



THE BEAR

Student Newspaper

February 05, 2026 WBHS Volume 29 Issue 4

900 W. Main St., West Branch, IA 52358

SATURDAY NIGHT JIVE CANCELLED; SHOW CHOIR PERSEVERES

Cassie Swisher
Photography Editor

WBHS's show choir, Christopher Jive and the Uptown 45, known as CJU45, faced setbacks in multiple aspects of their 2026 season. Their hosted competition, Saturday Night Jive, the annual season opener, was cancelled. In addition to the cancellation, the group foresees future adaptations to the program as show choir is redefined at WBHS to meet competition and financial limitations.

CJU45 hosted the final Saturday Night Jive on January 25th, 2025. The competition provided students with opportunities to excel in leadership by hosting schools and representing West Branch High School. West Branch also received praise for its organised setup and efficient schedule as well.

Simultaneously and more importantly, the event contributed a large portion to CJU45's program funds.

Last year's home competition hosted a generous 16 performing groups in the MS/HS building. Show choir competitions typically require more than 6 groups to hold finals and award a winner. With fewer than 5 groups to register for 2026, hosting the event became unfeasible and would ultimately create a financial discrepancy if not cancelled.

Christopher Reed, CJU45 director for 27 years, explained that, as popular as show choir is, most schools rely on hosting competitions to fund their program. With only a two-month span for show choir season, each school hosting their own competition makes the schedule more diluted and increases the difficulty of attracting groups to perform.

A small number of performing groups to register doesn't necessarily correlate with a bad competition, but instead is described as the nature of show choir. 3A and 4A schools rotate competitions annually to compete against new schools and find new opportunities to get awards.

Reed stated, "The 3As and 4As change their schedule every year because wherever they go, they have a shot of winning the whole thing. We were also on the same day as a State Speech contest in which most schools have a competitive speech program, and that can make or break if a show choir comes depending on how many kids they have involved in that."

Reed sent out the email informing students and parents that Saturday Night Jive wouldn't be

hosted this year on December 5. However, the outlook appeared unlikely for several months before that, with a dwindling number of schools to register.

Preparations for hosting a competition start as early as a year in advance, which is both time and energy-consuming for a show choir program. The decision to cancel opened up more questions amongst the despondency.

Without the main fundraiser to cover program costs, it is now up to the group to raise enough money to keep the program running, or forfeit certain aspects of show choir. Set building, costumes, and competition entrance fees all add up to define show choir as a fundamentally expensive program to maintain.

Reed stated, "I used SNJ

money to purchase upfront all of our costumes, which are reimbursed by the student fee."

Moving forward, we would need the money upfront before I can order costumes."

With Reed's plan moving forward for costume fees, it could potentially result in a jump in fees for students. However, Reed's outlook is positive for show choir as long as there is student interest and volunteers for their other fundraisers.

Without a home competition to prepare for, Reed shared that he is now able to properly plan effective and productive rehearsals.

The group predicts they will need it in the upcoming season as they continue to compete against more 3A and 4A groups, who cultivate stronger choirs via auditions. In contrast, CJU45 takes pride in their non-audition progress as a 2A school.

Reed stated, "The resilience of the group will be pushed when we compete with a lot larger 4A and 3A schools, cutting down our chance of making it to finals. Competing against all these bigger schools for 3 weeks in a row should make us dynamite by the end of the year, but it depends on whether everyone buys into that."

Amongst the competition's cancellation, this year stands apart for a multitude of reasons. The show theme is "Pool Party," and differs due to its simplicity rather than a complex storyline found in previous shows.

The group is described as a "young choir," meaning that the future for show choir at WBHS is promising. With a majority of singers found in the underclassmen, even with financial limitations, the group will persevere.



CJU45 performs for the community in the PAC on Saturday, Jan. 24, in lieu of SNJ. Photo contributed by Tracy Schutte.

CASH HATFIELD EARNS 100TH CAREER VARSITY WIN, PLACES 6TH IN IA RANKINGS

Halia Gade
Social Media Editor

After battling an injury, senior Cash Hatfield earned his 100th career varsity win during the quad dual at Regina on Jan. 8, 2026, and is currently ranked 6th in 2A at 144lbs.

Before getting injured, Hatfield stopped at his 98th win, which set him up to get his 100th at the Regina quad. To get his 99th win, Hatfield won by a tech fall against his opponent from Regina, 15-0. A tech fall is when a wrestler beats their opponent by 15 points before the six-minute period ends. Next, to get his 100th win, Hatfield once again beat his opponent from Anamosa by a tech fall, 20-5.

Hatfield said, "I was excited because my old teammates and friends were there to see. It felt really good getting it, especially

since I broke my arm freshman year and tore my meniscus in my other knee last year. It has taken a long time, and I'm glad I finally got it." Even though 100 wins is a big accomplishment, Hatfield called it "Just another win."

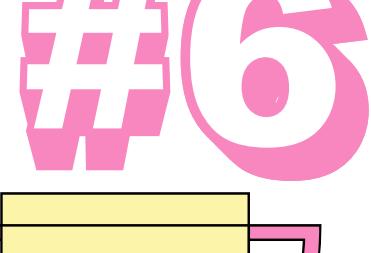
Hatfield said, "This wasn't a big deal to me; it's just a step toward my bigger goal, which is state champ."

