



Saratoga High School | Saratoga, CA

An Independent School Publication



LIFESTYLES

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Vol. 49, No. 5

Wanted: Obama tickets

by Elizabeth Lee

With tickets for president-elect Obama's inauguration more highly sought after than Super Bowl tickets, it is no surprise that finding a source for around 50 tickets is proving to be quite a hassle for the group of students going to the inauguration with history teacher Matt Torrens and other chaperones. So far the group has secured only four tickets.

Inauguration tickets are free for those who wish to witness the momentous event, no expenses paid, no reservations needed. The catch is, the whole ticket distribution process is done via a lottery system.

Anyone in the United States can get the tickets, but at the same time, many unfortunate people will be left ticketless. Torrens contacted the two representatives and two senators who are allowed to give tickets to the school and was told that possession of the tickets would go to the students whose names were pulled out of a hat.

"We knew that it was going to be a hit or miss whether we [got] the actual inauguration tickets," said Torrens.

The "hit or miss" situation is completely normal and has recurred at every inauguration, when millions are expected to arrive at the ceremony.

This year, a whopping five million people has been expected to gather in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20. Because it is not possible to allocate a seat to every person, chance was the most effective and fair way.

Last week came the defining moment when Torrens at last

see TICKETS, p. 3

LEADING THE WAY



Seniors Michael Guercio, Sanketh Katta, Lewis Chen and Julia Glausi plan an event during a tutorial leadership class meeting last Monday.

Leadership class plans big projects

by Grishma Athavale and Kelly Lamble

With so many students stepping up as leaders through their extracurriculars and in their classrooms, it comes as no surprise that the administration has decided to harness some of this power to enact positive

changes for the school by forming a leadership class.

When it was first conceived, the leadership class was supposed to be just that, a class that students sign up for with the rest of their schedule. But because many of the school's leaders already have full schedules, there were few people who signed up to take leadership as

a class period. The original idea was then changed to a group of 20 students handpicked by assistant principal Karen Hyde. The group meets twice a week during Monday tutorials and Thursday lunches to discuss projects different subgroups are working on.

"I felt that if somehow we could bring together recog-

nized school leaders, things could get done," said senior Paul Stavropolous, who originally advocated for the class. He presented the idea to Hyde and received resounding support from the administration. "[Originally,] we didn't have a specific purpose or goal other than bet-

see LEADERSHIP, p. 6

Amanda Yi

Holiday CD features musicians, football team

by Synthia Ling and Pia Mishra

The SHS Sports Booster program is selling a holiday CD, "Home for the Holidays," featuring classic Christmas songs performed by the Spirit Squad, varsity football team and various Saratoga students.

"We got to go to a professional recording studio," said sophomore Arianna Paranzino.

The Spirit Squad sang "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," and the varsity football team sang "Jingle Bells" and "Twelve Days of Christmas." The songs were recorded on Nov. 17.

Senior Aaron Garg recorded "Delivering Presents" live from the McAfee Center playing his dizi, a Chinese flute. Garg agreed to record after Sports Boosters re-

quested him to perform following a recent recital. He provided the background music for a few other tracks.

Other singers included are juniors Samantha Pack, Maddy and Chris Renalds, senior Juliana Lustenader and the Saratoga choir.

The CD can be purchased at the office for \$15. All proceeds benefit the school's athletic programs. ♦



Featured tracks:

- Santa Baby: Maddy Renalds
- Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas: Samantha Pack
- White Christmas: Chris Renalds
- Winter Wonderland: Juliana Lustenader
- Jingle Bells: Varsity Football
- I'll Be Home for Christmas: Maddy Renalds
- Santa Claus Is Coming To Town: Spirit Squad
- Delivering Presents: Aaron Garg
- Silent Night: Juliana Lustenader
- The Christmas Song: Chris Renalds
- Twelve Days of Christmas: Varsity Football
- O' Holy Night: Samantha Pack
- We Wish You a Merry Christmas: Saratoga Singers

SHS drops 8 places from last year in U.S. News ranking

by Shannon Galvin and Tiffany Tung

Last year, Saratoga was ranked No. 72 nationwide in U.S. News and World Report's first annual ranking of high schools. This year, however, students were disappointed to find the school's ranking had dropped to No. 80—behind local schools such as Gunn and Monta Vista.

"I thought we would do so much better," said junior Michael Zhang. "To tell the truth, I'm pretty surprised. It's not quite what I expected. I don't think anyone would have expected such a drop."

The U.S. News and World Report

ranks high schools based off three factors: whether students were performing higher than expected for the average student in the state, whether the school's disadvantaged students were performing better than the average students in the state and on the school's college-readiness performance.

The main factor in Saratoga High's drop in rank was that the U.S. News and World Report ranks schools based on not the quality of education or extracurricular activities offered at the school, but the number of students who took the AP tests and how well the students performed on them.

"Schools should be ranked on how students are as people, not necessarily how academically oriented each student is," said Zhang. "Our API score was greater than these other schools too, so that probably correlates to my disappointment. I thought we would increase in rank."

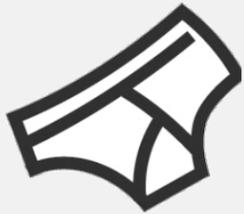
Administrators aren't phased by the drop rankings.

"If you look at the number of open-enrollment schools on the list, then you'll see that Saratoga High is number 26," said principal Jeff Anderson. "Just being on the list is good enough for us. It'll just ensure our reputation for being a good school. The thing about these rankings is that they

take a bunch of data points and compile them into this ranking. Dropping or rising a few points doesn't matter, because essentially, the quality of education will not change."

Other neighboring schools placed in the top 100 Best High Schools ranking were Mission San Jose at 60, Monta Vista at 72 and Henry M. Gunn High at 73.

"The thing that I'm most impressed with is not what [rankings] say, but the fact that even with open enrollment for AP classes, we still managed to have our AP pass rate stay at 89-90 percent," said Anderson. "It shows that more students get access to the curriculum." ♦

NEWS
BRIEFS

Senior class decides to postpone Lip Sync

The holidays are a time for tradition, and the senior class fundraiser is succumbing to the same tradition it had hoped to avoid.

In past years, Lip Sync has been the victim of numerous postponements and cancellations, something this year's senior class officers wanted to avert.

The annual fundraiser, which was originally scheduled for yesterday, has been postponed until the spring because of a lack of participation, according to senior class president Lewis Chen.

"There's not enough people that actually signed up and the people that did sign up wanted it later in the year," said Chen.

Although only three groups have signed up to perform in Lip Sync at this point, Chen believes that with the postponement, more students will be encouraged to practice and participate in the event.

"Hopefully we can get the word out. Not a lot of people actually know what Lip Sync is," said Chen. "I think people just stopped going because the school got more academic instead of wanting to have fun."

Mock trial holds first full run-through

With the first competition less than two months away, the mock trial team has begun to finalize their cases and has started rehearsing full run-throughs.

The team had its first full dress rehearsal on Dec. 16 with Judge Philip Pennypacker, a Santa Clara superior court judge and Saratoga alumni, presiding.

"It [was] really cool having an actual judge presiding over our practice trial," said sophomore Navneet Ramesh, "because in the tournaments, we're going to be judged by actual judges."

Until this run-through, the defense and prosecution had mainly been working separately. The run through allowed them to practice their cases against one another and get an idea for what a complete trial might be like.

The team hopes to learn from the rehearsal and use Pennypacker's advice in the county competitions, which start in February.

"The more practice rounds we get in the better prepared we'll be," said Ramesh. "I think we will definitely be prepared for the competition to come."

Cheer team qualifies for nationals in new division

The cheer team competed at a regional competition in Tracy on Dec. 13 and qualified for nationals for their second competition in a row.

The team, however, decided to move up to the intermediate level for this competition. To prepare for the higher level, the team increased the difficulty of their routine by adding in more advanced stunts, including full-twisting cradles and back-tucks.

"The girls had improved their skills and seemed prepared for the next level of competition," said team adviser Laressa Ridge.

Because the team qualified for nationals in the novice division at an earlier competition, they can now choose which division to compete in for nationals.

"It gives us the choice of what kind of routine we want to have," said Ridge.

Although the team practices three times a week, it was only able to practice with all members two weeks before competition. Due to these members' other commitments, the team will not participate in any other competitions until nationals in March.

"This was our last competition because not everyone is available for a weekend," said Ridge. "We can hopefully keep up the hard work until nationals." ♦

—by Neyha Bhat, Kirstie Lee and Abhi Venkataramana

CORRECTIONS

- "Bosco 'lookalike' subs as campus supervisor" article in the Dec. 5 issue was accidentally cut off. If you want the full story, please check the Falcon website: www.saratogafalcon.org.
- Clara Chao is a freshman, not a sophomore as stated in the story "Modern 'Romeo and Juliet' finishes with high praise."

School revs up for 'Grease'

by Holden Sparacino

The music and drama departments are collaborating in a musical for the first time in years for the school's production of "Grease," due to open in the McAfee Center in February.

In the past couple years, the two departments have traded off directing the school's spring musical, making some students feel less connected to one department or the other.

Drama director Chris Mahle sees this show as an opportunity for both parties to put the past behind them and concentrate on creating a great show together.

"I do believe 'Grease' marks the beginning of a beautiful friendship between music and drama at [Saratoga High]," said Mahle.

Auditions were held at the beginning of December over the span of a week, and ultimately resulted in the casting of 60 actors. The auditions may have been long, but because less had to be accomplished each day it was a less stressful experience for the actors.

"The kids were so relaxed," said Mahle. "They gave incredible auditions and made selecting



Melody Zhang

Juniors Andrew Hsieh, Natalie Tkalcevic and Sammi Lotti and sophomore David Mandell preform at Grease callbacks for the play in February.

the principle players in the cast extremely difficult."

Grease was chosen just over a year ago between Mahle and Boitz at the same time that 'Romeo and Juliet' was chosen, "over dinner and Wii games during the holiday break," said Mahle. The musical will be performed in February, as this was decided to be the most convenient time for both departments.

The two shows of the year were chosen because "both are very popular shows and [are]

likely to generate a lot of interest from performers and audiences," said Mahle.

Grease has two leads, Danny and Sandy, who will be performed by senior Eddie Zhang and junior Maddy Renalds, respectively, on Feb. 5-8.

"I'm looking forward to many years of incredible musicals with the Visual and Performing Arts Department as we continue to grow the drama program into something extraordinary," said Mahle. ♦

ASB cuts 30 clubs on campus; most already 'dead and gone'

by Amanda Yi

It had been threatened many times before, and now it has finally happened.

The ASB has narrowed down the number of clubs on campus to 45, a low number compared to the over 70 clubs the school had before.

The majority of the cutting, which the ASB had wanted to do for some time, took a couple of weeks and was done to get rid of inactive clubs on campus. The ASB also looked to get rid of or consolidate some clubs that did similar things.

"We felt that some of the clubs on campus had similar aims, so we tried to bring them together," said ASB president Ketaki Shriram.

ASB secretary Cindy Chang and assistant principal Karen Hyde worked to send out e-mails to all the club leaders informing them that they would

be cutting clubs and asked them to reply back with basic information regarding the club meeting dates, advisor and the purpose of the club.

"Most of the clubs that sent us back an e-mail were the ones who really cared, so we pretty much approved all of them," said Chang. "I don't think we really had to sit down and actually talk to the 30 clubs that were cut because they didn't reply back, so they didn't initiate their wanting of the club themselves. It was more like a sifting process."

Clubs next year may also stand the chance of being cut and will be harder to create. The ASB will also be keeping tabs on the clubs and making sure they are active throughout the year.

"We'll probably maintain the idea of cutting clubs to keep the number of clubs close to what we have now," said Chang.

The ASB is a lot more careful about letting people start clubs now, mostly because a growing percentage of students have been using the fact that they have started and are part of many different clubs as a way to "pad" their college applications, even though those clubs are unproductive or the students are not fully committed to them, Chang said.

"The colleges don't look favorably on having a lot of clubs because they know there's no way you could really be devoted to so many," said Chang.

If a student wants to start a club, the ASB is open to new ideas; however, they are hesitant about having similar clubs on campus, or clubs with an insufficient purpose.

"Come talk to us about your proposal because we're always open to ideas," said Shriram. "We're happy to listen to anyone who has them." ♦

Falcon Photo of the Week | by Melody Zhang



Seniors Alexei Gousev and Tiffany Lin test each other's blood pressure in an AP Biology lab on Dec. 11.

Link Crew holds 'sweet event' for freshmen

by Albert Gu

As the holiday season approaches and the first semester of high school draws to a close, freshmen are finding themselves in need of a break from the stress of school. The Link Crew provided that on Dec. 11 with Cookies in the Making, an event where freshmen and their Link leaders decorated cookies after school.

Cookies in the Making started at the beginning of seventh period. The Link leaders provided cookies, frosting and decorating materials for the freshmen to use. Link leaders and their freshmen met in the cafeteria to decorate cookies and have a good time.

"It's really easy to get caught up in schoolwork and extracurricular activities for both Link leaders and freshmen alike, so we want to give them the chance to relax a little," said Link commissioner senior Stacy Ku.

The event had a fairly high turnout, with approximately 100 students attending during seventh period and after school. Most of the freshmen enjoyed making cookies with their Link leaders.

"My seventh-period class came so I was able to make several cookies," said freshman Crystal Yen. "I had a pretty good time."

The event was originally going to run until 5 p.m. Because of the high number of students, however, it ended about an hour early because the cookies ran out.

Also, despite flyers, a Facebook group made by the commissioners and Link leaders spreading the word, not everyone was aware of the event.

"Many people, like me, didn't even know what [Cookies in the Making] was," said freshman Eren Veziroglu. "I just came after school to see what was going on. I also think that they should have had food for those that were not able to come during seventh period."

Even with the setbacks, Cookies in the Making still ran smoothly and was received positively by students and leaders alike.

"This was our most successful Link event yet," said Ku. "I thought it went pretty well. Plus, it's the holiday season/end of the year! We wanted to have an event that would end the year on a light note." ♦



Freshmen decorate cookies prepared by their Link Leaders on Dec. 11 in the cafeteria.

TICKETS | D.C.

continued from pg. 1

heard that of the 50 people who had signed up to go, only four had been selected from the hat.

The chosen ones

The lucky people were history teacher Mike Davey and seniors Abby Conroy, Alex Sclavos and Alana Ledbetter.

That is not the final head count for tickets, as the group is still waiting for the calls from two more representatives who have a few more tickets to give. The chances, however, that any more people in the group get called are pretty slim.

"[The number of tickets we have now], could be the final count," said Torrens.

Trouble with tickets

About 250,000 tickets were issued by a joint congressional committee, who decided where the inauguration would be held and who was invited.

The committee then passed along the tickets to the representatives in Congress depending on their seniority. Theoretically, a representative of the lower house would get fewer tickets than a senator.

"It's good for those who [did] get the tickets, but I'm not really disappointed [about not getting one]," said senior Sanketh Katta. "There are still other things to do [on the trip], so it's still going to be fun."

For all of the students who were planning to attend the trip but did not get the tickets, there are other alternatives, such as attending the public parade after the inauguration.

Middle school band to attend

In addition, they will be able to watch the Redwood Middle School's band, which has been chosen out of 1,382 organizations that applied to participate and perform in the 56th Inaugural Parade where the president drives toward the White House.

Selected by the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee, the middle school band applied and was selected, resulting in a total of 110 students who will be marching in the event.

As for the Saratoga students, their options for the inauguration trip include volunteering in the event or watching the inauguration from public, large-screened televisions or from afar on bleachers once the designated inauguration viewing area is full.

"We can sit and watch the inauguration. We'll try to get as close as we can," said Torrens. "We're still going." ♦

Chess continues success with league

by Albert Gu

With the end of this year's chess league, the Saratoga High team continued its dominance in both the league and tournaments, with a notable performance by freshman Brian Wai in the latest tournament.

In the league, the team lengthened a string of wins by crushing Lynbrook 6.5-0.5, Cupertino 7-0, Harker 6-0, Palo Alto 5-1, Fremont 7-0 and Monta Vista 4.5-2.5.

This is the fifth consecutive year that Saratoga has won the league, which consists of 10 of the best chess teams in the Bay Area.

"No other schools are a threat to us right now," said captain junior Charles Sun. "We've only lost one match in the history of the league, and that was three

years ago."

Besides those in the league, the chess team has also participated in other tournaments. On Thanksgiving weekend, freshmen Brian Wai and Evan Ye attended the Bay Area Chess Thanksgiving Festival, held in Berkeley.

No other schools are a threat to us right now. We've only lost one match in the history of the league, and that was three years ago."

—junior Charles Sun

Expert section but proceeded to win third place with a score of 3.5/6.

"I entered the tournament without knowing what to expect," said Wai. "I wasn't really expecting to do well."

However, Wai had one of his best performances ever. He defeated three of

the top 5 Bay Area players under age 12, all rated 100-200 points above him and drew a former master. He lost only two games, both to extremely strong adult players who ended up placing first and second in the tournament.

One of the young players Wai defeated is the top rated 7-year-old in the country, who ended up tying for third place along with Wai.

As a result of the tournament, Wai gained 95 rating points, an enormous jump for a player of his caliber.

Wai is currently the 86th top rated 14-year-old in the country, but will jump to around 60th as a result of his rating change.

"I was pretty happy with my playing results," said Wai. "Hopefully I'll be able to perform this well in the future."

Although the league is over, the chess team is preparing for the League Championships that takes place in a few weeks. After that, they will be ready to head to the State and National tournaments next spring. ♦

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Tiffany Tung

Freshmen Jennifer Lydon and Annie Barco enjoy the chocolate fountain at Winter Ball.

Winter Ball attendance falls short of expectations

by Neyha Bhat
and Lyka Sethi

ASB officers hoped to increase the head count at Winter Ball, which took place on Dec. 13, by holding it in the Large Gym, lowering bid prices, decreasing pressure on students to bring dates and allowing semi-formal attire.

Their hopes, however, were not fulfilled, and attendance fell short of what they expected. They had aimed to get a turn out of at least 500 but ended up with about 400 attendees.

"It was a record amount for this type of dance, but our goal was make it almost as popular as Homecoming," said ASB vice president senior Felix Tuan.

Students were even allowed to buy bids up until the day of the event in order to fill the dance floor.

"We thought by letting people buy bids on Saturday we would accommodate those who were unsure of whether they wanted to go up until the last minute," said Tuan.

Because of the location change, the ASB was able to splurge on decorations, with a total cost of about \$9,000 according to ASB treasurer senior T.T. Tu.

The dance also featured a dessert bar with two chocolate fountains (one

of dark chocolate and one milk chocolate) and an assortment of cookies and brownies.

