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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2012

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ATTENTION: Kindergarten student Zyeir Isom works on his phonics skills on the computer as part of a reading lesson during class recently at the Niagara Charter School. Student performance will be examined by the State Education Department to help determine if the school's charter will be extended.



PHOTOS BY JAMES NEISS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Big test for State Education Department to decide whether provisional charter will be extended Niagara Charter School

BY MARK SCHEER
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“
We are striving for excellence. Will I ever be satisfied? No. We've been good, but we need to get better. I don't want to become complacent.”

— Pastor Jesse Scott, parent liaison for Niagara Charter School

The first official day of classes at the Niagara Charter School is a day Pastor Jesse Scott will never forget. Scott was one of the leading advocates for opening the alternative free public school, which remains the only one of its kind in Niagara County today. “The first day the school opened and the kids started coming in was like a dream come true,” said Scott, who spent eight years pushing for the clearances needed to open the school on Lockport Road in the Town of Wheatfield.

This year, staff members are preparing to prove to the State Education Department that it made the right choice in allowing them to open the doors back in 2006.

Like any other charter school in the state, Niagara Charter operates under the New York State Charter Schools Act. The act requires charter schools to periodically submit applications for renewal of their charter agreement, which is a contract



CLASS IS IN SESSION: Kindergarten teacher Sherrie Kerl works with her students at Niagara Charter School.

signed by the school's board of trustees that defines the terms and conditions of the school's operation. Charter schools undergoing renewal must demonstrate that they've earned it by showing, among other things, growth in student achievement, systems in place that will continue to allow stu-

dents to progress and plans for future growth.

Niagara Charter School's “provisional” charter is up for renewal this year. The state allows successful applicants to receive extensions of up to five years.

“If we don't succeed, if we fail, they shut us down,” Scott said.

SEE **CHARTER** ON PAGE 6A

▣ **CASINO**

Grisanti victim in attack

INCIDENT: State senator, wife beaten at Seneca Niagara Casino.

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

A state senator and his wife were attacked and beaten and a casino “shareholder” was arrested after one or more incidents at the Seneca Niagara Casino Friday night.

Sen. Mark Grisanti was attacked while trying to break up an argument between two businessmen, one of whom accused him of hating the Indian tribe that runs the casino.

Grisanti suffered bruised ribs in the altercation, the senator's chief of staff, Douglas Curella, said. His wife, Maria, was more seriously hurt.

SEE **ATTACK** ON PAGE 6A



Mark Grisanti
Attacked Friday

Latest 'D-Day' for walk

Nik Wallenda is still left with that up-in-the-air feeling about the chance to fulfill his dream.

The highwire artist who wants to walk on a tightrope across the Niagara Gorge in the summer,

should find out this week whether he will be granted a permit for the stunt. Wednesday could be the day of the decision.

The Niagara Parks Commission, which rejected his request the first time around, agreed to a second meeting — with Niagara Parks Chairwoman **Janice Thomson** — to further discuss the plan.

At that session, in addition to meeting with the chairwoman,

SEE **GLYNN** ON PAGE 6A



DON
Glynn

Shedding light on teen dating violence

KARI'S CANDLES: Program founder sites some success in promoting Safe Dates curriculum at area schools.

BY JOYCE M. MILES
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Kim Davidson didn't fully grasp what her daughter had gotten herself into.

Although she had seen “changes” in Kari's behavior — sudden distance from old girl friends, quitting the cheerleading squad, downsizing her col-

lege and career plans to accommodate a boy she'd only dated a few months — Davidson confessed she had no idea those changes were warning signs of a looming tragedy.

It came in July of 2008 when Kari Ann Gorman, an 18-year-old Wilson High School graduate, was shot and killed by her ex-boyfriend Shawn Wolf, 19, after she ended their relationship. Wolf then killed himself.

Kari's Candle of Hope was founded by Gorman's parents to help young people recognize the difference between healthy and

unhealthy relationships. Its method is to purchase copies of Hazelton Publishing's Safe Dates curriculum, a 10-lesson instruction program aimed at students in grades 7 through 12, and give the program to schools that request it.

“We want to educate everyone so that a tragedy like this does not have to happen again,” Davidson said.

Two-plus years after Kari's Candle was launched, Davidson reports some success in persuading area schools to

adopt the Safe Dates curriculum. Districts on board include Niagara-Wheatfield, Wilson, Williamsonville South, North and East, Depew and Academy of the Sacred Heart. Last week, Davidson told “Kari's story” to students at North Tonawanda High School and worked on getting a meeting with teachers to discuss the curriculum. Next month, she and Amy Wiltse are headed to MacArthur High School in Long Island for two student assemblies and a meeting with teachers.

SEE **TEEN** ON PAGE 6A



HEATHER GRIMMER/CONTRIBUTOR

TALKING IT OUT: Youth Bureau Director Melissa Junke leads participants in “Girl Talk” through a self-quiz exercise in the Safe Dates instruction program guide. Kari's Candle of Hope, a Lewiston-based nonprofit organization, purchases Safe Dates curriculum packages and donates them to middle and high schools in an effort to promote teen dating violence awareness and prevention.



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