Hatfield jumped up a ranking last week, moving from sixth to fifth place at 144lbs in 2A. To move up in the rankings, wrestlers have to win, not give up matches, and beat opponents they weren't supposed to beat. Hatfield moved up to fifth because a wrestler ranked above him lost to someone Hatfield had previously beaten.

Hatfield said, "Going up and all of that is nice, but at the end of the day, rankings don't matter, you just gotta go out there and



Cash Hatfield holds his "100 win" banner after a meet at Regina on Jan. 8. Photo by Halia Gade.



(Story continued on page 10)

Read this issue online!

AND

Follow our Insta!



THEBEARSTUDENTNEWS

2

Clubs & Orgs

February 05, 2026



WEST BRANCH FFA VISITS IOWA STATE CAPITOL



West Branch FFA students attended a legislative symposium at the Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines on Jan. 21, 2026. There they met with state officials including Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig and legislators such as Sen. Dawn Driscoll, Rep. Heather Hora, Rep. Judd Lawler, and House Majority Leader Bobby Kauffman.

Photo contributed by Renee Thompson

DANCE MARATHON

FUNDRAISING SCHEDULE

- 1/26 - 2/13 - MS/Elem Coin Drive starts
- 2/5 - Texas Roadhouse fundraiser
- 2/10 - Silent Auction ends
- 2/13 - Coin Drive MS/Elem ends
- 2/13 - Dance Marathon shirt decorating during IS (schoolwide)
- 2/16 - 2/20 - Dance marathon week with dress up days and HS Coin Drive
- 2/20 - Dance Marathon 8:00-11pm

15% off Buffalo Wild Wings (2500 Corridor Way in Coralville) when you arrive with your DM shirt the night of the dance!

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEGO LEAGUE TEAM PLACES THIRD IN STATE

Wyatt Chapman
Writing Editor

The WBMS LEGO League team, Team of Doom, placed first in the River Valley competition at River Valley High School, on Jan. 3, 2026 with 330 points, ranking third in the state.

"Originally I didn't think that we would have placed 1st. I did think that we were going to get maybe third or second, as I did have high hopes, and I did believe we were going to do good," said eighth grader Rhys Arlen.

Team of Doom will compete at Iowa State University Feb. 7, 2026 against 60 teams. The team will have to complete the same tasks as before but in a more high stakes environment. Members of the team include eighth graders Rhys Arlen, Breana Lagunas, Mari Argueta, Camilo Garcia, Alex Pharr from Tipton and seventh graders Eli Finzel and Noah Wiechert who is homeschooled.

To prepare for the state competition, Team of Doom worked on fine tuning their

robot, for example finding the correct placements.

"We figured out that we have good code. Meaning we can do a mission that will push us up above the team in first at state if we do a perfect run," said Arlen.

In LEGO League, teams of students in grades fourth through eighth engage in research, problem solving, coding, and engineering. Students build and program a LEGO SPIKE Prime robot that navigates the missions of a robot game.

Team of Doom originally had a different robot. The decently sized, cube shaped bot, named 'bob-bot' encountered some issues.

The main issue being 'bob-bot's' size. Game rules classified the robot's second motor as illegal.

Arlen and Garcia decided they needed a smaller robot. After they researched designs, they found the design that Team of Doom is using now.

The smaller robot helped the effectiveness, allowing them to do a wide variety of missions.

WE CATER!

- Birthdays
- Graduations
- Team Dinners
- Pre-Dance Dinners
- Holiday Parties
- Fundraisers
- etc!

WILDWOOD

(319) 333-1750

4919 WALLEYE DR. SE IOWA CITY, IA

Jennifer Walker
Owner

(319) 643-5484
(319) 631-8615 cell
theservingcafe@gmail.com
theservingcafe.com

209 E Main St
West Branch, IA 52358

MEXICO LINDO

GRILL & CANTINA

711 S Downey St

West Branch, IA

(319) 877-8025

4

Community

February 05, 2026



MAIN STREET SWEETS PREPARES TO RENOVATE STOREFRONT

Karlee Hansen
Staff Writer

Jessica and Steven Grace, co-owners of the local business Main Street Sweets, plan to renovate the exterior storefront, in March of 2026.

The interior work for the renovation is now complete. 2023 WBHS grad, Ava Hazelwood and 223 Vintage Co owner, Macy Krall both pitched in to assist with the renovation.

Steven Grace said, "I reached out to people that are in the downtown community and have talent to do those things and are willing."

So far, the color palette of the previous interior has changed from an Iowa-themed wall, featuring mostly black and yellow, to a red and black West Branch wall consisting of framed jerseys and banners, red benches with a checkered back, and a quote that reads, "A Hometown Favorite."

They wanted both an Iowa and a West Branch wall due to "having connections with that. Macy Krall just pulled everything together." S. Grace said.

After considering renovating for a couple of years, the Grace's received a technical service grant

from Main Street Iowa, providing them the money to start the renovations.

