



Indian Cultural Awareness Club hosts first Garba at school



Halloween memories delight and spook



An overview of California's 2022 midterm Propositions



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NEW FACES ON BALLOT

5 Candidates vie for 3 School Board Positions



BY ShaanSridhar

Three seats on the district board are open in the Nov. 8 election. Five candidates are vying for the seats: Saratoga High parent and project organizer Misty Davies, private school teacher Chris Miller, tech executive and incumbent David Guidry, former LGHS science teacher Alex Shultz and former Los Gatos High math teacher Steve Chen.

The Falcon reached out to all five candidates with a standardized set of six questions to understand their qualifications, priorities and stances on pressing issues.

>> BOARD on pg. 4



Steve Chen



Misty Davies



David Guidry



Chris Miller



Alex Shultz

Graphics by ATREY DESAI and STEPHANIE SUN

Cuttlefish create robot for pumpkin-smashing event

BY MartinXu

As the goop and seeds of a newly mashed pumpkin were launched toward all four walls of the transparent enclosure, members of the school's flagship robotics team, MSET 6165 Cuttlefish, cheered in relief. Earlier this month, the Cuttlefish tested their pumpkin-smashing robot for the first time.

Its goal is to decimate carved pumpkins in an attempt to reduce and bring awareness to food waste and composting, especially after

Halloween.

Cuttlefish will showcase their pumpkin smasher at an event, STEM Madness at Saratoga High (SMASH), on Nov. 2 at 4 p.m. SMASH is intended for anyone interested in composting pumpkins or simply looking to continue the fun of Halloween.

In addition to the pumpkin smasher, there will be a robotics fair in which the audience can interact with other robotics teams in the community. Partnering with West Valley Composting, the team hopes to compost 300 pumpkins

and deliver all of the food waste gathered from the event to a composting plant in Campbell to reduce the waste caused by Halloween pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns in the community.

The inspiration of the Halloween-themed event came from senior hardware lead Emily Lu and her experience with composting.

Ever since her mom started composting for their garden in her freshman year, Lu said she has been fascinated with composting. After realizing food waste could be repurposed, she wanted to do more about it. Lu started off simple with vermicompost through a worm bin and composting food scraps.

Lu had previously learned of the numerous amounts of waste that pumpkins generate from Halloween, and after hearing about a team ramming pumpkins with their robots during a trip to Washington, D.C., she put the two concepts together to create a solution: a pumpkin smasher.

Composting pumpkins produces a significantly less amount of pollutants.

"There are a lot of jack-o-lanterns and other decorations that

are usually thrown away right after [Halloween], it's really unsustainable and bad for the environment," Lu said.

"I wanted to focus on composting the actual pumpkin and bringing awareness to food waste. Composting pumpkins breaks them down and produces a significantly less amount of pollutants."

The team originally had two potential approaches when designing the pumpkin smasher: The initial plan was a simple guillotine design consisting of a heavy block dropped from a reasonable height to smash the pumpkin.

>> ROBOTICS on pg. 2

Time: Nov. 2 at 4 P.M.
Location: Saratoga High

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Band makes big strides

BY AllisonTan & ZachZinman

As the marching band stepped on to the football field for a Senior Night performance on Oct. 14, a feeling of pride was easy to detect.

The countless hours of rehearsal over the past month and a half culminated in their 3rd to last home performance of the band season.

"The band worked really hard going into Senior Night," drum major Alison Okuno said. "It really paid off. There was just a re-

ally great showing of people and support for the seniors."

The band prepared all four parts of the show before the first competition. In previous years, learning the four movements didn't happen until the second or third competition.

"For as long as I've known the school's marching band, which has been since 2012, we haven't had the full show by our first competition, and this year, we did," Okuno said.

>> BAND on pg. 2

BAND

continued from pg. 1

"It really paid off. There was just a really great showing of people and support for the seniors."

The band prepared all four parts of the show before the first competition. This differs from previous years, in which learning the four movements didn't happen until the second or third competition.

