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Going from Saratoga to the military



Party games Rated E for Everyone

THE saratogafalcon



Saratoga High School >> Saratoga, CA
An Independent School Publication

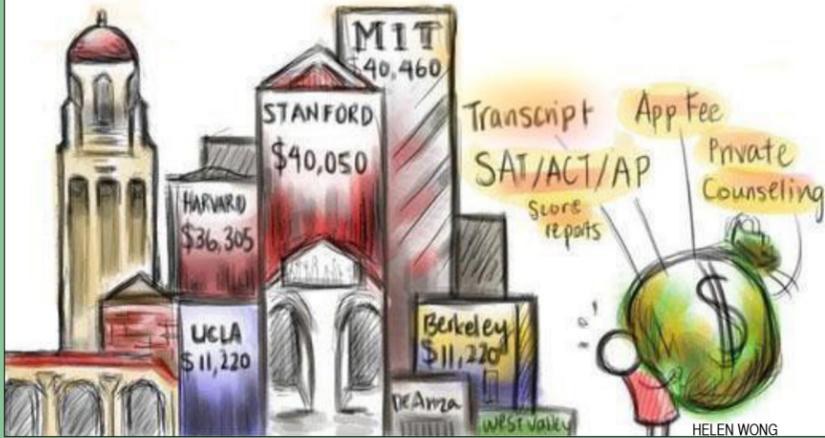
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APPLICATION COSTS RISE ALONGSIDE TUITION

Having to pay \$11 for College Board to send your scores electronically is ridiculous, because you're basically paying them to click on a few things.

>> Senior Katlyn Hirokawa



>> falconfigures

- 12 colleges the average senior applies to this year
- 7 colleges the average senior applied to in 2007
- 91 dollars on average per school: college application, SAT score report and an official school transcript order
- 30 dollar increase in the cost of a UC application from 2004 (\$40) to 2012 (\$70).*

SOURCE: GUIDANCE OFFICE AND ELESTOQUE.ORG

BY Sophie Mattson & Rohan Rajeev

Cost of an average college application: \$75. Cost to send SAT scores to each college: \$11. Rush delivery of SAT scores: \$35.

According to college coordinator Bonnie Sheikh, the average senior applied to seven secondary schools in 2007. This year, the seniors are applying to an average of 12 schools, making for a much more expensive college application process. As the admission rates at first-rate colleges decrease,

seniors are encouraged to apply to a broader range of schools, especially to many more "safety" schools.

Not only do seniors have to spend weeks, even months, writing essays and submitting forms, but they also have to pay a small fortune in application fees and components.

Aware of the stress that college essays place on students and the high cost of applications, senior David Zarrin trimmed his list of colleges to seven with only six different applications.

"Starting off with a big list, I looked

at college quality first [to begin cutting my list down]," Zarrin said. "I went through every school and marked some."

He then thoroughly researched the marked schools to make a shorter list of only 12.

"Then I looked at location and geography," he said. "I ruled out some colleges in the middle of nowhere."

His final priority was the school's population, and he cut out the schools with too many students for his liking.

>> COLLEGE on pg. 3

HOLIDAYS

Fundraisers encourage generosity

BY Michelle Leung & Amy Lin

As shops and houses around town put up decorations in preparation for the holiday season, the school prepares itself for the numerous amount of fundraisers it plans for the end of the year.

The administration is hosting the Family Tree's Holiday Wish Drive, one of the many fundraisers at school. Students can support the fundraiser by finding gifts listed on the tags hanging from boughs in the office.

"There are kids around the valley who have nothing for Christmas," said administrative assistant Susan Dini, who is in charge of the fundraiser. "There are codes for each student, and they put in their Christmas wishes. Students can just pick up the tags, attach it to the package and bring it into the office."

Although many students look forward to holiday gifts, many families around Silicon Valley do not have gifts to look forward to. The items these less fortunate children want are of no big consequence, often just a brush or coloring book, but regardless, a present on Christmas Day means a lot to them.

"All of us get really excited for presents, and lots of [children] don't have that chance," community commissioner senior Shireen Kaul said.

For Kaul, the biggest reward in joining fundraisers is the good anyone can do, no matter how small.

>> HOLIDAY on pg. 14

ACADEMIC TEAMS

History Bowl plays host

VARSITY A AND JV TEAMS ADVANCE TO NATIONALS, A PLACES SECOND OVERALL

BY Nick Chow & Bruce Lou

Although it is one of the newest clubs on campus, it has already won multiple victories. In only its first year, the History Bowl team conquered numerous other teams in its qualification for the national tournament. This year's team is starting off right where they left off last year.

In their very first tournament, hosted at Saratoga High on Dec. 2, two of the three teams qualified for the national competition.

The varsity team A, which consists of seniors Spencer Goldman, Maggy Liu, Kabir Chandrasekher and Kian Anderson, swept through the prelimi-

nary rounds of the competitions with a 4-1 record, including victories over high school teams Escobar A (Mission San Jose), Bellarmine B, Andrew Hill, Escobar B and Saratoga B.

Their playoffs record was equally as good, defeating Escobar and Saratoga B, yet again, en route to the finals. They lost in the finals against junior Sameer Rai, Bellarmine's one-man juggernaut team and reigning Quiz Bowl national champion. The team finished with a 6-2 record and second place overall.

"Even though we lost [against Rai] in the finals, we held our own, and it was an honor to play against him," Goldman said. "But I was most impressed with

>> BOWL on pg. 5

NEW PRINCIPAL

Students give a high-five to Robinson's involvement

BY Brandon Judoprasertijo

Whether it be the time he stood amidst a sea of red pride at the Beat Los Gatos Football rally or the many lunches he's spent kindly greeting students in the quad, principal Paul Robinson has taken admirable strides toward becoming a pillar of school unity this year, according to many students.

"He's super visible and really makes a solid effort," ASB president Sasan Saadat said. "He regularly leaves his office and becomes an accessible administrator by walking around the quad and saying good morning to staff and students each morning out-

side the office."

Robinson can be found at nearly every event at school and his attendance is something students take note of. Saadat specifically remembers Robinson showing up to opening night of the fall play.

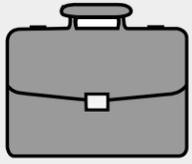


Robinson

"The following day he sent out an email praising the performing arts in general at Saratoga, which was really, really cool," Saadat said. "I have to attribute a lot of our successful outcome to his kind words and support."

When the band attended the Macy's Day Parade in New York over Thanksgiving, Robinson was a chaper-

>> ROBINSON on pg. 5



news >> briefs

Despite challenges, Saratoga Idol a success

Ten contestants took the stage on Nov. 29 at this year's Saratoga Idol in the McAfee Center. Each contestant sang one song in the preliminary round, and then the top three singers were chosen by the audience to sing in the next round.

Freshman Nina Nelson, junior Brian Park and senior Sanjeev Suresh were selected to sing in the next round, and the three won first, second and third place respectively.

"I'm really happy about second, and all of the support I got was awesome and very much appreciated," Park said.

The junior class officers put in an immense amount of effort for the show to run smoothly. Every officer was involved, whether it be helping out with graphics, contacting the Tuxedo Warehouse for the attire, making advertisements or updating the administration on the progress of the event.

"We spent a lot of time working out logistics, but honestly the amazing talent we had this year in combination with the fun atmosphere made this the best Idol ever," junior class officer Rick Roy said.

— Rohan Hardikar

Holiday Boutique a success for freshmen

The freshman class sponsored the annual holiday boutique on Dec. 1 in the cafeteria and the Thermond Theater. Fifty vendors paid for spaces, and visitors of the boutique had a wide variety of items to choose from to purchase.

"Each item was unique since they were all handmade goods and not factory-produced, but I didn't buy anything since they were expensive," senior Sarah Kuo said.

The items on sale ranged from clothing to handmade wind chimes.

Senior Michael Cheung, who purchased two pieces of jewelry for his sister, was impressed.

"There were a lot of cute little things that I wanted to buy and it was a great way for the shops to share their creations and ideas," Cheung said. "It was my first time coming to one of these holiday boutiques and I was very fascinated by all the shops' displays of creativity."

According to principal's secretary Susan Dini, the 50 vendors each paid for a 4x7 space, and they could rent a table and chairs if they didn't bring their own.

"They had a raffle where every vendor donated a raffle gift, and whenever the vendors sold something the vendors gave a ticket to put in the raffle," Dini said.

In total, the freshman class yielded a \$2,525 profit from the boutique. The money will be used to fund their Junior Prom, Senior Ball and assorted class activities.

— Sophie Mattson

Interact hands out notes of kindness

The week of Nov. 5 celebrated the 50th year since Interact was first created club as an international club. In order to commemorate its anniversary, the Interact club placed around 100 notes of kindness in random lockers around campus.

"We wrote notes during one of our meetings," club president senior Tiffany Yung said. "After writing them, all of the officers read the notes to make sure they were appropriate."

Each note began with the message: "To celebrate Interact week, we wanted to write notes of kindness. We just wanted to say ..."

After this introduction, the note had a personalized compliment like "you have the face of an angel" or "you are amazing in every single way" and ended with a wish for the students to have a great week.

Interact posted pictures of a few notes on Facebook and received many "likes" and positive feedback from students. Students from other schools also saw the pictures and showed interest in passing similar notes of kindness through the Interact club on their campus.

— Jade Bisht and Priyanka Nookala

>> upcoming events

Dec. 15 "Winter Fun-derland!" drama fundraiser

Dec. 17 Beginning of finals week

>> picturethis

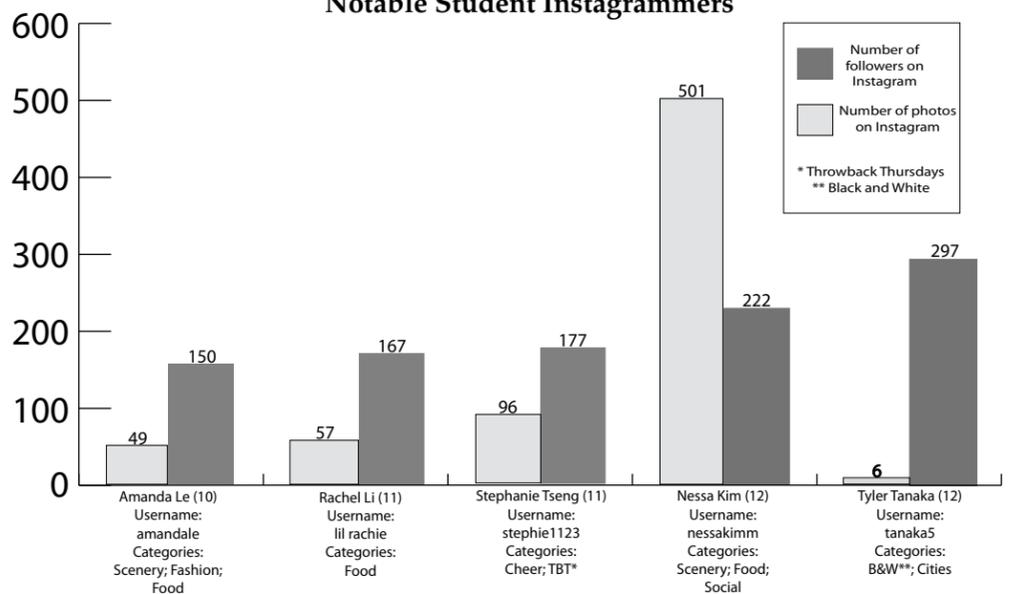


FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

STUDENT SINGERS >> Freshman Nina Nelson performs "Hurt" by Christina Aguilera at the McAfee Center for the Saratoga Idol preliminary round on Nov. 29. Nelson went on to win the competition.

>> falconfigures

Notable Student Instagrammers



SOCIAL NETWORKING

Instagram: a quick addiction

BY AmyJan & CarolynSun

Just as MySpace users switched to Facebook, Tumblr users are also switching to Instagram. Now, when people first meet, they sometimes don't even bother to add each other on Facebook, Tumblr or Twitter. Instead, they ask for each other's Instagram.

"I like Instagram better than Tumblr because it's more interesting to browse through when you feel like procrastinating," senior Eric Tang said. "Instagram is like a filtered version of Tumblr, but with all the good things: dogs and great food."

The social network, founded by Stanford alumni Kevin Systrom and Mike Kreiger in 2010, is also a great way to see what friends are up to. Based in San Francisco, the private company was bought by Facebook for about \$1 billion in 2012. Unlike Facebook, Instagram conveys everything through pictures.

"It's a great way to stay connected with friends, kind of like Facebook but without all the random activities," Tang said. "It's a cool way to share

pictures, and all the Instagram effects you can use will make your bad photo look a lot more artistic than it is."

Senior Nessa Kim got her iPhone a year ago, and Instagram was one of the first apps she downloaded. She continues to use it every day, taking photos of "anything and everything."

"Wherever I go and whatever I'm doing, I can quickly post a nicely edited photo with my phone," Kim said. "The photos are original and mine, instead of being recycled like in Tumblr. I liked Tumblr and would post a lot of my Instagram photos on it, but lately when I only have time to update one form of media, it's Instagram over everything."

The program provides 18 filters, ranging from the black and white look of "Inkwell" to the saturated colors of "Kelvin" to the warm feeling of "Toaster." These effects allow people to instantly enhance their photos.

"Very often, I can't pick between three or four filters that all look equally as good. This is one of my life's biggest problems," Kim joked.

Sophomore Jillian Bellamy

downloaded the app because her friends were using it.

"I like the effects because they're really easy to use," Bellamy said. "It doesn't matter what quality it is because one of the effects will make it look better."

When Kim went to Ecuador over the summer, she posted pictures every day to keep friends updated on her latest activities.

"What was weird was having my iPhone and bringing it up to the treks through the jungles in search of howler monkeys. Other times, I had my iPhone in one hand and a machete in the other," Kim said. "Instagram was my way of sharing what I was doing, where I was and who I was in Ecuador."

Besides keeping up to date with friends' posts, people can also follow other users that post photos of a specific topic.

"I also follow a lot of travel ig's [Instagrams] and fashion ig's," Kim said. "It's a good way to get updated or to get new ideas."

She even remembers her and Instagram's anniversary, the day she took a photo with it for the first time. ♦

COLLEGE >> Costs swell due to application process

continued on pg. 1

At the end of the process, Zarrin was left with seven colleges and universities. With a significantly shorter list than most other college-bound seniors, Zarrin's total application cost comes out to around \$400, and he has more time to focus and perfect each application.

By contrast, senior Katlyn Hirokawa is applying to a total of 19 colleges with a much wider range than Zarrin.

"I'm applying to mostly private schools, because I want to go to a college where I'm not battling to get into the classes I want to take and to have reasonable class sizes," Hirokawa said.

Hirokawa said she was frustrated with the way that the College Board overcharges for sending SAT scores, and experienced difficulties with the system.

"I'm sending my SAT scores, which I've been actually really annoyed with lately since College Board failed to send my scores to a school I was applying to early twice," Hirokawa said. "Plus, I think having to pay \$11 for College Board to send your scores electronically is ridiculous, because you're basically paying them to click on a few things."

Hirokawa's estimates her cost for applying to 19 colleges will come around to \$1,600.

In addition to application and test fees, the cost of college touring is usually the most expensive aspect of the college selection process.

During the past few months, senior Kaitlyn Finch has toured several colleges, including Northeastern University, Tufts University, New York University, University of Virginia, Georgetown University, University of Richmond, Tulane, Wake Forest University and Washington University in St. Louis.

"My first college trip was last spring. I flew to Boston, drove to New York City, flew to Washington, D.C. and drove to Richmond, Virginia and Arlington, Virginia," Finch said. "We essentially had to pay for a week of hotel

rooms, three flights to Boston, D.C. and home and [for the cost of] additional rental cars."

This summer, Finch also visited schools in New Orleans, St. Louis and North Carolina. Her family paid for a week's worth of hotel rooms, flights, rental cars and gas.

"That was a lot of flights, but I was told that the specific schools [I visited] really cared if prospective students visited, so we just grunted through and did it," Finch said.

At the end of the day, seniors only attend one college, no matter how many they apply to.