They arranged Retailworks, Inc. in West Branch for consultations for display designing with no cost to the business. This grant also tied into other West Branch businesses such as, The Honey Den, The Black Rose, Izzy's Treasures, and 223 Vintage Co. The Grace's chose to renovate since The Honey Den also received a grant for exterior work.

"The Honey Den has the grant to do exterior work and wanted to spruce things up, hoping to coincide with their designs. I essentially want to brighten things up," S. Grace said.

The reconstruction of Main St. Sweets will begin in March. This may affect business flow, however, Main St. Sweets are working with the landlord to avoid adjusting their hours. Along with these renovations, Main St. Sweets plans to rebrand the logo for the business. The Grace's said that these exterior renovations will hopefully give it a new updated feel and help draw people's attention."

This could lure in new customers visiting West Branch or citizens in the town.



Main Street Sweets owners Steven & Jessica Grace pose together in their shop.
Photo by Karlee Hansen

HONEY DEN UNDER RENOVATIONS THROUGH SPRING

Kendra Rarick
Staff Writer



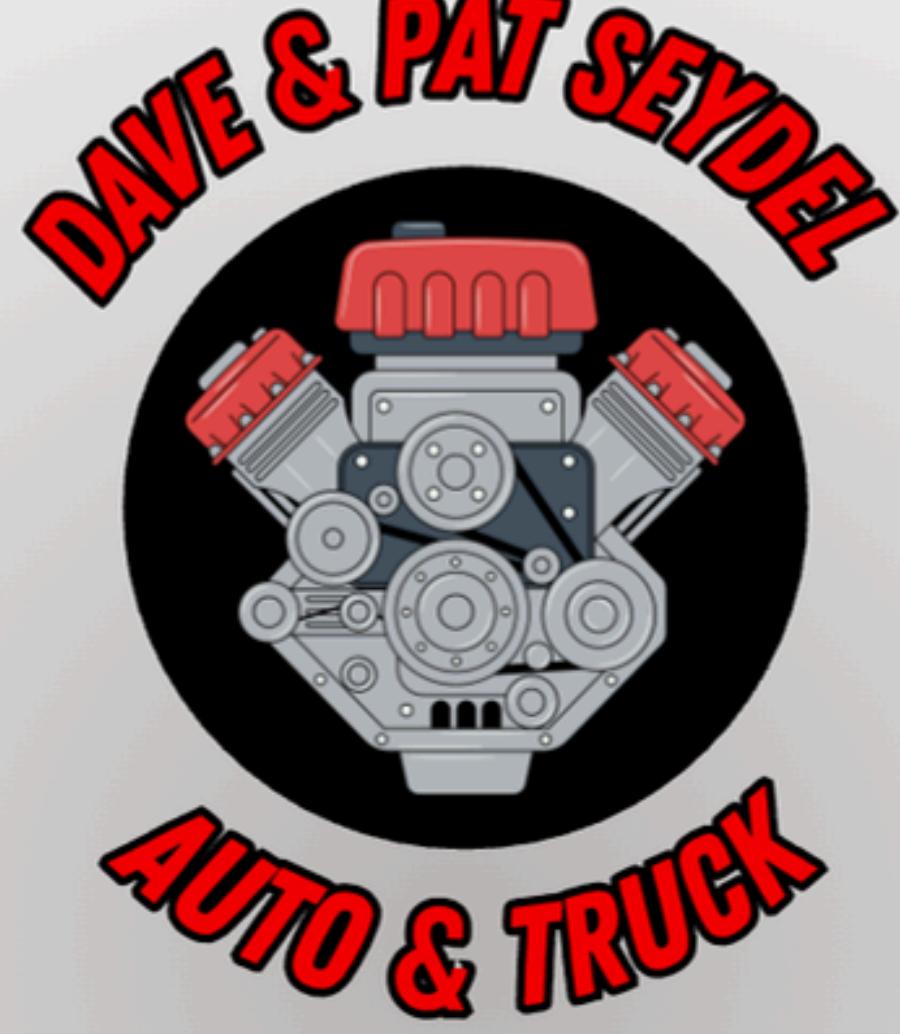
The Honey Den has been awarded the \$100,000 Iowa Main Street Challenge Grant and owner Tiffany Fredrick plans to match \$100,000 to use towards improvements and renovations to the store.

Currently, The Honey Den is relocated to the former Grace Ann Boutique at 106 West Main. The renovations are taking place at the 106 East Main storefront.

The store only moved 200 ft. down Main Street to its temporary location in West Branch.

Honey Den employee Harper Driscoll said, "the move was long, cold, and difficult, but worth it."

In a Facebook post made by owner Tiffany Fredrick on The Honey Den's page, she discussed renovations connected to Main Street Sweets and making their corner of Main Street more "inviting, connected, and unforgettable"



"THE BEST FRIEND YOUR CAR EVER HAD"

917 MAIDEN LANE
IOWA CITY, IA 52240

319-351-6805

BARNHART'S
CUSTOM SERVICES
WEST BRANCH, IA
319-643-1230
412 E. Main St
West Branch



Student Life

February 05, 2026

5

MULTIPLE ILLNESSES CREATE CHALLENGES FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Evan Highly
Design Editor

Students and staff at WBHS faced multiple illnesses leading into winter break and returning from the holiday season.