"For as long as I've known the school's marching band, which has been since 2012, we haven't had the full show by our first competition, and this year, we did," Okuno said.

To accomplish this goal, the staff pushed the band and leadership team to learn faster than previous years.

"We were smarter about how we designed the show," performing arts chair and band director Jason Shiuian said. "From a teaching standpoint, I felt like we have been more vocal with the leadership team."

The first of four movements consists of Shiuian's interpretation of Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody."

This planted the seed for this year's theme of "Blossom," a symbol for "reaping what you sow."

The second, the age-old ballad "La Vie En Rose," symbolizes "that first flower that blooms," Shiuian said. The third is based on "Fantasia" and "Fugue in G" by Timothy Maher. "Ode to Joy" in the final part of the show represents the idea of springtime when all of the flowers bloom.

This is represented by the color guard flags, adding a sudden burst of color that concludes the show on a high note.

"Hopefully we communicate something to the audience that makes them feel something special," Shiuian said.

The band performed last weekend in Fresno in the Sierra Cup Classic (results were unavailable because of printing deadlines).

The next performance is in Sacramento at NorCal Super Show, happening on Nov. 5. ♦



Junior Naomi Hsieh, Rishab Melkote and senior Emily Lu work on the structural design of MSET Cuttlefish (6165)'s pumpkin smasher. The team organized the event to gain awareness and encourage composting in the community. Over the course of weeks, the team designed and tested the pumpkin smasher multiple times for their showcase which will occur on Nov. 2.

ROBOTICS

continued from pg. 1

reasonable height to smash the pumpkin. The team also considered using a pneumatic piston with a plate to push down onto the pumpkin using high air pressure to actuate and retract the piston.

Ultimately, Lu chose the latter option because it was more challenging and consistent.

"We decided to use pneumatics since it would be much more technically engaging for us, since we haven't worked with pneumatics before," Lu said. "And instead of having to rely on gravity, we could control the amount of force that we want to exert."

Lu described how the team spent a week on research and design meetings with mentors to ask questions and gain feedback on their ideas after committing to the idea.

The team began building in late August after researching and designing different parts for the pumpkin smasher with CAD (Computer Aided Design), and completed their first prototype by Sept. 6.

One of the main problems that the team

ran into while testing their first prototype was the lack of force when the plate came into contact with the pumpkin.

"It wasn't as exciting as I had anticipated," Lu said. "The plate was pretty large, so the pressure from the piston is distributed throughout the pumpkin and does not provide enough force to smash the pumpkin at one singular point of contact."

Lu had two possible solutions. The first was adding screws around the plate in order to guide the force in more concentrated areas or mimicking apple splitters. The second was attaching them to the plate in order to guide the pumpkin into breaking points.

Ultimately, she decided to go with the apple splitters since it was much longer than the screws and could cut into the pumpkin more efficiently, which did the trick.

Junior Jarrett Singh, who works on the hardware team, said that the solution worked out, and that he was especially proud at how they came together to create the pumpkin smasher in a timely manner.

"I think it was a major success," Singh said. "Though we were all new to this type of engineering, we all worked together really well and got the first iteration only a

few weeks after the initial idea. Even then, we iterated really efficiently and solved the problems together. That was really impressive to me."

Additionally, Singh said his contributions on the design and build team for the pumpkin smasher have been one of the highlights of his time in robotics.

"You don't smash pumpkins on a daily basis, especially with a pneumatic piston that we've built as a team," Singh said. "Working with stuff that I don't usually get to, like pneumatics and wooden structural frames, was a really cool learning opportunity."

Ultimately, Lu said that she and her team are satisfied with the final iteration of the pumpkin smasher and hope that the event will be as successful.