"I liked all the decorations, and the food was good," said sophomore Aditya Dev. "It was also a lot easier having it at school, especially since I'm a sophomore and didn't have to worry about carpooling, but I otherwise would have."

Also, unlike previous years, behavior at the dance did not seem to be a huge issue, as many students toned down the dancing after parents' complaints regarding Homecoming.

"I was pleasantly surprised to see that people weren't being too rowdy," said Tu. "I'm pretty sure the chaperones were, too."

Although attendance was low, Tuan and Tu believe that the dance, themed "Never Felt This Way," was a success.

"The DJ was on time unlike at Homecoming," said Tuan. "People looked like they were having a good time, especially because the desserts were amazing."

The ASB officers have started a tradition that they hope will last.

"At first, no one knew how the new take on Winter Ball would turn out," said Tuan. "But after going through the process, we'll know what to do for future years." ♦

Students write 'Love' on arms to raise awareness

by Mary Mykhaylova

Many students came to school on Nov. 13 with arms embellished with pens and sharpies that spelled out a single word—"love." These students were participating in a national day of awareness, To Write Love on Her Arms Day.

This symbolic event was hosted by the non-profit organization, To Write Love on Her Arms (TWLOHA), whose goal is to present people with hope and find help for those struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicidal thoughts.

According to its website, TWLOHA's vision is "the possibility that your best days are ahead...that we're more loved than we'll ever know. The vision is hope, and hope is real. You are not alone, and this is not the end of your story."

TWLOHA sought to raise awareness by holding their second To Write Love on Her Arms day on Nov. 13.

The act of writing "Love" on one's arms is meant as a symbolic reminder to replace pain with love and hope.

The concept of TWLOHA day became known to Saratoga High students through a Facebook event, and many

students took an active part in raising awareness by writing the word on their arms—some simple, others intricate and tattoo-esque.

"I participated because [this day was a] way to show to these kids, who think no one cares, that someone does," said junior Adele Perera.

The founder of the organization was first inspired after urging a girl suffering from depression to seek help and watching her recover.

Her full story can be read on the website, and can also be found on the inside on some of the shirts that TWLOHA

produces.

The organization offers a variety of merchandise, which was at first solely available through TWLOHA's webpage, but can now also be found at Hot Topic stores.

TWLOHA gained publicity through Myspace, the Warped Tour and its Street Team, which eventually led to the advertisement of the organization and made a bigger impact.

"I'm really glad [TWLOHA] was founded and has been successful since it addresses an important issue that is often overlooked," Perera said. ♦

School hosts novice debate tournament

by Abhi Venkataramana

Hundreds of students dressed in freshly ironed suits and armed with legal pads flooded into the quad on Dec. 6 to participate in the Saratoga High Novice Debate Tournament. The tournament, hosted by the SHS speech and debate team, offered Parliamentary, Public Forum and Lincoln Douglas debate to first year debaters.

"Overall the tournament was a great success," said head coach Erick Rector. "There were a lot of concerns about room cleanliness, participation and the running and cleanup of the tournament. But the team really worked together, did a fantastic job and made this tournament a success for everyone."

Overall the tournament was a great success. The team really worked together, did a fantastic job and made this tournament a success for everyone."

—head coach Erick Rector

One of Rector's main concerns was making sure that there were enough rooms for the 300 participating students to debate in.

"We were really pressed for rooms and needed a lot more than what was available," said Rector. "Luckily all the teachers stepped in, allowing us to use their rooms and because of that we were able to host the tournament."

In order to accommodate the large number of participants, varsity level students from Saratoga as well as other schools volunteered to help out in judging the novice debaters.

"I thought it was a great experience," said sophomore Soorya Rangan. "Usually, I am the one being judged, but this time, I actually got to judge someone else. You really get to learn how the judges feel when they are listening to you debate."

Although the tournament ran smoothly, Rector was disappointed with the team's uncharacteristic performance. Only one team went undefeated. Ten teams with a total of 20 students from Saratoga participated.

"I had higher expectations at this tournament," said Rector. "But I have a feeling that the fact that we had student judges, who are more biased to their own style of debate, hurt our team more than anything else. We have good debaters who didn't go undefeated. I think we would have done better with a less biased or more experienced judge."

The only team to go undefeated at the tournament was that of sophomores Da-

vid and Daryl Chang, who won all three rounds in Parliamentary Debate.

"I was happy that we went undefeated, especially since it was our first tournament," said David Chang. "This tournament was a good learning experience. I figured out a lot of things that you can't really learn in practice and that you can only pick up in debate rounds."

Rector had higher expectations for the team at their next tournament at Santa Clara University on Dec. 12.

"I [knew] we would definitely do better than our last tournament," said Rector. "The competition [was] tough, but we sent in a lot more students."

In individual events, a total of eight students advanced beyond pre-

liminary rounds. Sophomore David Mandell earned second place in Novice Humorous Interpretation and sophomore Taara Rangan advanced to the finals in Novice Expository. Both were competing in their first tournament. Freshmen Michael Chen, Anoop Galivanche and Viraj Parmar advanced to the finals and placed in the top 10. In novice Impromptu, Chen also advanced to semifinals. In Varsity Extemporaneous Speech, sophomore Vance Lindholm and junior Varun Parmar advanced to the semifinals.

The team also had success in the debate events. In Student Congress, freshman Anoop Galivanche and junior Saniha Shankar advanced to the finals in Student Congress. Shankar earned fourth place. In varsity Parliamentary Debate, the team of sophomore Karthik Annaamalai and junior Rishab Jenthandani advanced to octo-finals. Freshmen Danielle Savage and Nicole Shadman also advanced to octo-finals in Novice Public Forum. In varsity Public Forum, senior Paari Kandappan was the second place speaker.

Rector felt that all the hard work and practice that the team has put it led to the success at Santa Clara. He said the team has improved greatly from the beginning of the season.

"Each and every day, I see improvement at practices," said Rector. "But, the most important thing is the idea that we are having a good time, while at the same time learning to debate, working hard, making good friendships and participating in an extracurricular activity that will help you throughout your life." ♦

End of First Semester and Final Examination Schedule

Jan. 12-20

Monday (Shortened), Jan. 12

1 7:50 - 8:22

2 8:27-8:59

3 9:04-9:36

B 9:36-9:46

4 9:51 - 10:23

5 10:28-10:59

6 11:04-11:35

L 11:35-12:15

7 12:20-2:20 (7th period final)

Tuesday, Jan. 13

6 8-10

B 10-10:15

4 10:20-12:20

Wednesday, Jan. 14

5 8-10

3 10:20-12:20

Thursday, Jan. 15

2 8-10:

B 10-10:15

1 10:20-12:20

Friday-Mon, Jan. 16-Jan.19

No school

Tuesday, Jan. 20

First day of Second Semester

FALCONFOCUS



courtesy of Alina Yang

Senior Alina Yang checks up on a patient of Congenital Heart Disease during her summer trip to Gansu, China, with Angelheart International.

Seniors aim to cure kids' ailing hearts

by Tiffany Tseng

Traveling miles away from home this summer, senior Alina Yang met children from some of the poorest families in China who were suffering from Congenital Heart Disease (CHD) and had no money for treatment. After helping these unfortunate children and learning about their many struggles in life, she immediately wanted to support this cause through a non-profit organization called Angelheart International.

Yang and her friend senior Elizabeth Lee collaborated with seniors Joleen Tseng and Guo Zeng from the Expressions Club to set up an SAT and ACT prep book donation from Dec. 3 to Dec. 5, giving students the opportunity to help children with CHD whose families are too poor to afford surgery.

CHD is a disorder that causes children to have an abnormality in their heart. A small hole in either their atrium or ventricle prevents their blood from flowing properly, causing them to have abnormalities. Angelheart International supplies money for the treatment, surgery, drugs and doctor appointments. With a 99 percent success rate in surgeries for CHD, the money raised is directly going to saving many lives.

"Without the surgery, the kids don't survive past the age of 20," said Lee. "It's really sad because they basically don't have a future and their families

can't do anything about it."

Yang and Lee have been discussing ways to help Angelheart International since last year, when Yang first contacted the president of Angelheart and expressed her interest in being a part of the newfound organization.

"This was a great opportunity since I'm really interested in seeing how engineering can be used to help people in the medical world," said Yang.

Yang's trip with the organization to Gansu, China greatly opened her views on the disease and the people affected by it. She was able to witness two open-heart surgeries and visit the countryside and the families in need of help.

"I met a wide variety of people who cared for the children so much. It's very different from here, where the mindset is so small and people focus on trivial issues," said Yang. "I got to learn about all their struggles and how they still managed to be so strong. They couldn't walk, yet were still able to do field work. It was amazing."

Besides planning fundraisers, Lee and Yang are also involved in marketing by helping to maintain the Angelheart website and promoting the organization as a whole. By supporting Yang and Lee's efforts, students can directly benefit the lives of many poor children with CHD who are in need of surgery.

For more information, visit <http://angelheartintl.org>. ♦

Career Day uses Naviance

by Elizabeth Lee

College and career planning, which every high school student often hears about, is just one of the functions covered by Naviance, the student-tracking system which is steadily gaining popularity from the student body. To further expand its usage by students, the College and Career Center (CCC) staff has extended Naviance's tasks to include Career Day preparations.

Career Day takes place every other year and next year it will take place on April 21. On this day, students can explore up to three careers or paths they are interested in, through presentations from voluntary speakers.

Using a Career Day survey, the CCC staff typically begin preparations early in the year; this time, however, the school decided to stray from the old method and approach "a 21st century one," according to CCC secretary Bonnie Sheikh.

"We started [the survey] this year with seniors and juniors because we're doing something different this year," said Sheikh. "We're having them do it on Naviance."

In previous years, paper sur-

veys went to students in their English classes where they would fill them out by hand. Without the help of technology, the staff had to take "all 1,213 of those and tally them."

Now, Sheikh can immediately look at the results, which are updated every day, online whenever she needs to.

Benefits of using Naviance to conduct the Career Day survey include convenience and time conservation. Like before, students will each have three speakers for the three topics they choose for Career Day.

"The other thing is that we're starting a lot earlier this year," said Sheikh. "This way we can tell [from] the early returns which topics are more popular."

Another reason the school has decided to use Naviance to conduct the survey is to familiarize underclassmen with the system so that they can be more comfortable with it in the future when they use it in their college application process.

THE BIG IDEA | Using Naviance

WHAT'S NEW: The CCC is now using Naviance for students to choose options for Career Day

WHY IT'S USEFUL: Students now can easily use this website without taking class time to fill the forms. Also, CCC staff can easily and quickly review the results.

WHAT'S NEXT: Career Day, using the results of the Naviance survey.

Right now, results surprisingly display that head chef is currently the most popular career selection, followed by psychologist, sales and marketing manager and biotechnologist.

The CCC finds speakers through the speaker committee, which is now headed by parent Shaila Iyer, who is reaching out to recruit 12 members. Each committee member then tries to find eight or nine career speakers.

One minor drawback of the system is that students cannot go back to change their selections after submitting them, except if they speak to directly Sheikh in the College and Career Center. ♦

FALCONSERIES

LEAVING CLASS MYTH UNTRUE

Often times, due to blocked traffic on Highway 17 or other unforeseen circumstances, teachers are tardy to their own classes. While some students may bolt for the door immediately, others sit in apprehension—watching the clock and waiting, hoping and even praying for the minute hand to reach 15 minutes past the start of class: the magical moment when it's OK for the class to leave without it being considered a cut. Right?

The truth is, there is no real "15-Minute Rule." Leaving the classroom without any teacher's consent is considered a cut and there are penalties.

This urban legend has been around since middle school days, and students have always assumed it to be true. The stu-

assistant principal Karen Hyde.

College rules, however do not apply at Saratoga High and those who simply choose to ignore the rules will pay the consequences. Hyde said that if students are waiting for a teacher, they should notify the office after five to 10 minutes.

Some students feel that a more college-like rule should be implemented here.

"I think [the rule] should be true, [and] we should have it," said junior Sam Li, "because it's [the teacher's] responsibility to teach us and show up." ♦

dents who leave the classroom, however, go unaccounted for still leave their safety in the school's hands.

This idea has come from some colleges, where there is a written rule that says that if the professor does not show up in class in a certain amount of time, the class is dismissed. "If a professor has something like an emergency meeting, they don't have to go and dismiss their class. It is used as an automatic dismissal," said

assistant principal Karen Hyde.

College rules, however do not apply at Saratoga High and those who simply choose to ignore the rules will pay the consequences. Hyde said that if students are waiting for a teacher, they should notify the office after five to 10 minutes.

Some students feel that a more college-like rule should be implemented here.

"I think [the rule] should be true, [and] we should have it," said junior Sam Li, "because it's [the teacher's] responsibility to teach us and show up." ♦

—by Ben Clement, Alicia Lee, and Nandini Ruparel

Service clubs work toward spreading the holiday spirit

by Kevin Mu and Anna Shen

Service clubs at Saratoga High, including Key Club, Interact, California Scholarship Federation (CSF) and Amnesty International (AI) are doing charity work for the holiday season.

Key Club, Interact and CSF collaborated for their biggest annual holiday event on Dec. 13, Caroling for Cans. Members from the three clubs walked around the golden triangle and sang Christmas carols, asking for can or money donations. All donations were spent buying cans from a supermarket, which were donated to the Second Harvest Food Bank for the needy.

"Before, it was all competi-

tion," said CSF co-president Theresa Yeh. "It [was] great to come together and be united."

Key Club, the biggest service club on campus, also participated in the Los Gatos Holiday Parade on Dec. 6. Members of the club marched in the parade with their fellow adult Kiwanis, members of the non-profit organization Kiwanis International, which founded and sponsors key clubs.

"We [showed] our spirit, and kind of [told] Los Gatos that there's a Key Club out there," said project manager Jennifer Li.

Interact spread the holiday cheer this year with their annual candy sales. The club shifted its Halloween candy sales to the holiday season because it felt

that it was more appropriate to sell Christmas-themed candy. All proceeds from the event were sent to the HydrAid project in Panama, which raises money to provide filter devices to places with unsanitary water.

"Everyone always wants candy," said Interact member sophomore Christy Chen. "It [was] a fun and effective way to raise money for a good cause."

Members of AI, which is an international human rights club, will be sending their annual holiday cards to prisoners of war and those who are unjustly imprisoned. AI tries to get as many people as possible to sign cards with optimistic statements such as "Hang in there" or "We're fighting for you." These cards are sent to



Theresa Yeh

Service club members carol house-to-house for Second Harvest Food Bank.

cheer up prisoners and to let them know there are people pulling for them, that they are not forgotten. This brings the holiday spirit to the people.

"It's hard to think that they're in jail, and they're not with their loved ones during this time," said AI president

senior Aditi Jayaraman. "It's just our way of making them feel that there's hope. We feel that the holidays are a time when everyone and anyone, regardless of where they are or what they have done, should feel happy, and it should be a joyful time." ♦

Pearl Harbor veterans share their experiences

by Robin Liu

Learning about history in a classroom can be exciting, but there's no replacement for hearing it firsthand. Three World War II veterans came to the McAfee Center on Dec. 1 during tutorial to speak to students about their experiences during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Many people attended, and over half the McAfee was filled.

The event, hosted by the History club, was intended to give students an opportunity to hear about the experiences of Pearl Harbor veterans Paul Bingham, Troy Morris and Phillip Dresden. The idea came from math teacher Larry Bingham, whose father was part of the veteran panel.

"Each year the History Club has the tradition of doing an event," said History club co-president senior Mridula Nadamuni. "[Larry] Bingham had approached us to say that his father was interested in coming to talk to us, so we just took it from there."

During the event, the veterans spoke to students about their moments during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack and their experiences as soldiers.

"I really wanted the veterans to share their stories," said Nadamuni. "It's one thing to read about Pearl Harbor in textbooks, but it's another thing to hear it from someone who survived."

History club co-president senior Nyssa Spector agreed that it was important to learn about the past from a primary source.



Amanda Yi

Teacher Matt Torrens greets a veteran at the Pearl Harbor Veteran Conference, Dec. 1.

"It's really important to learn about the history and get a firsthand experience," said Spector.

Nadamuni believed that there was much more that could be learned from the veterans.

"It's one thing to read about Pearl Harbor, but it's another to hear it from someone who survived."

—senior Mridula Nadamuni

"I wanted students to realize that there are lessons from Pearl Harbor that we can still apply today, and not to forget the past," said Nadamuni.

"The moment you forget the past, then you've lost your way in the future."

Spector believes that there may be few chances of learning about Pearl Harbor firsthand in the future and hopes that students realize that hearing a primary source are rare.

"We're the last generation that's going to be able to do this," said Spector. "[The veterans] are all in their 80's; they may not be [able to share their experiences] much longer." ♦

CLASS | Activities planned

continued from pg. 1

-tering the school community, but as this year has progressed, we have found ourselves taking on tasks that will bring a new taste to the campus."

Catered lunch from restaurants

The class organized a Second Harvest Food Drive and a catered lunch from Chevy's and Red Robin for students today.

Fifteen percent of the money paid will go to the school. The food was previously ordered; each student who wanted some had to fill out a form and turn it in to the office. The menu includes burgers, quesadillas and tacos.

"We are bringing food in to connect people and foster holiday spirit," said class member, senior Rishi Taggarsi.

Since the food needs to be delivered quickly, the campus is closed so there will be no traffic in the parking lot, according to Hyde.

For underclassmen, this is their first chance to buy off-campus food.

"I think it's really great that they're bringing food from off-campus that's different from every day cafeteria food," said freshman Vivien Lu. "It's also at a good price."

For some upperclassmen, the closed campus seems unfair, but others said they don't mind staying on-campus for one day.

"I like it better because I don't have to worry about getting back to school on time and I can get tasty food that I normally wouldn't be able to get," said senior Lewis Chen.

Challenge Day

In conjunction with Los Gatos, the leadership class is working on hosting a Challenge Day at Saratoga on March 17 to foster acceptance within the school

community.

"Challenge Day provides youth with experiential workshops that demonstrate the possibility of love and connection through the celebration of diversity, truth and full expression," said Hyde. "The program is created to build connection and empathy and to fulfill our vision that every child lives in a world where they feel safe, loved and celebrated."

Positive experiences with a Challenge Day held in 2006 convinced the administration to support its recurrence.

SafeRide

Another project the leadership class has been working on is the SafeRide program.

SafeRide is a program that will offer students an alternative to driving home drunk or getting in the car with drunk drivers. Instead, Saratoga High students can confidentially call a school-sponsored number for a ride home.

Volunteers from the Saratoga student body will wait in the Small Gym for a call, at which point a team of two volunteers, a boy and a girl, will pick up the intoxicated student.

Saratoga had a program like this in place about four years ago, but it was discontinued due to insurance problems. Now, insurance is again the main problem with restarting SafeRide. Companies feel it is very risky to insure students driving other students.