The count of Influenza cases continues to climb and is expected to get worse as the flu season progresses. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the number of Influenza cases this year is not at its peak and is expected to surpass last year in severity.

According to the CDC, the estimated number of flu cases this year is at least 15 million. Teachers of WBHS found they struggled during finals week due to the number of students missing. After polling 13 teachers, on

average, six students were missing from their finals due to illness.

Although most students ended up being fine during finals, teachers guessed that students struggled more on their finals while home sick.

History Teacher, Mr Vos, said, "It made it way more difficult to keep people on track with where they needed to be."

Multiple teachers, including Spanish teacher Abby Noelck, felt that this year's finals week happened to be unusual compared to those of the past.

Noelck said, "There were more students absent due to illness during finals than any other year I've taught here."

The majority of students who missed finals due to illness received an exemption. Exemption

is when a teacher omits you from taking the final, and you don't receive a grade.

Finals are not weighted more heavily than other grades and act as a normal grade.

"I couldn't make it to school because I was super sick, but I had really good grades, so I was exempted," said Cash Staker.

The virus spreading through the nation are identified as Influenza A and B. According to Cleveland Clinic, Influenza A is characterized by a sudden high fever and/or chills, cough, sore throat, sneezing along with a runny or stuffy nose, fatigue and weakness, headache, a loss of appetite, Nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, body aches, muscle aches, and joint pain. The National Council of Aging says Influenza B is the same, but the only difference between the two is

Influenza A affects more species whilst Influenza B only affects humans. Being more easy to mutate than Influenza B, Influenza A is more common and severe.

Health Direct says that the best way to prevent the flu is to get a vaccination each year.

Vaccinations prevent different types of influenza A and B.

Another way to prevent catching and spreading the flu is to stay consistent on hygiene. It's best to wash your hands regularly, cover your mouth when sneezing and/or coughing, and not share personal items with others.

If you caught the flu, Health Direct advises you to stay home. It's best to get plenty of rest, stay hydrated, and stay warm. Without treatment, most people get over the flu around seven to ten days.

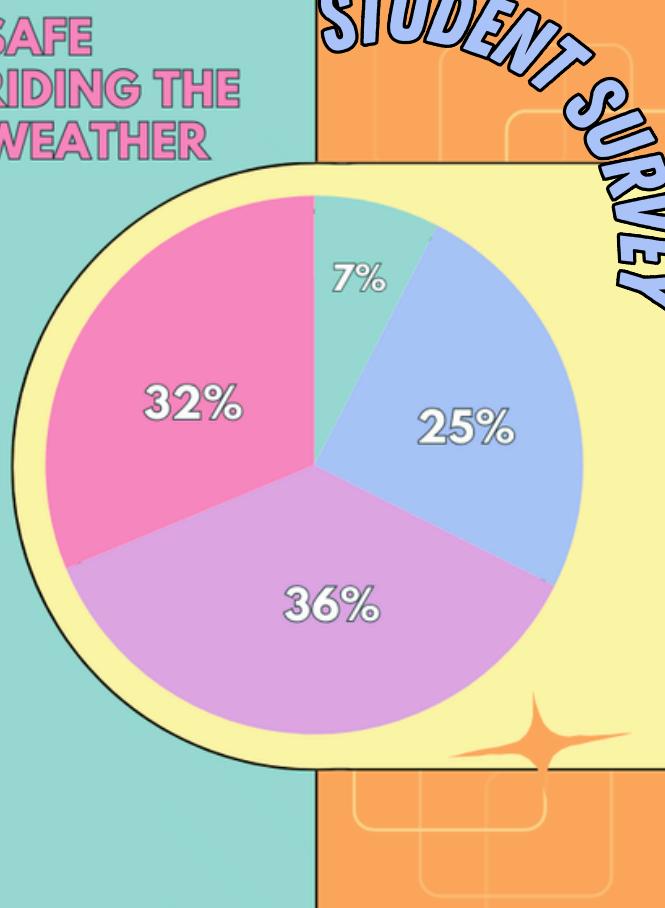


Of the 80 students and staff surveyed, only 7% said they have never felt unsafe traveling to school due to weather conditions. Despite a rough start to winter in Iowa, WBCSD experienced its first weather-related cancellation on Jan. 23. Just three days later, on Jan. 26, students and staff still traveled to school when the temperature felt like -14 degrees Fahrenheit. One anonymous student said, "There have been many times I've felt unsafe driving to jazz band due to fog, ice, or snow."

Graphic by Caitlyn Harrison.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT UNSAFE WALKING, DRIVING, OR RIDING THE BUS TO SCHOOL DUE TO WEATHER CONDITIONS?

- Never
- One or two times
- A few times
- Many times



Financial & Retirement Planning



Michael V. Sexton, CLU, ChFC, AFIS

319.643.4128

agentmichaelsexton.com

**FARM BUREAU
FINANCIAL SERVICES**

Registered Representative/Securities & services offered through FBL Marketing Services, LLC, * 5400 University Ave., West Des Moines, IA 50266, 877/860-2904, Member SIPC. Advisory services offered through FBL Wealth Management, LLC, ** Farm Bureau Property & Casualty Insurance Company, ** Western Agricultural Insurance Company, ** Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, **/West Des Moines, IA. *Affiliates. *Company providers of Farm Bureau Financial Services. PR-WMA-D (3-25)

LYNCH'S PLUMBING, INC.