"It was rewarding seeing the pumpkin smasher come together from an idea to actually smashing a pumpkin for the first time," Lu said. "I'm really proud of our team for working together and our mentors for helping us with some of our challenges along the way. I hope that this event will bring fun and awareness to the community." ♦

Soundings literary magazine seeks a larger audience

THE NEW STAFF HOPES TO PUBLISH TWO ISSUES: AN ONLINE EDITION IN WINTER AND A PRINT MAGAZINE IN SPRING

BY NIKHIL MATHIHALLI

During a normal October tutorial, English 11 Honors and Creative Writing teacher Amy Keys' classroom was filled with students. Throughout the 50-minute period, students on the editorial board of the school's art and literary magazine, Soundings, discussed upcoming deadlines, finalizing theme choices and future fundraising possibilities.

Since 1986, when it was first created, Soundings has featured students' submissions that go beyond the standard English and art curriculum. It provides an opportunity for students to showcase their creativity in areas such as poetry, short stories, photography and art.

This year, the magazine is led by Keys as the adviser along with three seniors who are the editors-in-chief: Christina Chang, Anastasia Panidis and Shaan Sri-dhar. Soundings will have two issues: one in the fall semester and another in the spring. The magazine during the fall semester will

be an online publication — due to the cost of print issues being high — while the spring semester one will be produced in hard copy.

Funding Soundings has been challenging in recent years. According to Keys, the magazine was printed and published using the excess money the yearbook program had after printing their issues. However, due to COVID-19 creating financial difficulties for Yearbook, the magazine staff needs to fundraise in order to keep the print issue alive.

A typical Soundings magazine costs around \$3,000 to print, so the outreach team — led by senior Dyne Lee and sophomore Anika Kapasi — is coming up with various ways of fundraising and fundraisers with local food places.

Keys hopes the magazine can be on a better footing as a result of the efforts this year. In the past, Soundings has had a small staff with little to no publicity within the school. Keys, with a more extensive team this year, wants



Keys



FALCON // NIKHIL MATHIHALLI

The Soundings magazine staff meets during tutorial to discuss editorial deadlines and advertising on Oct. 19.

to make it a better-known group within the school. In light of this, she is requiring her creative writing honors students — those taking the class for more than one year — to submit stories to the Soundings magazine and other publications.

Before the pandemic, Keys noted that many students who were a part of the Soundings were also a part of the Falcon newspaper staff — this was largely due to journal-

ism adviser Michael Tyler being the adviser of the Soundings magazine before Keys.

"A lot of the people on the staff already knew how to create a task ladder and an organized schedule detailing the submission deadlines," Keys said. "However, after the pandemic, we were starting with a brand new staff who were not necessarily involved in journalism or creative writing."

She said that last year was spent

trying to figure out a standard of how Soundings will proceed in future years and is now hopeful that the staff is able to receive the submission and create the magazine in a timely fashion.

"I think it's a great opportunity [to submit to Soundings]," Keys said. "[Soundings is] a way for people to express their creativity in writing and art, and I hope students will do that with the magazine." ♦

>> falconfigures

29 Sounding staff members

36 years since Soundings' first issue

2 issues of Soundings this year

60 submissions in 2021 Soundings



The Saratoga Downtown Starbucks location has been shut down as of Oct. 2. The shutdown is mostly due to staffing and lease problems.

FALCON // SHREYA RALLABANDI

Downtown Saratoga Starbucks closes

BY ATREY DESAI, JONATHAN SI & ANDY ZHU

The Starbucks located in downtown Saratoga closed on Oct. 2 because of a combination of staffing problems and the end of a lease, according to senior Victoria Prillwitz, who worked at the location between March and August.

When contacted, Starbucks representatives did not respond for comment.

Prillwitz said the location was convenient because of its short distance from the school.

Still, despite the store's closure, Prillwitz said she thinks there won't be too much of a negative impact since there is a nearby Starbucks located at the Argonaut Center and Quito Village.

However, for senior Shan-

non Wang, that particular Starbucks location was a primary spot to hang out with friends right after school.

"I was surprised when I heard it was getting shut down because it was usually really busy," she said. "I don't really go downtown anymore since my friends and I usually just went to hang out at Starbucks."

