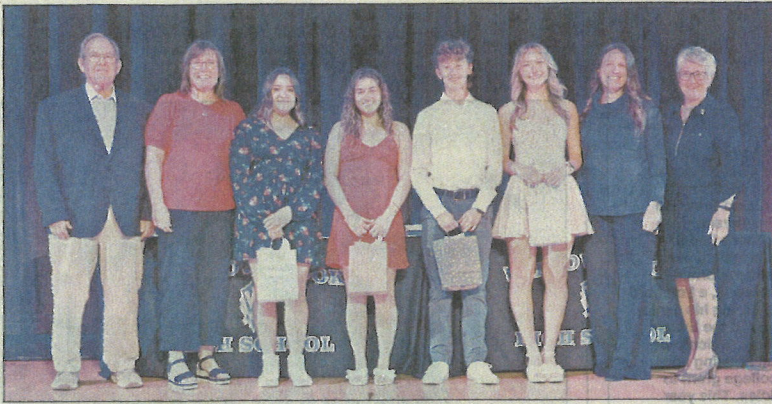




Pictured left to right are Keri Jurkonis, Jill Jurkonis Lesch, Naomi Aldana, Jady Pifafas, Brogan Byrne, Ally Stefani, Krista Jurkonis and Ellen Jurkonis. Not pictured are Mikeku Branch and Anthony Leo, who joined Aldana, Pifafas, Byrne and Stefani in receiving the Susan Jurkonis Memorial Scholarship in May. All six of this year's scholarship recipients are members of Willowbrook's Class of 2026. (Submitted photo)

## Six members of Willowbrook's Class of 2026 awarded scholarship honoring Susan Jurkonis

Willowbrook High School's Athletic Booster Club held its annual senior athletic banquet near the end of the 2025-26 school year. The event featured the presentation of scholarships and awards to several student-athletes in the school's Class of 2026.

Six student-athletes received the Susan Jurkonis Memorial Scholarship. That scholarship honors 1994 Willowbrook graduate Susan Jurkonis, who played badminton and volleyball for the Warriors, and received a scholarship to play

volleyball at Purdue University. Jurkonis died in 1998, at the age of 22, after battling a malignant brain tumor.

Her parents, Karl and Ellen Jurkonis, joined her two sisters to attend this year's senior athletic banquet. Susan's parents and sisters are all Willowbrook graduates.

The first of the Susan Jurkonis Memorial Scholarships was presented in 1999. This year's six recipients are: Mikeku Branch, Brogan Byrne, Anthony Leo, Naomi Aldana, Jady Pifafas and Ally Stefani.

## •Welch

(Continued from page 6)

harassment instances to Welch's office in April 2023. However, Welch's office didn't address the allegations with Benton until July that year.

According to Welch, his chief of staff at the time heard through second-hand sources that there were issues in Benton's office. The chief of staff reached out to Benton's staffer and asked her to put what happened in writing. Welch said his office waited months to address the issue with Benton because she wanted it to wait until she left her job in Benton's office, fearing retaliation.

Nevertheless, Benton remained part of the Democratic caucus, and Welch-controlled political funds spent \$1.4 million in 2024 to help him get reelected. Welch said there had not been any formal complaints against Benton at the time, as the staff member did not want to file a complaint with the LIG.

"When you're thinking about 2023, at that time I had an unofficial complaint and a member adamantly deny it," Welch said. "And so, when you think about a person's due process, you have to honor that."

Welch said that 2023 documentation helped build a case this year when he learned about new allegations against Benton. According to documents released by the Legislative Ethics Commission, Benton sexually harassed two different lobbyists at bars and the incidents were reported to the speaker's office by two state representatives.

Welch said his office learned about the incidents on Feb. 19, and he met with his chief of staff, chief ethics officer and chief counsel the following day. That same day, he said his chief legal counsel verbally informed the LIG. The House was not in session on Feb. 20, and Welch said he met with Benton when the House returned on Feb. 24 and kicked him out of the caucus.

A written report wasn't filed with the LIG until March 4, documents show.

Welch argued that processes for dealing with complaints—which he kept in place after their implementation under former Speaker Mike Madigan—"were not adequate" and his office is working to come up with stronger procedures.

Sexual harassment in the House was a problem for Madigan in 2018 and it eroded trust with lawmakers, who ultimately forced him out in 2021 as a corruption scandal grew.

One of Madigan's top political operatives, Kevin Quinn, and his chief of staff, Tim Mapes, were both hit with their own allegations of inappropriate behavior.

Eight years later, Benton's case and Welch's response to it have again put workplace conduct and sexual harassment in the House back in the spotlight.

"It takes all of us to change a culture," Welch said. "Everyone that sees something should say something. We should have an environment where people are comfortable to say something, and it's not going to be fixed by one person alone. It's going to take all of us, and for me, that's where the systemic failures come into place."