Wayne & Steve Lynch, owners



Residential and Commercial
New construction - Remodels
Boilers - Waterheaters - Softeners
Licensed - Insured - Bonded

115 S. 2nd Street
West Branch, IA 52358
Office: 319-643-2022 Email: Lynchsplumbing@Lcom.net

**Presidential
Builders, LLC**

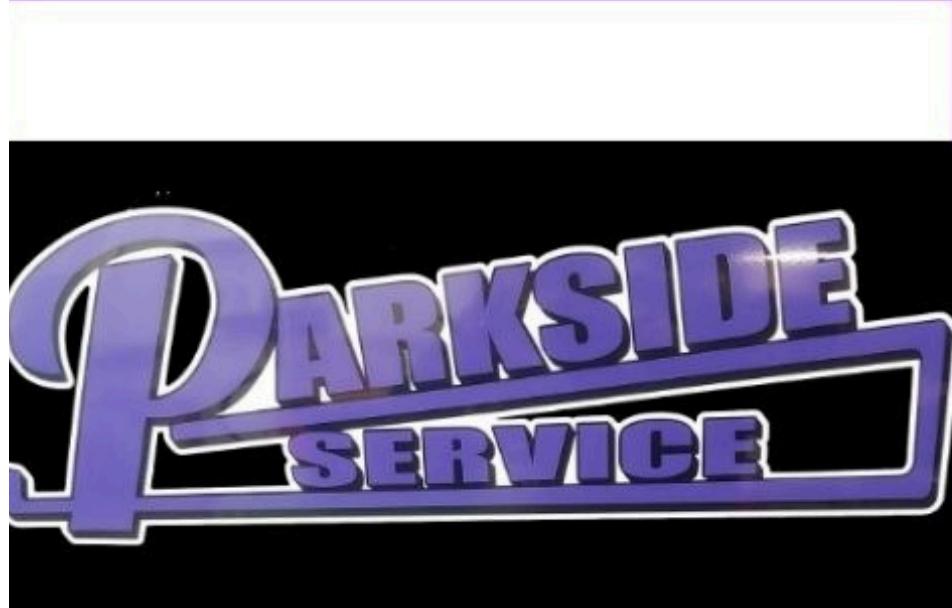
Gabe Waters 319-631-1210

New Construction - Additions - Remodels - Siding
Roofing - Porches/Decks - Screening - Snow Removal

6

Sponsors

February 05, 2026



• Auto Repair • Tires • Custom Accessories

319-643-2509

West Branch, IA

**JACK & JILL
GROCERY
STORE**

115 E Main St
West Branch, IA
319-643-2611



**FAMILY PET
VETERINARY**

West Branch, IA • 319-643-3555



(319) 643-5099
(563) 886-4546

Groomstation@aol.com

620 Division St.
West Branch, IA 52358

info@familypetveterinary.com

WB

WEST BRANCH ROOFING

GO BEARS!

(319) 643-2435

westbranchroofing@gmail.com

PO Box 100
West Branch, IA 52358



Sponsors

February 05, 2026

7

For the connections
that matter most...

**THERE'S
LIBERTY**



INTERNET

Get the speed you need to download music, stream 4k, play online games and more! With fast, reliable speeds up to a Gig, Liberty Communications is proud to be your local internet provider.

DOWNLOAD / UPLOAD SPEED	YOUR PRICE
1Gbps / 500Mbps	\$149.95
500Mbps / 500Mbps	\$99.95
250Mbps / 125Mbps	\$79.95
100Mbps / 50Mbps	\$59.95



PHONE **\$29.95**

Clear connections and no dropped calls mean you can keep in touch with loved ones and manage your busy lives.

Included FREE with your package:

- Unlimited Nationwide Calling to the 48 Contiguous United States
- Caller ID
- Call Waiting and Call Waiting ID
- Call Forwarding
- 3-Way Calling
- Speed Dial



MANAGED WIFI **\$8.95**

With Liberty's Managed WiFi service, our friendly technicians are here to optimize your WiFi experience. They will:

- Provide a premium WiFi router
- Set up your network
- Troubleshoot for you
- Ensure your WiFi is up and running

Expand your wireless coverage with a wireless extender for just \$3.95/month



TELEVISION

Watch what you want, when you want with a DIRECTV Device, developed exclusively for DIRECTV. Enjoy our complete entertainment experience:

- Unlimited hours of Cloud DVR
- Stream your favorite shows anywhere in your home
- A package designed just for you
- Easy set up

DIRECTV

Liberty
communications

CONTACT US TO LEARN MORE!