In addition to the insurance complications, SafeRide is still looking for parent volunteers. The project has about 15-20 student volunteers.

Despite the difficulties, the leadership class is hoping the program will be up and running by the first week of second semester. If successful, rides will be offered on Friday and Saturday from 11p.m.-2a.m. ♦



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Safe on the weekends

School should restart student-initiated Safe Ride program to help teens avoid drunk driving.

by Gautham Ganesan
and Ketaki Shriram

After a long night of incessant partying and heavy drinking, a student finds himself with just two options: spending the night on the host's front lawn or risking death by hopping into a car with an alcohol-influenced driver, two decidedly less-than-pleasant choices.

Soon, however, if a proposed plan to reinstitute the Safe Ride program at Saratoga High goes through, the student may

have the far more preferable third option of chartering a volunteer to pick him up and drop him off at home, no questions asked.

Safe Ride has a significant history at Saratoga High, having been operated over the course of several years before being cancelled due to a host of insurance issues involving student volunteers attempting to drive their intoxicated peers. Combined with a lack of interest in the program, these issues led to the indefinite hiatus of the program.

While some would contend that

SHS isn't directly responsible for the actions of students off campus and should not be held accountable for the inevitable consequences there, Safe Ride is an easy and safe way to save lives.

Having taken such measures as the cancellation of school dances and the establishment of a student Task Force to counteract student drinking, the school would be hypocritical not to take measures to preclude drunken driving, a far more dangerous activity than mere consumption.

Some may attest that Safe Ride promotes teen drinking by offering a consequence-free way to get home, but the benefits of having this program far outweigh any negatives. Students making use of the service would most likely have consumed alcohol without thinking about how to get home. If Safe Ride pre-

vents just one person from driving drunk, it is worth it.

The lack of Safe Ride was most glaringly obvious last spring when Every Fifteen Minutes, a program designed to illustrate the dangers of drinking and driving, produced an elaborate two-day presentation at SHS. Although an actual accident scene and subsequent funeral were simulated, students would have been better convinced of the school's concern for their well-being had Safe Ride been simultaneously available to prevent the very perils highlighted by the program.

Drinking-related automobile accidents that result in deaths have become increasingly common over the past few years across the county, a statistic that could be easily rectified should the school follow through on the preliminary plans in place to reinstitute this life-saving service that ensures students have a viable road to safety from the side effects of drinking and partying on the weekends. ♦

Schools need to rethink outdated tenure system

by Uttara Sivaram

The concept of teacher tenure might imply a decade-long wait before an instructor is hired for life. Fortunately for these instructors, the similarity between "tenure track" and "ten-year track" is simply a coincidence.

Teachers in California have a two-year long probationary period during which they must prove their competence and capacity as good teachers before becoming officially tenured at a school.

In general, tenure offers many benefits, which is healthy for both the teacher and student.

In addition, tenure is an incentive for people to pursue a career in teaching. If they do well during their probationary period, they have a more secure job until retirement. However, this system has its flaws for teachers sometimes become prematurely tenured before they themselves are ready. Teacher tenure often means a guaranteed lifelong job, should nothing absolutely catastrophic happen on the instructor's watch.

Tenure traps

This is a weighty privilege indeed, and there is no doubt that countless teachers deserve this kind of stability; the price, however, should be higher.

Two years is by no means enough time to establish a thorough understanding of a teacher—in fact, it usually takes two years to make sure the teacher has any

competence at all.

It doesn't help that tenures are, in addition to being lifelong, extremely tricky to deal with. In unfortunate situations, a teacher who has been tenured for a while after a mere two years of being on probation can have the tendency to become a little bit too comfortable with their freedom and unresponsive to the needs of their students. And if the teacher finally steps over the line, it is protocol for the administration to notify the school board to assemble and call a hearing in the interest of the teacher's right to due process, at which both the teacher and administration pose their arguments around a clear and defined standard of a school teacher's responsibilities to the school and its students.

If the teacher is guilty, then issues about the instructor's teaching license arise, and another couple of days are spent in discussion.

Firing a tenured teacher is not impossible, but it's clearly tedious, not to mention expensive, work.

If this situation was present at Saratoga High, the hiring of lawyers would not only cost a lot but it would also cut into administrators' schedules, wasting up to two weeks documenting their case, waiting for the verdict and prepping the lawyers about the instructor's entire

teaching period at the school.

On the other hand, the administration has an additional, and perhaps an even more intimidating problem to worry about—parents. If students start to continually complain about a lack of understanding because their teacher are hanging on a line that their tenure throws them—e-mails start to flood inboxes and the voices of concerned parents start to fill up the office's message machine. It is expected of the school to take some action in favor of their students. But the teacher didn't commit a felony, nor did they vandalize the band room, so nothing can be done. The students remain unhappy in class, parents continue to chew their fingernails at the sight of their struggling kid and the relieved administrators put away their box of tricks they call the tenure.

In the best interest of Saratoga

To keep the high standard of excellence Saratoga maintains in the teaching department, inflexible and premature tenure policies should be changed so that only the best continue to teach in Saratoga and elsewhere. Those who may be less qualified will not be allowed tenure right off the bat, and as a result, they may leave to find their calling in some other profession.

It is important to realize, however, that teacher tenure is mostly for the benefit of

the educational system, not for job security. The reformation of tenure policies are even more essential for more rural areas, where students may not have the motivation, support or resources that students in schools like Saratoga High are equipped with. These less-privileged students need teachers who have proven themselves capable of teaching all different types of learning styles.

President-elect Obama agrees that educational reform does indeed include the tweaking of tenure policy. His plan is to substantially increase teacher benefits while weakening tenure to make it easier to fire teachers. The benefits would re-net the teachers put off by their weakened tenures and would help conserve the school's budget.

However, weakening tenure potentially invites possible situations of firing teachers on a whim. So dissect Obama's strategy for tenure, and provide more teacher benefits while increasing the difficulty level for tenureship.

It's about time the tenure probationary period was hiked up to five or six years. After proving that they can successfully handle a classroom and continually have at least 60 percent of what they taught committed to their students' memory, teachers deserve some breathing space in the work area. This way, the students are happy, the teachers are (somewhat) happy and the administrators, along with their inboxes and message machines, are the happiest of all. ♦



COLLEGES NEED NOT FISH FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

by Brandon Yang

This year, colleges in the United States have been scouting and recruiting prospective students in China and other countries. At math contests and other competitions, high-performing teens have been offered scholarships to prestigious private colleges in the United States. Harvard, one of the schools most prominently recruiting, is hoping to boost its reputation in the math and science departments.

Although this method gives more opportunities to students in other nations, the chances for citizens of the United States to gain entrance into a private college are greatly decreased. Because

schools like Harvard receive funds from the U.S. government, colleges should have a preference to educate the next generation of Americans. Recruiting students from other countries is not only unfair to applicants here but also goes against the wishes of American taxpayers.

Even though students around the world deserve the chance to go to a prestigious college, schools should not favor students in one country over another country's applicants. Although there are many students in China with potential who cannot afford college, an equal number of students in America face the same difficulties. Schools like Harvard should not be focusing overseas while the poor Americans students are left behind to fend

for themselves.

Many citizens of the United States do not wish for their tax money to be used to pay for foreign students who, after finishing their education, will just return to their home country, essentially wasting the investments taxpayers make for the future of America. Although these schools believe they are encouraging American students to work harder by providing competition, giving these "competitors" an unfair advantage hinders the efforts of indigenous students.

Harvard may hope to recruit students from foreign countries who excel in math and science but should instead first focus on attracting bright minds from within the United States. This will ensure that

students within the United States are also given an opportunity to attend the college of their choice—something that will not be achieved if top schools continue to recruit students from other countries over the United States.

Although bringing in students from other nations may benefit the United States if the students stay, there should not be any favoritism; applicants from all countries should have to compete at the same level in order to succeed in education. If students from other nations wish to enter Harvard, they need to go through the same process as American students by applying and competing with everyone else. There should be no preference for foreign students. ♦

Blocked Internet restricts countless useful websites

Venturing into the library, one is confronted by a vast array of students attempting to access standard sites on school computers, but to no avail. YouTube? Blocked. MySpace? Forbidden. Facebook? Access denied.

The district has gone overboard in its quest to, according to the filter that appears when students attempt to access the aforementioned sites, ensure that students "should only be using school computers for educational purposes."

While pornographic sites should decidedly remain inaccessible, through the blocking of pages such as Addicting Games the school is sending clear signals that it lacks trust in its students. This is disheartening considering the excellent API scores accrued and top college admissions received by the same students the district is inhibiting through these means.

Students should be allowed to make such basic decisions as whether or not to spend their tutorial, lunch period or break surfing the web or doing something of a more productive nature.

The urge for SHS to block ostensibly time-wasting websites is understandable as there likely exists a considerable amount of parental pressure on school authorities to do so.

However, with the sites in question permeating every facet of students' lives, cutting off their access at school will only promote the use of proxies and the like to gain access.

Proxies often used to access sites

including Facebook and MySpace have become a common way for students to access blocked websites on campus. This method has surfaced in retaliation to the administrative crackdown on Internet use at Saratoga High. As these sites become blocked and therefore elusive, students are more likely to seek them out as YouTube, once a fun pastime, becomes a forbidden fruit.

The school filter is also hard to fathom, often blocking research related domains students attempt to access for research projects. This blocking of useful websites hinders students' academic performance

and generates apathy among normally industrious workers. Students can always request site be unblocked, but few have the time to undergo that arduous process. Thus, hampered students are more likely to spend their class periods in the Research Center talking with friends or completing homework for other classes. If the Internet allowed freer access, a stronger collective work ethic would be easier to maintain, strengthening the quality of research at Saratoga High.

Instead of denying students access to websites arbitrarily deemed unfit for academic endeavors by a filter, the district should attempt to demonstrate confidence in the exemplary performance at Saratoga High by allowing broader Internet access—thus fostering a more trusting environment and nurturing a happier student body. ♦



Seniors, it's time to face facts: Lip Sync isn't working anymore

by Aditi Jayaraman
and Kirstie Lee

The crowd waits, quiet. The spotlight falls on a group of five boys, clad in too tight shirts and clothed in outrageous colors—almost as loud as the music that starts playing in the background. As the lyrics come onto the speakers, the boys open their mouths and begin to sing and the crowd erupts into laughter and applause.

This humorous event is the annual senior class fundraiser. Doesn't sound too familiar? You may not remember, since it hasn't taken place in two years.

As an attempt to raise money for the numerous amounts of activities, the senior class has planned for a second semester Lip-Sync, where groups of students dance and mouth song lyrics. This has always been a popular idea, but the

event has now gained the reputation of a joke—because it has always been an idea, but rarely transformed into reality. The event is always postponed, and then eventually cancelled.

The idea of Lip-Sync as a creative way to relieve some of the stress, is a good one. The problem, however, lies in finding willing volunteers.

While underclassmen are too timid to dance and sing in front of large crowds (homecoming quad day dances are enough for

one school year), juniors and seniors who would participate have far too many other commitments to hold practices to choreograph dances. With the introduction of AP classes and the SATs for juniors and college applications and first semester grades for seniors, upperclassmen are left with little time for Lip Sync. Attending the event would take less than two hours,

but performers contract themselves to a month of time away from academics, something juniors and seniors cannot afford at this time of year.

Moving Lip Sync to a later spring date is not an option, because the events that it funds, such as Prom, happen during the end of second semester. In addition, second semester seniors aren't exactly...dependable—senioritis, anyone? As for the juniors, there are still new things such as AP testing and Prom to distract them from prepping for a frivolous school event.

It is time for the senior class to give up this tradition of postponement and cancellation—Lip-Sync is not working. There are numerous other events the senior class use to raise money for the last few months of high school. Maybe instead of hosting one large event, the senior class can raise money throughout the year by selling candy at games, having fundraisers at restaurants or the good old fashioned way—begging parents. In any case, it's clear Lip Sync isn't working. ♦

The event has now gained the reputation of a joke—because it has always been an idea, but rarely transformed into reality.

Unhealthy eating habits risk lives

TEENAGERS SHOULD STOP 'LOVIN' IT' AND LAY OFF UNHEALTHY FAST FOOD

by Kevin Mu
and Anna Shen

America is notorious for many things, but perhaps best known for its leading status as the most obese nation in the world. With over 13,000 McDonalds franchises, the United States is a bastion of unhealthy eating.

Today, some health-conscious teens are aware of the dangers of fast food and do their best to avoid it. Others are utterly oblivious of the consequences of eating fatty and greasy foods.

In fact, according to the CDC's website www.cdc.gov, 16 percent of American children and adolescents ages 2-19 are obese. The risks and consequences that come with being overweight include hypertension and Type 2 diabetes, which has seen a whopping 90 percent increase in the past decade, according to webmd.com.

Meanwhile, a recent New York Times article stated that "the thickness of artery walls of children and teenagers who are obese or have high cholesterol [resembles] the thickness of artery walls of an average 45-year-old."

For those who do gain weight and develop other health

problems, the effects are not just physical, but emotional as well. Many teenagers, especially girls, are unhappy with their weight, leading to low self-esteem and comfort eating—a vicious cycle. And it's not only teens. The problem of poor eating habits and obesity in the United States has reached astronomical proportions. According to the New York Times, an astonishing two-thirds of Americans is overweight.

Although some teens have a fast metabolism that results in a lack of weight gain after heavy consumption of fattening foods, they are not free from the many adverse effects upon the body such as high cholesterol.

These realities should serve as a powerful signal to students—they need to be careful with their eating habits. At the lunch line, most students choose Papa John's pizza rather than greens or sandwiches, an unhealthy choice driven by ignorance.

Other students drive off campus to buy "better" food at restaurants such as

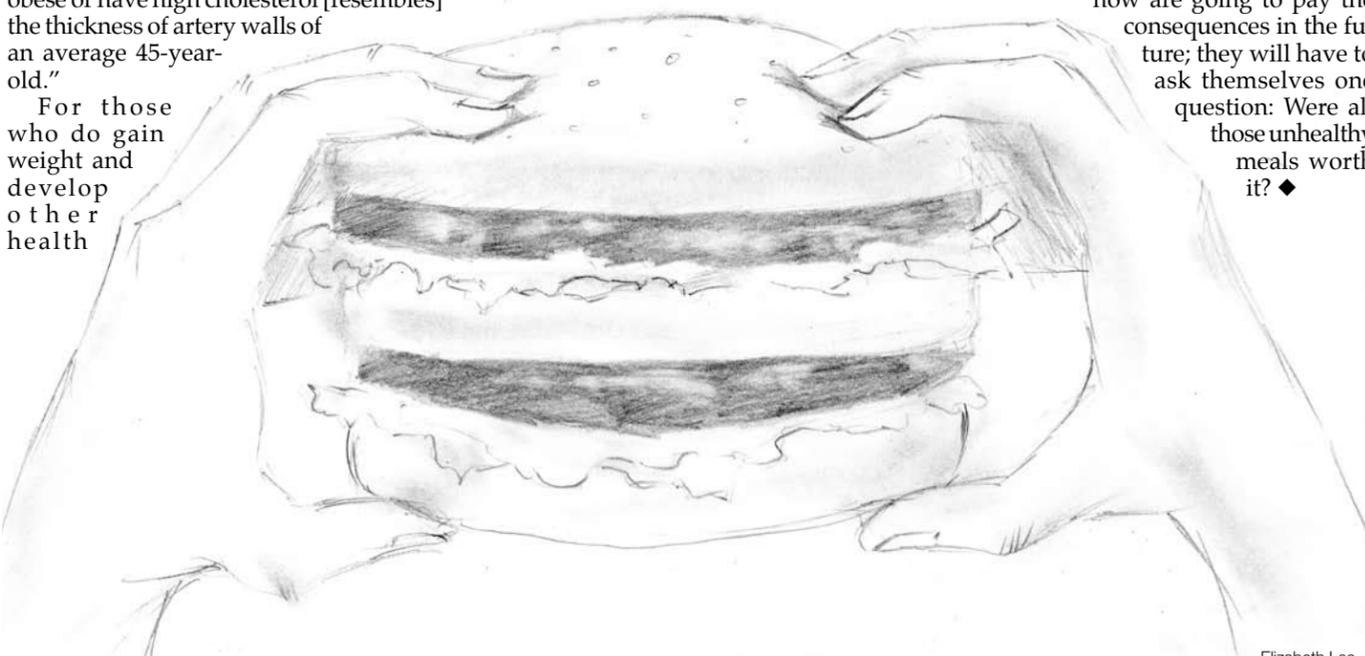
Chipotle; however, according to www.chipotlefan.com, an ordinary wrap with rice, tomato, corn, cheese, sour cream, lettuce and carnitas has nearly 1,000 calories—more than a day's worth of sodium and saturated fat! The unfortunate truth of this is that off-campus lunches from most restaurants are often healthier than those from school.

Some schools are tackling the issue head on. Berkeley High School in East Bay decided that they could curb the eating problem by improving the quality of food served in their cafeteria. Deemed as one of the best-fed high schools in America, Berkeley has offered a menu that consists of everything from organic salads and whole grain breads to grass-fed hamburgers and hot dogs. But according to the "San Francisco Chronicle," the high school is planning to drop this program because students continue to go off campus to fast-food restaurants, and too few are buying the organic food. Despite the ambitious attempts by Berkeley, the actual problem cannot be solved until teenagers recognize the dangers of unhealthy eating.

Change cannot come if teenagers don't take what they have learned to heart. Those who don't know or don't care right

now are going to pay the consequences in the future; they will have to ask themselves one question: Were all those unhealthy meals worth it? ♦

The problem of poor eating habits and obesity in the United States has reached astronomical proportions.



Elizabeth Lee

The Saratoga Falcon

STAFF POLICY

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The staff of *The Saratoga Falcon* is committed to objectively and accurately represent the diverse talents, cultures and viewpoints of the Saratoga High School community.