Junior Maren Hofman, who has been working at the Starbucks located in the Argonaut plaza since this summer, said the closure will have a negative impact.

"It was the one place downtown that was directed more towards the younger community here in Saratoga because everything else is mostly fancier restaurants," Hofman said. "Now, kids don't really have a place to go after school." ♦

Language barrier sparks film passion

BY ANIKA KAPASI

When senior Darren Guo moved from China to Saratoga in seventh grade, he spoke little English. Until his English improved, he had a hard time in most of his classes — except during his media arts elective.

"Media arts and filmmaking was something that my language barrier didn't bar me from being good at," he said.

Guo liked the class so much that he took the same elective in eighth grade and, when he came to Saratoga High, he knew the Media Arts Program (MAP) was the "obvious choice" for him.

"There's the aspect of filmmaking [that allows] self-expression and fulfillment, which is what I [discovered in middle school]," Guo said.

While in MAP, his talent for filmmaking was recognized last year during SMASH'N, an event held at the end of the school year to award the year's best projects. In May, Guo won three awards for his films: best curricular project, best documentary and best American story. Mike Davey, Guo's history teacher in his sophomore and junior year, described him as a humble, responsible and quick-witted leader who must have had "extra hours in the day" to get all of his projects done.

Over the years, Guo's passion for filmmaking grew, and when the leadership class decided to create a dedicated commission for the tech aspect of leadership



Courtesy of DARREN GUO

Senior Darren Guo films former mayor Yan Zhao's campaign video.

events, Guo applied for and earned the lead position as a result of his filming and editing abilities. The homecoming reveal video played on Aug. 16 during the Food Truck Fest and the football hype film aired during the first rally on Sept. 19 were made by Guo and the rest of the commission. Along with creating films, they are responsible for handling the audio equipment and recordings for quad days.

Currently the commission is creating a video for the Trunk or Treat event on Oct. 29, with the concept of the video being similar to the Homecoming theme reveal video. While he has often been told to submit his films to festivals, Guo said he has "never felt the time or need to do that." However, for his senior year, he is required to submit his group's MAP Capstone project, a 10-minute film, to a film festival and is curious to see the result of his submission.

"My project is about a member of a search team in a post-apocalyptic world facing a moral dilemma when they encounter an infectious monster," Guo said. "Currently, the film is in pre-production and I have finished a draft script."

Along with his MAP and his commission's films, Guo has worked on various outside projects, recently working with former mayor Yan Zhao for her 2022 campaign.

He said he hopes to pursue film in the future, applying to the film programs at USC, UCLA, Chapman University and Loyola Marymount College.

"To me, filmmaking is really like any other form of art," Guo said. "It's the process of having what you imagine coming to life in a tangible medium, which is the part I have found to enjoy the most." ♦

ICAC officers arrange first school-wide garba in gym

THE EVENT, WHICH OCCURRED ON OCT. 8, INCLUDED TRADITIONAL DANCES, A FLASH MOB AND DINNER

BY KAVYA PATEL & SARAH THOMAS

The school's large gym hummed with the energy of 400 students and parents celebrating the Hindu holiday Garba on the evening of Oct. 8.

Garba is a traditional Gujarati holiday, focusing on garba dances and dandiya portions. The event was split into two parts: First were the garba dances, where participants danced in a circle around the Goddess Amba, who was the centerpiece. After students and parents had dinner, the event resumed with more garba and dandiya — a stick dance with partners.

About \$12,000 in revenue was raised from sales of 400 tickets, priced at \$30 per person, according to Indian Cultural Awareness Club (ICAC) officers. The cost of the ticket covered dinner from Chaat Bhanu, paying the DJ and custodial staff and purchasing decorations. Still, some of the funds were conserved in order to be donated. The officers said a specific charity hasn't been chosen yet, but all total donations will be made later in the year with profits from all of their events, including Bombay in the Bay.

The ICAC officers this year are seniors Ananda Agarwal, Risha Desai, Avani Gupta, Isha Jagadish, Annika Muju, Varun Shah and Ojas Somani. In addition to the traditional Garba dances, there was also a Flash Mob dance taught by the Toga Tamasha team and other members in charge of setting up the event.