Welch said one of his top priorities is centralizing human resources operations in the House. Currently, district staffers report HR concerns like sexual harassment to the representative that employs them. Welch said that "complicates an already volatile situation" and he is looking at ways to have district staff members report to the speaker's office instead.

Welch is also establishing a House Democratic working group on "culture and accountability" that will be led by Rep. Dagmara Avelar, D-Romeoville. Welch's working groups typically form a package of policy recommendations that eventually turn into bills, some of which could be on the docket for the November and December veto session.

"Workplace culture goes beyond sexual harassment, and a lot of the conversations we've been having with members these last two weeks, they believe that too—that it goes beyond sexual harassment," Welch said. "It goes to bullying. It goes to hostile work environment. There's a lot of things that need to be addressed to change the culture."

Welch said he's also bringing in an outside investigator to make more recommendations for changes.

Rep. Fred Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates, is the only Democratic representative to call for Welch to resign. The two aren't on speaking terms after Welch removed him from the caucus last year for working on a budget bill without his permission.

"At best, his failure to adequately respond to sexual harassment complaints is the consequence of poor management and irresponsibility," Crespo said in an opinion piece published by the Tribune. "At worst, the speaker doesn't take sexual harassment seriously and his office normalizes such behavior."

Other Democrats have criticized Welch's actions and handling of the situation but stopped short of calling on him to resign.

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# Sports

## Alsobrook heads to U. of Kansas



Ryan Alsobrook, a 2026 Glenbard East graduate, is pictured (right) with Glenbard East Principal Antoine Anderson (left) at the school's Local Scholarship Night event in Blester Auditorium in May. Alsobrook, a Lombard resident, during his senior year received the Evans Scholarship, which provides a full housing and tuition college grant to golf caddies. This year marks Alsobrook's fifth summer as a caddy at Glen Oak Country Club in Glen Ellyn. Alsobrook will attend the University of Kansas and will depart this weekend to prepare for his freshman year as a Jayhawk in Lawrence. (Submitted photo)



Senior quarterback Israel Abrams, who guided Montini to 24 straight victories and IHSA state championships in 2024 and 2025, is pictured above during the Broncos' first practice of the 2026 season on Aug. 5. (Submitted photo)

## Ready for the season



Members of Willowbrook's dance team pose for a photo at the end of the recent summer camp for kids, which concluded on July 24. Pictured left to right: (front row) Avery Schwanderlik, Izzy Krygowski, Etainia Grebin, Ellie Fieri and Alexa Thon; (back row) Soleil Martin, Brooke Turner, Emily Dew, Elizabeth Deany, Amanzia Termini, Kaylee Fortuna and Kyri Burritt. The dance team will perform during halftime of the Willowbrook football team's 2026 season opener against Glenbard East in Villa Park on Friday, Aug. 21. (Photo by Chris Fox)

## Broncos begin 2026 quest for third straight state title

The Montini Catholic football team held its first practice of the 2026 season on Wednesday, Aug. 5.

The Broncos are seeking their third straight IHSA state championship. Montini won the Class 3A state title in 2024 and captured the Class 4A championship in 2025.

The Montini program has won 24 straight games. The Broncos won their last 10 games of the 2024 campaign.

They then posted a perfect 14-0 record during the 2025 season.

Montini will open its 2026 season with an Aug. 21 home game against Hoopeston Area High School.



Montini senior offensive tackle Gavin Ericson of Lombard runs through drills at practice on Aug. 5. (Submitted photo)

## New turf in place at Montini



The new synthetic surface at Montini Catholic High School's John L. Duffy Memorial Stadium is in place for the start of the 2026-27 school year. Fifteen years ago, a synthetic surface was installed to replace the stadium's grass field. That surface was removed and replaced in June. The new field is named "Chris Andriano Field" in honor of Montini's former football coach. Andriano guided the Broncos to six IHSA state championships during his 38-season tenure (1979-2016) as the program's head coach. (Submitted photo)

## Willowbrook holds Community Night this Friday

Willowbrook High School invites all students, parents/guardians, alumni, staff, community members and friends to celebrate the start of the 2026-27 school year by attending the school's Silver and Blue Community Night this Friday, Aug. 14.