LETTERS

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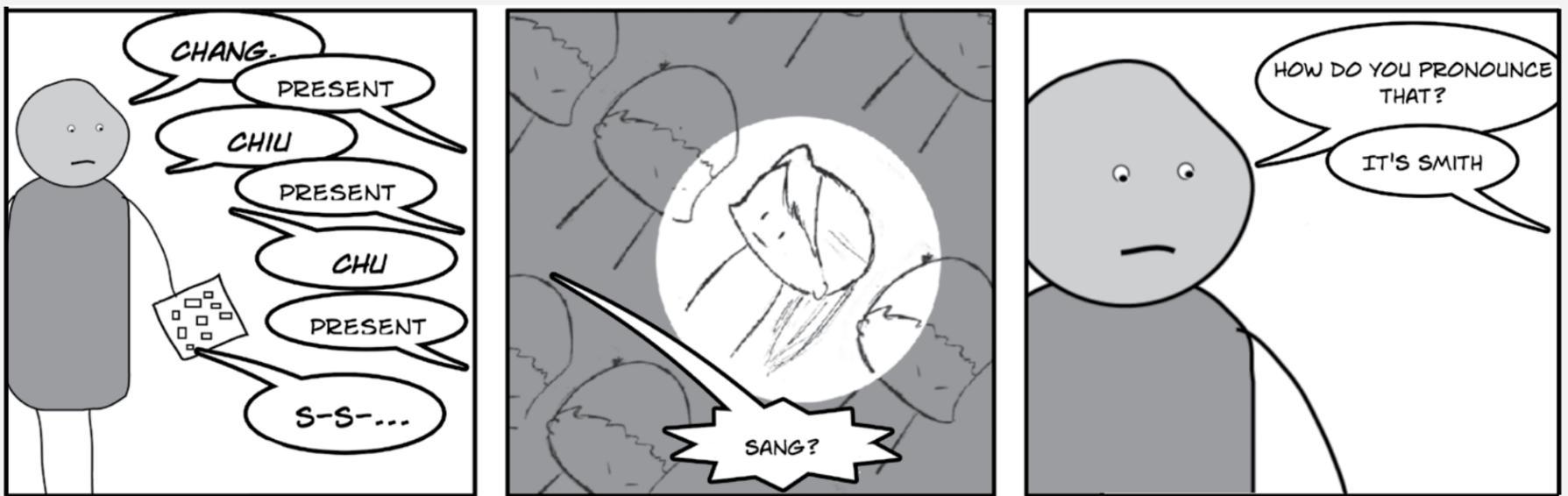
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*Various contributions were also made by the third period staff.

Taking the attendance in an AP class | by Alex Song



Peer, parental pressure create competition, racial gap in AP courses and other classes

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ALSO PLAY A PART IN INFLUENCING STUDENTS' DECISIONS OF COURSES

by Tiffany Tseng
and Jocelyn Ye

Drama 4 Honors: 2 Asians, 11 Caucasians. AP Chemistry: 78 Asians, 13 Caucasians. Newspaper staff: 57 Asians, 12 Caucasians, as determined by a Falcon head count.

Statistics obtained from the school registrar show that in comparison to other public high schools in the area, Saratoga High School, sporting a 41.0 percent Caucasian, 40.9 percent Asian, and 11.9 percent Indian student population, according to the SHS Student Distribution Report, is relatively diverse. However, despite a near-equal ratio of Caucasians and Asians, an increasingly large racial imbalance has developed in some classes over the years.

The imbalance is particularly noticeable in advanced and challenging classes and has put stress on many students who may therefore be discouraged to sign up for them. This is unfair, as many of these students who may otherwise have excelled in a more advanced course lose motivation because of the uneven racial distribution. Students should sign up for classes based on their own potential and desire rather than being influenced by outside pressures.

Racial imbalance in courses at Saratoga High is often a result of different cultural backgrounds. Students who are pressured by their parents starting from a young age sometimes feel that the only way for them to excel in the future is through a good education. These students typically have parents who immigrated from countries with high value on academic standards. This forces some students to take tougher classes offered at the school. As a result, many AP classes have high numbers of students from similar races and backgrounds.

"My parents pressure me to get A's in my AP classes," said senior Megha Raghavan. "Even though I want to do well in school, sometimes it's hard to live up to their high standards."

In contrast, parents who grew up in the United States or even within the Saratoga community were able to experience a life very similar to the typical Saratoga High student and have a better understanding of the pressures present in high school. These parents are more likely to encourage students to enjoy their high school years and take classes

of their interests in order to lessen the pressure to be at the top of the class.

Racial imbalance in classes also stems from peer pressure around campus and the competitive nature of students. Many feel that if their friends are enrolled in more advanced classes, they also need to take tougher classes to be at the same level as their friends.

Students should sign up for classes based on their own potential and desire rather than being influenced by outside pressures.

"There's a lot of pressure from peers, especially in AP classes," said junior Fred Chua. "Students don't want to have the lowest grade in their class, but at the same time

there are a lot of smart people in the harder classes, so there's a lot of competition."

For some students, racial imbalances serve as a discouraging factor to take certain classes. Many AP science classes at Saratoga High have large racial imbalances. Students who constitute a racial minority in their class may feel out of place and be pressured to drop down to regular level courses. The creation of the open access system enabled students from all academic levels to enroll in difficult classes without fulfilling certain

prerequisites. Even though students are free to decide for themselves which classes are suitable, racial imbalances prevent them from taking advantage of the opportunity.

Although many students on campus are aware of this issue, few steps have been taken to improve the situation. Teachers and the administration should encourage students to interact with a wider variety of peers, rather than solely those with a similar cultural background. For example, in classroom activities, this could be achieved if teachers formed groups consisting of students of all different races and encouraged them to work together. This way, social barriers created artificially based on culture would be broken, and the factor of race would play less of a role in students' key decisions.

Racial imbalances manifest themselves in a variety of ways around the school campus, from classes to extracurricular activities and sometimes even to social groups. If steps were taken to promote more diversity in these activities, students would experience less pressure and enjoy greater freedom to pursue their unique interests during their high school career. ♦

CURRENTEVENT

AMERICA MORALLY OBLIGATED TO SUPPORT INDIA

Following Mumbai bombings, U.S. must re-examine Pakistani alliance in order to effectively fight terrorism

by Ben Clement
and Gautham Ganesan

The recent Mumbai bombings have brought long-harbored feelings of animosity between India and Pakistan back into the spotlight, compounding the fear of another clash between the two nuclear powers.

The attack, which occurred on Nov. 26, consisted of young Islamic terrorists bombing and raiding several different locations around the city, killing, according to the *New York Times*, nearly 200 individuals, wounding roughly 300 and taking a number of hostages in differing ages, gender, and race.

The assault on Mumbai was performed with devastating efficiency and spanned nearly two days until Indian authorities managed to regain control of Mumbai.

The testimony of captive Azam Amir Oasab confirmed conjecture that the attackers were trained by a Pakistani militant group originally formed by Pakistan's spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, to fight Indian influence in the Kashmir region.

The mere fact that such a large-scale act of terrorism was successfully carried out on Indian soil and unable to be stopped, or at least inhibited, by the Pakistani government is unconscionable. The current president of Pakistan, Aif Ali Zardari, denies any connection with the attacks. According to the *New York Times* editorial recently published by Zardari, Pakistan and India are equally

susceptible to acts of terrorism. But Pakistan's refusal to hand over suspected members of the Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorist organization allegedly responsible for the attack when the country itself claims to have detained at least 15 members of the organization reeks of ulterior motives on the part of Pakistan.

Despite the United States' long-held status as an ally of Pakistan, it is imperative that America does what is morally right and takes India's side on this issue, and increase international diplomatic pressure should Pakistan continue to deny India vital information regarding the identity of the suspected terrorists.

After waging war on Afghanistan fol-

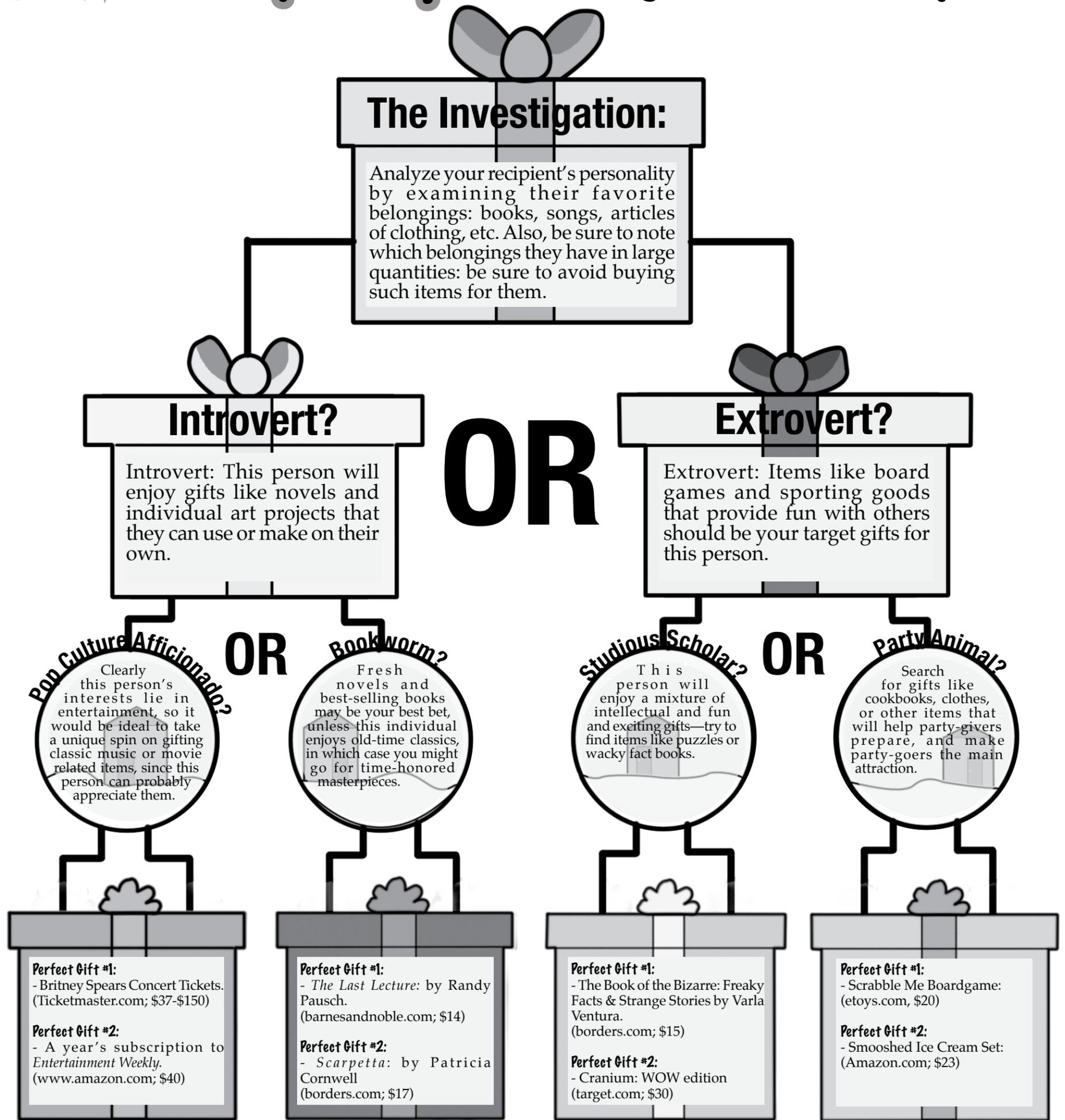
lowing the 9/11 attacks, America hindering any attempt by India to defend its homeland in response to this crisis would be hypocritical.

With Pakistan having pledged to sever all ties with militant groups following 9/11, the government's blatant lack of cooperation with international goals to seek out those responsible for the attacks is particularly despicable. This makes it even more unbelievable that America has failed to strongly support India in their current standoff against Pakistan.

The acts of terror alone should be grounds for the U.S. to aid Indian diplomatic efforts, but Pakistan's recent outright refusal to hand over suspects after agreeing to India's ultimatum stipulating their obligation to cement the fact that India needs to take action and the U.S. should provide what help it can. ♦

It is imperative that America does what is morally right and takes India's side on this issue.

How to buy the perfect gift in 6 days...



graphics by Albert Gu

Sister's perfect presents overshadow eager attempts



Aditi Jayaraman
Head in the Clouds

It sucks to have an older sibling. Of course, we younger siblings ironically get the upper hand in deciding who has to take care of household chores – generally, we are “too young to know how,” or need “someone else to show how to do it first,” – and we usually get away with more than our role model siblings, who are forced to set a continuously positive example for us. When it comes to getting the perfect

Christmas gifts, however, we are downright hopeless.

I still recall Christmas 1998, when I thought for the first time ever, my polka-dot tie and Raggedy Ann figurine would beat my sister's presents for my parents. On Christmas morning my parents opened my sister's gift first, and then those terrifying words poured out of my mom's mouth.

“WOW! A BLUE LAVA LAMP!”
“Where's the nearest chimney I can fall into?” I thought.

Keep in mind that this was the '90s, when anything that exhibited patterns and was glittery or colorful was in style. In comparison, my gifts seemed silly and worthless.

During a more recent Christmas celebration, I decided to take a more

practical approach to gift-buying. I proudly exited the mall with an automatic Belt and Tie Organizer (I don't have an affinity for ties, I swear), and a tracksuit hanging from my hands.

Christmas morning ensued with smiles on my parents' faces as they unwrapped my gifts to them. “Success!” I thought. My sister then entered the room grasping a huge rectangle which had clearly been sent down from Christmas gift heaven. As my parents unraveled the wrapping paper, which had been carefully set relative to my slovenly executed job, I noticed what seemed to be a photo frame. In the center of possibly the biggest frame I had ever seen was my parents' favorite photo from their wedding. I know what you're think-

ing, but unfortunately at this time, our house was being remodeled and there was no potential chimney to fall into.

Still, that Christmas, I was granted the capacity to blame my sister's creative gift-buying skills on her ability to drive, and my inability to do so. For me, buying presents up until that point had never been a secretive process. It meant having my parents drive me to the mall, picking out a present while they kept an eye on me so I “wouldn't get lost,” and ultimately having them buy it.

This year? This year, I have a car. I am grown up. My piggy-bank is full, and I'm ready to make the best purchases ever. A striped tie for my dad and a doll in a track suit for my mom. Just kidding. ♦

curing the holidays

Corporate Christmas war

by James Jiang

You've been sitting outside in the freezing cold for seven hours. Finally, an employee comes out of the doors. He announces, to much widespread disappointment, that the store will open in 60 minutes. A massive crowd rushes into the store, each holding newspaper clippings of what they want.

Christmas is widely recognized as the season of giving, of love, and of family, but big companies have taken this feeling of charity and marketed it to the people with relentless vigor. This heavy marketing of the holidays angered many students.

"If you think about it, modern depiction of Santa Clause: Coca-Cola; modern depiction of Rudolph: Sears Roebuck," said senior Nyssa Spector. "The list goes on and on. Christmas has



break from life so they can get good quality time with friends and family," said Vu. "Just because they call it Christmas doesn't mean you have to be always involved in the true significance of it. People just need the holidays to have time off."

Vu realizes that although Christmas has been commercialized, millions of people still participate in the season. Simply put,

"people know when Christmas is coming

around."

Despite her distaste of corporations' advertising influx during the season, Spector admits that it is futile to complain.

"[I] don't think we can get away from the marketing," said Spector. "People make a lot of money during Christmas. People I know who aren't even Christian celebrate Christmas because they think it's a holiday of giving and gifts."

For some, the commercialization of Christmas can also be seen as a positive influence on the holidays. Without the widespread marketing of Christmas, the holidays just wouldn't be the same.

"[Commercialization] is probably a bad thing, but it makes the season more fun," said freshman Kellie Chiou.

But this holiday season, with the current financial crisis leaving an unprecedented number of people without in this holiday season, many agree that giving must once again emerge as the true spirit of the holidays.

"Whatever you have, even if you have a little, you should donate it," said Vu. ♦

graphics by Brandon Yang



ay blues

Sophomore sets standards for festive spirits

by Kevin Mu

For students all across the nation, winter vacation is a time to take a break from their hectic school lives and relax with family, friends and a hot cup of cocoa while listening to cheerful renditions of holiday songs. At least, those are some of sophomore Tiffany Tam's annual Christmas plans.

Tam doesn't need a typical vacation like many other students to enjoy break and the holiday season it brings, and unlike many of today's children and teens, Tam's favorite part about Christmas is not the presents or new toys that she receives on Christmas Day. Instead, Tam has embraced the true holiday spirit, and her reason for loving the winter

holiday is simple.

"It's not all about those materialistic things, but it is about family, caring and giving," she said. "I love how on Christmas Day, families can be together."

Tam has some other yearly Christmas traditions that she looks forward to each year as well. Some of these traditions include waking up early in the morning to open presents with her brother and sister, helping out with Carriage Rides in downtown Los Gatos and a yearly Christmas family dinner, which she helps prepare along with her mom and sister.

"I help cut up the food and help my mom make the custard pie," she said. "I feel really cheerful because I get to talk a lot with my mom and sister. We get to know each other

better."

Tam loves spending time with all her relatives as they enjoy a Christmas feast of all her favorite dishes at home. They all "really enjoy the food we make," she said.

As an avid fan of the holiday season, Tam offers some advice for making the most of one's Christmas. "You don't have to do all the traditional things like have a Christmas tree or give out lots of presents. You just need to use the time you have to have fun," said Tam.

With people like Tam all around the globe celebrating Christmas to the fullest and embracing the true traditions of Christmas, one thing is clear: even in today's hectic world, the holiday spirit is still very much alive. ♦



photo courtesy of Tiffany Tam

Sophomore Tiffany Tam (right) with her siblings.

Math teacher encourages holiday joy in classroom

by Ren Norris

Every holiday season, Algebra 2 and Strategic Learning teacher Julie Scola goes through the same joyful routine. Starting on Thanksgiving day, Scola puts up a vast display of Christmas decorations in her house and classroom and brings out Christmas carols and movies to spread the joy of the holiday season to others.

She has many family traditions, including watching movies such as "A Christmas Carol" with her children. According to Scola, a great book to get out of the Christmas blues is "A Cup of Christmas Tea" by Tom Hegg. She reads this every holiday season and keeps the book on her desk in her classroom.

Every Christmas Eve, her family has a competition to see who can find the pickle ornament on her two fully decorated Christmas trees. These, are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to boosting holiday happiness.

"The holidays are just a fun time," said Scola, "We always go to the Village Ceremony, drink hot cocoa and just try to get into the Christmas mood."

In fact, Santa Claus even paid Scola a visit last year when her daughter Hailey wrote Santa a letter asking that her mom and dad both receive a gift on Christmas Day, too.

"Santa actually brought me his workshop!" Scola exclaimed as she showed a picture of the big figurine of a workshop in the North Pole that she received from St. Nick.

What does Scola say about people who are less enthusiastic about the holiday season?

"If they want to be bah-hum-bugs, that's fine, but they're not

going to rain on my parade," Scola said.

Scola's students respond well to her holiday cheer, especially when she starts to wear her Christmas sweaters.

"I definitely feel the Christmas joy in [Scola's room]," said junior Chelsea Sabella. "It always puts me in a better mood."

Scola believes that the key to a merry Christmas is just having a good time, and being with family and people you love.

"It's about the magic of Christmas," said Scola.