"The BNB officers and parents planned the flash mob," Somani said. "My sister and I had done a flash mob for other Garba events so the officers thought it would be a good

idea to include it in the event program."

Planning the event itself required a large time commitment from the officers and their parents. The event had been proposed for four years to ICAC, but had been rejected until this year. The club spent around two months planning the event.

Setting up for garba required Muju and other officers to spend significant time preceding the event setting up. The officers said that scheduling conflicts with a band competition made it hard for some students to help set up, a challenge they overcame.

"Garba has always been a celebration of community and unity."

SENIOR Ojas Somani

Afterward, ICAC officers agreed that the only problem was that the gym wasn't big enough and a larger venue would work better.

Though Garba is a holiday usually celebrated by Hindus, the officers were excited to see a wide variety of the community in attendance.

Although the majority of Garba focused on cultural dances like dandiya, the event turned into a school-dance-style mosh pit at the end, with the exception that popular Bollywood songs were playing instead.

"Garba has always been a celebration of community and unity," Somani. "It helps the Saratoga community get a lot closer not only to Indian culture but to each other." ♦

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Graphic by SHAAN SRIDHAR

Steve Chen: former LGHS math teacher

What are your background and qualifications?

I believe I can bring a balanced and educated perspective to the board as a former LGHS teacher, parent to three grown children who've also attended LGHS and former sales executive.

I graduated from Stanford with a degree in electrical engineering. While I spent my first 30 working years in the tech industry, deep down I always wanted to teach.

So, about eight years ago, I pivoted and got my masters degree in education at Santa Clara University and have taught math at LGHS until this past June.

What are your thoughts on employee hiring and retention?

On retention, I would want to understand the reasons why our recently departed employees left, along with the top job dissatisfaction issues with the remaining staff.

I'd then work with the superintendent to make sure there is a plan in place to address these issues going forward.

For new staffing positions, I would re-

view the interview process to ensure there's a mutual match of skills, interests and organizational fit between the job candidates and the hiring team.

Better hiring practices should improve retention rates if the staff are better matched to their job function and work team.

How can the schools better address student mental health?

I believe the current administration and board have done a good job prioritizing student mental health concerns.

There's a number of programs available, including wellness centers, on-site and on-call therapists and academic support services.

I would continue to focus on messaging, making sure students, parents and staff are aware of these services and de-stigmatizing any negative connotations these services may have.

More importantly, I would want to create metrics to track how much each resource was being used to gauge effectiveness and to determine future needs.

What is the role of board members?

As a former teacher, I would definitely want to share my observations and experiences with the superintendent and other board members.

That said, I think the board position is one of oversight. My job is to ensure that any final recommendation made by the administration is logical, thorough and includes input by all stakeholders: students, parents and teachers.

Do you support renewing the parcel tax?

Yes, I support the parcel tax. My highest priority as a board member is to ensure the renewal of this tax when it expires in 2025.

I would also work with the other board members, administration and community to determine if there is support for a tax higher than the current \$49 rate.

For example, our communities have recently approved a parcel tax of \$67 and \$335 (plus a 2% annual increase) for Saratoga Union School District (SUSD) and LGUSD, respectively. Can the high school district also pass a parcel tax with an increased rate?



Courtesy of STEVE CHEN

What are your other priorities?

Job one should be to investigate increases in other funding sources, either one-time or ongoing.

At the same time, we should go through the budget to make sure we are doing everything we can to streamline expenses that don't impact the classroom.

On sustainability, solar is great but can we find a community sponsor or obtain an infrastructure grant to help pay for the up-front capital costs?

I see declining enrollment as another issue.

Optimizing the course curricula for both high schools with smaller student bodies will be an ongoing challenge. ♦

David Guidry: incumbent board member

What are your background and qualifications?