"I have to ask myself, 'Would I actually go to this college if I got in?'" Zarrin said. "Can I picture myself there?" ♦

>> falconfigures

11 The price for sending SAT scores from College Board

19 Applying to this many colleges costs around \$1,600

1 One student's total application cost can range from \$400 to \$1,600

75 Cost of the average application itself

35 Delivering your scores quickly to college is an extra \$24

SOPHOMORE ASSEMBLY

Speaker moves students with strong presentation

BY Rachel Hull & Nitya Sampath

When the red curtains of the McAfee Center were parted during tutorial on Nov. 26, the sophomore class was met with the sight of a man in a green T-shirt and blue jeans.

Principal Paul Robinson said sophomores are often overlooked due to their inevitable status as those stuck in the middle.

This is why Robinson called in the self-proclaimed "motivational ninja" Josh Shipp, 30, to give a presentation to the approximately 300 students in the sophomore class.

Shipp began his speech by recounting random facts about himself. These included how he has ADD, is a member of a secret society and hates motivational speakers.

After Shipp's combination of background information and funny remarks at his own expense, the sophomores were fascinated.

Growing up as an orphan in foster care, Shipp explained how he has received his fair share of bullying. These insults, he said, were what fostered his interest in comedy as a means of defense; any taunts against him would quickly be met with a witty remark.

Shipp then broke the ice with a few clever jokes, which most listeners found to be both entertaining and effective. According to sophomore April Khowong, Shipp's natural humor loosened up the audience while also making his main points more memorable.

"He was really funny and related to the audience by making jokes," Khowong said. "He always tried to get us to laugh, and we felt more comfortable with him, so he could talk to us more."

Once the audience had warmed up to him, Shipp recounted a story about how he once got arrested for speeding and spent the night in jail. After Shipp's foster parents bailed him out, he expected them to be furious. Instead, his

father told him something he would never forget.

"We see you not as a problem but as an opportunity," Shipp's father said.

Shipp said that when faced with undesirable circumstances, one has two choices: to become bitter or better. Becoming bitter means giving up, trudging gloomily through life, while becoming better means learning from one's mistakes.

Sophomores were pleased with how Shipp related his advice to events that had actually happened to him, rather than abstract, hypothetical situations. Khowong felt that the life anecdotes Shipp told reflected his self-assured personality.

"Usually you wouldn't share childhood stories with someone, because it's really personal, and you think that they'd judge you," Khowong said. "But he didn't seem to have a problem with people judging him."

Shipp also stressed the importance of keeping a positive attitude, especially when facing difficulties, remaining "optimistic but not unrealistic."

According to Shipp, it is a natural human tendency to hide one's errors, believing that to reveal these failures would be to diminish one's self-esteem. However, he emphasized how rising above these mistakes is the only way better one's self-image and make an impact on others.

"Imperfection makes you human," Shipp said. "Your humanity makes you influential."

After the presentation, the halls were abuzz with sophomores' positive reactions to the speaker. According to Khowong, the things Shipp said — ranging from his hilarious anecdotes and witty quips to his touching stories and meaningful advice — will not be forgotten for a long time.

"Whenever I'm feeling down," Khowong said, "I'll think about what he said — and all the funny things he said — and I'll feel better." ♦

FALCON FOCUS: SHARON FONG

Guidance secretary aids in college process

BY Bruce Lou

She is virtually unknown to students not in the senior class, yet she's essential to seniors' hopes, plans and dreams. She toils hundreds of hours during application season in order to help get secondary school reports, teacher recommendation packets, and midyear packets done on time, yet she's little seen or heard out of the office. This superhero who labors on behalf of seniors is none other than guidance secretary Sharon Fong.

Fong, who has worked at the school for 15 years, processes secondary school report packets and National Merit applications, sends transcript requests and oversees Senior Awards Night and graduation ceremonies, among other duties.

During college application season, which peaks between October and early December, Fong is often at her desk processing school report packets—that

means working with as many as 351 seniors, some of whom apply to 10, 20, or even 30 colleges.

"Like any job, it gets very hectic," Fong said, "but it's very rewarding."

Fong said that the rest of the guidance department has helped her be successful.

"I work in a very teamwork [oriented] environment and really enjoy the people I work with," Fong said.

Many seniors have been quick to notice that Fong puts a tremendous amount of time into her job. Fong recounts a time in which her work was appreciated by someone from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

"Many years ago, when I had completed the National Merit Scholarship applications, a National Merit representative called [former assistant principal Gail Wasserman]," Fong said. "He told [Wasserman] that the applications looked absolutely perfect. I was pretty proud of that. This was very long ago—

I work in a very teamwork [orientated] environment and really enjoy the people I work with.

>> Guidance secretary Sharon Fong



FALCON // JADE BISHT

Guidance Secretary Sharon Fong sorts out many college applications class on Dec. 5.

back when I used a typewriter!"

Students say that Fong is among the most diligent people on campus.

"She definitely seems very hard-working," senior Tim Park said. "I can't imagine how hard her job is. I'm grateful that she works so hard for us."

Fong said that while she enjoys all aspects of her job, she especially enjoys Senior Awards Night and graduation.

"I enjoy [Senior Awards Night] because the kids are being recognized for

their achievements," Fong said. "I also enjoy graduation a lot. It is sad to see the seniors graduating, but many of them come back and visit me."

Fong, of course, gets so familiar with the seniors that she can recognize most by face.

Even with all the challenges of her job, Fong says that she wouldn't want to work anywhere else.

"I love my job," she said. "I enjoy the people I work with and getting to know the students each year." ♦

SPRING MUSICAL

Cast chosen for 'Thoroughly Modern Millie'

BY AmyJan
& JayMulye

From Feb. 28 to March 3, the drama department will perform "Thoroughly Modern Millie," a musical with a much more lighthearted tone than "The Crucible."

"Our fall play this year was incredibly serious, so part of the reason I chose this musical was to provide a contrast to that," drama teacher Sarah Thermond said. "I've been joking with the students that we need to cheer our audiences up."

According to Thermond, the musical, which entered Broadway in 2002, is a contemporary show based on the film of the same name, "Thoroughly Modern Millie." The musical is about a small-town girl that travels to New York City during the 1920s, seeking fame and money, but ends up finding out that some things are much more important priorities in life.

"There's a lot to consider because you are trying to not only find the best person for each role, but you are trying to make the strongest cast overall as well," Thermond said.

The students will need to be trained in more dance classes to prepare for the musical. Thermond plans to utilize the dancers more and help those who do

not dance gain more experience. Tap classes, which started on Nov. 6, have been offered on Tuesdays after school for free in the Thermond Drama Center.

"I think [the musical is] a good opportunity to show the students that good comedy is very precise and specific," Thermond said. "This script also includes so much humor, but the characters must be played honestly for it to be effective. We have a lot of great comedians at this school, and I want to see what happens when they combine that with a set script and heartfelt story."

Drama student junior Annelise Nussbacher adds that "Thoroughly Modern Millie" is different from the last musicals that the drama department has done.

"'South Pacific' was a very classic 50's 'yeah-happy-fun-sunshine musical,' and then Jekky and Hyde before that was like 'death,'" Nussbacher said. "[Thoroughly Modern Millie] is pretty lighthearted and a warm story with romance, fun and scandal."

Nussbacher believes that most students can relate to this play and get a great laugh out of it.

"One thing that I think will make it really special is that it plays for and against racial stereotypes, particularly with Asians," Nussbacher said, "Every-



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

Sophomore Natalie Miller warms up by buzzing her lips to sing in preparation for the auditions of the spring musical on Nov. 30. Roles were announced on the last day.

one at this school will enjoy it because [stereotypes and prejudice for being Asian] is something that a lot of kids at this school face regularly."

Auditions lasted for a week on Nov. 26 through Nov. 30. Students were auditioned on dancing, singing and trying out scenes from the show. There are under 40 students total in this play.

Junior Manini Desai will be playing Millie, a young woman from Kansas whose goal is to marry wealthy rather than for love. Senior Ethan Drohan is cast as Jimmy, an attractive young salesman who doesn't take pride in

his wealth. Miss Dorothy, Millie's best friend, will be played by senior Gabby Crolla.

Directing the musical will be different because Yowell will be teaching the vocal parts, Dini will be teaching the dancing and Thermond will be in charge of the scenes and making sure that everything fits well with the story.

"How I approach a show depends on my cast and what kind of energy they bring to rehearsals, but given how comedic this musical is, I think it's safe to say that we will have a lot of fun working on this show," Thermond said. ♦

FALCON FOCUS: KEVIN CHIANG

Sophomore shares ardent passion for math journey

BY BrandonJudoprasertijo
& MichelleLeung

Sophomore Kevin Chiang likes AP Calculus BC because of the subject's variety and its emphasis on understanding.

"I like math because there are a bunch of interesting topics that you can explore," Chiang said. "There's not much emphasis on getting the right answer, but rather getting the concept of the problem."

Most students would agree that AP Calculus BC is one of the most difficult courses the school offers. However, Chiang not only takes this challenging math class, but also mentors younger students.

"I was first interested in math in fourth or fifth grade," Chiang said. "The elementary school's Math Olympiad material was interesting."

According to Chiang, the variety of math topics kept him involved throughout Redwood Middle School. After he joined the math club, Chiang pursued math as more than just a casual interest.

Chiang is the public relations officer in math club and works mostly with the Internet. Other math club officers said that Chiang plays a significant role in the club.

"Kevin is a very talented member of math club," junior Priyanka Krishnamurthi said. "He is really fun to be around and brings a lot of energy."

Chiang's most memorable experience in math was his first success at a math competition.

"My favorite memory was in seventh grade when I made it into the AMC

[American Math Competition] 10 for the first time," Chiang said. "I got into a higher math class because I had passed the AMC 10 in 7th and 8th grade, so my counselor [allowed] me to take Trig/Pre-Calc freshman year."

Since his initial success in AMC 10, Chiang has continued to score among the best in competitions such as the California Math League and Mandelbrot. He has even qualified for the higher level test, the American Invitational Mathematics Examination (AIME).

Chiang attributes his success in mathematics to perseverance.

"I think it's the idea that you have to work hard and practice, and that will eventually pay off," Chiang said.

Although keeping pace with the class is tough, Chiang said that the benefits outweigh the difficulties.

"I think being in a class with older students is really helpful because they tell me a lot about how to prep for junior and senior year," Chiang said.

Chiang said that his biggest inspiration is his 21-year-old sister Angela Chiang, a Stanford graduate.

"My sister has encouraged me to just continue doing the things I enjoy regardless of what other people say," Chiang said. "She's also guided me through high school."

Chiang also helps teach at Redwood Math Club, where he is head coach of one team.

Aside from math, Chiang enjoys video games, running, football, badminton, piano and computer science. He hopes to spread his love of math to others through math club.

"[I hope] everyone who joins sees it as something fun," Chiang said. ♦

SPEECH AND DEBATE

Team shines at SCU igniting hope for future tournaments

BY RohanHardikar
& SudeepRaj

At the Santa Clara University tournament on the Nov. 16th weekend, the speech and debate team displayed an impressive show as many individuals advanced to the final rounds in multiple events against participants from 47 different schools.

The team sent a total of about 100 students to the tournament.

For individual events, senior Neil Prasad placed first in extemporaneous speech and senior Sanjna Verma got second place in impromptu. In both events, speakers give speeches after minimal, spontaneous preparation.

Sophomore Supriya Khandekar received first place in original interpretation, an event where speakers provide their own interpretation of famous speeches; her brother, senior Sujay Khandekar, made it to the finals in original oratory, an event that requires a prepared 10 minute speech on a certain topic.

For the debate side of the tournament, parliamentary debate pair Justin Chiang and Shauray Agrawal ranked first despite being seeded 14th. In this event, teams of two debate after 20 minutes of preparation.

"It's a really good feeling because my hard work paid off," Khandekar said. "Last year I didn't even break."

In addition to the varsity division, Saratoga had two novice debate teams and three speakers advance past the

preliminary rounds.

"A lot of novices [advanced to elimination rounds] this tournament so that was really good," Khandekar said.

Overall, many speech and debate competitors advanced in multiple events.

"We won in IE, extemporaneous, and debate, which has never happened before," said Agrawal.

With the success from this tournament, members are more confident in the team's potential.

"Justin and I are currently ranked first in parliamentary debate [in the country], so we should be ranked higher than next year," Agrawal said.

Although the team did well, both Agrawal and Khandekar believe that there are areas for improvement.

"We could strategize against other schools more," Agrawal said. "Individual captains also need to make sure kids come out to practice."

The Santa Clara tournament reflects a general consensus among the team that they are capable of competing at a higher level for future tournaments, which is why the captains are already considering more advanced competitions.

They believe there needs to be an improvement in the logistics of the practices, but they also think in order to do better at tournaments, participants need to strive to be more unique in comparison to members from other strong teams.

"In order to do well, you really need to differentiate yourself from others," Khandekar said. "But the biggest form of improvement is to practice hard." ♦

We won in IE, extemporaneous, and debate, which has never happened before.

>> Senior Shauray Agrawal

ROBINSON >> New principal increases red pride on campus

continued from pg. 1

-one and made the effort to accompany the band in the parade as well.

"I think it's really cool that he shows such an interest toward the band," sophomore band member Tia Jones said. "He's helped me feel closer to the school community in how he puts himself out there."

Aside from boosting school unity with his physical presence, Robinson said he's trying to have an open-minded administration that listens to and supports students.

"I've been getting out of the way for people to do the things they've always wanted to do to try to increase campus culture," Robinson said. "If I've had a part in it, it's mainly just been to be like, 'Go for it.' That's what's been really good for me, to give permission for folks to step out of their box a bit and do things."

Robinson's encouragement has given

way to renewed spirit events such as Red Pride Fridays when staff and students are encouraged to wear school colors and the Red Pride Tailgate before the first home football game this fall. His efforts to be "a real cheerleader" in trying to grow school spirit have succeeded and are being felt by students such as senior Henry Shen.

"This year was probably the year that the most school spirit was shown throughout my whole high school experience," Shen said. "It'd be awe-

some if this tradition continues for the grades below us."

Robinson said he will continue to be open to new ideas for bringing the campus together.

"When you've got an idea, bring it to us," Robinson said. "Let's talk about it and see what we can do to have a positive impact on campus. I think there's a very good feeling on campus right now, and we want to continue growing that." ♦

Robinson said he's trying to have an open-minded administration that listens to and supports students. His encouragement has given way to renewed spirit.

BOWL >> History bowlers triumph at competitions

continued from pg. 1

the JV team. I had high expectations for them, but I never expected that they'd blow away the competition."

The JV team, consisting of sophomores Bruce Lou, Boyu Pang, Nitya Sampath and Linus Lu, surpassed all of the team's wildest expectations, cruising to an impeccable 4-0 record in the preliminary competition.

In the playoffs, the JV was equally as dominant, crushing the teams like Escobar to advance to the finals where they faced Bellarmine. This match was a little closer, with the team down 40 points at the end of the third quarter, but the team ultimately pulled out a victory and emerged victorious. They finished with a 7-0 record as the undisputed champions.

"I felt validated by the victory," Lu said. "It was like our hard work had paid off completely."

However, the varsity B team of seniors Nikki Bedekar, Amin Mirzadegan and Michal Kranz, junior Nick Chow and sophomore Ethan Ngai missed the

cut for nationals by one mere question.

The question, which caused quite a bit of controversy, asked what a sarissa, a type of spear, was. However, the judge refused to accept "spear" or "long spear" as an answer, accepting only "pike," leading to team B's defeat against Saratoga team A.

Team B members were understandably upset.

"The tiny difference between a spear and a pike cost us nationals," Ngai said.

Other than the disappointment suffered, team members were generally very pleased with the performance of the team.

"We've really showed our prowess as a team," Bedekar said.

The History Bowl team will send two squads to the national tournament in Washington, D.C. in late April, with the remaining team possibly qualifying this spring.

"[My expectations for the team] are pretty high. All three teams are of high quality," Goldman said, "We can do really well if we just try hard." ♦

RECREATION

New sports join list of school's existing clubs

ULTIMATE FRISBEE AND SQUASH GAIN MOMENTUM AS MORE STUDENTS TAKE INTEREST

BY Nikhil Goel & Rohan Rajeev

With more than 60 clubs focusing in a range of activities from cooking to volunteering to advanced academics to quirky hobbies, it seems that sports clubs are nowhere to be found, especially with the diverse range of school sports teams. However, this year, two new sports clubs have been created: Ultimate Frisbee and Squash.

