

Edwardsville High School hosts annual New Friends Prom

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – A rainy Friday night in Edwardsville didn't dampen the spirits of several groups of special-education students from throughout the region.

That's because they go together to meet each other, enjoy a formal dinner and dance the night away at the sixth edition of Edwardsville High's New Friends Prom, held at the EHS commons.

The prom, organized by Edwardsville High's Student Council, gives a chance for special-ed students from area high schools to meet each other, dance, enjoy dinner and enjoy the trappings of a traditional high school prom.

In attendance were students from Edwardsville, Triad, Highland, Collinsville, Alton, Granite City, Roxana, East Alton-Wood River and (for the first time this year) Piasa Southwestern.

“This is our sixth year putting this on,” said EHS Student Council advisor Melissa Beck. “It gives the kids from all over the area the chance to meet each other and have a good time. A lot of these kids wouldn't have the chance to meet each other otherwise, so it gives them a chance to know each other.”

The idea for the prom came from a similar event that was put on by the Albert Pujols Family Foundation when Pujols was playing for the St. Louis Cardinals. “One of my friends has a daughter with Down's Syndrome (similar to one of one of Pujols' children), and they had an event for kids like that,” Beck said. “I thought it'd be a fun idea and I brought it to the Student Council.

“They voted to do it and it's just grown and grown since then.”

The entire event is organized and put on by the EHS Student Council, with donations of food, treats and a goodie bag made to help the event take place. Dinner was prepared by Triad's culinary class and was an Italian feast.

The event is organized and presented by the Student Council. The honor of heading up the organizing committee this year went to Nina Weatherly, the council's vice-president of council records.

“Ms. Beck asked me if I would do this, and it's a great honor,” Weatherly said. “It's a big, big event, especially considering we're also inviting kids from surrounding districts. It's a lot of work to put this on, but when you see the kids having fun, with smiles on their faces, meeting each other and having a great time, it's all worth it.”

The theme for the prom was “1950s.” Council members dressed up as servers from a 50s-style diner, with two of them wearing in-line skates in homage of carhops from that era. Participants were each introduced individually as they came through a tunnel

designed to be a soda shop from that era, and a group of dancers showed off some 50s-style moves during dinner while dancing to music from Bill Haley and the Comets, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis.

For the participants, they were glad to have the opportunity to enjoy a well-deserved night out. “The kids all love it; the smiles I see are great,” said EHS student Tyler Mackey, who has volunteered and participated in the prom since his freshman year. “Getting to meet people from other schools is fantastic. It shows that we've got a lot of things in common even though many of us go to different schools.”

For a first-time participant, the opportunity to be there was just as exciting. “I got a note from my teacher (Jackie Belt),” said EHS freshman Andrew Aramonicz. “I felt happy when I got the note.”

And what did Aramonicz have planned for the evening?

“Play some games, dance and meet people,” he said.