[in](#) [f](#) [o](#) [libertycommunications.com](#) | 319.627.2145

413 North Calhoun, West Liberty, IA 52776 | 117 1st St, West Branch IA 52358

**THE
ENCOUNTER
CAFÉ**

Open Monday - Saturday
7:00 - 2:30
Closed Sunday

376 Clinton Street, Iowa City, IA
(319)-530-9285
encountercafe2017@gmail.com
www.theencountercafe.com

Enjoy a round of golf
or grab a bite to eat
in West Branch!

CEDARS EDGE
Golf Course
WEST BRANCH, IA

3 Ember Lane
West Branch, IA 52358
(319) 643-3343

Birdies
EST. 2022
EATS & DRINKS
WEST BRANCH, IA
(319) 643-3287

FIDELITY
BANK & TRUST
[www.bankfidelity.bank](#)
Member FDIC

**MAIN
STREET
Sweets**

104-1/2 E. Main St.
319-643-5001
[www.mainstreetsweetswb.com](#)

Open Year round!
Serving Sandwiches, appetizers, soft serve ice cream, slushies, and hot & cold drinks!
Hot plate lunches served Friday
Homemade Pie every Thursday!

February 05, 2026



THE TURING TEST REIMAGINED: HOW WELL CAN WBHS STUDENTS AND TEACHERS RECOGNIZE A.I.

Anthony Heitzman
Business Editor

In many schools across the country, teachers have been dealing with the growing issue of students using generative A.I. platforms to cheat on assignments. And due to how new these technologies are, many educators haven't been fully trained on recognizing A.I. use amongst students, which has led to instances of teachers both falsely accusing students of cheating and missing cases of actual academic dishonesty. According to a poll conducted by the Digital Education Council, 86% of students admitted to using generative A.I. for school assignments during the 2024-2025 academic year. The same survey also found that only 17% of educators feel confident in their A.I. literacy skills, and that 58% of students feel they lack significant A.I. literacy skills.

These trends and concerns inspired me to do an experiment to test whether or not teachers at WBHS can accurately recognize A.I. written work from human-written work. In order to do this, I designed an experiment based on the Turing Test.

British mathematician Alan Turing originally conceived the Turing Test in 1950 as a way to determine whether computers can truly think by measuring their ability to imitate a human in a conversation. The release of artificial intelligence platforms such as ChatGPT in recent years has reignited discussion about the Turing Test and its implications. The most recent version of ChatGPT scored 73% on the Turing Test, which is the highest ever scored by any program to date.

The Turing Test works by having a subject propose a series of text-based prompts to two participants, a human and a machine, without knowing which is which. The subject then must deduce which participant

is a human or a machine based on the responses provided by each. The subject's score is calculated based on how frequently they could accurately tell the human response from the machine. In my experiment, I modified it to test the subject's ability to distinguish between the human and the machine rather than the machine's ability to mimic a human.

For the first part of the experiment, I generated four sets of two paragraphs each, answering a question designed to mimic an assignment students might have to do in class. A human subject created one paragraph while ChatGPT created the other. I then presented the two paragraphs to an anonymous teacher who agreed to participate and they must decide which is A.I. and which is human-made.

The results of this first experiment contrasted greatly with those of the official Turing Test conducted on ChatGPT. In the experiment, all teachers were able to correctly identify the A.I. generated text and many did so quickly and confidently. One teacher even noted specific cues and signs that gave away the A.I. generated text.

I then conducted the second experiment similarly to the first one. I generated five sets of two images, one found on a stock footage website and the other was generated by ChatGPT. The images were then sent out in a survey where students would then identify the AI-generated image. In total 43 students responded to the survey and averaged an accuracy of 95.34%

The results of these two experiments greatly contrasted those of the national surveys previously mentioned. In both of the experiments I conducted, participants were able to accurately and confidently distinguish between human work and A.I. generated content. These results demonstrate that West Branch students and faculty have been able to quickly adapt to the ever-changing digital age.

WBHS STAFF WORD SEARCH



YERBD	TSMDTPD		
CVRDUTY	TXCHOUEKTT		
JWUQSQDQBE	NADROJIXJPJX		
OPDIUMASKEBW	HMDGREBNETSCK		
SNPGRENYRORBW	YCAOXQAJXPDQE		
NGVPSIZCCPKVCY	BWSFHGMYERYRTUKVRP		
WRVKDGCHHHM	NGVPSIZCCPKVCY		
DXTEIRVXSEFM	SPYVDONOVAHCHEZJ		
VYRSDEBOXUJLNU	WRVKDGCHHHM		
SBKNABNESAHDAFK	ADNFRWKMLXJEDMQQI		
DQSXRRSVAYTZ	DRKDRIAXFTQZUJQ		
AWHOGOZPFSMWWK	LVZBREHGALLAGNLJ		
NGLYFKRDI0AAELPN	HRSOMIBRCZHDYCZ		
MITWNWONLRSQ	DQSXRRSVAYTZ		
GQYYAYBNOSTREBORK	HAEFATLGDNUVWTS		
GXUNHNONOJHLPT	GHLDZLQ		
ZXOEENAAEYMMNJW	WMBKKGFVZ		
SCHSLAWRICEJBDY	SCLEZLC		
RFOCMYLCBCEUGQI	HBRUQ		
GXXIQHKWLRS	HBRUQ		
SNKTIBYINOHB	BRJP		
NZSMEMYOCNDTQQ	WZ		
Brown	Flanegan	Q Q D D C F S H J N F X	Reed
Budreau	Gallagher	R A S X S P D X J L	Reynolds
Cain	Hasenbank	S H T E M D N U	Ryner
Connor	Heick	C C A O O A	Schwickerath
Culver	Jordan	D S H L	Stenburg
Curtiss	Maske	W T	Taylor
Dix	Meth		Thompson
Donovan	Noelck		Vos
Duwa	Oswald		Walsh
Farmer	Popkes		Taylor



Where your dogs
are part of the
family!