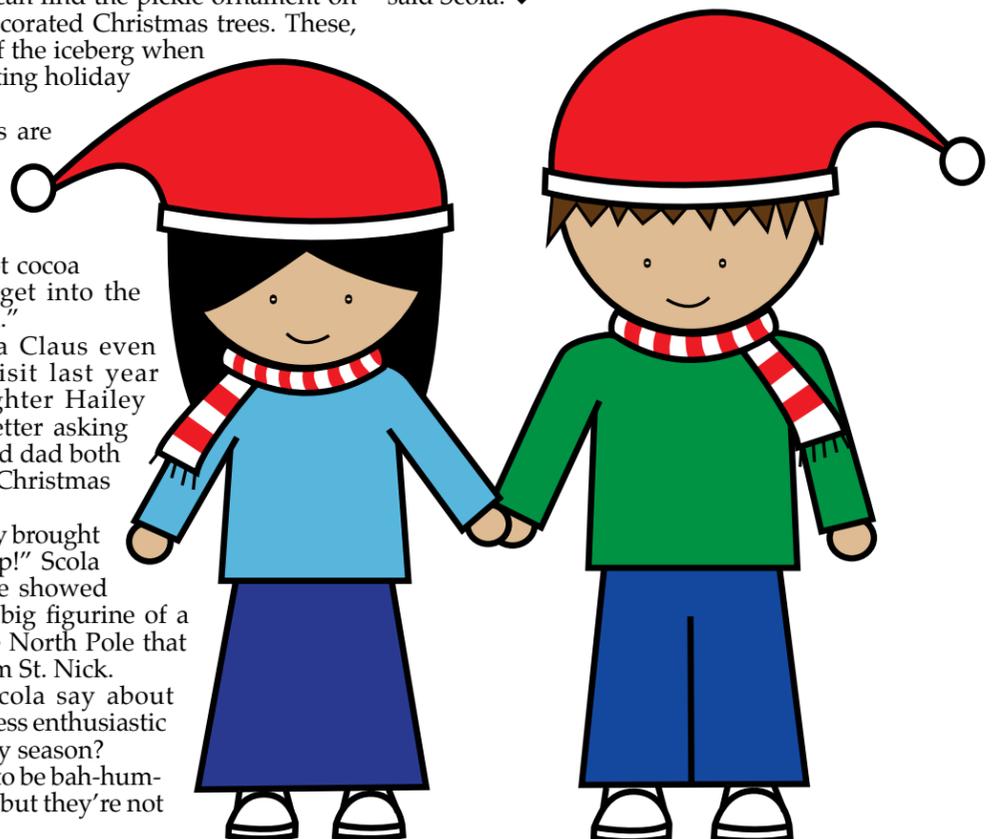
Her love for holidays is apparent through her traditions and how she brings life to the season in which many feel down.

"If you're blue, come into my room and hopefully some Christmas spirit will rub off on you," said Scola. ♦

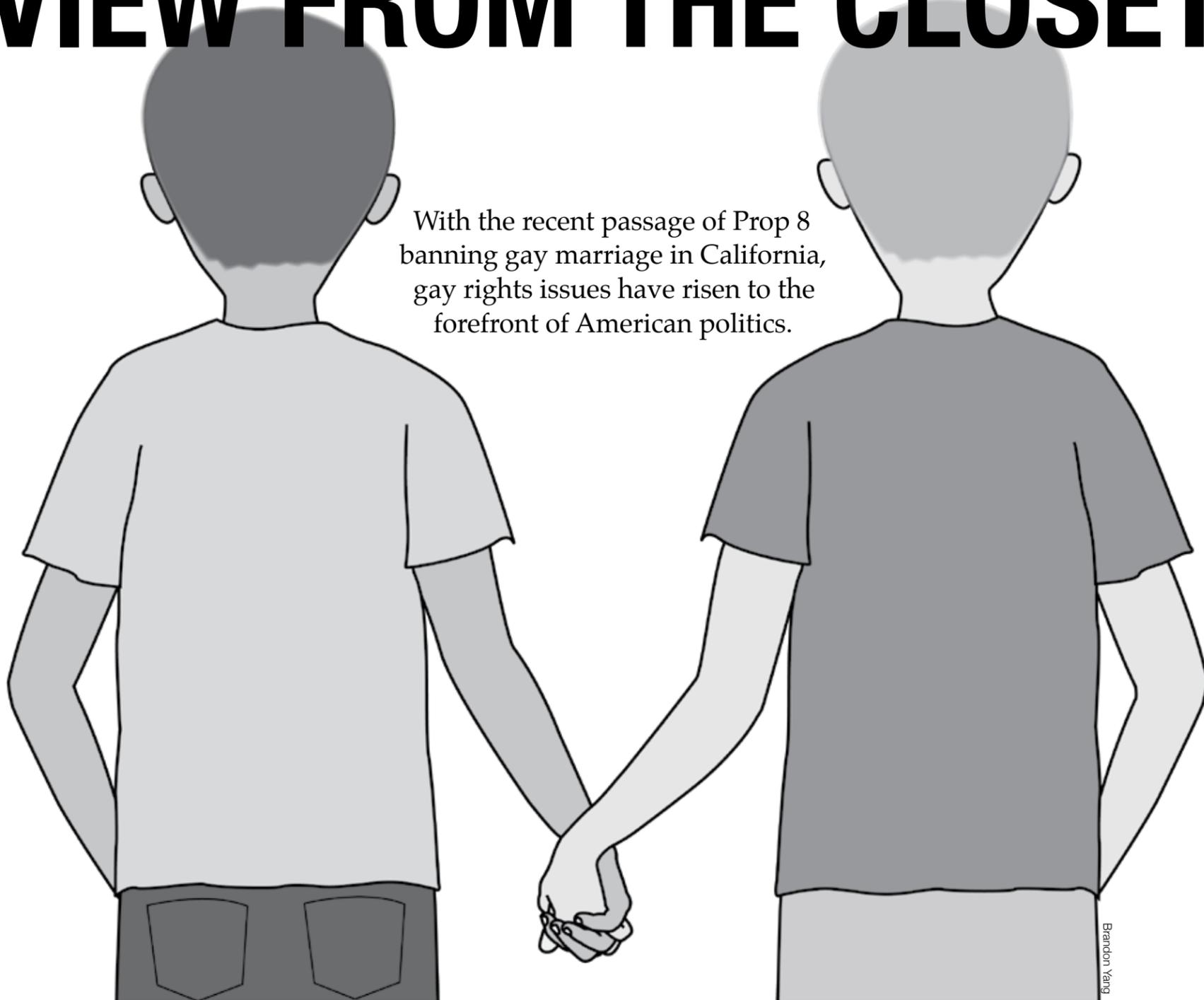


Amanda Yi

Math teacher Julie Scola puts up decorations in her classroom to bring holiday cheer.



VIEW FROM THE CLOSET



With the recent passage of Prop 8 banning gay marriage in California, gay rights issues have risen to the forefront of American politics.

Brandon Yang

Gay student reveals trials of lifestyle

by Uttara Sivaram

Meet Dave. He is a friendly and hard working student at Saratoga High who receives good grades in school and shows an enthusiasm for extra-curriculars. Dave also happens to be gay.

Dave was in his SAT prep class during a discussion about essay topics when the talk turned to one about role models and their positive and negative qualities.

"I brought up Dumbledore," said Dave, "and so a kid stood up and said 'yeah, he's a positive role model, helping kids and all that. But then again—he's gay.'"

Since he is a gay student, it would have been perfectly justified if Dave had jumped up in outrage or perhaps engaged in verbal debate about bigotry in response to such a comment. But he is not a hot-tempered, quick-to-enrage person. "I don't think it was meant in a mean way," said Dave. "The guy was just...ignorant."

Feelings about Prop 8

Gay students like Dave experience this kind of careless flippancy and discrimination regarding their orientation almost every day. Some handle this by holding up picket signs and aggressively promoting equality for all. In this regard, Dave is different. He stands for the same ideals, but in a quieter way. He strongly disagrees with homophobic ideas but tries to understand them. He tolerates

those who condemn his own identity because he would like the same tolerance in return.

The recent passage of Prop 8, which bans marriage for gays in California, was disheartening for Dave.

"I'm mostly just disappointed," he said, and for a split second, his face fell. "I mean, I knew there was a good possibility it would pass. But then I had thought [and] hoped that people in California, at least, would be smarter, you know?"

Dave looked down for a minute, but then smiled, as if to reassure that, although a pivotal battle may have been lost, the war was far from over.

"I'm not angry," he said quickly. "Because I know that, inevitably, something will be done. It has to."

Dave has certainly not lost faith, even after a majority of citizens in the state he lives in voted against his right to marry some day. He has not lost faith in the ability of his fellow Californians and Americans at large to rethink their beliefs about right and wrong and make a positive change. He looks toward a silver lining, noting the progress that America has already made.

"The Bay Area is much more liberal than other parts of the country," he said. "Especially Saratoga—everyone is really good when it comes to gay students." However, Dave finds it disturbing to think about the students and individuals living outside the Bay Area in places where homosexuality is considered to be socially and mor-

ally unacceptable.

"It sort of makes me feel for the kids who don't have the support I have here," said Dave. "It must be really hard for them to get through the day."

As for being gay himself, Dave acknowledges that while one would assume his rights are significantly inhibited, support is widely available.

"I guess I'm pretty lucky. My friends are really cool about everything—really supportive. I don't really get that many negative [vibes] from anyone," he said.

He had support and help from his friends, but Dave had just one more obstacle—coming out to his parents.

Out of the closet

"I haven't told my mom yet," he admitted. He had, however, approached his father. "He didn't handle it too well at first," said Dave. "He thought that I was just an impressionable kid who didn't know what he was talking about. How could a 17-year-old know anything about anything? [But] this was something I knew for sure, something that was so much a physical part of me—how could I not know?"

However, it wasn't so much the disbelief that upset Dave. "It hurt to look at his face and see the pain that I had caused him," said Dave. "'Don't tell me that,' [his father] had said. 'Please don't tell me that.'"

Dave didn't mean to transmute to his father the immense pain he

himself was also feeling and had been feeling for a length of time. Dave didn't mean to shock or confuse him. But his dad was shocked and confused and maybe just a little bit sad. And Dave understood that.

"I realized that he was mainly worried that I wouldn't have a happy life," said Dave. "I was too impatient earlier—I needed to give him some time to work things through. I was his son and he loved me."

To Dave, that was really all that mattered.

On a broader note, Dave thinks there will always be discrimination against gay individuals. But it will get better—he is sure of it.

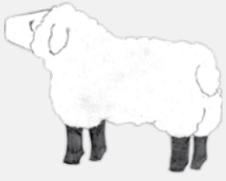
"Everyone is connected. Gay people are...everywhere," he said, raising his hands to demonstrate. "It doesn't matter, being a man, woman, black, white, or Asian. Things like that don't matter."

Dave paused, trying to put into words the things he had gone through. "You really have to be careful of hurting someone. You just...you just don't see it. For all you know, your brother, your sister, your best friend, your teacher, any of them could be gay. And people will say that they don't know anyone who is gay, so they'll be like, 'Oh, it doesn't matter to me, right?'"

Dave shook his head, and one could almost feel his outrage, his hurt. "But it really does [matter]," he said, his mind impossible to read behind that forgiving smile. "It should." ♦

IS IT A CHOICE?

One view:



Where: Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine
What: Genetic study of homosexual sheep
Findings: Cluster of nerve cells in hypothalamus of rams attracted to females was larger and contained more neurons than that in male-oriented rams and ewes.
Significance: Demonstrates a direct correlation between imbalances in the brain and homosexuality of animals
source: Science Daily

Where: National Institute of Health in Bethesda, MD
What: Genetic experiments on fruit flies

Findings: Homosexuality-determining gene in fruit flies pinpointed by scientists and transplanted to a host of other fruit flies who subsequently exhibited homosexual behavior.

Significance: According to the study, a similar gene exists in humans, further suggesting sexual preference in humans is genetically determined as well.
source: Time Magazine



The other:



"I have one of my absolute best friends for the last 30 years [who] happens to be gay, and I love her dearly. And she is not my 'gay friend,' she is one of my best friends, who happens to have made a choice that isn't a choice that I have made. But I am not going to judge people."
source: abcnews.org

-Gov. Sarah Palin

"If it's inevitable that this scientific evidence is coming, we have to be prepared with a loving response. If we don't have one, we won't have any credibility."
source: Boston Globe

-Rev. Robert Schenck



-by Ben Clement and Gautham Ganesan

Bay Area organizations reach out to homosexuals

ALUMNUS LIU VOLUNTEERS AT EQUALITY FOR ALL, GSA

by Nandini Ruparel and Lyka Sethi

At Saratoga High, the list of alumni has always been "star-studded," including Steven Spielberg and the like. Alex Liu, a graduate, may not be so famous, but is hoping to have a major impact on his community. Liu, who came out as gay during his senior year in high school, now works for many gay rights organizations in the Bay Area.

With the recent passage of Prop 8, these organizations work to spread awareness in the Bay, where there are those who are satisfied with the outcome, those who remain indifferent and those whose expectations were crushed. While anti-Prop 8 protests have been well-publicized, little light has been shed on the organizations behind these rallies.

Reaching out to the Valley

According to Liu, a graduate of UC Berkeley, there are "hundreds, if not thousands of organizations that serve the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual (LGBT) community [in California]." The Equality for All Coalition, which ran the No on Prop. 8 campaign, involved more than 30 organizations in itself.

Liu has worked with many

organizations including Marriage Equality USA, of which he is the San Francisco chapter leader. This nonprofit organization is committed to fighting the battle against restrictions on gay marriage. Liu has been a huge part of all aspects of the organization, helping to plan fundraisers and organize rallies and volunteer recruitment drives.

"Most important, as far as in the past election, was going into the Silicon Valley and focusing on the big cities," Liu said. He's also on the governing board of the Gay Straight Alliance Network, where he helps prioritize the organization's goals, develop strategies and approve budgets. His work against Prop 8 included canvassing numerous communities to speak about the proposition, organizing volunteers to do campaign activities, planning Election Day activities and distributing campaign supplies.

Working towards the goal

"One thing we're doing is providing a forum [at Town Hall], providing a network where people can volunteer," he said. The organization held a Town Hall meeting on Dec. 4 for the people to speak.

Liu has even worked with biotechnological company Genentech's Out and Equal em-

ployee resource group, of which he is the community outreach and education lead, serving as a liaison to connect employees to the LGBT community. Along with Genentech, several huge Bay Area based companies have taken steps to ensure equality in the workplace, including Yahoo Inc., Google Inc. and Kaiser Permanente.

Spreading the word

One entry of Google's official blog, posted by Sergey Brin, Co-founder & President of the Technology branch, stated "it is the chilling and discriminatory effect of the proposition on many of our employees that brings Google to publicly oppose Proposition 8...We hope that California voters will vote no on Proposition 8—we should not eliminate anyone's fundamental rights, whatever their sexuality, to marry the person they love."

The progress that California has made for the LGBT community is evident through the work of these organizations, companies and individuals like Liu. As each organization takes small steps toward gaining acceptance of gay marriage rights, Liu hopes the state will get closer and closer to the ultimate goal of complete equality for all, regardless of sexual orientation. ♦

Gay portrayal in media evolves

by Ben Clement and Sulmaan Hassan

Though homosexuality has become a more acceptable practice, conservatives and liberals still struggle to find a middle ground when it comes to teaching about homosexuality and showing it on television.

Pre-1990, television and movie stars had to hide their sexual orientation for fear of being

outcast in the film-making community. Robert Reed, who played the father in *The Brady Bunch*,

concealed his orientation for fear of losing his role on the popular TV series.

The 90's marked a transition to a more accepting TV industry. When Ellen DeGeneres, star of the sitcom, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, came out publicly, her character on the show, Ellen, came out soon after.

This was the first openly homosexual main character to be portrayed on TV and pulled in the highest ratings the show had ever seen.

Nowadays, portraying homosexuals openly has become a common practice on many popular television shows

including *Will & Grace*, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Desperate Housewives*. The trend towards the inclusion of more homosexual characters in shows mirrors society's increased acceptance as a whole.

"Homosexuality is a part of life, so it would be unrealistic to leave it out of TV shows," said junior Samantha Tsang.

Despite this, conservatives worry that homosexuality on TV will influence children.

Portraying homosexuals openly has now become a common practice on many popular television shows.

"Parents have a right to be warned about programs depicting acts of homosexuality on television," said Martin Mawyer, former-president of the *Christian Action Network*, on *religioustolerance.org*. "Unless these producers are trying to promote a secret agenda, they should have no problems alerting parents that their programs contain homosexual content."

For parents who share this fear, technological advances provide the answer.

"With the technology these days, parents can choose which channels they want their kids to have access to if they didn't want their kids to watch certain things," said sophomore Vanessa Block. ♦

TOGATALKS

What are your feelings on the passage of Prop 8?

I don't think it should have passed, because everyone should have the right to be married.



sophomore Katie Ciffone

I think it's a pretty good idea because marriage is supposed to be [between] a man and a woman.



sophomore Christina Wu

I was disappointed; everyone should have equal rights.



sophomore Arianna Paranzino

It's ridiculous. You can't force your own beliefs on other people.



senior Kian Banks

-by Grishma Athavale and Nandini Ruparel

IMPROV

Everyone needs to take a breath of fresh air from the stressful atmosphere of Saratoga High School, once in a while. To the Saratoga Falcon staff, Improv Everywhere was the perfect example of a group striving to lighten tension. If you've been on YouTube,

you've probably seen the hilarious, creative scenarios of Improv Everywhere freezing at Grand Central Station and singing a musical at a food court. The Falcon staff took these ideas to heart and staged their own Improv Saratoga.

1. The Lonely Student



Students are called out of class one by one, until sophomore Miles Emerson is left alone for a lecture from teacher Mike Davey.

Photos by Theresa Yeh

by Alex Sclavos

For sophomore Miles Emerson, it seemed like any other Wednesday morning in Mike Davey's World History class. Little did he know, he was about to be the victim of an elaborate ruse—one even his teacher was in on.

Around 9:30 a.m., newspaper reporters who needed to interview a few students came into the class. This was not an unusual event, until the same reporters kept returning, each time they pulled out one more student. The class was surprised as one by one they were all asked to come outside except for one, Miles Emerson.

"I didn't know what was going

on," said Emerson. "I just figured they needed some people, but then, when the whole class left, I was really confused and wanted to go too."

Not only was Emerson confused, the rest of the class did not know what was happening either, until they were told outside it was all a social experiment.

"We all thought we were getting taken out to talk about Mr. Davey and his teaching styles," said junior Heather Gummow. "No one expected the whole class would come out."

To make the prank more believable, Davey was asked to remain teaching as if the whole situation was normal.

"I kept lecturing him. It was really funny because he paid more attention than normal."

