



Benedictine School teachers and staff take a moment during a staff meeting Wednesday, Feb. 7, to celebrate receiving a two-year accreditation from the National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services. The accreditation places Benedictine among 26 institutions in the nation to receive the honor.

Benedictine School wins accreditation

By **DUSTIN HOLT**
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RIDGELY — Benedictine School in Ridgely recently earned a two-year accreditation through 2020 from the National Commission for the Accreditation of Special Education Services.

The accreditation places the Benedictine School among 26 institutions in the nation to receive the honor out of about 200 special education schools.

As a national commission that verifies and promotes excellence in education service, NCASES evaluates

private special education programs through a process that encourages diversity of educational practice and innovation. The process assures students in private special education settings are provided environments that are healthy, safe, comfortable and conducive to learning.

"It is a validation of what we do and who we are," said Benedictine School Education Director Julie Hickey. "We are providing really quality services and following best practices.

"Accreditation says you do it in one of the best ways you

can do it," she said. "We are really proud of it. A lot of people put in a lot of hard work for the school to earn this achievement."

The accreditation process reviews all aspects of the school's program, which includes a co-ed day and residential educational program for individuals ages 5-21 with intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities and autism. The review requires adherence to not only state and federal laws and regulations, but industry standards as well. Benedictine joins four other Maryland schools that have achieved

this accreditation.

The Benedictine School has 64 students enrolled with eight day students and 56 students living on campus or in community-based group houses. The students come from the entire Mid-Atlantic region, including Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"Our staff really makes Benedictine what it is," Hickey said. "Our students have really intense needs. Our staff is very passionate.

"They give extra of themselves every day to give the students what they need,"

she said. "They bring their creativity, their compassion, their dedication to work every day. That makes us who we are."

The NCASES accreditation comes as an additional industry accolade as the school currently is certified by The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for its day program and The Department of Human Resources (DHR) for its residential program, with several group homes licensed by The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

Hickey said community involvement is a big part of the

accreditation.

"We give our community resources, such as a place for college interns to learn things that they may not learn in our settings," she said. "Our students can interact with the community, and the community is extremely welcoming to our students. We've formed great partnerships with local schools and businesses."

For more information about the Benedictine School, visit www.benschool.org.

Follow Caroline/Dorchester Editor Dustin Holt on Twitter @Dustin_StarDem.

CCPS donates \$25,000 to Imagination Library

By **ABBY ANDREWS**

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DENTON — Caroline County Public Schools presented a \$25,000 check to Caroline County's Imagination Library, setting up 1,000 county children to get a free, age-appropriate book mailed to their homes every month for a year.

The check was presented at the Caroline County Board of Education's meeting Tuesday, Feb. 6.

Superintendent Dr. Patricia Saelens said this is the third year the school system's administrative and instructional staff teams held a fundraising challenge to raise money for the early childhood literacy program.

Throughout December, staff members organized a raft of fundraisers, Saelens said, from bake sales to auctions.

Most popular, she said, were "jeans days," in which teachers made a donation and wore jeans to school.

"Teachers will pay anything to wear jeans," Saelens joked.

After raising \$7,000 and \$10,000 in its first two years, the challenge pulled in \$25,000 in its third.