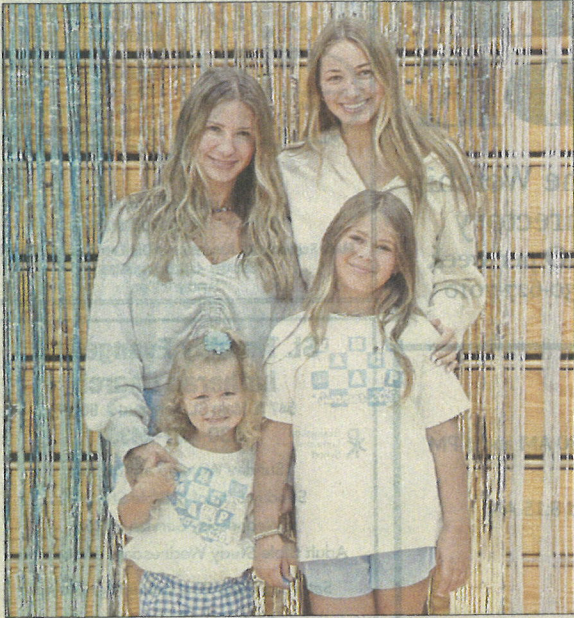
Silver and Blue Community Night, which will feature a showcase of the school's fall athletic teams and extracurricular activities, is an opportunity to welcome and thank all Willowbrook stakeholders for their support and

partnership in building positive futures for students. This event is a time to come together to enjoy an evening of fun, fellowship and Warrior Pride.

Activities will begin in Willowbrook's stadium at 6 p.m. Gates will open at 5:30 p.m. Admission is free. Concessions will be available to buy.

For more information, contact District 88 Director of Community Relations Dani Brink at 630-530-3989 or dbrink@dupage88.net.

## Family spirit at Willowbrook dance camp



Sabrina (Bernardi) Figueroa (top row, left) and her sister, Tabitha Bernardi (top row, right) are pictured at the end of the Willowbrook High School dance team's five-day summer camp for kids, which concluded July 24. They are pictured with Sabrina's daughters, (front row, left to right), Ivy (age 3) and Emry (age 9) Figueroa. Sabrina (Class of 2010) and Tabitha (Class of 2024) were both members of Willowbrook's dance team. (Photo by Chris Fox)

## More storm damage around Lombard



The July 27 storms that passed through Lombard downed numerous trees, including this tree pictured above on Grace Street south of Harrison Road. The left photo from July 28 shows a tree limb on Grace Street near Washington Boulevard in Lombard. (Photos by Chris Fox)

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# Sports



Pictured left to right, Waves swimmers Gabriella Durec, Isla Graffia, Luke Bolotin and Abigail Bates received the Most Improved Award. (Submitted photo)



In the top photo, left to right: Adriano Bifero, Connor Wedel, Betsy Balgemann, Avery Norman and Joey Hitzker received MVP awards during the Waves' end-of-season party. Pictured below, from left to right: Katherine Van Kampen, Parker Bergman, John Nelson, Joshua Massengale and Cate Ford received the Waves Way Award that "embodies what it means to be a Lombard Wave through hard work, sportsmanship, a positive attitude and team spirit." (Submitted photos)

## Waves hold end-of-season party

The Lombard Waves completed their 2026 season by winning the championship at the DuPage Swim and Dive Conference's Red Division 'A' Meet in Glendale Heights on July 18. The Waves won the six-team Red Division's overall title, edging the second-place Bartlett Barracudas.

Lombard and Bartlett will both compete in the conference's White Division during the 2027 season.

After winning the division title, the Waves held their end-of-season party later in the day on July 18. Several Lombard swimmers received awards during the party.



Waves head coach Jane Denenberg (left) with assistants Ariel Hoda (middle) and Lillian Vish (right) during the season-ending Red Division 'A' Meet in Glendale Heights. Not pictured is assistant coach Adriano Bifero, a 2026 Glenbard East graduate who swam for the Waves during the meet. Hoda and Vish are former Waves who both graduated from Willowbrook High School in 2024. (Photo by Chris Fox)

## Willowbrook's Silver and Blue Community Night set for Aug. 14

Willowbrook High School invites all students, parents, guardians, alumni, staff, community members and friends to celebrate the start of the 2026-27 school year by attending the school's Silver and Blue Community Night on Friday, Aug. 14.

Silver and Blue Community Night, which will feature a showcase of the school's fall athletic teams and extra-curricular activities, is an opportunity to welcome and thank all Willowbrook stakeholders for their support and part-

nership in building positive futures for students. This event is a time to come together to enjoy an evening of fun, fellowship and Warrior Pride.

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Admission is free. Concessions will be available to buy.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

## Coppersmith earns scholarship

Allie Coppersmith, a member of Willowbrook High School's Class of 2026, recently received a \$1,000 Illinois High School Activities Foundation Scholarship.

The scholarship is an award given to Illinois high school seniors who plan to pursue careers in education as teachers, coaches or officials.

Applicants had to submit a video reflecting on how high school participation impacted their lives and demonstrate their intent to major in education or serve as a coach or official.

Coppersmith was a standout member of Willowbrook's softball team.

She will continue her academic and softball careers at Millikin University.