Started at the beginning of this year by seniors Doug Jones and Spencer Goldman, the Ultimate Frisbee Club has rapidly garnered interest, and has had many recent participants. Most Friday afternoons the team hosts an informal "pickup" game at school in which anyone is welcome to play.

"We get a huge turnout [at the Friday games]," Goldman said. "It seems to be the same people every Friday though."

The club participated in its first competitive event at Lynbrook on Nov. 12 against Lynbrook and Gunn.

"[The other teams] were quite a bit more organized and had more people than us," Goldman said.

However, he feels the game was a good experience for the club.

"Even though we lost, we learned a lot about the game and generally had a better game sense," he said.

The club hopes to pick up

steam second semester and become more competitive by going to tournaments. Goldman and other club officers plan to go to a tournament in April, in which schools like Gunn and Bellarmine will compete. Goldman and Jones hope to get Binh-Young Tsao, a member of the marching band staff who played the sport at UCLA, to coach them.

"We'll have actual practices and run actual plays instead of having random pickup games," Goldman said. "We may have one big team with a lot of substitutes."

For now, though, the club continues to relax and have fun.

Another nascent sports club on campus is Squash Club, founded by sophomore Agastya Gupta.

The game is played in a four-walled court, as players smash a small ball against the walls with a racket.

"Squash is like physical chess," Gupta said. "The game is based on strategic and tactical movements and simultaneously provides a great physical challenge found in the likes of tennis."

With 31 members so far, Squash Club meets every other week at lunch on top of the weekly practice sessions to discuss techniques, tips and strategies for the upcoming sessions. Gupta markets his club



FALCON // JADE BISHT

Senior Minsoo Kim blocks as junior Phillip Young attempts to pass a frisbee to a nearby teammate Dec. 7.

by emphasizing how highly top colleges regard squash players. However, Gupta plays out of passion for the game.

"I started playing in the 6th grade and have fallen in love with the sport ever since," Gupta said. "Even in high school with a tight schedule, I still find time for squash because it's a great way to relieve the stress of high school."

In order to practice and teach squash to members of the club,

Gupta holds practices every week at the Squash Club in Los Gatos. The club is convenient for students because it is only 15 minutes away.

"The club has some of the finest international coaches including Gareth Weber, Yale squash coach, and Rahmat Khan, coach of squash legend Jahangir Khan, often referred to as the best squash player of all time," Gupta said.

Gupta has high goals for

the club, and hopes to turn the growing squash club into an official team.

"I want to bring a great sport to my peers here and in this revolutionary endeavor, take the lead in making the first squash team at a public school."

Even though these clubs were created with the intent of bringing together casual sports players, the school may be seeing two new sports teams in the near future. ♦

>> togatalks

What other sports would you like to see at Saratoga?

"I think windsurfing because I've tried and it's pretty intense but awesome."



sophomore Shivaram Yellamilli

"Kickboxing because it's both a cardio and strength workout, and you'd be toned all over."



junior Katherine Sun

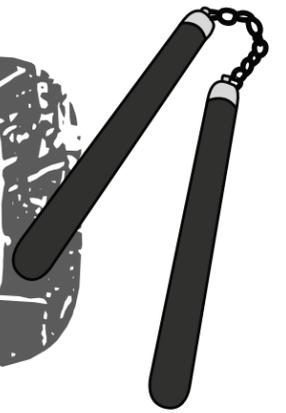
"Archery would be cool because it's fun and not very common."



junior Reggie Wu



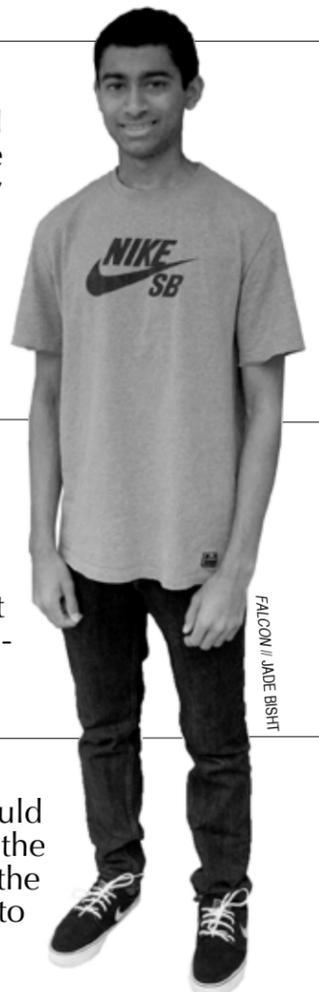
DEFENSE



Stranger danger: how to respond

>> Teachers and students were asked how they would respond to dangerous situations. Keshav Tirumurti, a black belt, responded by providing his take as an expert on martial arts.

A dangerous situation:	What a person not trained in self-defense would do in the situation:	Keshav Tirumurti would do in the situation:
<p>Grabbed Wrists. You encounter a stranger who threatens you by grabbing your wrist, robbing your ability to run or retaliate.</p>	<p>Jeffrey Chen (11): I would try to get out of his grip. That would be my first step. I would then punch him in the face really hard to give myself a chance to an escape. Once he is distracted and is in pain, I would sprint away.</p>	<p>If my wrist were grabbed, I would turn and open the grabbed wrist, then swiftly drag my elbow across my body parallel to the ground, and elbow the attacker in the face.</p>
<p>Choke Hold. Similar to being grabbed at the wrists, someone can put you in a chokehold. This is considered more unlikely since it frequently leads to a fatal result.</p>	<p>Spanish teacher Brett Yielding: I'd try to elbow my choker in the ribs and if that did not work stomp on his feet or legs.</p>	<p>If I were in a chokehold, I would use my left hand to cut off blood circulation in their left wrist and twist my body, windmilling my right hand across my body then elbowing them in the face.</p>
<p>Stalking. You are walking down a large street in a populated city, trying to find your way home. A stranger has seemed to be following you for 5 minutes and continues to follow your direction.</p>	<p>Mohith Subbarao (11): I'd just keep my cool, mind my own business, and probably go to a crowded place because if I tried to confront him he could go crazy and shank me. I don't want that.</p>	<p>If I were being stalked, I would run in an attempt to lose the pursuer. I would run to the nearest public area in order to stay safe.</p>



FALCON/JADE BISHI

content by Minu Palaniappan Senior Keshav Tirumurti

Karate provides invaluable knowledge and protection

BY Rachel Hull & Sudeep Raj

Sophomore Mihir Samdarshi has participated in many sports, including rowing, boxing and basketball. But the one sport that he thinks impacted his life the most is karate.

Besides being physically exerting, karate requires a great deal of mental toughness, since it teaches values such as discipline and dedication.

"All the other sports I was good at only because of my karate training," Samdarshi said. "[Karate] teaches fitness, discipline and mental toughness, all of which are major components in every sport."

Samdarshi has trained at the Saratoga Community Center since age 5, and is now training as a purple belt, working toward attaining a black belt when he

turns 18.

Samdarshi said though the practices are taxing, he has continued with them for all of these years because of the invaluable set of skills they have ingrained in him.

"In the beginning I did it because I thought it would be fun," Samdarshi said. "But now I understand the value that it brings to my life."

Sophomore Michael Ong began participating in karate at the age of 5 when his parents urged him to try it.

"My parents wanted me to do it mainly for discipline," Ong said. "That way, I would have some knowledge of self-defense and how to protect myself."

Ong's karate training came to an abrupt end soon after he started because of conflicts with other commitments.

Though the time he spent learning karate was short, he realizes that his little experience actually helped him.

"[Karate], in addition to teaching me self-defense, taught me to become stronger physically," Ong said. "Even after I quit, karate taught me how I could get stronger without lifting weights or anything."

Many people, like Ong, have gained a lot from a short time in self-defense.

"It's definitely better if you continue, but doing a little bit or taking one of those crash courses is better than nothing," Samdarshi said.

Samdarshi, who has been steadfast in carrying on with his karate training for years, finds that the training has sparked his interest in increasing his stamina in other ways.



Samdarshi

"Because of karate, I learned to do push-ups and got good at them," Samdarshi said. "I did boxing for some time as well, and I can defend myself if I need to."

Samdarshi appreciates how karate has both increased his athleticism and improved his knowledge in self-defense.

"Something can always happen in my life, and being able to defend myself would come in handy," he said.

The main purpose of all forms of martial arts, after all, is self-defense.

This skill may not be required on a daily basis, but it rests at the backs of the minds of all who know it, ready to be used whenever necessary.

"I know if I hadn't done karate, I wouldn't be even close to my physical capabilities now," Samdarshi said. "Karate helps me more than I could think every day." ♦

Marijuana reform critics: Pipe down

BY Andy Fang

In the last general election on Nov. 6, Colorado and Washington passed ballot initiatives that legalized recreational marijuana for adults 21 and over. Putting aside the cumbersome complications of state law contradicting federal law, which still views marijuana as illegal, it's high time that we revised our viewpoint on marijuana.

From a purely economic standpoint, legalizing marijuana yields many economic benefits, and not just from increased sales of Doritos and donuts.

According to a report from the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, via the Huffington Post, regulating marijuana in a similar manner to alcohol will produce hundreds of new jobs and raise \$60 million annually in combined savings and revenue, which can go toward the construction of Colorado public schools.

The numbers may seem too good to be true, but the increased funds come from both an instant reduction of criminal costs (police and court costs could be delegated to other crimes) and future revenue from sales taxes.

Yet numbers are only a small part of the issue, especially for parents. There are worries that making marijuana legal, if only for adults, will guarantee an unhealthy increase in exposure among youth to the controversial herb.

These fears are, quite bluntly, unfounded. First of all, restricting access to marijuana is already a losing battle. A survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that marijuana was the easiest drug to obtain on school grounds. Medicinal marijuana clinics and smuggling from across the border have made obtaining the drug virtually unimpeded.

In addition, youths are constantly exposed to similarly regulated substances that are regarded as harmful (if not more harmful than marijuana), like cigarettes and alcohol. Yet, not all youth smoke and drink; in fact, those

who smoke and drink are the minority, not the majority. Critics need to have more faith in the decision-making capabilities of younger generations.

Some sling the term "gateway drug" in regards to marijuana. These critics base their disapproval on the premise that the drug's usage will cause the users to gravitate to harder drugs, such as cocaine and meth. However, according to the Huffington Post, it's likely that marijuana usage is only an indicator of a bigger underlying cause that increases susceptibility to hard drugs.

Numerous studies, including one published by the Center for Drug Research of the University of Amsterdam, show that the Dutch, who legalized marijuana in the 1970s, now smoke marijuana half as often as Americans. This likely results from approaching marijuana as an adult civic liberty rather than an illegal substance.

History demonstrates that trying to ban an already popular substance doesn't quite work. Just look at the Prohibition, in which alcohol was made illegal, yet was still incredibly popular. In addition, many turned to alternatives that were legal but far more dangerous than alcohol. A popular alternative was Jamaica Ginger extract, or Jake, which ultimately caused paralysis.

Due to the illegal nature of marijuana, many turn to legal synthetic marijuana products, such as K2 and Spice, which are much more harmful and difficult to regulate. If marijuana were legal and subsequently regulated, fewer would turn to more dangerous alternatives.

Colorado and Washington are headed in the right direction; it's time the rest of the nation realizes that the grass may be greener on the other side of the legalization debate. ♦

If marijuana were legal and regulated, fewer would turn to the more dangerous alternatives.

<< PRO

Legalization laws a step backward

BY Carolyn Sun

On Election Day, Washington and Colorado became the first states to legalize the recreational use and sale of marijuana, the most commonly abused illicit drug in the United States.

Despite these victories, legalizing the drug is a bad idea. Marijuana has numerous negative effects on users' health and social lives and can lead to addiction and compulsive behavior.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), several studies have linked marijuana use to increased rates of anxiety, depression, heart disease, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Smoking the drug can also lead to respiratory problems, like daily cough, excessive mucus production and lung cancer.

Marijuana is also a gateway drug. According to NIDA, high school students who use marijuana have a higher risk of trying other "harder" drugs. Using marijuana puts smokers in contact with drug dealers, who may urge them to try other drugs, such as cocaine, heroin and meth.

Now that two states have legalized marijuana, more people will think that using the drug recreationally is acceptable. More teens will begin to smoke marijuana, which was already a trend even before Election Day.

Marijuana use has been steadily increasing among high school students, according to NIDA. In 2006, 5 percent of 12th graders reported using marijuana daily, compared to more than 6 percent in 2011. NIDA says that marijuana addiction has harmful effects on abusers' cognitive abilities, social lives and functioning at work.

Teen users have a 9 percent higher chance of becoming addicted, and, ac-

ording to CNN, performing poorly in school. Adolescent smokers also increase their risk of exhibiting anti-social behavior as an adult.

CNN reports that because their brains are still developing, teen users also risk long-term brain damage and up to an eight-point decline in IQ. Persisting into adulthood, these side effects are extremely damaging and can harm a person's long-term career prospects, job performance and income.

Although Colorado and Washington attempt to avoid this by legalizing marijuana for only those over the age of 21, younger users will still find ways to attain the drug. They smoked marijuana even when it was illicit, and legalizing the drug only facilitates their possession of it.

Because legalizing marijuana would allow states to tax it, legalization proponents argue that the tax would help the U.S. economy. However, even though the United States annually collects \$40 billion for alcohol and tobacco use, the tax revenue makes up only about a tenth of medical costs that stem from premature illness, accidents and death, according to CNN.

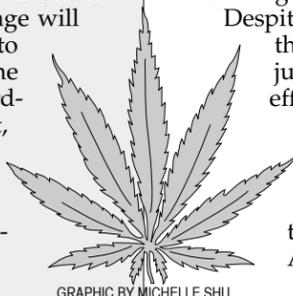
According to Princeton University, marijuana has 50 percent more carcinogens than tobacco. Since joints lack filters, marijuana users take in all of these cancer-causing chemicals. Also, marijuana smokers inhale more deeply and hold smoke in their lungs longer than tobacco users.

These risks would vastly add to health costs. While taxing marijuana would generate some tax revenue, it would not be nearly enough to help balance states' budgets.

Another issue is that marijuana is against the federal law, which prohibits the drug. In 2011 and 2012, federal officials cracked down on California and Montana, where regulation of medical marijuana had grown extremely lax.

Although it may no longer be illicit in Washington and Colorado for adults to smoke marijuana, voters in other states should think long and hard before enacting similar laws. ♦

Marijuana has numerous negative effects on health and can lead to addiction and compulsive behavior.



GRAPHIC BY MICHELLE SHU

CON >>

New senators pave way for cultural, gender equality

BY Helen Wong

America is moving in the right direction. The U.S. has always been called "the land of the free," and now it's beginning to fully live up to its reputation, something it often failed to do in the past.

It took a civil war that cost more lives than both World Wars combined to abolish slavery. And, pray tell, how many female presidents has America had? Meanwhile, countries like India, Brazil and Germany have female leaders.

The U.S. is far behind, but change is coming. Hawaii elected its first woman representative to the Senate, Mazie Hirono. She's Japanese-American, to boot.

"I bring quadruple diversity to the Senate," Hirono said. "I'm a woman. I'll be the first Asian woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate. I am an immigrant. I am a Buddhist. When I said this at one of my gatherings, they said, 'Yes, but are you gay?' and I said, 'Nobody's perfect.'"

It's nice to know that the Senate no longer lacks an Asian-American female

representative. It's also nice to know that the gender-biased glass ceiling is finally starting to show the cracks of stress.

The "glass ceiling" is a name for the invisible barrier women must fight against. According to Forbes, men with bachelor's degrees earn 40 percent more than women with similar education. America, as a democracy, with freedom and rights for all citizens, owes it to the female population to make things equal.

Another modern political issue is gay rights. This is America. Everyone should be treated equally, regardless of their sexuality. Luckily for gay rights, Wisconsin elected the first openly gay senator, Tammy Baldwin, who is also a woman.