Located at:
52 280th Street
West Branch, IA 52358

Phone: 319-371-3200

Email: info@twosisterskennels.com

Fax: 319-371-3201

North Dodge
Hu·Vee[®]

Fresh. Fast.
Friendly.
Right Here in Your
Neighborhood.





Sports

February 05, 2026

9

KEELER COMPETES AT STATE DANCE WITH WEST LIBERTY DANCE TEAM

Ava Lacina
Staff Writer

On Friday, Dec. 5, West Liberty Dance Center (WLDC)—including Lauren Keeler, a senior at WBHS—traveled to the EMC Expo Center in Des Moines, Iowa for the Iowa State Dance competition.

The girls performed a jazz routine at 10:24 AM and placed eleventh with a total of 317 points and a Division II rating. Succeeding their first performance, the team competed at the Casey's Center arena at 12:01 PM with a pom routine—one of Keeler's favorite genres of dance, along with lyrical—, placing eleventh with 316 points and a second Division II ranking. The group left the competition with a Sportsmanship Award.

Speaking of team camaraderie, Keeler mentions how her team keeps each other

up at big competitions.

Keeler said, "We are pretty supportive of each other and yell out things before difficult sections," and, "It was an amazing experience."

She also notes that the moment Lone Tree's team cheered for them their entire performance felt great.

Along with two of her teammates, Keeler reached a Division I status following her solo performance at the Solo Qualifiers. She did not present her solo at the state championships.

Keeler first began dancing in 2011. When asked why she made the choice to continue, Keeler explains with some heartfelt reasons. She said, "I really enjoyed it and the family atmosphere inside the studio."

Her advice to young, aspiring dancers is to, "stay confident and try everything you can because you never know what you may like."



West Liberty Dance performs their jazz routine at State Dance. Photo contributed by Lauren Keeler.



Keeler, pictured on far right, poses with two teammates. Photo contributed by Lauren Keeler.



The West Liberty Comet Dance Team. Photo contributed by Lauren Keeler.

West Branch Animal Clinic

Providing quality health care to our small animal, large animal and equine patients with efficient, effective and practical animal care services and products.



508 N. 4th St.
West Branch, IA 52358 (319) 643-2127
westbranchanimalclinic.com

MIDTOWN
Family Restaurants

2 LOCATIONS!

200 Scott Ct.
Iowa City, IA
319-351-9303

1069 Hwy. 1 West
Iowa City, IA
319-351-9323

www.midtownfamily.com



Amanda Budreau

OWNER/PLANNER

✉ dragonflyevents.amanda@gmail.com

⌚ @dragonfly__events

⌚ dragonfly wedding & event planner

NOEL
AUTOMOTIVE
REPAIR + RESTORATION

319-643-5088

700 Leonard Ln
West Branch, IA

noelautomotive.org

YOUR VISION. OUR PASSION.

Cotton Creek MILL
QUILT SHOPPE
www.CottonCreekMill.com



3000+ BOLTS OF FABRIC • CLASSES • FREE OPEN SEW
GIFTS • BOOKS • NOTIONS • PATTERNS • KITS
BLOCK OF THE MONTHS • SEW ALONGS • SEW RETREATS

113 W. MAIN STREET • WEST BRANCH, IA 52358
www.CottonCreekMill.com

319.643.3554

HOURS: TUESDAY - FRIDAY 10 - 5 PM • SATURDAY 10 - 2 PM

10

Sports

February 05, 2026



(Continued from page 1) wrestle."

For the future, Hatfield already committed to wrestle at Loras College in Dubuque. Hatfield said, "I'm excited. I'm looking forward to being more independent, and the intensity and environment of the college wrestling room."

Although Hatfield's future in wrestling is bright, he faced many challenges to get there.

While live wrestling at practice mid December, Hatfield's knee buckled, leaving him unable to

walk. He later got an MRI, found out he tore his meniscus, and had to get surgery on Dec. 21 2025. Hatfield could not practice and had to sit out for one tournament.

Hatfield said, "Physical therapy played a big part in my recovery, but I couldn't wrestle at practice, and had to be easy on it, which meant I had to eat right, and use the bike and sauna to lose a lot of weight. It really sucked."

The physical challenges Hatfield faced weren't the only ones; he also had to overcome many mental obstacles.

Hatfield said, "It sucks not being able to do what you love. I was worried about missing matches, because it's my senior year and I wanna make the most of it. I was really eager to wrestle again, and I was back on the mat within two weeks."

It has been a month since Hatfield could return to wrestling.

he has participated several duals and tournaments, placing first in the Ed Hadenfeldt Invitational tournament Jan. 17.