I am a current board member running for re-election, so I have four years of experience in this position. Previously, I was very active in the SHS community, including being President of the SHS Foundation and Chaperone Lead for the marching band. I have an engineering degree from UC Berkeley and a master's degree in business administration from London Business School, as well as a long, illustrious career in high tech. I'm also very involved in our community, including being President of the Friends of the Saratoga Libraries — this year's Organization of the Year! — and a Rotary member.

What are your thoughts on employee hiring and retention?

We recently experienced some big losses in our district for a variety of reasons, most not due to salaries, but we have been able to replace all of them with excellent people. Our district is considered one of the best places to work in our area and we

consistently have many candidates apply for any open position. Still, staff retention is very important and the key is providing competitive compensation and excellent working conditions. We accomplish these through negotiations with our unions and I'm proud that we reached agreement with them for over five years using the cooperative IBB method.

How can the schools better address student mental health?

This has been a primary focus for me, and the board, during the past four years and we have taken several steps to help address mental health. I'm particularly proud of our Wellness Centers and that we have added a College and Career Counselor at SHS. We have made great strides dealing with some very tough issues at LGHS, but we can do more to help SHS with key issues students face there. I'm particularly concerned about academic stress and I'd like to see us work closer with our students to find ways to better support them in dealing with this stress.

What is the role of board members?

The board is currently discussing this issue with our new superintendent now, as part of our effort to update the governance handbook. Board responsibilities include hiring a superintendent and evaluating their performance. The board is also responsible for setting the vision and providing guidance on the priorities for the district, and performing oversight of the district to ensure that we stay financially secure and are moving in the right direction. The board is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the district, nor should it directly manage any of the staff.

Do you support renewing the parcel tax?

We are one of several basic aid districts in our area, where our core funding is based on local property taxes rather than the number of students in our schools. These taxes currently supply 83% of our total revenue, with the parcel tax being less than 1.5% today. That parcel tax will be up for renewal during the next board's term and I am open to increasing it, but we



FALCON // ATRÉY DESAI

need to have a clear message for how it will be used so that we can get the support we need from our community to pass it.

What are your other priorities?

These are just some of the many issues that the board is addressing right now. One area that will be important for our district to address in the near term is declining enrollment and how we will continue to support important programs like drama with fewer students. We also need to continue working to achieve the goals we set in our latest strategic plan, which is focused on further improving the educational experience of our students. As a board trustee, know that I always have and will always do what is best for all of our students. ♦

Chris Miller: former LGUSD board trustee

What are your background and qualifications?

I graduated from Los Gatos High and attended Santa Clara University. In 2019, I received a doctoral degree in education in curriculum and instruction and recently graduated with a master's degree in clinical psychology. I enjoyed working as a substitute teacher at LGHS and SHS. In 2004, I was elected at age 23 to the LGUSD board, serving two terms. Currently, I am a 10th and 11th grade religious studies teacher at a high school in the East Bay.

What are your thoughts on employee hiring and retention?

Staff retention is an essential element of a successful organization, and we need to address the problem's physical and personal satisfaction aspects. Employee salaries must keep up with the cost of living, and quality health care should be offered to employees and their families. Also, we need to be sure that our teachers are supported by the administration and their departments. As a prospective board member, I will advocate for outside-the-box

thinking around teacher recruitment and retention. This includes the possibility of teacher housing and incentive programs within the district.

How can the schools better address student mental health?

The mental wellness of our students, staff and faculty is of utmost importance. Sadly, approximately 40% of students at both LGHS and SHS in the 2020 California Healthy Kids Survey reported that they experienced chronic sadness or hopelessness in the previous 12 months. When students feel safe at school, they can learn. I am honored to have been involved in writing California Senate Bill 224, which was recently signed into law. School districts that offer health instruction must include a mental health component. You can learn more at this website: <https://steinberginstitute.org/champion/chris-miller/>.

What is the role of board members?