In the past, America has been notoriously biased against gays. But now, the fact that an entire state has been willing to accept a gay person as a representative shows progress toward the American ideal of equality and freedom for all.

Quite simply, the 2012 election broke barriers.

Most people who grew up in the U.S.



have recited the Pledge of Allegiance at some point. We pledged our allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic, for which it stands,

one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

It's time that the next generation of Americans make good on their word. ♦

FOURTH PERIOD

STAFF POLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published 11 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

MISSION STATEMENT

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

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*Various contributions were also made by the third-period newspaper staff

Research courses needed to benefit problem solving

Last year, using private grant money, Los Gatos High implemented an advanced science research class that gave students an avenue to have a hands-on approach to science.

In this course, students are primarily in charge of their lab work and have the freedom to explore science through experiment rather than lecture. With their collected research, the students apply scientific knowledge to practical situations and delve into learning disciplines other than those of any other science-based electives.

Saratoga High is in dire need of a class that allows students to cultivate their interests in many forms of engineering, medicine and sciences. The diversity of science elective courses is lacking, and through a science research class, students can master skills that are otherwise not attainable at school.

By introducing a class that differs from the average test-and-lecture-based class, students would gain new avenues of learning.

In addition, Silicon Valley is widely known for its flourishing companies that specialize in many research-related sciences and mathematics. It is imperative that the school empower students to explore these fields, since the majority of occupations are directly correlated to mathematics and science.

The most noticeable difference between the conventional classroom and Los Gatos' advanced research course is that the newly implemented course allows students to freely explore certain issues such as bacterial infection and soil contamination and, more importantly, use their knowledge to solve them.

An interdisciplinary research class would encourage students to revisit and combine the knowledge gained in other classes — biology, chemistry, physics,

environmental science and math, among others.

In addition, this class presents opportunities that are similar to work experience. A majority of students at Saratoga have little, if any, familiarity with working environments; research and experimentation can help to prepare students for possible science-related jobs down the road.

The glaring problem is funding for this kind of class. All of the experiments and research require resources that may not be readily accessible. A variety of chemicals, lab equipment and textbooks, along with computers to gather information, could spell heavy costs for the class.

However, Los Gatos obtained funding for this class through the assistance of private grants. Saratoga could attempt the same.

A new science research class would provide vital opportunities for students and additional diversity in the science department, as shown by the success it has had at Los Gatos. ♦

>> THE BIG IDEA

Advanced Research Class

Who should take it
Students interested in taking a lab driven science class.

Who would teach it
A teacher currently at Saratoga would teach the one available class

Types of resources needed
Students would need research materials and a variety of chemicals and utilities for lab work.

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editor-in-chief
Deborah Soung

Opinion Editor
Michael Lee

Reporters
Minu Palaniappan
Elijah Yi



The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 33-0 for adding a research course.

The Disney empire strikes back

BY Nick Chow
& Nikhil Goel

>> candid caricatures

Recently, Disney bought Lucasfilm for a whopping \$4 billion in yet another high-profile purchase. As a result, it is safe to say the world is going to end.

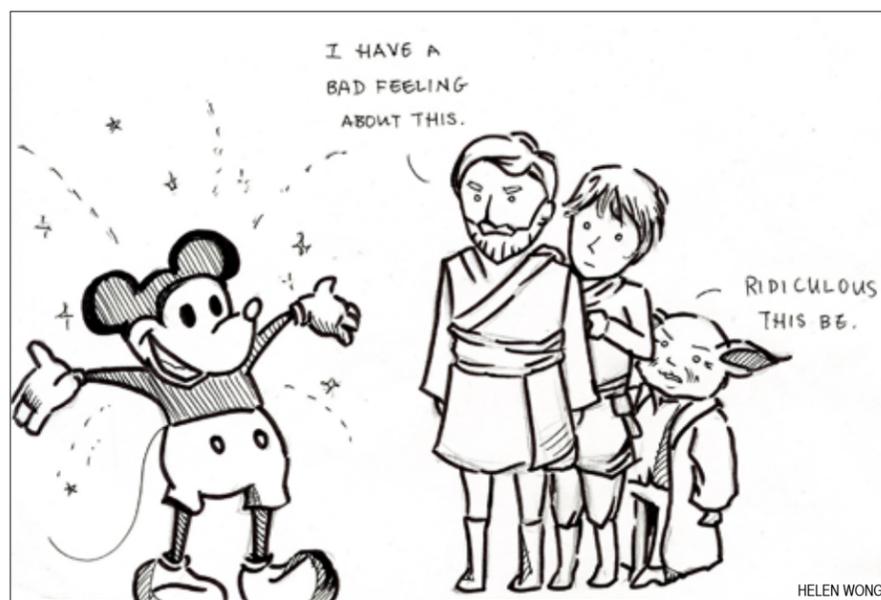
The fateful day that George Lucas signed over his entertainment industry was the day that marked the ruination of one of the most admired and beloved film series in the world.

What will we see in Star Wars Episode VII which, according to USA Today, is set to be released in 2015? Answer: the utter destruction of a meticulously constructed universe.

While this is a shrewd business move for Lucas, who wants to keep his film empire alive after his imminent retirement, Star Wars fans will be sorely disappointed. Disney made this move for purely financial reasons, and the company is capitalizing on the brand equity of the Star Wars universe. Soon, it's likely we will be extremely overwhelmed with not only mediocre new Star Wars movies, but we will also have ridiculous spin-off shows shoved down our throats.

Further commercialization of the Star Wars saga will be extremely profitable for Disney. No matter what opinion moviegoers have about Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm, they will still pay money to see another Star Wars movie. No matter how terrible Disney makes the movie, the mere mention of the epic Star Wars universe will draw in viewers.

However profitable it may be, Disney will ruin Star Wars simply because



it had the perfect ending. At the end of Episode VI, all in the universe was well. The lone Jedi Luke Skywalker overcame the omnipresent Galactic Empire to liberate the galaxy from oppression.

Now, Disney will create a whole new storyline with descendants of previously seen characters that we love and adore, and we will cry at how poorly they try to imitate past characters. Some may say that the Iron Man series, created by Disney, is a testament to Disney's ability to produce powerful, serious movies that appeal to a wide audience. However, Disney created the Iron Man series, so it had the power to take the movies in any direc-

tion it wanted. The Star Wars movies cannot be adapted to Disney's whims, as the Star Wars movies' plot is not malleable and already ended on the perfect note.

Furthermore, even Lucas was not able to revive interest in the Star Wars movies after Episode III. Lucas produced an animated movie and television series set between Episode II and III detailing the adventures of Anakin Skywalker and his apprentice Ahsoka. The movie and television show did not prove to be very successful, even with the genius of Lucas. If Lucas was unable to resurrect interest in Star Wars films, it will be impossible for Disney. Maybe it would be best to steal a line from Obi-Wan Kenobi to summarize this recent deal: "I have a bad feeling about this." ♦

The Star Wars movies' plot is not malleable and already ended on the perfect note.

Students should stand up for peers

BY Nikhil Goel

This year, our school has shown how tight-knit it can be; just take a look at the success of Homecoming. However, we still have students who sometimes do not understand the lasting impact of their words and actions. Despite attempts to combat this problem, blatant bullying still occurs in our school.

Recently, on multiple school sports teams, there have been accounts of severe bullying. It is not only ridiculous, but also simply astonishing that students would even think about hurting their peers for whatever reason.

If we still have bullying in our school after so much has happened to show us the repercussions of bullying, it seems that some people just cannot be

taught not to bully.

There has been a repeating trend in our school in which underclassmen (not just in recent years, but all underclassmen classes) have a tendency to bully online and in person as they come into and experience high school. Maybe it has something to do with the change in environment from middle to high school. Whatever the reason is, students need a certain level of maturity before they can realize the impact that their words have on others.

The actions taken by the administration in order to promote a comfortable social environment have indeed worked for the majority of the school. Most students know how their words affect others.

However, there are still the select few who do not. In this situation, there is only one way

to stop bullying from taking form and hurting students: Witnesses to bullying need to take action and prevent it when they see it.

Being a leader is not limited to being a club president or organizing a fundraiser. Being a leader means taking a risk in preventing something that may seem trivial — even a couple of mean words or a “funny” comment to a teammate — but is actually huge in a victim’s life. Insecurity is debilitating and can take over a person’s life.

We need students to stop their friends from cracking jokes that were meant to be funny but actually hurt, or saying mean

words solely to raise their self-esteem. Just say no when you see bullying. Stop a friend from saying “gay” or “fag” to mean “stupid.” Befriend a victim if you see him or her get hurt.

No one will see you as weak; you have the backing of the school when you stop bullying. It takes confidence to stand up

to bullies, but even greater courage to stand up to your friends and tell them to

stop their hurtful actions.

Recently, in Queen Creek, Ariz., a group of high school football players befriended a sophomore girl whose brain functions at a third-grade level because of a genetic defect. They prevented her from being

bullied any further by including her into their group and making sure she was not alone in the halls walking from class to class. In this way, we can also make a change in our fellow students’ lives.

It is difficult for the teachers and administration to prevent bullying from happening outside of the classroom. So, we, as the students who make the culture of the school, need to work to stop bullying.

In many cases, bullying can be subtle and unintended. Dropping a witty line about a teammate or forming cliques within sports teams can be unintentional, yet harmful, forms of bullying. It is time for all of us to have more awareness and work to prevent words and actions that make Saratoga High a place where anyone would fear to be. ♦

Being a leader means taking a risk in preventing something that may seem trivial.

>> togatalks

What can the school do to stop bullying in sports?

The teams need to have more team bonding. There needs to be a mutual respect for each other.”



sophomore Adrienne Kim

There should be motivational speeches on teamwork where everyone holds hands and sings kumbaya.”



senior Maggy Liu

The school should promote consciousness and awareness about the impact of our words and actions.”



senior Sasan Saadat

The 'archaic' art SCHOOLS NEED TO PRESERVE CURSIVE WRITING EDUCATION

BY Bruce Lou
& Carolyn Sun

For the Oct. 6 SAT, students were required to fill out an academic integrity agreement in cursive.

Groans immediately filled testing rooms, followed by questions such as “How do I write a cursive ‘s’?” and remarks like “I forgot all my cursive.”

This is just one of the many signs that cursive has almost become a forgotten art. Once a required subject drilled into students, it is now optional or even completely disregarded in most elementary schools.

Cursive used to be the preferred script for both professional and personal discourse, but now most people only use cursive for their signatures.

We cannot afford to have an art form practiced for thousands of years die out. Many languages, including Arabic and Cyrillic, are traditionally written completely in cursive. English has also been written in cursive for hundreds of years.

Many older people still use cursive, and younger generations should also be able to read and write it. Our Founding Fathers wrote several major documents, including the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, in cursive. It would be a

shame if young people could not read the writing that makes up the ideological foundation of our country.

In addition, cursive is more personalized than printing. Every person’s handwriting is unique, and cursive emphasizes that uniqueness. Handwriting is an expression of personality and individuality, but the straight strokes of printing do not express one’s character as well as the loops, slants and twists of cursive. In fact, to verify test-takers’ identities,

the SAT requires the academic integrity agreement to be in cursive because printing is much more easily duplicated than cursive.

Cursive also has its practical benefits. Chief among them is that cursive can be faster than printing because the letters are joined.

Teaching cursive to elementary school students also helps them write much more neatly because it forces them to concentrate and carefully form each letter precisely. Cursive education makes students form good handwriting habits early on.

Even if students choose to revert back to printing in later grades, the experience of learning cursive improves their handwriting and grounds them in a tradition shared by countless educated people across the world’s history. ♦

Many older people still use cursive, and younger generations should also be able to read and write it.

Affirmative action equalizes opportunities for minorities

BY Sophie Mattson

The country seems to be headed in the direction of the Stone Age — the U.S. Supreme Court is unnecessarily reconsidering affirmative action for the first time since 1978.

Abigail Noel Fisher, a 22-year-old Caucasian student, was rejected for admission from the University of Texas in 2008. In Fisher vs. University of Texas, Fisher is suing because she believes that the school discriminated against her in favor of admitting less qualified African-American and Latino students.

This case is not a proper one with which to abolish affirmative action, since universities typically admit students on a holistic basis, and Fisher’s scores did not indicate that she would undoubtedly be admitted into the university. Affirmative action was not the sole factor in her rejection and shouldn’t be blamed for it.

The decision in Fisher’s lawsuit would be much more clear-cut if her scores were slightly lower or significantly higher. Because she was placed into the pool of students for further evaluation, it is difficult to tell if Fisher possibly missed admission due to the priority given to minorities.

Under the university’s “top 10 percent” plan, students in the top 10 percent of their class at a Texas high

school who apply are automatically admitted into the university. Eighty-one percent of the students admitted to the university in 2008 came in under this plan. Fisher was in the top 12 percent of her graduating class, and thus was put into the “standard” pool of applicants who were considered for admission on the basis of talent, leadership qualities and race.

In 2008, the 25th percentile of SAT scores for the University of Texas was 1,120 on a 1,600 point scale. Fisher scored a 1,180 and had a 3.59 weighted GPA. Fisher believed that she would have been admitted if minorities had not been given preferential treatment in the admissions process because her scores were above the mean.

People claim that, in America, all citizens have the opportunity to achieve their dreams if they set their mind to it. However, people tend to forget how difficult it can be to rise up from one’s circumstances if a person is born into a broken family or a rough neighborhood, or if he or she can barely afford to purchase a standardized test prep book.

Students in Saratoga were born to parents who are hard working, educated individuals who are able to afford the mortgage in an area with one of the best high schools in the country. The majority of students in

the U.S. live in much less economically advantaged areas with less funded public schools.

Studies show that African Americans and Latino Americans tend to earn significantly less than Caucasians and Asian Americans and are much more likely to be below the poverty line.

We need to take into account the situational factors that minorities face when making admissions decisions in order to break the cycle of poverty and educational deficiencies. From the viewpoint of a college admissions officer, an African American student from a rough Chicago neighborhood whose grades and SAT scores are close to those of a wealthier Caucasian or Asian American student should be given admissions priority, simply because they have overcome economic challenges in addition to the circumstances of high school.

It may seem unfair to such students who live comfortably in idyllic neighborhoods and study at well-funded schools, but it is much more difficult to receive high scores while attending a poorly funded school while barely scraping up the funds to pay for school supplies and eventually college application fees.

Affirmative action by no means should be restructured or abolished. ♦

Holiday drink disappoints

>> togatalks

CRANBERRY WHITE CHOCOLATE MOCHA FALLS SHORT OF EXPECTATIONS

I love coffee. In fact, some might even consider me a coffee addict (no thanks to Mrs. Anzalone's in-class coffee). Whenever Starbucks begins offering its holiday drinks each year, I jump at the opportunity to try out the latest concoctions it has stirred up.



Allison **CHANG**
Chang-ing it up

As I hitched a ride with a classmate to Starbucks after seventh period on a chilly Tuesday, I was already thirsting for some warm, coffee goodness.

I strolled into Starbucks with the anticipation of trying out a peppermint mocha. I thought I already knew all of the holiday drinks: eggnog, gingerbread and caramel brulee lattes, along with peppermint and peppermint white chocolate mochas. To my surprise, however, I noticed a "new" sticker next to one of the images.

Underneath the image a caption ran "Cranberry White Chocolate Mocha." Since I had come to taste new drinks, I was naturally drawn to the little orange "new" sign, so I decided to go on an adventure and ordered it.

Two quick minutes later, a venti, red coffee cup with my name scribbled on the side in Sharpie was delivered to me. I was curious as to how



Barista Joseph Barrientos takes junior Kevin Sun's order at Starbucks on Dec. 6.

the cranberry taste would be incorporated into the mocha.

Excited to try the new drink, I took a long sip, but tasted nothing but cream and chocolate. I scratched my head in confusion, wondering where the cranberry flavor was. Cranberries are very tart and flavorful, which was why I thought that it was unusual that I tasted absolutely no trace of cranberry in the drink.

I slowly drank the entire drink, hoping to find some hint of the vibrant fruit, but to no avail. It wasn't until I reached the very bottom of my cup that I could sense the tiniest wisp

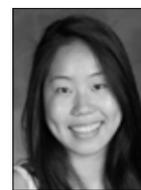
of cranberry.

