

Students enjoy the return of school in Macomb County

At Erie Elementary that included a red carpet ceremony



Welcome to Camp Learnalot! That was the theme for the first day of school ceremony at Erie Elementary School in Clinton Township. Greeting all of the students entering the school was their principal Jerry Evanski aka the park ranger. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

By [GINA JOSEPH](mailto:gjoseph@medianewsgroup.com) | gjoseph@medianewsgroup.com | Macomb Daily

PUBLISHED: September 7, 2021 at 2:22 a.m. | UPDATED: September 7, 2021 at 2:46 p.m.

Tuesday was the first day of school for many students in Macomb County but few were greeted by a principal dressed up like a park ranger.

“Welcome back,” said Jerry Evanski, principal at Erie Elementary School in Clinton Township, who wore a ranger’s hat and forest green shirt covered with patches for the occasion of this year’s school theme at Erie’s Camp Learnalot.



Erie Elementary Principal Jerry Evanski greets first-grader, Loris Sterjo on the red carpet. Last year because of the pandemic the first day as a kindergartner was an online experience for Sterjo. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

Several of the school's teachers also joined in the fun by dressing up like S'mores. All of them stood on the red carpet awaiting the parade of students returning to school along with the little ones starting for the first time.

Once they reached Mr. Ranger they were greeted by high-fives and lots of smiles, bubbles and cheers.

"I'm very excited to see them," Evanski said. "I didn't realize how much I missed them until now. We went virtual for almost a year. When we finally got them back it was only for a short time, and then it was summer."



Charlotte Dostal smiles on her first day of kindergarten at Erie Elementary School. Watching in the wings is her mother, Amanda and little brother, Liam. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

Evanski was not wearing a mask outside the Clinton Township elementary school but he would be wearing one inside — as would some of his students – which appeared to be about a third of those arriving Tuesday.

Emma Luckritz, 9, was among the masked.

"She wants to wear it," said Emma's father, Chris Luckritz.



Chris Luckritz takes a photo of his daughter, Emma on the first day of school Tuesday, at Erie Elementary. GINA JOSEPH –

Also wearing a mask was Kyla Henderson and her grandmother, Tanya Allen, who dropped her off at school.



Kyla Henderson, who is excited about science, math and reading poses with her grandmother, Tanya Allen on the first day of school, Tuesday. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

“When you come to school you have to be properly dressed – and right now – that should include wearing a mask. At least while they’re in school,” said Allen. “When they’re at home they can do what they want.”

Mask or none it was easy to see everyone was excited to be returning to in-person especially first-graders like Debono Collier and her parents.



Debono Collier, a first-grader at Erie Elementary School gets a warm welcome from her principal, Jerry Evanski, during Tuesday’s first day of school red carpet ceremony. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

“We’re very excited,” said Peyton Collier, speaking on behalf of her and her husband, Justin. Debono started kindergarten last year but because it was virtual learning only she missed out on all of fun and hoopla that goes along with starting school for the first time.

“She was so excited last night she couldn’t sleep,” Collier said.

Among the kindergartners who were able to experience the ceremonial first day was Juliet McGuffey.

Both of her parents, Stephanie and Jarod McGuffey, are teachers in nearby Fraser, one being at Disney Elementary and the other at Richards Middle School, so Juliet's grandmother, Janet Mitchell had the honor of taking Juliet to school.

"I'm happy she's able to experience this," said Mitchell. "It's so unsettling. I feel like so many children missed out on so much last year. The homecomings, proms, all of the memorable experiences that made us who we are, they missed out on all of that."



Janet Mitchell accompanies her granddaughter, Juliet McGuffey, to her first day of preschool at Erie Elementary School in Clinton Township. GINA JOSEPH – THE MACOMB DAILY

Mitchell reflected on the impact last school year had on students and adults.

"I think everyone has learned to appreciate the things we took for granted before COVID," Mitchell said.

But it's not just the fun activities students missed.

A lot of children struggled with online classes and, while their parents are worried about learning loss, Evanski assured them that their children will catch up.

"Every year, there are kids who are behind," Evanski said. "We take those students and we work with them until they're caught up. I'm not worried about learning loss."