—teacher Mike Davey

When the rest of the class was allowed to return to the classroom, Emerson presented the material that he had just learned from Davey.

"When everyone was outside, I had asked [Davey] if I was going to have to teach the class," said Emerson. "He

told me I would, so I figured it would be important to pay attention."

Once Emerson was done with his lecture, the students gave him a round of applause and class resumed, with Emerson never realizing it had all been a joke.

"It was funny to see Miles having to teach in front of the class," said Gummow. "It was nice to take a break from school and have something random and funny happen."

With the end of the semester approaching, classes can become repetitive and predictable, causing days to drag on, but with this surreal experience, Davey's World History class got to break out of the mold for a day. ♦

SARATOGA

2. The Fake Break-Up

by Sulmaan Hassan
and Theresa Yeh

Imagine writing an essay in English class when suddenly a fuming student storms through the door and breaks up with the girl sitting next to you.

This became a reality on Dec. 5, when senior Holden Sparacino blew open the door to Mrs. Head's classroom, barged over to his girlfriend senior Christina Lauro and broke off their long-term relationship, right in the middle of class!

The Falcon conducted a series of social experiments during the week of Dec. 3 to observe student reactions following odd scenarios.

Sparacino and Lauro had planned their break up thoroughly. Supposedly, Sparacino had seen Lauro with another boy, and to get revenge, had begun flirting with another girl, which then upset Lauro. This scenario worked perfectly in that neither student could be

blamed completely, and an argument would seem likely and convincing.

When Sparacino burst into Head's room, many students were confused or uncomfortable about what was going on around them. Some were amused at this welcome distraction from their studies. But, others, such as senior Alex Ren, were not too impressed with this experiment.

"People knew it was an act," said Ren. "[Lauro] wasn't crying, and everyone knew they were really close and saw them together that morning."

After accusing Lauro of cheating, Sparacino left the classroom with a stern face, and left Head's class bewildered, including senior Michael Beam.

"I was just confused and didn't know [what was going on]," said Beam. "I didn't want to get involved, so I kept on working."

Sparacino and Lauro's acting may not have convinced everyone, but according to senior Vikram Babu, it was Head who made the act seem even more fake.

"I was actually pretty convinced that they were breaking up, but when I saw Mrs. Head doing absolutely nothing and not even paying attention, I knew something was up," said Babu.

According to Beam, many of the other kids in the classroom also had no interest in the scene taking place. The students just ignored the two and continued their work, hoping not to get concerned with others' problems.

Despite *The Falcon's* attempt at fooling some fellow classmates, most of the class was left confused and some unaware. However, Ren commended them for their valiant effort.

"This wasn't pulled off great, but [Sparacino and Lauro] are still great actors and made it seem real," said Ren. ♦



Lauro



Sparacino

THE BEST

Here are some of Improv Everywhere's best skits that can be seen on their website, improveverywhere.com

Best Buy:

The group dressed in blue shirts and khaki shorts (a look very similar to that of the Best Buy Employees) and entered a Manhattan Best Buy electronics store. The 80 person mob entered the store together and took up posts spread out from each other. Customers at the store looked in bewilderment when they asked "employees" for help and were told, "Oh, I don't work here."

Cell Phone Symphony:

A band of about 60 people entered a book store that had a coat check and checked their bags, complete with a cell phone on loud. Outside, 60 people stood in a nearby park with 60 cell phone numbers. On cue, they each called one person: which caused an onslaught of ringtones and more than a bit of confusion in the book store.

Food Court Musical

Unsuspecting food court customers were treated to an impromptu musical when a cashier at a hot dog stand spontaneously burst into song. One by one, more people started to join this venter's song. Eventually a security guard showed up to see what the ruckus was about, and then he started singing as well!

3. The Big Freeze

by Grishma Athavale

As students filed out of class at the sound of the bell on Dec. 3, they weren't expecting anything out of the ordinary. Little did they know, they were in for surprise.

In the quad, 30 seconds after the bell, around 30 students simultaneously froze in place in the middle of the quad for two minutes.

The intent of the freeze was to see the students' reaction to the experiment. Many people were confused, and some students decided to test the participants by poking and talking to the statue-like figures.

Sophomore Taara Rangan had an unexpected experience while in her frozen state.

"It went well at first, a couple people were curiously staring at me, when a freshman walked up to me and started a conversation. Seeing that I wasn't responding, he took my backpack and cell phone out of my hand and ran with it—it was quite amusing," said Rangan.

Students were not just frozen while walking—some were passing papers to each other, hugging, tying their shoes or participating in a high-five. It had an immediate effect on students and because of its randomness acted as a stress reliever for some students, including freshman Amanda Olson, who had a test on the day of the freeze.

"For a change it was pleasant to have

THE BIG IDEA | SHS IMPROV

IDEA: Students would freeze in the quad during break simultaneously for about two minutes.

PROBLEMS: Some participants could not get to the quad in time.

REACTIONS: Many students were bewildered.

something non-academic-related event at school," said Olsen.

When selected students were told about this project, they were interested in participating and trying to confuse their friends.

"I was so excited when I heard about the experiment; after all, it's fun to see people's reaction to this," said sophomore Meena Vempaty, a participant in the freeze.

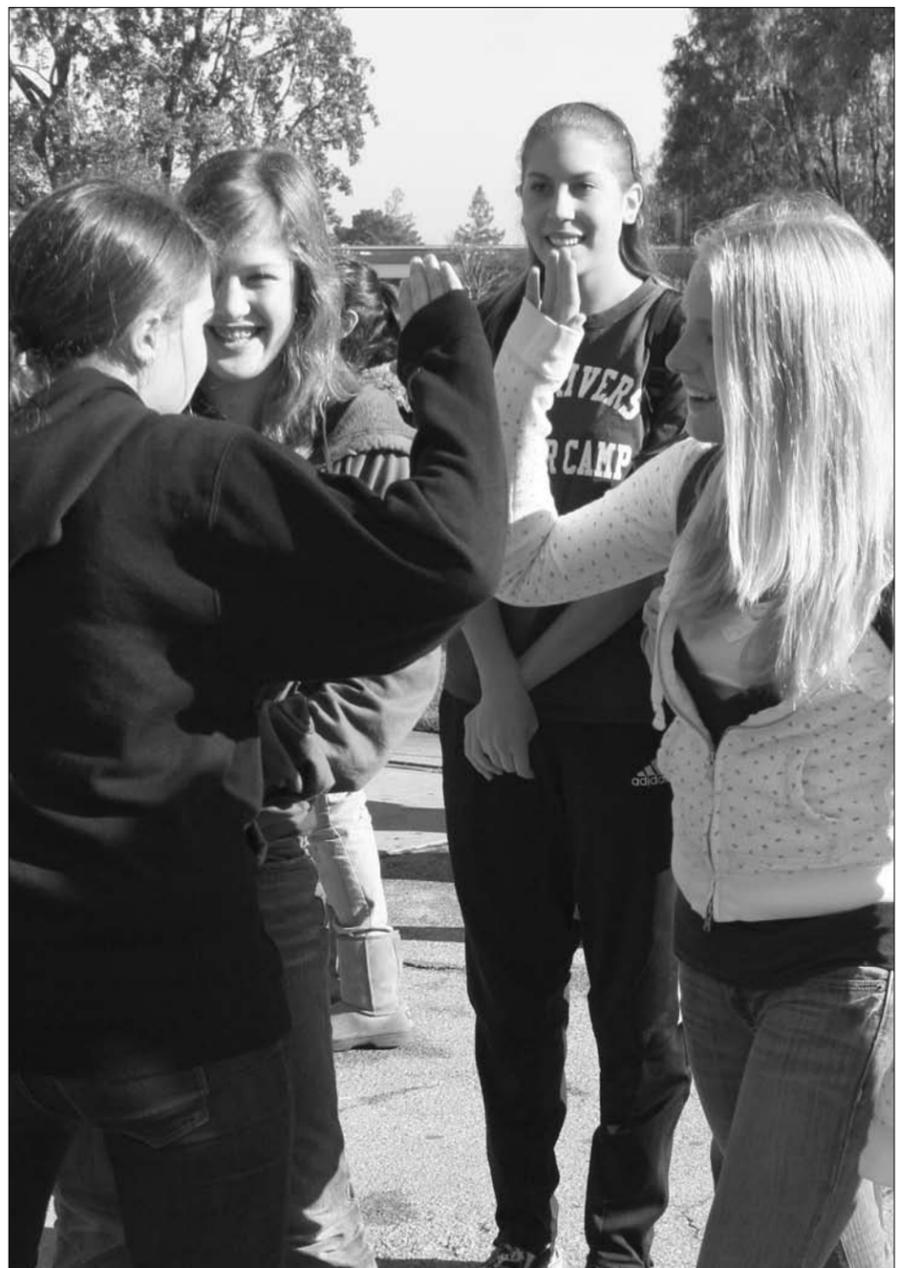
However, the experiment was not without its glitches. Some students who had been chosen to participate were not able to make it to the quad in time to participate, and others, who were supposed to be surprised, knew what was going on thanks to a Facebook group, school announcements and word of mouth.

"I was excited on doing the freeze, but I didn't make it to the quad in time for the experiment," said sophomore Daryl Chang.

The Falcon got the idea for the freeze from an Improv Everywhere scheme, a mass freeze involving 200 people in New York's Grand Central Station. ♦

"A couple people were curiously staring at me, when a freshman walked up to me and started a conversation."

—sophomore Taara Rangan



Theresa Yeh

SOPHOMORES AMALIE MACGOWEN AND REN NORRIS FREEZE MID-HIGH FIVE IN THE QUAD DEC. 3.

The Boy Who Lived draws his wand to a dazzling smile

by Karen Lyu
and Anna Shen

The magical world of famous Harry Potter beckons on one side. With a flawless smile, the “dazzling” Edward Cullen does the same. Which one to choose? Each side all too different from the other, and yet so many feel as if they are obligated to make this choice.

Every girl dreams of the perfect boyfriend—one who is handsome, strong, intelligent, musical, selfless and ideal in just about every way. All the same, most were secretly disappointed when at the tender age of 11, they didn't receive that Hogwarts acceptance letter to learn magic. Regardless of one's preference, one thing is for certain: both the Twilight and Harry Potter series have captivated their audiences.

The Twilight series is composed of four romantic best-selling novels written by author Stephanie Meyer. The saga of the teenage girl and vampire received another rush of popularity this summer

with both the release of “Breaking Dawn,” Meyer's final installment, and the announcement that the series would be transformed into movies reflecting its novel counterparts. Many girls found themselves buzzing about Bella and her two beaux, Edward, the elusive vampire, and Jacob, the kind werewolf. Superfans proclaimed themselves a member of either Team Edward or Team Jacob. Meyer's recent fame, however, is hardly overshadowing the intensity of the Harry Potter phenomenon. J.K. Rowling's series became immensely popular by 1999, two years after its release of the first book, “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone.” Unlike Twilight, which is more a romance with fantasy elements complicating its plot, Harry Potter embraces magic at its core. Harry and his friends live in the exciting world of magic and flying brooms, where most problems can be solved with the simple wave of a wand. Rowling

has cast a deep unbreakable spell over her audience, proving so when “The Deathly Hallows,” Rowling's final installment in the series, sold 8.3 million

copies in its first 24 hours in the United States. “Breaking Dawn,” the final book in Meyer's Twilight saga, paled (no pun intended) in comparison, selling a total of 3.7 million copies.

Despite this, many still stand for Bella's delighting story.

“[Twilight] is different from an ordinary teen romance,” said sophomore Pamela Lee. “There are more elements involved that make it so much more interesting and captivating.”

Popular clothing store Hot Topic is also cashing in on the trend. It has recently started to sell handfuls of Twilight apparel, from Twilight shirts to amulets inspired by those worn in the movie. According to a CNN article, “improving sales and margin trends could boost the teen apparel retailer's stock by more than half over the next year.”

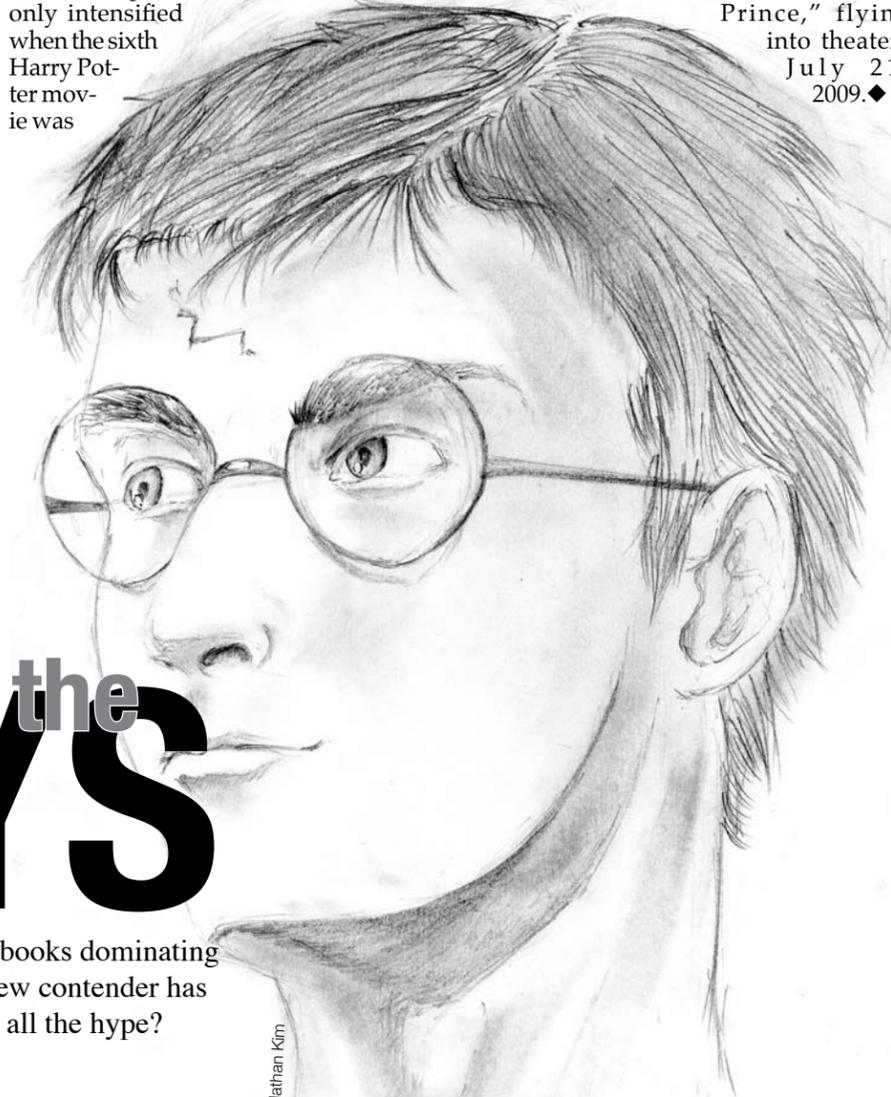
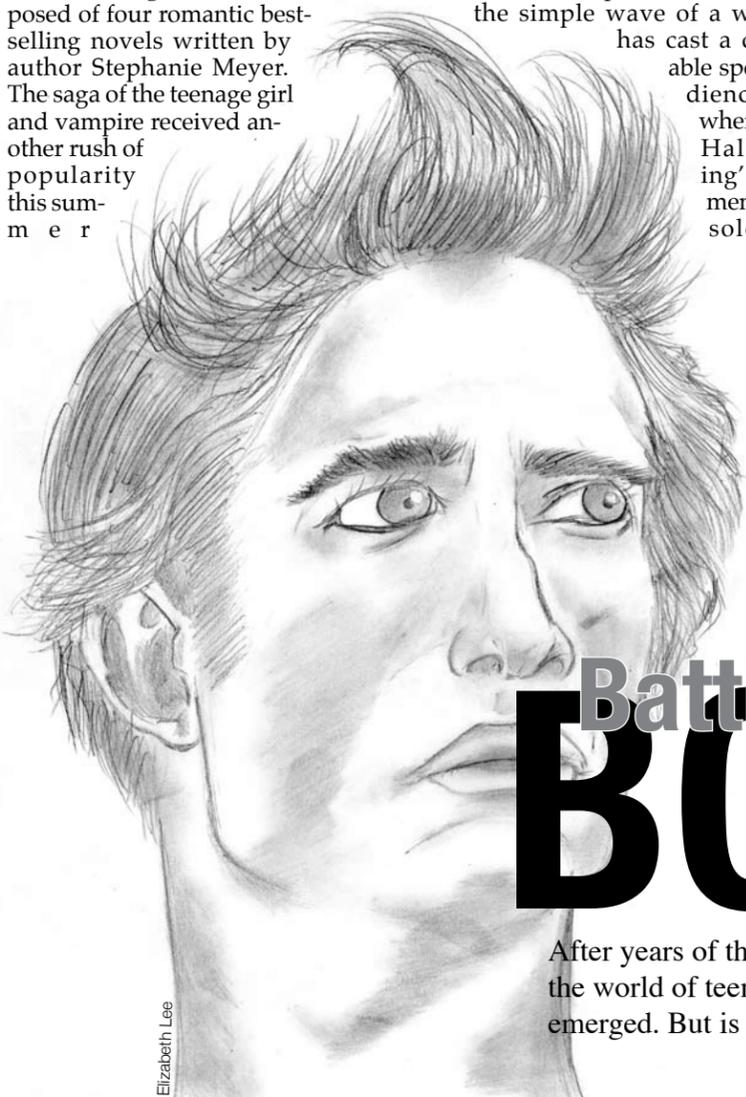
The competition only intensified when the sixth Harry Potter movie was

postponed from Nov. 2008 to July 2009, a move that was rumored to have been made in an effort to avoid competition with the highly anticipated Twilight movie, which arrived in theaters Nov. 21 to sold-out showings.

Although Twilight has some wild fanatics, there are many who are displeased with Meyer's popularity and prefer Rowling's style of writing. Meyer's writing style sounds “bland,” they argue. Rowling's style of writing is much more “smooth and solid.”

“Twilight is written [as though by a] 13-year-old,” said freshman Ariella Yendler. “The prose is bad; the plot is a soap opera written about vampires. It's populated with badly written characters. Every sentence must be dramatic in Twilight.”

The world can only watch as competition heightens with the sixth Harry Potter movie, “The Half Blood Prince,” flying into theaters July 21, 2009. ♦

Battle of the
BOYS

After years of the Harry Potter books dominating the world of teen literature, a new contender has emerged. But is Twilight worth all the hype?

Twilight's weak writing no match for Harry Potter



Kelly Lamble

Note to self

In preparation for writing this column, I decided to do some thorough reporting and read the last two books in the Twilight series. Although I read the first two over the summer and found them less than delightful, I thought I might as well read the last two in order to make accurate judgments. Bad idea. Although I guess I have closure now, I also wasted several hours of my life. With college application deadlines looming, those hours definitely could've been put to better use.