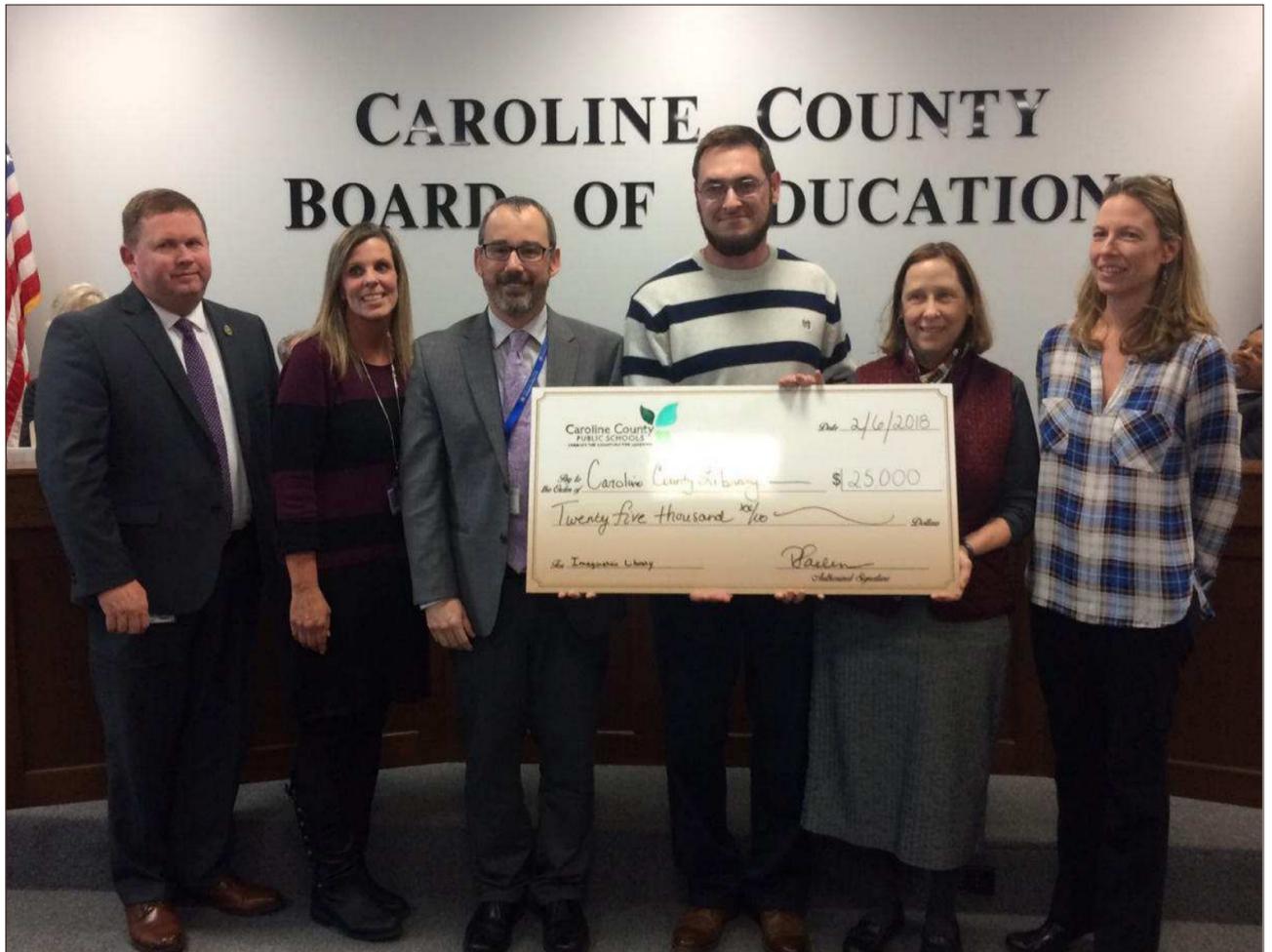
To further incentivize the fundraising efforts, Saelens and Milton Nagel, assistant superintendent for administrative services, dress up as characters to pass out candy canes to students at the school whose staff raises the most money per person.

This year, Denton Elementary School's staff was the winner, on the strength of sales of magnets featuring the school's dolphin mascot, Saelens said.

Saelens and Nagel dressed up as Elsa and Olaf from "Frozen," and passed out the candy canes to students during lunch one day.

The fundraising challenge also pits against each other the administrative and instructional staffs, Saelens said. This year, the administrative staff won, raising about \$1,500 more.