As it turns out, the only cranberries in the drink were a few cut-up dried pieces sprinkled at the very top, which sank to the bottom. And because the cranberry pieces had been cut up so finely, their flavor was degraded to the point of being nearly undetectable.

While I typically love all of the holiday drinks, this new mocha is no more than a plain white chocolate mocha with a dash of tasteless cranberry pieces. Hopefully, Starbucks can do better next time they release a new holiday drink. ♦

What's your favorite part about the holidays?

“Roasting marshmallows with chopsticks.”



senior Christine Xue

“Besides the whole family thing, seeing Christmas lights on houses.”



senior Nikki Bedekar

“I love seeing my family's reaction to presents.”



junior Tim Casey-Clyde

STYLE FILES

Winter Formal: "Somewhere Only We Know"

Eddie Ruppel, 12

TIE, MACY'S: \$55

SHIRT, EXPRESS: \$60

BELT, MACY'S: \$30

PANTS, EXPRESS: \$120

SHOES, MACY'S: \$150

Cori Posadas, 12

DRESS, MACY'S: \$100

SHOES, DSW: \$65

EARRINGS, JEWELRY STORE IN CHINATOWN: \$100



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

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COOKIE EATING



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

Senior Brandon Judoprasertijo (left) and sophomore Jade Bisht (right) attempt to eat as many OREO cookies as they can in 3 minutes on Nov. 30. Brandon finished 7.5 cookies, while Jade ate 7 cookies.

Santa's consumption of lovingly laid out cookies is one of the most crucial aspects of the job. Eating cookies may seem like all fun and games, but after a certain number, it ceases to be an enjoyable activity and becomes more of a tortuous chore. The reporters started off with eager saliva-filled mouths but unanimously started gagging miserably after the third OREO. "I couldn't swallow the OREO cookies as quickly as I was shoving them in my mouth. The texture soon became like dangerously thick and chocolaty mashed potatoes," Jade said tearfully. "I can't eat them anymore." Michael successfully ate 8 cookies; Brandon ate 7.5 and Jade and Helen both consumed 7 cookies.

SING AND DANCE OFF



ALL PHOTOS BY DAVID SPARKMAN

HELEN: "JINGLE BELL ROCK"

Helen's rendition of this classic Christmas song was by far the strongest vocal performance. With quiet confidence, each note she crooned rang and echoed throughout the room, not unlike the jingle of the bells she was singing about. Her stage presence recalled that of Adele; while she remained relatively stationary throughout her performance, her impressive vocals made dancing seem simply unnecessary.

SCORE: 8/10

MICHAEL: "ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS YOU"

Michael let his emotions take over during his performance, at one point even passionately throwing off his Santa coat. His sheer glee, evidenced by his broad smiles, lifted every on-looker's spirits while his body gestures added a raw and powerful physicality into the fray. Though his singing left little to be desired, Michael more than made up for it through his engaging on-stage presence.

SCORE: 8/10



BRANDON: "SANTA BABY"

Brandon balanced charisma with smooth vocals. The audience swooned upon hearing his caramel voice while his cheerful disposition filled the room with warmth. By interacting with Michael in a flirtatious Marilyn Monroe-esque manner that accurately reflected the feeling of the song, Brandon proved to be a natural in the spotlight.

SCORE: 7/10

JADE: "JINGLE BELLS"

Though visibly nervous, Jade's performance was innovative and thought-provoking. She connected with her Indian ethnic roots by integrating Bombay-in-the-Bay dance moves with a classic Christmas song. Her performance, which seamlessly blended Indian and American culture, was microcosmic of the melting pot that is America.

SCORE: 6/10



THE ULTIMATE SARATOGA CONTEST

HO, HO, HO! STUDENT RE...
INNER SANTAS IN A SERI...
COMPETITIONS

1ST PLACE

senior
michael lee



Michael pulled off a fresh take on Santa, giving the typically corpulent figure a svelte makeover, replete with track pants and sneakers. While thoughtfully making a statement on the plagues of obesity, he still manages to keep in touch with the traditional aspects of Santa we all love.

3RD PLACE

sophomore
jade bisht



Jade adopted a monochromatic and minimalistic approach, creating a visual effect at once startling and risky. But this girl pulls it off. Her outfit seems to convey that, perhaps, the true meaning of Christmas has gotten lost through the unnecessary and excessive extras.

er 14, 2012

E nta MPETITION



REPORTERS CHANNEL THEIR
IES OF HOLIDAY-THEMED

(Santa analysis by Andy Fang)



2ND PLACE

senior
**brandon
judoprasetijo**

A bold embrace of the iconic Santa that we have all grown up with, Brandon's outfit provokes rich nostalgia. With a bulging belly as the finishing touch, the decadent excess of his outfit unashamedly celebrates the past.



4TH PLACE

sophomore
helen wong

Casual and carefree, Helen's outfit conveys a sense of aloof indifference. Simply composed of a ubiquitous Santa hat and a plebeian red scarf, her outfit falls flat, falling into the nebulous territory that is neither traditional nor avant-garde.

PRESENT WRAPPING



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

Sophomores Jade Bisht (left), Helen Wong (bottom right) and senior Michael Lee (top right) were evaluated on the quality of the presents. They were given 2 minutes to wrap a present.



FIRST PLACE: Brandon was a clear winner in this challenge; his present wrapping was expertly done with sharp clean edges.

SECOND PLACE: Helen made a valiant and mad dash to the finish but her present wrapping quality was sub-par; the wrapping paper was both crumple and lumpy.

THIRD PLACE: Jade initially showed promise but was ultimately defeated by the unforgiving three minute time restraint.

FOURTH PLACE: Like Jade, Michael got off to a promising start but alas, he too fell victim to the challenging time parameters, falling just shy of finishing up his wrapping.

SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

Left: Sophomore Helen Wong sprints through rain puddles in the 600 wing on her way to the office. Right: Senior Michael Lee delivers candy canes to Arnaldo Rodriguez's 4th period Spanish class.

In this arduous leg of the competition, the reporters braved pelting rain, devious puddles, and assistant principal Kerry Mohnike's stern warnings of "no running in the hallways." They were tasked with running from the Journalism room to Kristen Thomson's 1015 classroom, Arnaldo Rodriguez's 601 classroom and the attendance office. At each stop, the reporters wished those they encountered happy holidays and distributed candy canes. Brandon faced several challenges along the way. "Towards the middle of my competition, my robe became undone, exposing my backpack belly," Brandon said. "I felt so ashamed." Michael was the fastest, completing the task in 2 minutes and 16 seconds. Helen was next, followed by Jade and Brandon.

Christmas

THE SCHOOL FINDS ITS OWN WAYS TO ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS DURING FINALS

French students spread holiday cheer

BY Jade Bisht

For 16 years, French teacher Laura Lizundia has embraced the holiday spirit within her classes. Students enrolled in upper French classes have gone around campus during the

holiday season, visiting classrooms to showcase songs they learn that day.

The songs they present to the classes generally consist of French equivalents to the classics: "Jingle Bells," "Deck the Halls" and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

"I think learning the songs and singing them to the other classes helps teach you about different cultures," sophomore Celia Kohler said.

Although the experience is proven easier with the lyrics given to them, some students feel that there are downsides to the caroling.

"It's really awkward when you go in the class and they just stare at you," Kohler said. "It's really fun but kind of intimidating when 30 eyes are on you at all times."

According to Lizundia, going caroling isn't her decision — it also depends on the students' preference as well.

"I'll take them caroling if they are willing to do it," Lizundia said. "It de-

pends on whether they are feeling stressed or wouldn't mind going around."

Because finals now take place in December, Lizundia feels that it's harder to decide whether they should go caroling or not due to the students feeling overwhelmed with stress.

"I think that caroling helps them take a little break from all the pressure of finals and studying," Lizundia said.

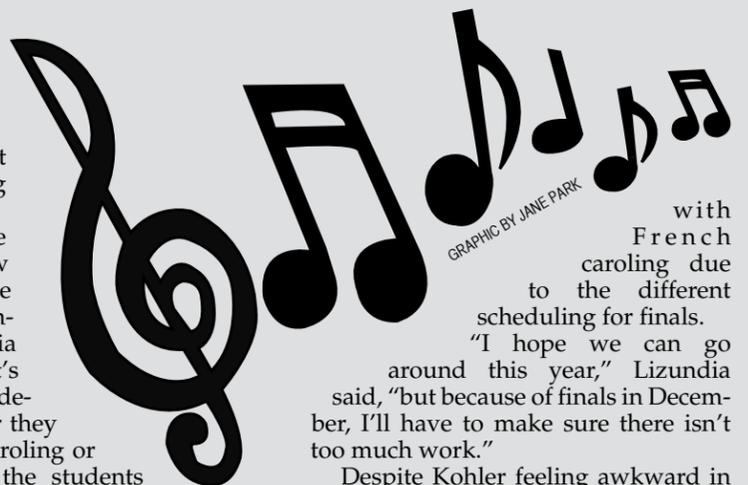
Lizundia is unsure of whether her classes will be finishing off the year

with French caroling due to the different scheduling for finals.

"I hope we can go around this year," Lizundia said, "but because of finals in December, I'll have to make sure there isn't too much work."

Despite Kohler feeling awkward in unfamiliar classes, she wouldn't mind going around to share joy with her fellow schoolmates.

"It's nice to be able to say that I was able to spread some kind of spirit around after singing carols to the classes," Kohler said. ♦



GRAPHIC BY JANE PARK

>> THE bigidea

French Christmas Caroling

The class

Laura Lizundia's upper-level French classes.

What they sing

French equivalents of "Jingle Bells," "Deck the Halls," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and other classics.

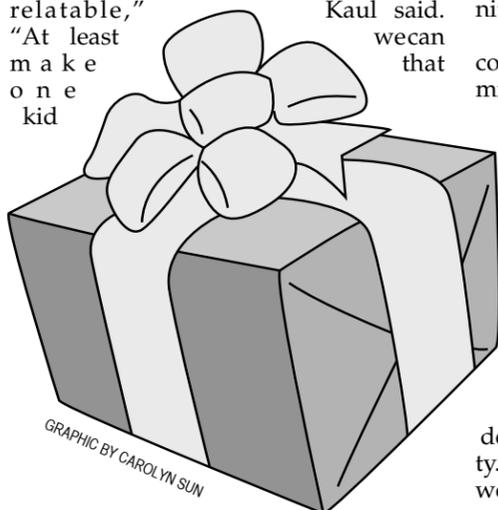
Will it happen this year?

Dependent upon if the students are willing, but Lizundia thinks it helps take away from the stress of finals.

ASB >> Fundraisers promote spirit of giving

continued from pg. 1

"It's really nice to be able to get presents for peers; it's a lot more relatable," Kaul said. "At least we can make that kid



GRAPHIC BY CAROLYN SUN

happy."

In addition to the Wish Drive, the Harvest Food Bank's Can Drive is also an easy way to give back to the community.

According to community commissioner senior Samika Kumar, those who donate gain back something too.

"Anyone can donate or volunteer somewhere," Kumar said. "But when you do it as a school, it creates a sense of unity. From these fundraisers, I hope that we can become more aware of those less

fortunate than us in the community."

In previous years, commissioners have simply encouraged students to donate. Sometimes, teachers offer extra credit as well. In fact, Kaul's most favor-

ite memory is of the extra credit incentive offered for cans by one of her teachers.

"Last year, Mr. Torrens offered extra credit, and our class went crazy about bringing in cans," Kaul said.

This year's fundraiser differs

from previous years because of another added incentive: the class competition.

Seniors and freshmen will join forces against juniors and sophomores.

We are encouraging people to get into the holiday spirit by, for instance, buying a gift for a child in need or bringing in food for families who don't have Christmas dinners."

>> Senior Sasan Saadat

"The fundraiser has been going on for a while, but this is the first year it has been classes against each other," Kaul said.

I just hope that we get as well a turnout as we have this year. And maybe we can fill up the cans."

Of course, students are encouraged to donate not just for the competition, but also for meaning and thought behind supporting people in their community.

"A lot of times, since most people in Saratoga are well off, we forget about the rest who don't have as much," Kaul said. "It's always great to give back, especially during the holiday season. Even if you have extra food, even if it's just one family, you can still give food to their children."

Many clubs also show holiday spirit through different independent fundraisers, from FBLA club selling hot chocolate to Interact club selling holiday treats. ♦

>> togatalks

What is your favorite part of the Christmas season?

"The holiday spirit of warm and fuzzy feelings. And cookies."



senior Cynthia Chen

"Making pumpkin pie. It's always a competition to see who makes the best pie. I win."



junior Jennie Werner

"The ugly Christmas sweaters!"



freshman Caroline Jens

On campus

Reporters bring holiday spirit to J-room

While Santa's elves were busy sleeping in their comfortable beds in the North Pole, the two of us were decorating. As the only people hallucinating sugar plums before Thanksgiving had even come around, it fell to us to bring a slice of holiday cheer to room 303.



RACHEL HULL
Hull-k



NITYA SAMPATH
Nitsy bitsy spider

And thus, armed with red ornaments in one hand and paper snowflakes in the other, we began transforming the journalism room into a holiday wonderland. Our goal was to outdo last year's impressive decorations, done by fourth period editor-in-chief Christine Bancroft.

After almost forgetting her bag of holiday goodies at home, Rachel was eager to show off what she'd dug up from her red-and-green boxes the night before.

And so the two of us got down to business. Phase one of our decoration plan involved tacking up Rachel's holiday-themed gift bows and handmade

paper snowflakes to the journalism room's walls.

Once the basics were up, we strived to bring the holiday spirit to the classroom with red velvet bows, small stockings and a Christmas tree-shaped welcome sign. A few other knickknacks, like a couple of wreath ornaments and some homespun childhood decorations, also found their way onto the walls in the back of the room.

The finishing touch for day one of decorating was stringing a piece of multi-colored yarn, adorned with a variety of ornaments, bows and snowflakes, across the front of the room, while a photographer dutifully followed us and snapped the occasional picture.

Of course, there are dangers involved in every job, as illustrated when the cover of last year's yearbook toppled down on Rachel's head. By a near Christmas miracle, the incident was not captured by a photographer, though it did warrant a few amused looks and bursts of laughter from those watching.

Day two of the spread of holiday

cheer began when Nitya entered the room with a wide array of even more decorations. The walls were splattered with red and gold flowers, crystals and shimmering snowflakes. We even embellished the ceiling by climbing up on the desks around the room.

The price of such extravagant decorations, however, was the sparkly residue left everywhere from the desks and chairs to our hands.

The last of our holiday spirit was manifested in the twinkling tinsel and radiant ribbon we tacked to the vacant parts of the walls.

Pleased with the tremendous amount of decorating we had accomplished in two days, we were slightly discouraged when our advisor Mr. Tyler jokingly blamed us for the recent cold weather, attributing it to the wintery vibe we had given the room. Well, it is often said that magic comes with price.



FALCON // ARMAN VAZIRI

Sophomore Rachel Hull spreads the Christmas spirit by hanging decorations in the journalism room at the end of November.

Although there were a few stumbles along the way, the decorating experience was still filled with lots of enjoyable chaos, sparkly madness and heartfelt laughter. In future years, we hope to have the chance to do this again and eventually make it a tradition.

Even though Santa's real elves are still sleeping in the North Pole, the journalism room has its own elves—us. With holiday spirit as our present and falcons as our reindeer, we're happy to be their replacements. ♦

>> falconfigures

16 ornamental snowflakes hanging from the ceiling.

15 small bows on the walls.

8 cloth flowers all over.

15 paper snowflakes pinned on the walls.

Scola gets students into 'cup of cocoa' mood

BY David Sparkman

It's that time of year again. The moist ground is littered with a colorful carpet of fallen leaves. A slight breeze blows through the air. Students walk around holding warm cups of hot chocolate, coffee or tea, steaming like the chimney of a winter cottage. They quickly shuffle into their classrooms, happy to escape the chilly hallways. One of the classrooms that is especially festive during this time of the year is Room 106.

Every year, math teacher Julie Scola transforms her classroom into a win-

ter wonderland complete with spray-snowed windows, snowflakes (her favorite decoration) hanging from the ceiling and lining the walls, as well as snowmen guarding her math equations. A warm electric fireplace at the

front of the classroom keeps students — adding to the cozy atmosphere.