What bugs me about Twilight books is not that they exist or even that they have sold millions of copies, but rather that they compete with Harry Potter, arguably the best series ever written. I honestly do not understand how the two can be compared. J.K. Rowling

is a genius; she constructed an entire, intricately detailed world from scratch. There are so many little details that make the Harry Potter books unique; from Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans to Quidditch to Gringotts, everything is completely original. I can understand that people are looking for a replacement to Harry Potter, but surely they can find something more worthy than Twilight. The two series aren't even the same genre: Twilight is a love story—a sappy, unrealistic, slightly sickening love story, not an adventure saga combined with a coming-of-age story.

Coming of Age

I guess I could be considered a little bit of a Harry Potter freak. I've read all the books at least five times, and even dragged my friend Dorey along with me to the midnight release party of the seventh book. Each time I reread the books, I discover some little detail that I overlooked before. Harry Potter comes to Hogwarts a bewildered but courageous boy and emerges seven years later an accomplished wizard. Throughout the series, Rowling creates a cast of major and minor characters, each with

detailed histories. From the light humor of Fred and George to the severity of Professor McGonagall to the intelligence of Hermione Granger, each character adds some new dimension to the story.

Take, for example, Severus Snape. For the first five books, he is a source of constant gloom for Harry, never missing an opportunity to inflict pain on him. Still, despite his past as a stout Voldemort supporter, he gains the uneasy trust of the Order of the Phoenix and his dislike of Harry is seen more as a vendetta against the boy's deceased father than an indication that he is still affectionate towards the dark arts.

In the sixth book, this changes as he runs off with Draco Malfoy after murdering Dumbledore, apparently exposing his true allegiance at last. By the end of the seventh book, however, he is revealed to be a more complex character than anyone could have guessed. It turns out he did revoke the dark arts and his murder of Dumbledore was one puzzle piece in a carefully orchestrated plan to ensure the downfall of Voldemort. Furthermore, his hatred of Harry was a result of the conflict between his love for Harry's mother and his resent-

ment for Harry's father. Twilight simply lacks the same level of depth and character development. As someone who does not believe in love at first sight, I found the premise of the book unrealistic and its execution pitiful. I have never seen such a gross over usage of the word love—or dazzling. Really, who describes someone that way? In the span of a week, Edward and Bella fall in everlasting love, despite the fact that they know absolutely nothing about each other.

According to teenage girls across the country, Edward is the epitome of perfection; despite the fact that as a vampire Bella's blood “sings” to him, he resists the urge to bite her because, as the series proves over and over again, love trumps all else. He even has trouble touching her. That is not romantic. That is just dumb. Meyer is preying on the fantasies of pre-teens, satiating their thirst for “the perfect boyfriend.”

Twilight is not the worst book ever written, it just doesn't measure up to Harry Potter. Twilight is just a book and Edward and Bella are just characters, whereas Harry Potter holds a special place in my heart—and on my bookshelf. ♦

Entertainment for the holidays

Looking for a great way to fill your two week break? Here are some movies and a TV special to put you in a good mood this holiday season:



FOUR CHRISTMASSES

Reese Witherspoon and Vince

Vaughn star in this comedy about a couple visiting their four sets of parents during the holidays.

A COLBERT CHRISTMAS

Stephen Colbert puts a satirical spin (as well as a musical touch) on the classic celebrity holiday special.



NOTHING LIKE THE HOLIDAYS

Be prepared for tears in this drama about a Puerto Rican family's reunion for Christmas dinner.

—by Dorey Schranz

THE CRITIC Twilight

Twilight movie fails to impress

Overly hyped novel-based film fails to satisfy reader with dramatic emphasis

by Amalie MacGowan

On the weekend of Nov. 21, theatres were swarming with frantic teenage girls, and the occasional boy, clamoring at the idea of being able to see their favorite fictional character, Edward Cullen, portrayed on the big screen during the release of "Twilight."

After the first book of the Twilight Saga by Stephenie Meyer made its debut in 2005, the enterprise slowly molted into a frenzy. Millions of copies were sold worldwide, and the sequels of "New Moon," "Eclipse," and recently published, "Breaking Dawn" followed suit.

The immense popularity has led to the creation of "Twilight," the movie, directed by Catherine Hardwicke.

Robert Pattinson plays Edward Cullen, the somber, 100-year-old vampire, while Kristen Stewart takes on the character of clumsy Bella Swan, the melancholy teenager ridden with angst over her recent move from Arizona. She finds herself in the drizzly town of Forks, Wash., on the Olympic Peninsula—one of the rainiest spots in the continental U.S.

Upon attending her first day at her new high school, she finds herself infatuated by a strangely captivating young man who later is revealed to be a vampire. Throughout the course of the novel, the couple struggles through Edward's craving for Bella's blood while he attempts to physically interact with her. "Twilight" sums up to be a quick-read passionate romance strung along with exciting action and details.

The motion picture, however, failed to meet the challenge of staying true to the book; the pace was either rushed or stretched out awkwardly, and the characters' potential was limited thanks to the painfully anemic script. The plot was tied up within the film reels and hard to untangle or decipher for the unknowing viewer. Much of the original

charm from the book is extricated, making the characters' exchanges garbled and uncomfortable.

The most peculiar aspect of the movie's plot was the irrelevant emphasis on James, the violent vampire and antagonist of the story, rather than the star-crossed couple.

The character's impressively sculpted body and personal story were

played up profusely in the film, while in the book, James is simply the vicious, bloodthirsty villain who appears within the last hundred pages in order to muster some conflict in the novel.

Even though the movie and the book may have been off kilter from one other, the motion picture pulled through as a result of matchless casting.

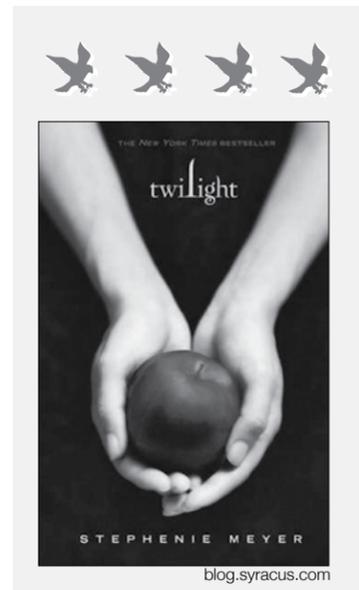
Director Hardwicke worked assiduously to find the perfect actors and actresses for "Twilight."

However, even with a young Hollywood cast, some students still could not excuse the inaccuracy of the movie.

"It didn't do justice to the books," said sophomore Lauren Gardanier, who attended the midnight opening of "Twilight." "I think that they packed together a majority of the novel that people really love, and instead tried to make it an action

movie, to attract more viewers." Though the movie somewhat distorted Meyer's novel, "Twilight" was an enjoyable film.

Despite the deviations from the original plot, the motion picture, much like the book, had a plethora of excitement, action, humor and romance—the qualities people all over the world fell in love with to begin with. ♦



WEBSPOTLIGHT Goozex.com

Bad deals, Mr. Dinosaur? Quoth the Goozex, nevermore

Goozex.com, a video game website, regulates trades between users with no middleman, creates savings

by Holden Sparacino

Goozex.com, essentially, is a website that moderates users' video games trades. But under the surface, it is much more.

The way the site works is simple: Users look through their collection of games and search Goozex for the titles they wish to sell, state the condition the game is in and enter a queue line for the game.

When a buyer is available, Goozex automatically matches up the buyer with the person in front of the queue line, notifies the seller, and sends a shipping address and date to the seller.

The seller is then rewarded Goozex points when the trade is complete. Each game is assigned a point value from 100 to 1000 depending on how much the game is worth.

These points are needed to get games and can be acquired either by selling games on the site or by purchases from Goozex.

When a user requests to buy a game, Goozex matches up the buyer with a seller and provides an address for shipping the game to as well as a date to ship the game by.

This process provides a quick and simple way to allow users all over the country (and the world) to exchange games. Games can

usually be shipped for around \$2, and in a week a user will receive feedback and will be awarded their points, which they can use to purchase a game at a later date.

The user can then use their points to buy games from other users.

Yes, all this buying and selling can be done on eBay or at Game Stop, but eBay cannot offer the guarantee or the speed of Goozex, who is ready at hand to deal with cases in which users were scammed. Goozex can easily reimburse users should they be cheated out of

their points.

As for stores such as Game Stop, Goozex is much less expensive because there is virtually no middleman to add another share to the price of each game.

Users only pay shipping when they send a game and a dollar service charge when they receive one (the service charge can be bypassed, however, by referring friends to join Goozex.)



This means the deals are great! For example, someone buying Halo 3 from Goozex will have it shipped to his or her door the same way they could through a company such as Game Stop, but they will end up with the pleasant surprise of 17 more dollars in their pocket.

Trading games is not the only way to get great deals on Goozex. Points are sold for \$5 per 100 points.

To give you an idea, games like Gears of War 2 or Little Big Planet (which retail at around \$60) sell for \$50 on Goozex, and you don't pay for shipping!

Goozex does not just draw the line at helping users get their games, it also helps them with games they have through forums, where users discuss anything about gaming, making Goozex an invaluable resource for any video game player.

Since users are automatically connected with each other, thousands of trades are always being processed, enabling trades to be as quick as possible.

This combined with the lack of a middleman also means more games for less cash: a welcomed surprise for anyone. Goozex's easy to use interface, great deals and preference toward efficiency let gamers spend less time finding games and more time actually playing. ♦

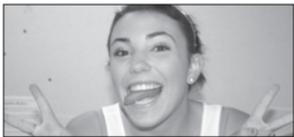
saratogafalcon.org/sports



The Best of Times & the Worst of Times in Bay Area Sports

Sports columnists weigh in on their favorite professional Bay Area teams.

Warriors disappoint fan



Alex Sclavos

Obnoxiously Loud

It looked as if the Golden State Warriors were going to be victorious on Dec. 1 against the Miami Heat. With only seconds left in overtime, the Warriors were up by four. Then, a three-pointer from the Heat and a lazy pass by Andris Biedrins gave the Heat the one point victory.

This game sums up the Warriors season so far: disappointing. The Warriors, who were 5-15 as of Dec. 6, have managed to dig themselves into a deep hole by losing nine straight games. In doing so, the team is on the fast track to failure, going from having a glimmer of hope of making the playoffs to having none.

The team's fall from feared contender to a lower echelon team started when guard Monta Ellis decided to ride a moped in his hometown last summer. The decision turned out to be bad when he fell and injured his left ankle, forcing him to get surgery and sit out for three months. Some may blame Ellis for the Warriors downfall, and yes, he is a factor, but he is not the whole problem.

The Warriors' issue is that they can't

get it together long enough to win a game. Games can't be won by throwing ridiculous shots at the basket, nor can they be won when no one feels the need to play defense. Coach Don Nelson's style is a run-and-gun offense, and it is apparent that defense has not been a big part of the Warriors game plan. It is not that this team is untalented. They do have a few key players such as Stephen Jackson and Corey Maggette, but none of these men have stepped up and become leaders for the team. The team has had to rely on its less experienced players to make plays on the court.



With everything the team went through last year from coming up just short of a playoff spot to having their star point guard Baron Davis decide he would rather a higher paying contract on a worse team, one would think these guys would want to prove something. For

instance, that they do not need Davis and that even though they are not the most talented team in the NBA, they are still tough competitors.

Being the die-hard Warrior fan I am, I hope the team can find a way to be the team they were two years ago, the team that beat the No. 1 Dallas Mavericks to advance to the second round of the playoffs. It is time for that team to return. No matter what their record is now "I Believe" they can win. ♦

49ers headed for glory



Guy Quanrud

It's a Guy Thing

The Catch has long been the symbol of San Francisco 49ers' football. The impossible throw from Joe Montana to Dwight Clark began the team's glorious span of five Super Bowls. As for the Raiders, their "commitment to excellence" was more than just a slogan. In 2002, the Raiders, led by quarterback Rich Gannon, stormed all the way to Super Bowl XXVII.

These teams used to be great every year, always playoff contenders thanks to quarterback Steve Young and receiver Jerry Rice, running back Marcus Allen and quarterback Jim Plunkett. These men gave Bay Area football a name for decades.

Today, however, these teams are an embarrassment. Even after Young's retirement and Rice's departure the Niners were decent, but since receiver Terrell Owens' left, the Red and Gold have only gone downhill. The Raiders, meanwhile, thanks to their senile owner Al Davis, have had a series of six different coaches in the past five years. For the past few seasons, both franchises have struggled to win games. The only silver lining has been that they have gotten a top first-round draft pick every year, but they have somehow managed to turn these into negatives as well. The

Niners' pick of quarterback Alex Smith a few years ago was a disaster, and last year the Raiders, who have several holes in their line-up, chose a running back, Darren McFadden, when they already had Justin Fargas, LaMont Jordan and Dominic Rhodes for the same position.

This year, though, it seems that one of the two teams has taken a step in the right direction. Want a hint? It's not the Raiders. Mike Singletary, a Hall-of-Fame linebacker for the Chicago Bears in the 1980s, replaced Mike Nolan, and he has already brought change. Known for his no-nonsense attitude, Singletary emphasizes discipline and work ethic in an attempt to overcome a harsh reality: The team sucks.

In a post-game press conference, Singletary laid down the law, saying, "I want people who want to win." This new mentality is the push the Niners need to become better, and the results are showing. Two weeks ago, the Niners handily beat an 8-4 Jets team led by Hall of Fame shoo-in Brett Favre.

The Niners will not make the playoffs, but they are improving, and San Francisco fans have a lot to look forward to if Singletary keeps his job.

There is good news for Oakland, too: They probably couldn't get worse even if they tried. The Raider Nation can hope that Davis dies (because he won't give up control of the team, no matter how far down he drives it), but outside of that, it's hopeless. The Raiders' next winning season seems an eternity away.

It's tough to love Bay Area football right now, but there's always a chance that something good will happen. Well, for one team at least. ♦



Sharks' optimism tempered by past playoff blunders



Gautham Ganesan

Gotham City

As the National Hockey League season nears its midway mark, the league standings are an appealing sight to any Sharks fan. Having accrued the best 26-game start in the NHL's illustrious 91-year history, San Jose has steamrolled over the competition heading into their Dec. 11 tilt with the Anaheim Ducks. Suffice to say, it's been a good year. But it makes little difference if the Sharks end the season 55-0. San Jose's season will be judged solely on their playoff success, or lack thereof.

While this year's team is decidedly more impressive than those of previous seasons, the Sharks are no strangers to hot starts and regular season success. In the league's three post-lockout seasons, San Jose has placed fourth, fourth and second in the competitive Western Conference. What leads to their league-wide reputation as chokers is that they've bowed out in Game 6 of the

second round of the postseason each of those years, always to lower-seeded opponents. Their early exits have had an adverse effect on me personally, often causing me to spontaneously arise in the middle of the night, screaming curses at the likes of Shawn Horcoff, Robert Lang and Brenden Morrow. So is this finally the year the Sharks get over the hump and win the Stanley Cup? I think so, and here are three reasons why.

1. Coach Todd McLellan

General Manager Doug Wilson was swift in handing Ron Wilson his termination notice following the team's gut-wrenching quadruple-overtime loss to Dallas last spring. Reports abounded that the team had tuned out Coach Wilson; the team's sub-standard play supported that contention. Doug Wilson was equally quick in hiring a new coach, identifying a diamond in the rough in Detroit Red Wings assistant coach Todd McLellan. A Cup winner with the Wings last June, McLellan's offense-oriented, puck-possession style has thus far complemented the Sharks' talented forwards seamlessly. His institution of what essentially serves as the antithesis to Ron Wilson's stifling defensive style bodes well for San Jose's playoff success.

2. The revamped blueline

Doug Wilson certainly didn't sit on his hands during the off-season following his hiring of McLellan. After losing trade deadline acquisition Brian Campbell to free agency, Wilson quickly signed 38-year-old, Cup-winning defenseman Rob Blake to a one-year contract. 24 hours later, Wilson traded youngster Matt Carle and a draft pick to Tampa for Cup-winning All-Star defenseman Dan Boyle and veteran Cup-winner (noticing a trend?) Brad Lukowich.

Tampa has already gotten rid of both Carle and the draft pick, so it's safe to say the Sharks won the trade but, more importantly, the advent of all three defensemen—particularly Boyle and Blake—have immensely assisted San Jose's once-stagnant power play. Sharks defensemen Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Christian Ehrhoff are also enjoying eye-opening seasons, largely thanks to the influence of Boyle and Blake. With the Red Wings winning it all last year in no small part due to the play of their dynamic defensive duo of Nick Lidstrom and Brian Rafalski, the impact of Boyle and Blake on San Jose's bid for the Cup cannot be overstated.



3. Joe Thornton

As the former league MVP and leading scorer goes, so go the Sharks. And for three years, the destination has been an early playoff exit. Thornton's reputation around the league has expectedly mirrored that of San Jose: phenomenal in the regular season, but once April rolls around, all bets are off. And with just 37 points in 70 career playoff games—contrasted with 788 points in 781 career regular-season games—Thornton is as much a cause of his unfavorable rep as the rabid Canadian media.

But ask anyone who closely observes the team and they'll attest that this season is a different story with Jumbo Joe. Finally using his 6'4", 235 pound frame to drive to the net with conviction, Thornton has realized skill only takes one so far. His work ethic and willingness to fight for the dirty goals are an indication that he's ready to shed his label as a chronic playoff underperformer. Courtesy of his improved play, an impeccable defense and inspired coaching, it looks like his team has all the makings of a Cup winner. ♦

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Davey adjusts to new role as girls' coach

by Alicia Lee
and Uma Sambasivam

As the girls' varsity basketball team inches into its game season, significant changes have been made this year that could influence their playing as well as their overall season results. For one, Mike Davey has switched to coaching the girls' team after leading the boys' team for 16 years.

While his main reason for switching from boys' basketball has to do with building up a good program over the next few years for his daughters to enter when they come to Saratoga High, Davey also hopes to bring some stability to the girls' team.

"For the girls who have had four different coaches in four years, I think we can build some continuity and have some good memories for the girls," said Davey.

With starting players sophomore Hanna Nielson, junior Nicole Gragnola and seniors Sheeva Hamidieh, Melissa Lin and Alex Sclavos, the team will have a strong front.

Although the team moved up a league this year to the De Anza League, known as the A League and the best possible league in the Bay Area, Davey hopes to attain his main goal for the season: to go far in CCS.

To accomplish this he is working with the girls to improve on fundamentals.