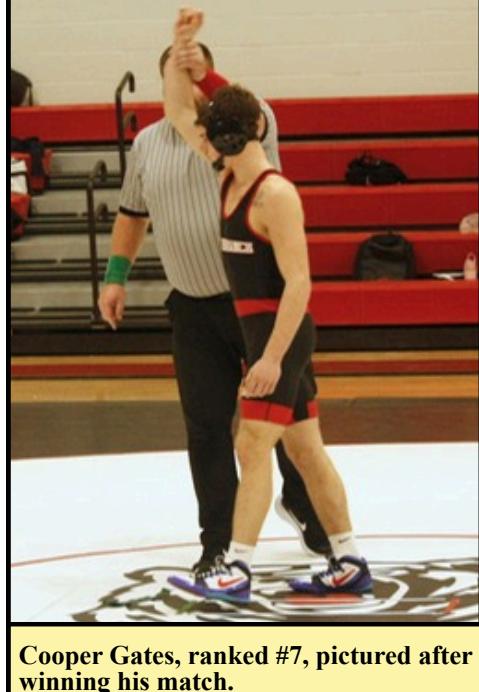
Hatfield said, "It obviously feels better than it did before surgery. It still gets sore sometimes, but that's normal, I'm used to it. I'm excited for the rest of the season, and thankful that my knee was able to heal fast."

WBHS wishes Hatfield and the boys wrestling team luck for the remainder of the season.

Cash Hatfield, ranked #6, pictured attempting to pin his opponent. Photo by Halia Gade.



Keaton Gates, ranked #11, pictured working to flip his opponent. Photo by Raelyn Wilcher.



Ethan Humphrey, ranked #3, and RVC champion, pictured after winning his match at Lisbon. Photo by FLR

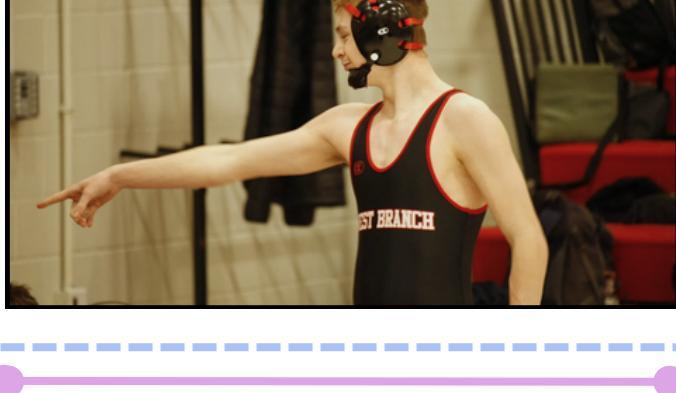


BOYS TAKEDOWN THE 25-26 WRESTLING SEASON



Liam Exline gets a takedown at meet on Jan 22, 2026. Photo by Halia Gade.

Teague Thomas, placed third at RVC meet, pictured pointing at his team. Photo by Halia Gade.



WB GIRLS WRESTLING SENDS TWO TO STATE

Cameron Waters
Staff Writer

Sisters Finley Rushton and Sawyer Rushton both qualified for the state wrestling meet after both wrestlers placed second in their weight brackets at the regional tournament at Midland on Friday, Jan. 30.

Junior Gisele Gross and senior Saylee Gingerich also placed in their weight brackets at the regional tournament. Gross placed third. Gingerich placed fourth.

Currently, Freshman S. Rushton is also ranked tenth in the state of Iowa as of Jan. 29.

S. Rushton said, "It's obviously nice to be considered in the rankings but they don't really matter. I just try to focus on myself and work hard every day to get better."

Throughout the season, Gingerich, F. Rushton, and freshman Zoey Wildman led the team for wins.

It has been a busy season, with multiple meets since returning from winter break.

The girls RVC Conference took place on Jan. 23 at Cascade. F. Rushton placed first, Gisele Gross placed third, and Layla Hamilton, S. Rushton, Karly Shelton, and Cameron Waters

placed fourth.

The team overall placed fourth, half a point behind third.

On Jan. 17, the Bears hosted their second home tournament of the season.

F. Rushton placed first in the 105lb. weight bracket, and S. Rushton placed first in the 100lb. weight bracket. These two wins helped the team to place fourth out of ten teams.

Monday, Jan. 13, the Bears traveled to Lisbon. They won the meet against Lisbon, North Linn, and Wapello.

On Jan. 12, the team hosted their first home meet of the season.

To start the meet, Gingerich and wrestling manager Lauren Keeler were both honored for senior night. This is the third year of wrestling for Gingerich.

"The most important lesson I have learned is to take it one match at a time," said Gingerich, "I know I won't wrestle my best if I am worrying in advance or if I'm overthinking my last matches so it's important for me to take it one match at a time."

The Bears placed second at their home meet beating Camanche and Durant.

SAWYER



Freshman Sawyer Rushton holds an opponent at the Maquoketa meet in December. Photo by Cameron Waters.

FINLEY



Junior Finley Rushton grabs the leg of her opponent working to flip her for a pin. Photo by Cameron Waters.