"I probably started decorating [my classroom] seven or eight years ago to get students in the

mood for the season ... to put them in that cozy 'I want a cup of cocoa' mood," Scola said.

Students often look forward to Scola's creative and elaborate decorations,

since it creates a much more cheerful and welcoming learning environment than just looking at the cold gray walls with the occasional motivational poster. Few students know that she spends about an hour for each season of decorations, putting the new ones up and taking the old ones down.

"I think [the room decorations] are really cool and make it fun to be in her classroom. It really lightens the mood," freshman Darby Williams said.

Scola enjoys decorating the classroom as the seasons change, and if time permits, includes students in the deco-

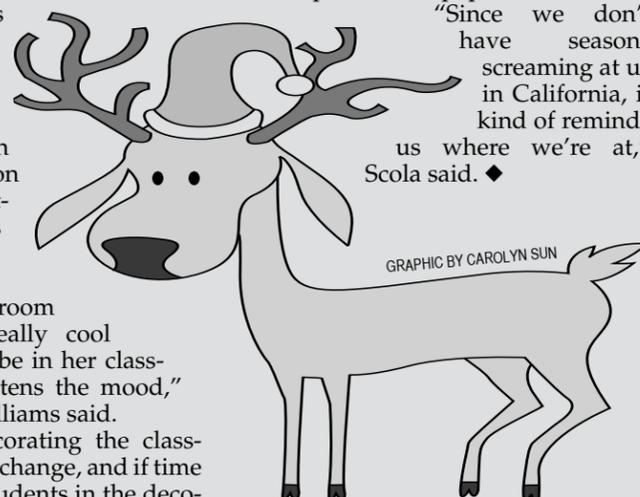
rating process, teaching them how to make snowflakes or other decorations out of plain white paper.

"Since we don't have seasons screaming at us in California, it kind of reminds us where we're at," Scola said. ♦

"I think [the room decorations] are really cool and make it fun to be in her classroom."



freshman Darby Williams



GRAPHIC BY CAROLYN SUN

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?



THE FALCON INVESTIGATES MILITARY SERVICE

ALL GRAPHICS BY MICHELLE SHU, JANE PARK AND CAROLYN SUN

Going Army strong: joining the fight

BY Michelle Leung
& Helen Wong

Few people think too long about the mysteries of the military. It is enough for most of us to know soldiers are out there protecting our country. However, joining the military is actually a relatively simple process, and hardly as well guarded as Hollywood would have us think.

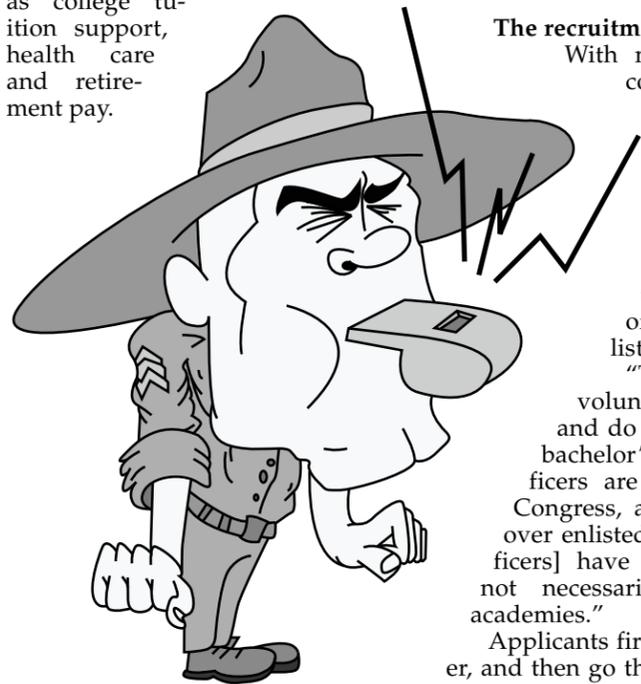
The military is made up of five different branches: the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard.

They represent land, air and sea combat, respectively. Of the five branches, the Army is the largest and is always seeking fresh recruits.

"The army is looking for the best to join the profession of arms," said Staff Sgt. Faux of the San Jose military recruitment center. (Faux did not give his first name, only his title, in deference to military protocol.) "The Army seeks qualified, motivated Americans to step forward and serve."

Why join the armed forces?

In addition to the prestige of being part of the powerful U.S. Army, soldiers also receive benefits such as college tuition support, health care and retirement pay.



According to Faux, however, most recruits join for the overall military experience.

Soldiers gain experience from the adventures, diversity and discipline involved in being part of the U.S. Army.

"My favorite part is pushing myself past limits I thought I had, learning to overcome obstacles," Faux said. "Obstacles like physical and psychological strength barriers."

Soldiers from the Navy also said that honor and pride played major roles in their choice to join the military.

"The reason why I joined [at first] was that I wanted to go to school," Chief Calderon (he, too, did not give his first name) of the San Jose military recruitment center said. "Things changed, and it became about the pride of the organization and wearing the cloth of the nation. For people to depend on us for freedom."

According to Calderon, the Navy deals mostly in humanitarian efforts. They ensure the seas are clear, internationally.

Calderon said, "It's not so much battle; it's more protecting and helping out."

The recruitment process

With military enlistment comes military ranking, and this applies to all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.

There are two divisions within the military: the officers and the enlisted.

"The enlisted are volunteers who enlist and do not already have a bachelor's degree, while officers are commissioned by Congress, and have authority over enlisted," Faux said. "[Officers] have four-year degrees, not necessarily from military academies."

Applicants first contact a recruiter, and then go through a qualifying

process, which takes into account the applicant's age.

Applicants can join all the way up to age 42, but the vast majority are in their late teens or early 20s.

Once applicants qualify, they can select a job from those they qualify for, and are officially sworn in as soldiers.

Training and preparation

After being recruited, soldiers join the Future Soldier Training program, where they learn the basics of their respective branch and earn early promotions prior to attending Basic Combat Training.

According to Faux, the U.S. Army implements the basic skills required. Soldiers learn drill and ceremony, basic rifle marksmanship, land navigation, physical training and other basic military customs and courtesies.

Among these military customs and courtesies is the deference that younger soldiers must show in the face of drill sergeants.

"Training and drill sergeants today are mentors to the young soldiers," said Faux. "They are their principal trainer and guide to becoming a soldier."

After completing basic training, soldiers move on to Advanced Individual Training, where soldiers learn a specific area of expertise.

Within the Army, there are many specialized areas to work in, called military occupational specialties, or MOS.

Depending on qualifications during enlistment, MOS will be determined with the respective person's transcription.

An example is of a weapon repairer. They work on everything from handguns all the way up to a tank's main gun and artillery.

Soldiers must learn to utilize their skills, so they must practice out in the field.

However, the field is not the actual

fighting ground; it is a simulated environment.

"The field is a training environment set to replicate a combat environment," Faux said.

Education and military service

The offer of a free education draws many civilians to the Army. Soldiers are authorized \$4,500 annually to attend college, not necessarily operated by the military.

According to Faux, everybody who honorably serves is given the option to receive the Montgomery GI Bill, which currently provides \$53,028 to attend college after one's enlistment contract.

The Reserve Officer Training Corps is another educational option for soldiers, much like a class that one may sign up for.

ROTC teaches military service to college students, while junior ROTC teaches military service to high school students.

Civilian or soldier?

The Army offers two ways to serve: the reserves and active duty. Active duty is a full time position while the reserves attend battle drill one weekend a month and one two-week period a year.

"The difference is the reserves serve as civilians first, then soldiers second, while the active duty serves as soldiers first, civilians second," Faux said.

In 2012, the Army enlisted 58,000 new soldiers for active duty and 12,000 for Army reserves.

But according to Faux, only one in four 17-24 year olds in the United States is fully qualified to become a soldier, as only the most skilled are permitted to enlist.

"The Army is striving to recruit an all-volunteer force, by finding the best to join the profession of arms," Faux said. "I joined to serve my country and do something positive with my life." ♦

Only one in four 17-24 year olds in the United States is fully qualified to become a soldier.

>>togatalks

Would you consider joining the military?

"If I don't have to fight in combat, then maybe."



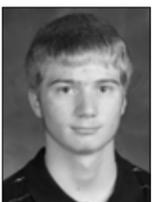
junior Steven Tran

"I definitely don't want to join, but if I had to, like in a draft, I would serve to defend my country."



junior Eric Kao

"If I joined the military, I would be more likely to join as a defense engineer."



junior Ivan France

What exactly is a party game?

BY Lauren Louie, Jay Mulye
& Arman Vaziri

To some people, old party games are better than new party games and vice-versa. But in order to say which really is better, first one needs to define what a party game actually is.

The game must be at least a four-player console game to be called a party game, preferably not on the computer. Console games allow the players to immerse themselves into the game while being in a competitive atmosphere. Some old party games include Super Smash Bros. Melee and the older Mario Party games.

"A party game is simply a multiplayer game that can be played with multiple people and everyone can have an equal chance of winning," senior Greg Harriman said. "[We can] have fun and become friendly rivals or enemies for a while."

What makes a party game fun

In a party game, the players must use enough skill so that they are evenly matched with their competitors. However, there is almost always one person in the group who has enough skill in the game to outclass the other players. This creates camaraderie between the other players in an attempt to cease the dominant player's winning streak.

"I think a fun party game gets reactions from everyone like yelling and cheering," sophomore Tony Holt said.

Whenever players gather at one friend's house to play the party game, they must be engaged enough in the game so they can play for a couple hours straight without getting bored. The game should be appealing to the

audience, even to the players waiting for their turn. The duration should be short enough so that the waiting players do not get impatient.

Old and new

Years ago, party games were commonly associated with animated Italian brothers donning mustaches and decked out in red and green. These days, party games often involve intense battles of warfare and the satisfaction of killing the opponents, including games such as Call of Duty and Battlefield.

As opposed to old party games, which are played leisurely, newer party games evoke the competitive nature in the players.

"Before, it was just about having fun and choosing the character you want, but now it's more competitive," sophomore Jay Sehbey said. "[New party games] measure the accuracy so you can't randomly take shots because [new party games] measure kills."

According to Sehbey, newer party games require a higher level of skill than old party games — button mashing will not suffice to win the round.

"Before anyone could jump in and press random buttons and do something cool. Now if you press a [random] button, you throw a grenade at yourself," Sehbey said. "Either you're good or you're not — there's no luck anymore."

There is often an age gap between those who enjoy old party games and those who like new party games. Many children enjoy the fanciful and magical video game setting, whereas teens enjoy the more realistic games packed with violence.

"[Older guys] don't believe that you should be able to knock someone out

with a banana," Sehbey said. "They think that [the game] has to be limited to reality."

As opposed to new party games, old party games are more inclusive, so anybody who does not know how to play the game can easily grasp the controls and play.

"[First person shooter games] are harder to learn and if you don't know how to play, it's very hard to do anything productive," Holt said. "[Old party games] are easier to learn and that's why I like them."

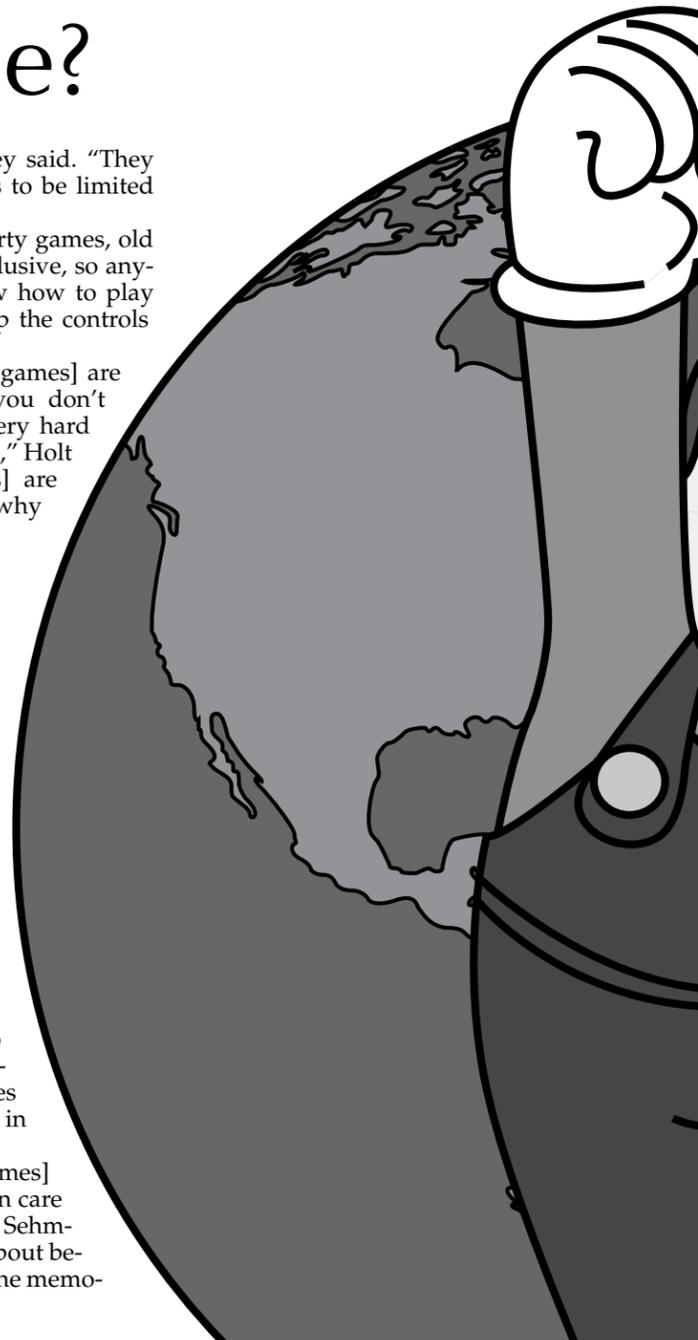
Why do we play?

Even though new party games and old party games have their strengths and weaknesses, the two different types of games are suited for different players' personalities.

"Some people only like real stuff like guns and explosives," Sehbey said. "Other people like having fun and doing random stuff like hitting flying peaches."

At the end of the day, party games are meant to bring a group of friends together and create memories which they will reminisce in the future.

"When I play [party games] with friends we don't even care about playing the game," Sehbey said. "We care more about being together and sharing the memories." ♦



RATED E FOR

Brawl Bros. gets ready for second semester

BY Amy Jan

Most seniors can't wait for second semester when they'll have more free time to go hang out with friends. The members of the Facebook group "Brawl Bros." look forward to spending quality time playing each other in Super Smash Bros. tournaments.

Seniors Tyler Bakke, Arush Shankar and Feargus Macfhionnlaioich created this group with a few of their friends to try and get as many people as they could to play the popular party game Super Smash Bros. Brawl together. There will be several different tournament types, such as 2v2, 1v1, free for all and skill-

level based brackets.

"I came up with the idea with Arush and Feargus during a Brawl session because we thought it would be more fun to find other people who played," Bakke said. "We'd get them all together at once for an intense tournament."

This Facebook group will be used as the information provider for the location and times of events as to when the tournaments will be held.

"These tournaments will begin when members are the most free, which will most likely be second semester after apps are turned in," Bak-

ke said. "If we are lucky, maybe even Christmas break."

According to Bakke, there is no skill requirement needed to join in. For those who want to join, just inform Bakke and he will add people to the group.

"We do this mainly for fun. Whether they are a Super Smash veteran or a beginner, anyone can join and hang out," Bakke said.

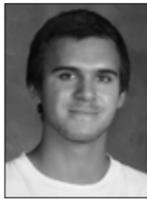
Although Bakke says that there are no skill requirements, most people in this group have played a lot with their friends or even by themselves. Shankar said he played

about two to six hours per week in his junior year, depending on the time of the year. Even senior Derek Chao, another member of the group, finds time to play during his free sixth period.

"I play a lot with my friends," Chao said. "I'd say I play a good amount, about five hours a week. Second semester will be off the charts."

With much anticipation, the members await the beginning of second semester.

"I like playing because it really brings out the pent up rage I have at school," Shankar said. "And it's fun to hang out with friends. I'm looking forward to a massive Brawl tournament we're going to have soon." ♦



Bakke

>> togatalks

What is your favorite party game and why?

