," Leonard-White said. "The kids join this group for the love of the music and it shows. They represent the diversity of Highland."

It was 2025 grad Selena Lopez who was the inspiration for the Highland High School Mariachi Band.

"She came to me in her senior year and said 'We need to do this' and the band bubbled up from that as a direct result of student leaders. They built this program the way they wanted it to be," he said. "Superintendent Brian Smith and the district embraced the idea and, just like that, we became the newest instrumental group at the high school."

Upcoming Concerts

Join us for these free, family-friendly performances by our very talented performing arts students.

December 8 | 6:30 p.m.
Orchestra Concert

December 9 | 6:30 p.m.
Band Concert

December 11 | 6:30 p.m.
Choir Concert

December 16 | 6:30 p.m.
Merkley Elementary Program

Where: Monbeck Auditorium,
Highland High School, 9135 Erie St.



Meet new mascot: Southridge Sammi

The newest Southridge Elementary ambassador is known as Sammi, named by a vote of the student body. Not a replacement for the Warrior that has identified student team sports, Sammi goes wherever the people are – parent-teacher nights, ball games, back-to-school and more. Principal Kevin Beveridge said Sammi is something new that is both fun and exciting for the children.