It has, however, been a tough start. In the first five preseason games, the team

lost three, including a brutal 22-80 loss against Valley Christian, two-time CCS championship winners. The team lost to Evergreen 50-58, but recovered and beat Willow Glen 56-30.

Davey, however, is confident these challenges will only help the team grow and gradually improve.

"We have played a very good schedule so far [in the preseason games]," said Davey. "We are looking to be of a difficult [game] schedule, so we can challenge ourselves."

In preparation for the season, Davey has had the varsity girls on an extensive preseason workout plan, with practices six days a week of running, lifting and playing.

Unfortunately, the team is a few steps behind other schools in training because four girls on the team were in field hockey and three girls were in volleyball. Both sports had great runs in CCS, preventing those girls from joining the basketball team earlier on.

Although it is great for the team to have athletic and involved girls, it is also unfavorable because, according to Davey, "now we have to set up all of our offenses and [other plays] later in the season."

While it is still too soon to predict anything from the preseason games, Davey hopes that his coaching will help to further develop the varsity girls' techniques as well as make lasting impressions and memories for them. ♦

Davey is confident these challenges will only help the team grow and gradually improve.



Amanda Yi

Junior Shannon Fung tears up the court practicing for an intense basketball season.

MEET THE CAPTAINS

GIRLS' SOCCER



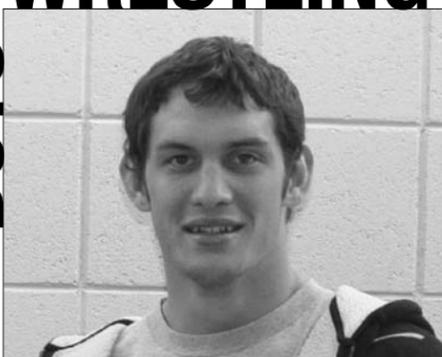
Seniors Hana Pruzansky (not pictured), Katie and Claire Marsh stand as the new captains for girls' soccer. Though Pruzansky is injured, she still supports the team as a captain.

GIRLS' BASKETBALL



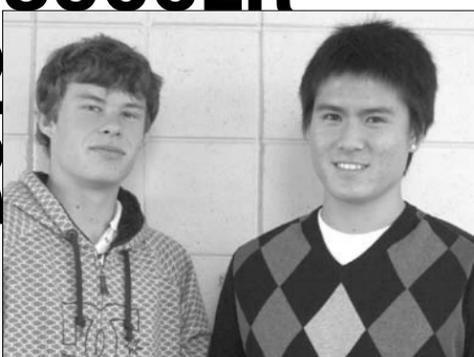
Seniors Alex Sclavos, Ashley Cole, junior Baylee Yates and senior Melissa Lin excel as the team captains for the season, working with their new coach, Mike Davey.

BOYS' WRESTLING



Senior Jasper Loren will lead the wrestling team to the top as captain, making a great start in his first tournament on Dec. 6 with several of his wrestlers placing in their divisions.

BOYS' SOCCER



Seniors Hoffman Hibbett and Chris Chung emphasize commitment to help the team excel in the El Camino League.

BOYS' BASKETBALL



Photos by Amanda Yi

As team captains, seniors Alvin Hsia and Ryan Pak will help their team adjust to its new coach Trevor Nast and new league, El Camino.

BOYS' SOCCER

New coach emphasizes hard work, commitment

Boys start to overcome last year's issues by coming together as a team and adopting a new mentality

by Lyka Sethi
and Tim Tsai

With a new coach and a relatively new group of players, the boys' varsity soccer team hopes to pull together and improve their commitment this season.

So far, they've suffered four preseason losses to Yerba Buena, Menlo, Watsonville and Milpitas in which the team lost 2-1, 1-0, 1-0 and 5-1, respectively. The only game they have won thus far came against Prospect with a score of 3-1. The players are looking to improve in league games, which started on Dec. 17 against Wilcox.

"We're still new as a team, so we're not playing up to our potential yet," said senior center mid-fielder Chris Chung. "But that's what preseason is for, so it's a good learning experience and chance for us to improve."

The boys' new coach Brock Woodard "has high goals," according to Chung.

"[Woodard] has a winning attitude," said Chung. "He has a lot of experience and emphasizes fitness and commitment."

Woodard, who played Division II soccer at Sonoma State University, employs more tactics and strategies than did last year's coach. Under his instruction the team hopes to overcome problems they had last year.

"Last year there were issues with commitment and a lack of team bonding," said senior defender Michael Vu. "But [Woodard] is trying to implement a new soccer mentality by emphasizing dedication and commit-



Amanda Yi

Senior Chris Chung dribbles down the field in the Dec. 9 game at home against Milpitas. The Falcons lost 5-1, making their preseason record 1-4.

ment, so I don't think that will be a problem this year."

Along with this new sense of dedication, the team has noticed stronger camaraderie this season. According to Chung, the team has gotten closer during hard training sessions and

weight lifting.

As a result of moving down from the El Camino to the De Anza League, the team hopes to string together some wins.

"We're kind of in a tough situation because we're among the top in this lower league, but at

the bottom of the upper league," said Vu. "I think if we work on our teamwork and come together, we can do well."

By joining the De Anza league, the boys feel that they have a better chance of making it to CCS.

"We didn't do so hot last year," said Chung. "We didn't make CCS, but the team is pretty new this year and it's very good."

With all our training and our good coach, we know we can dominate league." ♦

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Falcons play in new league

by Anna Shen
and Abhi Venkataramana

The boys' basketball team has to get used to one major change this year: Longtime coach Mike Davey has switched to coaching the girls' team this year.

Taking Davey's place is coach Trevor Naas, who coached the JV team last year.

"I think [Naas] is good, because he's really tough on us," said senior co-captain Ryan Pak. "He's making us run and working us hard; it seems like he knows what he's doing."

In addition to having a new coach, the team will also be playing in a new league. After several years of playing in the De Anza League, the team has been moved down to the El Camino League.

"Our three best players were seniors, and we were in the bottom of the A-league," said Pak. "[Because of that], we got moved down, and Los Altos and Wilcox moved up."

Naas hopes to make the CCS playoffs. As of Dec. 11, the team has preseason wins over Los Altos, Prospect and Live Oak and losses to Leigh, Leland, Pioneer and Willow Glen, taking their record to 3-4.

"We are trying to get better every day," said Naas. "The team knows that every day we must be committed to playing hard, playing smart and playing together."

The toughest competition, according to Naas, will come from Homestead, Lynbrook and Monta Vista.

"I would say talent-wise, we're probably [the] best in the league," said Pak. "It's just a matter of us playing [up to our potential]."

Naas feels the only way for the Falcons to play their best is if they constantly pressure opponents defensively and let their defense fuel their offense.

"Our success will be determined by our play on the defensive end of the court," said Naas. "When we go after it defensively, that leads to opportunities for us to get out and run in the open court, and that is when we are at our best."

Naas is relying on senior guards Jaime Turley and Owen Huang to lead at the defensive end of the court.

"Turley and Huang are great on-ball defenders and provide a lot of energy in our back court," said Naas.

On offense, Pak and junior guard Daniel Chou are outside shooting threats who can score from all areas of the court. Senior Alvin Hsia is "a very solid post player" who will be a dominant inside scorer, according to Naas.

Co-captains Hsia and Pak will lead the team through the season and hopefully to CCS.

The team will play against Sequel on Dec. 22 in a preseason game. Their preseason will conclude on Jan. 3 after a game against non-league rivals Los Gatos. ♦

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GIRLS' SOCCER

Talented team hopes to unlock potential

by Aditi Jayaraman
and Tim Rollinson

The girls' soccer team is trying to gel around a new coach and integrate three freshmen and three new sophomores—a continuing challenge that has shown up in some pre-season losses.

"[The girls] are just getting to know each other and play as a team, which is what preseason is about," said new coach Tulin Mendoza.

Mendoza has been coaching for the past 15 years at a number of different high schools, youth programs and Olympic development programs in the Bay Area. Mendoza expressed enthusiasm about working with the Lady Falcons this year, but there is still much room for improvement.

"I think this year's group of girls really represents what Saratoga sports are about," said Mendoza, "The preseason record of three losses and one tie doesn't reflect how talented these girls are."

Senior co-captains Claire Marsh, Katie Marsh and Hana Pruzansky are trying their best to bring players closer together and improve teamwork throughout the season.

"I think we have some of the best individual players on our team this year," said Pruzansky, "but we've been struggling to find connections."

Despite the team's 4-0 loss to Homestead during a home game on Dec. 8, players have begun to communicate more on the field and teamwork is definitely improving, said Pruzansky.

This season's lineup consists of forwards Katie and Claire Marsh and Kelly



Amanda Yi

Junior goalie Jan Iyer dives for the ball to block a goal during practice as the team prepares for a game against Los Gatos on Dec. 12.

Darchuk, mid-fielders Jordan Leonard, Sloan Lewis and Ren Norris, and defenders Kari Clark, Colleen Garland, Sarah Guy and Sam Li. Goalie Jan Iyer, who was recently out because of a bruised Achilles, has also returned to play this season.

"We just need to be more confident," said Pruzansky. "If we fire it up and increase our intensity, we can really play up to our potential."

The Homestead game was a valuable experience for the girls who have recently moved up into division A in the El Camino League.

"I think the preseason will teach us a lot of things we need to work on, especially playing against division A teams," said junior Sam Li.

With many tough practices and challenging games still ahead of them, the

girls, under the guidance of Mendoza, hope to utilize their full potential as they tackle a demanding and competitive season.

"[The girls] are very talented and receptive and I think that the practice in the preseason will help to prepare the team for league games," said Mendoza. "If you asked me if I think they are going to be champions, I would say 'yes.'" ♦

WRESTLING

6:15 a.m. practices prep wrestlers for new season

by Guy Quanrud
and Holden Sparacino

This year the wrestling team is taking a different approach to their practices. By popular vote, the team has changed its practice time and adopted an early morning training routine.

They lift weights in the morning so that afternoon practices are shorter, allowing the wrestlers to go home earlier. This is also better for the team because they will have more time to finish their homework. In addition, with this new policy, the afternoon practice can focus on wrestling technique.

"When we lifted before we wrestled, the boys' muscles were tired," said head wrestling coach Kirk Abe. "Now they have time to rest during the day."

The team gets to school at 6:15 every morning, warms up by jumping rope, and then heads into a rigorous workout routine that is different day to day, week to week, constructed by assistant coach Gabe Tseng.

After the workout, the team showers in the locker room and is usually finished by 7:40.

Team members had positive things to say about the change.

"I like the morning practices because they shorten practices after school," said sophomore Jordan Waite, "and although it's hard to wake up in the morning, the

extra effort is worth it."

On Dec. 6, the Falcons started their season with the Peninsula Invitation Tournament at Half Moon Bay High School.

The tournament was an overall success for the team, which placed fifth overall out of 38 teams.

Senior Jasper Loren was the highlight of the tournament, taking first place in the 160-lb division.

Seniors Nathan Nguyen, Richard Macklin and Holden Sparacino also placed, with Nguyen taking third in the 119-lb, Macklin sixth in the 152-lb and Sparacino eighth in the 171-lb.

Waite and freshman Alfred Murabito got fourth in the 140-lb and sixth in the 125 lb., respectively.

At the tournament, the Saratoga Falcons went up against some of the toughest teams in the state, such as Palma High School, giving the team a good look at what to improve on in the upcoming tournaments.

"[The tournament] was good in terms of assessing what we have to work on for the bulk of the season, and what the competition is like," said Abe.

The team is now training for the Sierra Nevada Invitational Tournament taking place over the winter break.

Due to publication deadlines, the results of the team's dual meet against Fremont High School, held yesterday against Fremont High School, could not be reported. ♦

"I like the morning practices because they shorten practices after school, and although it's hard to wake up in the morning, the extra effort is worth it."

—sophomore Jordan Waite

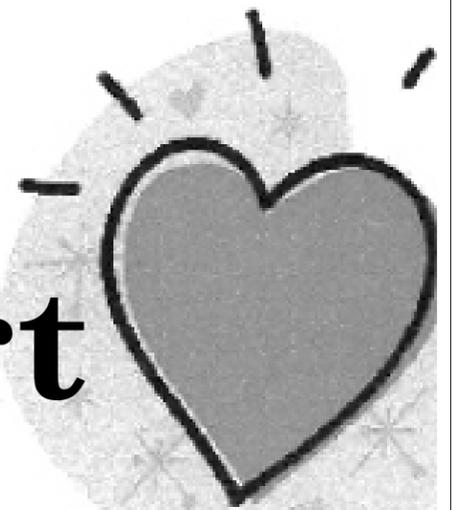
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buzzworthy

Senior wins county band competition

After playing the flute for six years, senior Aaron Garg decided to enter the 2009 Santa Clara County Band Directors Association Concerto Competition (SCCBDA) on Dec. 2. With his solo piece "Fantaisie Pastorale Hongroise" by Franz Doppler, Garg was able to win and will perform this piece with the SCCBDA Honor Band on Jan. 18.

Along with the help of his accompanist Emily Hsu, who was an alumnus in 2000 and now a professional pianist, Garg was able to wow the panel of six judges at an audition held at Independence High School.

Garg arrived at the competition optimistic.

"I was feeling pretty good. We got there early so I had time to rehearse with my accompanist once," said Garg. "Then it was just waiting until it was my turn."

Although, some people are nervous wrecks before performing in front of judges, Garg was able to remain calm as he had rehearsed the piece several times for a May competition, so he felt completely prepared.

The moment Garg received his congratulatory call, his goal became a reality.

"I was really thrilled. I was hoping for it and thought I had a pretty good shot at getting it so I was just waiting for the call," said Garg. "I thought I'd played really well. I mean, I thought I had played my best." When other students found out Garg won, they were enthusiastic for his accomplishments.

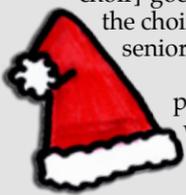
"Everyone was telling me 'congratulations' and I think a lot of people are excited for me too," said Garg.

Carol Grams bring holiday spirit to students

Classes this week were interrupted with a bit of holiday cheer as the Chamber Singers sang their annual Carol Grams to raise money.

The tradition also financially benefits the Chamber Singers.

"We do it to raise money for our music accounts since [the choir] goes on a lot of trips. The Chamber Choir is the choir that travels the most," said choir member senior Sarah Baldwin.



The grams were delivered during each period on Tuesday, Dec. 12. The song choices were: "Hark the Herald Angel Sing," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Jingle Bells," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," "Silent Night," "Joy to the World," "Deck the Halls," "Carol of the Bells" (Jazz Version), "Carol of the Bells" (Regular Version), "Sleigh Ride" and "Santa Claus is Coming to Town."

"We go through this long stretch of I'm-stressed time and then the holiday season comes and it's a time to spend with family friends. The Holiday Grams set the state for this. It lightens our hearts," said assistant principal Karen Hyde.

The grams were sold for \$2 each, \$3 for two or \$8 for five.

-by Rebecca Nguyen, Sophia Copper, and Tim Rollinson



FALCON FREEZE FRAME



Amanda Yi



Amanda Yi



Melody Zhang



Amanda Yi



Amanda Yi

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **PLAY YOUR HEARTS OUT** SENIORS AUSTIN SHIEH AND JAIME TURLEY PLAY AT A BAND CONCERT DEC. 12. **COOKIES IN THE MAKING** A GROUP OF FRESHMEN GATHER DURING THE LINK CREW ACTIVITY TO DECORATE COOKIES DEC. 11. **PLANTING SEEDS** MEMBERS OF EMS USE A CAMPUS MAP TO CHOOSE PLACES TO PLANT TREES DEC. 10. **HARD AT WORK** MAP STUDENT MEMBERS ATTEND A MEETING TO PRESENT TO THE PROGRAM'S LEADERSHIP BOARD DEC. 11. **WINTER FUN** ASB VICE PRESIDENT FELIX TUAN AND BOARD REPRESENTATIVE COREY RATEAU SELL A WINTER BALL BID TO JUNIOR MADDIE RENALDS.

TOPTEN

GREAT THINGS ABOUT OBAMA

- 10 Young people love him. There isn't much difference between him and Miley Cyrus.
- 9 He's so tall and skinny. If he weren't, he wouldn't be able to walk on water.
- 8 For the next four years it will be pronounced "nuclear."
- 7 Obama even smokes occasionally. Especially on election day, when he smoked McCain.
- 6 He is going to end the war in Iraq. Right after he invades Afghanistan.
- 5 He's so young. In McCain's defense, he's 335 in dog years.
- 4 He will be our first black president.
- 3 Since the first season of "24." There isn't much to joke about with Obama.
- 2 Which is why we have Biden. President Bush briefed Obama about the state of our nation. The slogan changed to "maybe we can."
- 1 He even got together with his rival John McCain.

Both said it was a relief to put their differences

- by Benjamin Clement and Sulmaan Hassan

Columnist's guide to surviving California winters



Dorey Schranz
Hilariously Hungarian

Baby, it's cold outside. Thus goes a classic Dean Martin holiday duet. In its very innocently tongue-in-cheek mid 20th century style it basically (and I'm paraphrasing here) is the man telling his female friend at his apartment that she shouldn't go home, even though she knows she should. His reasoning? Well, it's cold outside. She decides to stay and I think it can probably be assumed he takes advantage of her. Men. Even Mother Nature is working in their favor.

Yes, ladies, it is that time of year, again. The time when every girl needs a nice warm fire and a strong pair of arms around her to make it through these sometimes surprisingly harsh California

winters. Watch out, for most of the time those strong arms are attached to a man with abs of (but by no means a conscience of) steel. And with some deceitful guys, the fire may be least dangerous thing in the room.

Instead, follow these quick and easy ways to keep your body warm and your dignity intact.

Scarves. They aren't just for

Warm clothing. It's really not rocket science—if it's cold outside, put on a jacket.

covering up hickeys anymore! Cheap and easy to match with any outfit, they are a great way to keep your neck warm. Also, for when your morals escape you, a scarf doubles as a handy ladder to help you sneak out your bedroom window for a midnight meeting with that guy you swore was just a friend. That's when the

first use comes in handy again.

Hugs. What better way to warm up than by generating some nice, clean body heat and making some new friends along the way. After all, it's the holidays—we could all use a little love! After the third or fourth hug, you will start to defrost! On a side note—hugs should not last more than three seconds. Just putting that out there.

Warm clothing. It's really not rocket science—if it's cold outside, put on a jacket. Yet, judging by the amount of clothing I see people wearing in the dead of winter, our API scores must be some kind of fluke. There is hope for the future; however, I am certain that when True Religion starts making thermal underwear, our cold and flu rates will disappear almost over-night.

So ladies, take my advice. The next time you find yourself cold and lonely on a winter night: find yourself a nice, respectable... space heater. Because, baby, it's cold outside. ♦