"Dance Dance Revolution, because it has an essentially nonexistent learning curve."



senior Johnny Chang

"Halo, because it lets up to 4 people on one console. It's easy, too."



sophomore Bridgette Olsen

"I like Assassin's Creed because it has good graphics and is probably the best shooter."



freshman Anik Joshi



'Skyfall': a must-see

BY David Sparkman

The movie theatres are packed and people are lining up outside to buy tickets. No, it's not the new "Twilight" movie, but a film packed with action, adventure, nostalgia and plenty of explosions. On Nov. 9, many fans were eager to see "Skyfall," the latest movie in the James Bond series.

The movie opens with the obligatory chase scene that has opened almost every Bond movie. This sequence immediately grabs the audience's attention as they watch MI6 agent James Bond 007 attempt to catch an enemy, who has stolen classified files, as they scramble over the roof of a train speeding along the countryside, over bridges and through tunnels.

Daniel Craig, the actor portraying Bond, does an excellent job playing the legendary agent. At the beginning of the movie, where Bond is not at his prime, he effectively manages to portray the haughty attitude one would expect an elite agent like him to carry when things aren't going so well. He also manages to maintain the sarcastic attitude throughout the duration of the movie.

The script also went beyond the usual. Unlike those of many other films, the writers seemed to place a lot of emphasis on the plot and Bond's backstory. For long-time Bond fans, this was a welcome surprise, and added the pleasing element of a story line to the movie.

In addition to adding

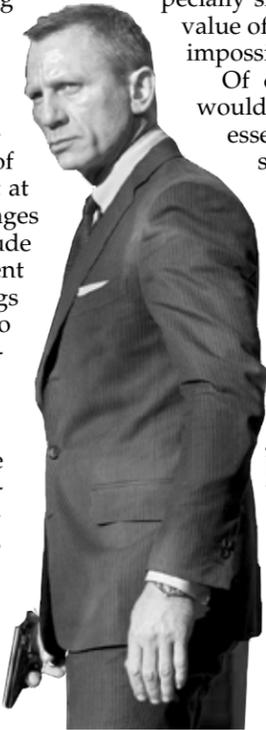
Bond's backstory, the writers also gave M, Bond's superior, played by Judi Dench, a larger role as she accompanies Bond back to the Skyfall, the estate where he grew up. This not only gives her the opportunity to gain a better understanding of her favorite agent, but gives the audience additional insight on his tragic childhood.

The villain, Raoul Silva, played by Javier Bardem, also falls under a different category than those presented in previous Bond films. Instead of just hiring goons to kill Bond and his allies, he takes on a personal vendetta against 007 and M. This creates a slightly more psychological element in the film, especially since he seems to have no value of human life, and is nearly impossible to predict.

Of course, no action movie would be complete without the essential pyrotechnics. The special effects team of "Skyfall" did exactly this. They not only blew up parts of London, but took their pyrotechnics to the extent of completely destroying an old stone house with a helicopter crash.

Overall, those in charge did a spectacular job in casting, writing and filming the movie, not only through the backstory, but also through the various references to previous films.

This film is definitely a must-see. ♦



Courtesy of http://gettyimages.com

Laugh, cry, wonder: 'The Fault in our Stars'

"I'm not a mathematician, but I know this," says Hazel Grace Lancaster, the narrator of "The Fault in Our Stars" (FIOS), the 2012 novel by young adult fiction author John Green. "There are infinite numbers between zero and one. There's .1 and .12 and .112 and an infinite collection of others ... Some infinities are bigger than other infinities." The truth, she adds, is, "I want more numbers than I'm likely to get."

Hazel is a 16-year-old cancer patient, who bluntly describes her life through wry humor and intelligent sarcasm. From the start, she's relatable, funny and entertaining, when mocking the sappy routine conducted in the support group that her mom makes her go to.

"[I] listened to Patrick recount for the thousandth time his depressingly miserable life story — how he had cancer in his balls and they thought he was going to die but he didn't die and now here he is," Hazel narrates dryly.

And although the days of Hazel, her boyfriend Augustus Waters and her friend Isaac are numbered, FIOS is NOT one of the cancer stories droned on in Hazel's Support Group. There are no tubes, no scans, no gruesome details in this novel that'll move you to tears.

Rather, FIOS focuses on how people deal with cancer — and how the people around them — deal with it all. It is "an epic love story," Hazel describes her relationship with Augustus, and more.

Her oxygen tank and his prosthetic leg do nothing but make the romance more touching than a candlelit dinner could. Furthermore, FIOS includes friends, distant and close, and family, who all play in a significant role of the ripple effect of a cancer patient. So you're reading a romance that doesn't make you cringe with its sickening sweetness, but one that

leaves you with awe and sorrow.

And Green tells this all in his trademark tone — melancholy, funny, touching and philosophical. His prose is to fall for. At one moment, he may eloquently say things so profound you'll revel in the beauty of those words; and the next, he may spout nonsense about Hazel's made-up headlines for her childhood swing advertisement: "Lonely, Vaguely Pedophilic Swing Set Seeks the Butts of Children." The contrast is astounding.

That's what makes John Green the best young adult fiction author I've read so far. I

tend to steer away from the young adult genre, but he doesn't treat you like a teenager, with immature emotions and shallow qualms about life, unlike some of the authors I saw on that Teen Bestsellers shelf. (I'm looking at you, Stephanie Meyer.) Instead, he makes you feel like he understands you. It's because his characters' feelings are so human and so valid that I unexpectedly fell in love with them.

"Sometimes, you read a book and it fills you with this weird evangelical zeal," Hazel says, honoring her favorite novel, "and you become convinced that the shattered world will never be put back together unless and until all living humans read the book."

That is, as wonderfully told by Green, precisely "The Fault in Our Stars." ♦



Kelly LIU

Liu Jelly?

>> thebigidea

Preview of novel

Terminal cancer patient Hazel Grace Lancaster unexpectedly meets and falls in love with Augustus Waters, an ex-basketball player and amputee, at a support group. Their compelling story targets the big subjects of life, death and love.

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Racist claims opposing 'Cloud Atlas' unfounded

BY Michael Lee

The Wachowskis, the mindbending masterminds behind "The Matrix," are back with "Cloud Atlas," a new movie based on David Mitchell's novel of the same name.

The film, which is composed of six separate — yet thematically similar — storylines, features a main cast of actors who play multiple characters. One of these stories is set in a futuristic South Korea. As a result, the non-Asian actors had to undergo a slight transformation.

Movies like "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and the film adaptations of "Dragonball Z" and "Avatar: the Last Airbender" have opted to use Caucasian actors instead of their Asian counterparts due to historical anti-Asian sentiment. This type of job discrimination is both unjust and unconstitutional; actors deserve to have their chances weighed on talent, not skin color.

As a result, critics have accused "Cloud Atlas" of "yellowface," the use of makeup or CGI — specifically, to alter the actors' eyes — to portray Caucasian actors like James D'Arcy or Jim Sturgess as Asian. These critics, however, seem to have missed the point of the film.

Under the tagline "Everything is connected," the film has one major

theme: Despite racial, social and temporal barriers, all humans' lives are interwoven. The recurrence of the main actors in various roles visually links the six storylines together, further contributing to the film's theme of unity. If anything, the fact that the actors could superficially alter their race and gender so easily helps break down some of society's barriers.

The truth about Hollywood is that most of the dominant names are not Asian. As an independent film with a relatively small cast, "Cloud Atlas"

needed to rely on big-name actors to gain popularity. This is simply a consequence of the movie industry, not a fault of the Wachowskis.

By attributing the Wachowskis' casting choices to racist intent, critics are misinterpreting the film's ideas. The film and novel encourage people to look beyond the boundaries of race; one of the characters notes that social class is "curiously [based on] the quantity of melanin in one's skin."

Intrinsically similar plot lines — such as the 19th century fight against slavery and a future rebellion against a system of cloned slave labor — show that humans are tightly linked, regardless of ethnicity. To call the film racist is an insult to Mitchell's vision of a bigotry-free world. ♦

The film and novel encourage people to look beyond the boundaries of race.

Columnist fails at assembling fantasy team

I'm a huge follower of European soccer leagues, such as the Barclays Premier League (England), La Liga (Spain), the Bundesliga (Germany) and Serie A (Italy). I'm also big time into the NFL.

When it comes to basketball, however, I'm not nearly as adept. I know about as much basketball as rapper Nicki Minaj knows about music. Beyond stars like LeBron and Kobe ... I'm clueless.

Some of the members on the newspaper staff who are big fans of the NBA, decided to make a fantasy league and allow me to join. The catch was that they would not give me any information, and that I was supposed to figure it out for myself. The better catch was that I'd never been a part of any sort of a fantasy league before.

I named my team the Ballers because the name felt auspicious.

The experience didn't start too well for me, though. I missed the draft because I thought it was at 12:45 a.m. It turns out it was 12:45 on the East Coast. Getting online a good three hours after

the draft, I disappointedly viewed my team, not being able to recognize a single name on the list. My players had names like Al Horford and Chauncey Billups. I had no idea what to expect.

After reviewing my players' names, I took a look at all of their stats, which were intimidating, to say the least. The data are arranged in a graph, in which the rows are all the players and the columns were their numbers. Each column has a short abbreviation like "FTM/FTA" and "FT%," and I had no idea what anything stood for. At 1 a.m., it was hard to find motivation to figure these things out, so I gave it up.

When the league simulated our first few games, I dropped to last place (surprise, surprise).

I was pretty confused when I got my first trade offer. Fellow staff member senior Dylan Jew wanted to exchange James Harden and Roy Hibbert for my players David Lee and Paul Pierce.

"Uhh, sure," I muttered to myself as I clicked the accept button. I remembered hearing about James Harden, so I figured

if he was famous enough for me to know him, he was probably pretty good.

Fantasy basketball was a lot less exciting than I had imagined it would be. I figured that even if I wasn't very knowledgeable in the sport I would at least enjoy the excitement of seeing my team move up and down the standings.

But this league is just invisible teams playing each other in invisible games. I understand that a basketball fan would probably appreciate it, but not being one myself, I don't really know what I'm doing.

Now I'm sitting in seventh place out of eight teams, which is way better than what I expected (Team Apex Dinosaur, run by Nick Chow, you have some work to do). I would try to research some players not currently attached to other teams in the league, but the numbers still intimidate me. All the other members of the league discuss strategy and make decisions based on whether their teams need more blocks or steals. For me, well, I'd rather judge a player based on how famous he is.

By the way, can someone trade me Jeremy Lin? ♦



ROHAN RAJEEV
Rohan Rondo

THE saratogafalcon >>

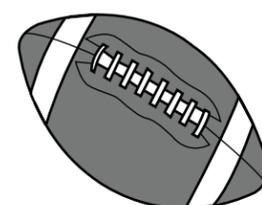
FANTASYLEAGUE

- 1. Bellgrove Monobrows (32-13-0)**
Elijah Yi (12)
- 2. Kobe Wan Kenobi (31-13-1)**
Minu Palaniappan (11)
- 3. MR. FRODO?? (27-17-1)**
Sudeep Raj (10)
- 4. Liu (23-20-2)**
Samuel Liu (11)
- 5. Rack City Tygers (23-21-1)**
Dylan Jew (12)
- 6. Young (18-26-1)**
Jonathan Young (11)
- 7. Ballers (12-33-0)**
Rohan Rajeev (12)
- 8. Apex Dinosaur (11-34-0)**
Nick Chow (11)

THEBALLERS

Point Guard John Wall	Forward Paul Millsap
Shooting Guard Wesley Matthews	Utility Al Horford
Power Forward Josh Smith	Bench Amar'e Stoudemire
Center Andrew Bynum	Kris Humphries
Guard Isaiah Thomas	Chauncey Billups
	DeAndre Jordan
	James Harden
	Roy Hibbert

HOW FAN-TASTIC ARE YOU?



GRAPHICS BY JANE PARK & MICHELLE SHU

Once a fan, always a fan

Steve Nash. Pau Gasol. Dwight Howard. Kobe Bryant. These four players are all-stars who have been the top dog at their position at one point in each of their careers. And guess what? They are all on the Los Angeles Lakers.

Before the NBA season began this year, the hype for the new Lakers super team was unavoidable. ESPN, Yahoo sports and all other major sport networks were predicting a monumental season for the Lakers.

Even Snoop Lion, formerly known as Snoop Dogg, made an appearance on ESPN claiming that the Lakers were a lock for the finals in June.

I, however, still believe that my hometown team, the Golden State Warriors, will overcome the Lakers and end up in finals against the Miami Heat.

A fan can dream, right?

Scarily enough my dreams are starting to take shape. The Lakers began their season by losing three straight and had lost more games than they had won as of early December. The Warriors, on the other hand, are at the top of their division.

Yes, the Lakers will probably heat up at some point and live up to their high expectations, but for the time being, it is fun to be a Warriors fan.

And that is the reason why loyal fans stick around; they get the opportunity to ride the highs and lows of a

team, and the reward is so much more meaningful when one has stayed for the whole experience.

This year, the Oakland Athletics were supposed to be the laughing stock of Major League Baseball.

Still, being the cocky sports fan that I am, I boasted that the Oakland A's would somehow make their way to the playoffs.

And to the shock of the baseball world, they did, winning the American League West over the ballyhooed Texas Rangers.

Through the grinding out of games and winning more than a dozen by game-winners, the A's were able to make it to the playoffs. Though they were stopped short and the San Francisco Giants took the prize in the end, I probably had more fun watching the

A's than the Giants fans did watching their team.

The feeling of watching the underdogs win and experiencing a game winning home run fly out of the park in person just was overwhelming. All the years that I have invested in the team was paid off in a single historic season.

So maybe the Warriors will shock the world just as the Oakland A's have, or maybe they will be stopped short. But the pride of being a loyal Warriors fan is much more valuable than any other bandwagoning Heat or Lakers fan. ♦



ELIJAH YI
Yi-li Manning

Falling off the bandwagon

A sea of orange bursts into wild cheers while a motley band of Falcons' fans bursts into groans. And all the while we sat there silent and confused.

Such was the experience of us two non-sports fans in a sea of sports nuts on the biggest sports night in Saratoga of the year: the Los Gatos vs. Saratoga home-football game on Nov. 9.

As two teenagers who know almost nothing about sports, we had the task of watching the LG game and seeing how we liked it.

High hopes fade

We were originally excited for the game. "We actually have a chance of beating LG this year!" we thought. "Those Cats stand no chance!"

It was a far cry from the truth.

Upon arriving, we took a moment to survey the field. The visitors' stands across the way looked packed. They were pumped up, waving banners, posters, and flags. They were a solid bloc of orange and black.

We came out of our trance when LG scored two touchdowns early in the contest, leading students next to us to boo.

Finally, the moment came. An offensive drive by Saratoga resulted in a touchdown. Our side exploded in an ear-splittingly loud cheer. 14-7.

"We might actually catch up and win this one!" we thought. We both stood up and waved our red towels like everyone

else on our side.

Suddenly, a large fan directly behind us stood up and screamed, "Ref, if you're gonna make calls like that, you might as well forfeit the game!"

We were astounded that fans could get so hostile over a topic like sports.

They were not riled up over politics, nor anything that has anything lasting consequences after the game is over. Sports.

It was bitterly cold that night — in the 30s. Yet the 20 or more boys who make up the Code Red spirit group paraded onto the field with naked torsos.

Sadly, not even their spirited cheerleading could bring our spirits up.

Code Red, in a last-ditch attempt to pump us up, started to chant "I believe that we will win. I believe that we will win!"

This came just as LG scored a final touchdown, bringing the final score to 28-10.

Reflections

We think this game truly made us step into the shoes of sports fans, and walk around in them.

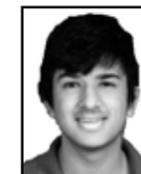
We felt the passion in the heat of the game, and during that last hour or so, we really felt like our well-being was tied to the fate of the game.

We can always beat them next year. Maybe next year, "Toga."

Spoken like a true sports fan. ♦



BRUCE LOU
Brucester Posey



SANJ NALWA
LeSanj James

BOYS' SOCCER

Team looks to rebuild lineup with new faces

BY Rohan Hardikar
& Rohan Rajeev

As the new winter season begins, the boys' varsity soccer team must cope with drastic changes, since most of last year's starters have graduated.