Caroline County Public Library



Caroline County Public Schools recently donated \$25,000 to Caroline County's Imagination Library chapter, which mails a free, age-appropriate book to any child in the county, from birth to age 5. Pictured here at the check presentation at the Caroline County Board of Education's meeting Tuesday, Feb. 6, are, left to right, Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services Milton Nagel; Superintendent Dr. Patricia Saelens; Director of Student Services Dr. Derek Simmons; Caroline County Family YMCA Branch Executive Director Dylan Vickers; Caroline County Public Library Executive Director Debby Bennett; and Caroline County Board of Trustees member Amy Brandt.

Executive Director Debby Bennett accepted the check, along with Dylan Vickers, executive director of the Caroline County Family YMCA in Denton, and Amy Brandt, member of the Board of Library Trustees.

"Thank you for supporting this so passionately," Bennett said. "Go jeans day!"

Bennett said Caroline County's Imagination Library program consistently has about 1,000 children enrolled, and about 500 have

aged out since it was established.

The program sends a new, age-appropriate book to children from birth to 5 years old. Any child is eligible.

Caroline's is a local chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Li-

brary, a national foundation that administers the program across the U.S.

For more information, or to register a child to receive free books, visit www.imaginationlibrary.com.

Denton gathering information about proposed power plant

By **DUSTIN HOLT**
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DENTON — Denton Town Council members Dallas Lister and Keith Johnson spoke at the Feb. 1 town council meeting about the proposed natural gas power plant Spectrum Energy Inc. wants to build in town.

The North Carolina-based company started Eastern Shore Energy Center LLC for the project and wants to build the plant on private land that is zoned Industrial along Foy and Legion roads in Denton.

According to Spectrum Energy, the proposed private project is a \$700 million, 600 megawatt high efficient

power plant for natural gas with one turbine. The power plant would be used to generate electricity that would feed into the eastern grid, and tap into a natural gas pipeline. The proposed project will be for generation and distribution, not for fracking.

Lister said the town council is aggressively seeking additional information about the impact the power plant could have.

He said Mayor Abby McNinch has met with the mayor from Myersville in Frederick County, the location of a gas-fired power plant. He said McNinch learned Myersville was sued for not allowing the power plant to proceed.

"Just because a group of people may not want something, the company can still meet the requirements of the zoning and the design and the impacts, and they have the right to do certain things with the property that they own," Lister said. "We are aggressively out, trying to find the best solution for our town. We are as committed to this town as any resident is.

"For clarity, nothing is predetermined," he said. "People are doing the things that are required of them by the laws, the ordinances, the processes of permitting and all of those things. They are following the rules."

Lister said the informa-

tion McNinch and the town council have received from different towns has not been bad.

"The horror stories that she has received back from other mayors and council people have been nowhere near the fear-mongering that has gone on so far," he said. "That doesn't mean we should not do our due diligence to ensure that we are not taken advantage of as a community."

Johnson said he is planning a trip to speak with towns in Charles County that also are near a power plant. He said he and the council continue to collect all the information they can to see if the power plant is best for Denton.

During a January public information session in Denton, Mark Gilliss, vice president of Spectrum Energy, gave an overview of the proposed plant.

The plant, to be built on a 157-acre site zoned industrial near Legion and Foy roads, will use a state-of-the-art single-turbine design, allowing it to generate up to 600 megawatts of power while producing minimal emissions — no sulfur, and only 2.5 parts per million of nitrogen oxides and 2 parts per million of carbon monoxide.

"This will be the most efficient power plant in the region," Gilliss said.

The plant itself will use

only 15 acres of the site, set near the center, Gilliss said; the surrounding land will remain farmland.

He said it will provide employment opportunities — up to 350 jobs during construction, using as many local workers and suppliers as possible, and then 25 to 30 permanent positions, paying an average annual salary of \$100,000.

It will generate tax revenue for both the Town of Denton and Caroline County, while not requiring any additional infrastructure, other than a new well, Gilliss said.

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