Leading the team are co-captains senior Fred Feyzi and junior Nikhil Goel.

"As captain, I definitely want to make sure that everyone is motivated to play at their best level since we took a big hit losing many good players," Feyzi said. "I want to encourage everyone to strive to do better."

In order for the team to perform at a higher level, they must focus on having more productive practices, Feyzi said.

In a recent scrimmage against Harker on Nov. 20, the Falcons won 3-0, with senior David Zarrin scoring the first two goals. The team went on to lose 5-0 to the Wilcox Chargers on Nov. 27.

A major problem the team faces right now is simply adapting to the new formations and figuring out which players will fill the shoes of last year's "dream-team" seniors. Coach Adam Clarke now works to assemble the best possible lineup, and has to work around the lack of the 13 graduated seniors of last year.

Juniors Will and Sam Guy will be in the starting lineup for the third year in a row, playing center defenders or center midfielders. Sophomore Komdean Masoumi will play in a defensive mindset in the center midfield.

However, the rest of the positions, such as outside midfielders and strikers, are still up for grabs.

Against Wilcox, the team experimented with three midfielders and three forwards rather than playing with the normal four midfielders and two strikers. For the first half of the match, the Falcon defense held together well.



FALCON // JADE BISHT

Sophomore Komdean Masoumi fights for the ball against a Yerba Buena player on Dec. 4.

During the second half, Wilcox was able to find holes in the midfield and penetrate; and despite retaining less than half the possession, they were able to net a barrage of goals. The final score, 5-0, did not tell the whole story.

"In the last two games, our team chemistry was low, but that will improve as the season progresses," Feyzi said. "These games weren't a big deal, and we will definitely get better from there."

Although steering an almost new team toward success and unity is plenty of work, Feyzi enjoys his job.

"Being captain is fun, and it gives me a sense of leadership. The team is still developing, and it is my job to make sure we progress," Feyzi said.

The Falcons drew 2-2 with powerhouse Yerba Buena on Dec. 4, showing definite signs of improvement. The team plays Mountain View next on Jan. 4. ♦

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Center provides spark on team's defensive end

BY Elijah Yi

The center is the last line of defense, altering and contesting shots. He is tasked with rebounding the ball to ensure his teammates extra possessions. He is the anchor of the team's defense, the five, the pivot, the man in the middle.

On Falcon basketball team where big men are few, 6-4 senior Jonathan Boldt acts as the protector of the paint.

"He's our most intimidating guy," senior guard Brian Kim said. "When we walk into the gym, players on the other

team see our best shot-blocker."

As a player who performs much of the team's work on the defensive end, Boldt takes on a team-first mentality.

"I do what's best for the team," Boldt said. "Usually that includes rebounding, blocking shots and defensive presence."

During his high school career, Boldt transformed his basketball skill set to conform to the role as a center.

"I used to be a guard," Boldt said. "I became a center [during] my sophomore year after a growth spurt."

The transition to the varsity team dur-

ing his sophomore year was a difficult change for Boldt because of his inexperience as a center.

"The game is played at a much faster pace and the competition is at a much higher level," Boldt said.

As a freshman and early sophomore, Boldt played as a perimeter defender and started playing center after growing 5 inches in his sophomore year.

"I've improved on post-defense and I have been trying to get better at rebounding and boxing out," Boldt said.

Even beyond the tangible aspects of

his skills, Boldt excites the rest of his team through his efforts on the court.

"Whenever Jon makes a great block or finishes around the rim, the rest of the team always gets energized," Kim said.

Now looking forward to the season, the team faces a different league with reputable teams like Palo Alto. However, Boldt and the team are confident that they will perform well.

"We are ready for this new league," Boldt said. "It is one of the best public leagues in the area so it should be fun and filled with new competition." ♦

GIRLS' SOCCER

Forward emerges as key player through hard work

BY Jay Mulye

As the MVP on the JV team her sophomore year and an All League First Team Player her junior year, senior forward Courtney Schlossareck has excelled as a key player for the girls' soccer team.

In first grade, Schlossareck tried soccer to see if she liked it. After discovering her passion and talent for the sport, Schlossareck took her game to the next level by joining the competitive De Anza Force soccer club in fifth grade.

"As a child, I always watched the older kids play soccer and I wanted to be as good as them," Schlossareck said.

According to her teammates, Schlossareck is the playmaker for the team and an active thinker on the field.

"She is good at passing and doesn't ball hog," senior Rachel Leonard said. "She reads the plays so she knows what's going to happen next."

Not only is her passing extraordinary, but her agility and shooting ability is what distinguishes her.

"When she shoots on goal she has good placement and it always goes in," Leonard said.

As a senior on the team, Schlossareck sets an example by putting 100 percent of her energy into winning the ball after losing possession.

"Even if I am tired, I push myself through the burn to poke the ball away from the opposing players and push the ball up the field," Schlossareck said.

Aside from her field skills, Schlossareck has a friendly personality.

"[Schlossareck] always includes people and she is very nice," Leonard said. "She always tells people 'good job.'"



Schlossareck

Even though Schlossareck may appear to be slender, her finesse touches on the ball and her speed make her a difficult opponent to defend.

"People may underestimate her but her quick passing and speed get her out of trouble," Leonard said.

Since the Falcons barely made the cut-off to stay in the competitive De Anza League with a 3-8-1 record last year, Schlossareck expects hard work from the team of 26 girls.

"A good goal for this year is to win more games than last year and ensure that we stay in the upper division," Schlossareck said.

Although Schlossareck is a skilled soccer player, she is not going to pursue it on a college team.

"I'm not going to play on the [college] team, but I might play club or intramural soccer," Schlossareck said. ♦

WRESTLING

Wrestler strives to fulfill legacy brother left behind

BY Michelle Leung
& Bruce Lou

Living up to an older sibling's legacy is a difficult challenge for many younger siblings. For sophomore Christian Murabito, having a wrestling legend as an older brother makes it much harder.

Christian's brother is Alfred Murabito, who is now wrestling at the University of Pennsylvania. Alfred was also captain of the SHS team.

"I would describe my brother as one of the most hardworking and determined people I know, and one of the most supportive," Christian said.

Christian said that having such an accomplished older brother can be hard, but also motivates him to perform well.

"The inspiration [to start] wrestling for me was my brother, who was on the middle school team," Christian said. "He's still the wrestler that I look up to the most."

Christian said the sport has taught him more than just wrestling techniques.

"I wrestle because it teaches character, keeps me in shape, and hopefully will get me into college," Christian said.

Christian has already wrestled his way to third in the El Camino League in the 170-pound weight class and hopes to eventually win League and CCS.

Other wrestlers see Christian as a role model. Senior wrestler Henry Wei

recounts a time when Christian's perseverance shone in a tough match.

"Once, Christian took on a much bigger senior as a freshman. It got to 6-0 and he was about to lose," Wei said. "But then he started trying really hard, and only lost by one point. He nearly won the match."

Despite disappointing seasons in previous years, new coach Armando Gonzalez hopes to overcome team size difficulties and reach the next division level. The Falcons currently consist of only 15 athletes, making it a challenge to compete against other, larger teams.

"This year, my goal is to win a majority of our [matches] in league to move to the upper division, and just to continue improving," Gonzalez said.

According to Gonzalez, Christian is among the more talented wrestlers.

"Christian is very hard working," Gonzalez said. "He has the talent to become a great wrestler."

Christian has enjoyed getting to know Gonzalez.

"He knows more about the sport and technique, he knows what each of us needs," Christian said.

Despite challenges in past seasons, the wrestling team continues to view this season with optimism.

"I expect the rest of the season to go really well because everyone seems to be working hard," Christian said. ♦

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Hannah Johnson: basketball star

SENIOR CAPTAIN AND POWER FORWARD TAKES CHARGE ON COURT AND ENCOURAGES TEAMMATES WITH DEDICATION AND ENTHUSIASM

BY Helen Wong

Everyone on the girls' basketball team knows and respects Hannah Johnson for her prowess on the court.

She has been on varsity since freshman year, and has received honors such as First Team All League and All Mercury News Honorable Mention sophomore and junior year and League MVP last year.

Johnson is a captain this year and a power forward. She began in fifth grade, initially influenced by how many of her friends had joined the sport. She was also tall for her age, so her mother thought she would be good at it.

While Johnson, now standing at a height of 5'11", had a lot of

natural talent early on, she found that teamwork was just as important on the court as her individual skill.

"You have to put a lot of trust in your teammates to do their part during games," Johnson said. "You won't win if one person chooses not to play their hardest."

This sort of teamwork is appealing to Johnson.

"I think the reason I love it so much is that you don't just make friends; you make really close friends who all work super hard for you," Johnson said. "All

five people have to be really invested."

Johnson not only likes the sport for its teamwork aspect, but also for the game's quick tempo.

"I love that every play during basketball is different," Johnson said. "Games are always so fast paced, and when you mess up, you always have your teammates to pick you up again."

Teammates such as junior Trishika Shetty look up to Johnson as a role model.

"Hannah is an amazing player and she works really hard during the season," Shetty said.

"On top of her being skilled she is probably one of the nicest and classiest players in our league, so she really inspires me to work as hard as her and commit as much as she does to our team."

Shetty also admires Johnson's work ethic.

As an example, Shetty said Johnson still came to weight lifting even though she had to dress up for Homecoming court right after. One week, she never failed to show up to practice despite having pink eye and being sick.

As a power forward, Johnson tries to pull down rebounds and score from inside, but she also has the freedom to take outside shots.

Making the '12-'13 season especially

You have to put a lot of trust in your teammates...you won't win if one person chooses not to play their hardest.



senior Hannah Johnson



FALCON // DAVID SPARKMAN

Senior captain Hannah Johnson launches the ball over the hand of a defending Monta Vista Matador towards the net on Dec. 6. The Falcons went on to win the game 49 - 40.

challenging is that the team has moved up a league.

"Well, we are in the upper league this year and it is one of the best public schools leagues in the area," Johnson said. "We are going to have to work really hard to do well this year, but I think we can be successful if we stick together

and don't get down when we play bigger, stronger teams."

While facing stronger teams in an upper league seems daunting, Johnson is optimistic about the team's future.

"We work super hard and other teams aren't going to see us coming," Johnson said. ♦

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polaroids



Junior Nina Jayashankar performs in the McAfee Center at Saratoga Idol on Nov. 29.



Senior Chelsea Miller, freshman Cayla Zelanis and sophomore Madeline Ryan go to the Holiday Boutique on Dec. 1.



Junior Vivian Li does a battement kick during auditions for the winter guard on Dec. 1.



Senior Hannah Johnson dribbles down the court in a game against Monta Vista on Dec. 6.

buzzworthy >> Forging friendships through pen pals

BY Andy Fang

Like listening to a vinyl record or eating a sundae at an old-fashioned ice cream parlor, there seems to be a romantically nostalgic quality to communicating through handwritten letters. It was this desire to reconnect with the past that galvanized senior Jackie Gu to start a pen pal friendship with Prayuj Pushkarna from Singapore during her sophomore year.

"I specifically wanted a pen pal because I thought letters were a really quaint and old-fashioned way of befriending someone," Gu said. "There was something really nice about opening an actual letter."

After Gu and Pushkarna began writing, both saw benefits to conversing through letters.

"Writing and receiving letters feels

better because you know the time some has put into them," Pushkarna said, through email. "You can [also] draw on them so it's a lot more fun. In her letters, she drew random things like seals and turtles and I drew Pikachu and dogs."

Gu said the distance makes it easier to be more open.

"I felt like the distance made him seem like less of a tangible person, more like some entity that existed to write to me," Gu said. "It made it easier to confide in him and trust him."

Though Gu and Pushkarna conversed about typical subjects, such as hobbies, school and pop culture, Gu also used the letters as an educational opportunity.

"I wanted to know more about Singapore because I thought the government seemed very oppressive; you can't chew gum, and there is a death penalty for even possession of marijuana," Gu said.

"I thought the country must be completely difficult to live in."

The inception of Gu and Pushkarna's pen pal relationship almost seems serendipitous. Gu was writing an article about students with cultural worldliness for the now-defunct Bay Magazine during her sophomore year. Her friends, seniors Evaline Ju and Ashwini Velchamy, recommended Pushkarna, their friend from Challenger School, for an interview.

"I emailed him a list of only six questions and he typed up six pages in response. It was ridiculous," Gu said. "After reading his responses, I thought he sounded very interesting and wanted to get to know him better."

After half a year of conversing through letters, Pushkarna came back to California to visit during the summer and the two finally had a chance to meet.

"When we met in person, it felt some-

what natural," Gu said.

Soon, the two became fast friends, hanging out as often as three times a week.

"We hiked, watched movies, went to the park, made breakfast and had lunch together multiple times," Pushkarna said. "We became very close."

Gu and Pushkarna no longer send letters to each other but still talk frequently over the Internet. Although they're glad to have met each other, both would like to have another pen pal that they could never actually meet.

"I think the mystery of not knowing anything about the other person aside from what they choose to disclose to you is really cool," Pushkarna said. "I would be down to talk to anyone in the world." ♦



Traveling back in time with a record player

One of the many joys of Thanksgiving break besides the slight reprieve from the constant flow of school work is the chance to have a little free time — a concept we tend to forget about while living in work-centric Saratoga.

My family decided to capitalize on our spare time this year and finally got around to a project we had talked about for years: setting up my dad's old record player.

Although neither my older sister nor I had ever seen this record player, as it had yet to make an appearance since the mid 1980s, we had both heard stories about the "old" days of listening to records rather than blasting music through the always-tangled earphones of an iPod.

So we eagerly pulled the dusty record player down from a shelf in the

garage, along with two very heavy boxes filled with old records. Every band or musician seemed to be represented, from Pink Floyd to Bruce Springsteen to David Bowie to so many more, some of which were completely foreign to me.



Cristina CURCELLI
Curjelly

As soon as I heard the first record being played, I could tell there was no comparison in sound between this and a CD or an iPod. Call me old fashioned, but our generation is missing out.

It's hard to put a finger on exactly what that difference is, but the sound of a vinyl record has something unique and special that doesn't translate into the convenience and compact size of an iPod.

Listening to favorites from past decades that I had only ever heard on a CD was fascinating. The more popular records of the day certainly didn't

disappoint and my favorites that are on my iPod (all of The Police and U2 albums) sounded twice as nice. I also can't forget my beloved musical soundtracks — homework proved to be more difficult when my sister chose to play the original "Grease" record and all I wanted to do was sing along.

I'll be sure to spend some time over winter break hunting for more records. Rather than just listening to a song, records seem to take me on an imaginary trip back to a time when perhaps teenagers were not quite as obsessed and stressed with the SAT and college admissions.

Right now, I'm anxiously awaiting the time when I can sit back and relax with a cup of tea and an old Christmas album spinning in the record player, listening intently to the music without any stress clogging up my brain.

That sounds perfect right about now, don't you agree? ♦

>> togatalks

What will you do over Winter Break?

"I'm going to have some family from different states over and do lacrosse conditioning"



sophomore Varna Jammula

"I'm going to visit my family in Illinois and prepare for our Christmas celebration."



senior Benjamin Yang

topten

BEST THINGS ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS

- 10 Warm chocolate chip M&M cookies by the fireside on a cold winter night while petting Jimbo the Scottish Terrier.
- 9 Filching your parents' eggnog. Virgin eggnog, of course. We do not condone underage alcohol consumption at this fine educational institution.
- 8 No more waking up at 6:30 a.m. Now you wake up at 7 a.m. to the smell of mom's buttermilk pancakes
- 7 Finishing up college apps on New Year's Eve.
- 6 Enjoy a little Christmas love under the mistletoe. If there is no one present, treat yourself to some peppermint mocha
- 5 Buy presents for your parents... with their money.
- 4 Christmas presents! That creeper dressed like Santa at the mall says he has a few...
- 3 Watching "Elf" with your Buddies.
- 2 Wearing sweaters and sweatpants with no makeup on. Drake says you look beautiful like that.
- 1 Surviving Dec. 21, 2012.

>> Nikhil Goel
Rohan Rajeev