The five-member governing board is legally, morally and ethically responsible for oversight of the school district. How-

ever, the governing board has one direct employee — the superintendent. Ideally, the superintendent communicates with the stakeholders in a given situation and makes a recommendation to the board. The board then reaches a consensus and gives direction to the superintendent, who works with their administration at the district and school site levels to implement the board's decision. During my eight years as a trustee, I worked with five different superintendents. I learned the importance of having a superintendent who clearly understood the board's direction.

Do you support renewing the parcel tax?

I am intimately familiar with the school district's budgets, having served on the district Budget Advisory Committee (2018 to 2020), the district Parcel Tax Oversight Committee (2017 to 2021) and the district Bond Oversight Committee (2021 to present).

The district has an existing parcel tax of \$49 per parcel, in which the funds raised are split between LGHS and SHS based on the size of the student body. I support



Courtesy of CHRIS MILLER

such a source of income, provided there is accountability and a provision for exemptions.

What are your other priorities?

The district has done a poor job of communicating with constituents. In fact, the district has not issued an annual report since 2016. In contrast, other districts mail yearly reports. I will advocate for more communication with the broader community, including issuing an annual report. Also, in comparison to similar communities, LGHS has higher 30-day marijuana and alcohol use rates. If elected, I will advocate for implementing a positive community norms campaign, a research-based approach to reduce substance use among the adolescent population. ♦

Misty Davies: SHS parent, project manager

What are your background and qualifications?

If elected, I will be the only member of the board who is a working parent and who currently has children in the district. My doctoral degree is from Stanford University in engineering and I manage engineering projects, so I understand how to interpret data and evaluate budgets. I've held many leadership roles across our local educational organizations, and have chaired math teams, musicals, robotics clubs and community events. I also received the 2018 Saratoga Union School District (SUSD) Volunteer of the Year Award and am endorsed by the LGSUHS Teachers Association. See more at www.mistydavies.com.

What are your thoughts on employee hiring and retention?

Unfortunately, there is no way to monetarily compensate public school employees for what they are actually worth, and there is probably only so much that the district can continue to do to make sure that sal-

aries here are monetarily competitive. I do believe that an important strategy the district can employ for recruiting and retaining employees is to look at rounded benefits packages, not only in terms of the quality of health care benefits, but also including looking at how the district's culture can support the emotional well-being of employees in the district.

How can the schools better address student mental health?

I applaud our district for its recent investments in wellness. However, much of this investment is focused on trying to repair damage that has already been done.

The next step is to change our school community cultures so that this damage is less likely to occur in the first place. To improve school culture and to help our community with resiliency, the highest priority needs to be on providing opportunities for every student for their individual success path, whatever that path is.

Students need to be given the space and grace to attempt new things, make mis-

takes and improve.

What is the role of board members?

The school board has a responsibility to ensure that all interested parties have been consulted in major decisions, and to ensure that public funds are spent wisely and responsibly. If the board has done its job correctly in the hiring of the superintendent and approving top-level processes and budgets, most day-to-day administration should be the responsibility of the superintendent. The superintendent should then further delegate those responsibilities to the experts in his or her administration and staff.

Do you support renewing the parcel tax?

I do support a parcel tax. Our community enjoys high property values largely because of the quality of our schools, and it is in our community's interest to maintain or even improve school quality. Our community is willing to support measures that are communicated clearly with solid evidence as good investments. I think we



Courtesy of MISTY DAVIES

can easily provide that clear communication and evidence.

What are your other priorities?

Substance abuse: This is a growing problem and a symptom of the mental health damage referenced in the question above.

Solar panels: Switching to renewable energy is not only the right thing to do, it is likely to have a financial benefit starting in the five- to 10-year time frame after implementation. With a plan in our back pocket, we can look for grant opportunities or public-private partnerships.

School safety: I've been approved as a Moms Demand Action Gun Sense Candidate. ♦

Alex Shultz: former LGHS science teacher

What are your background and qualifications?

I am a former LGHS science teacher and parent of three LGHS graduates and have been an active member of the community for 36 years.

I have a deep passion for the education of all of our students.

For 28 years, I enjoyed helping build a world class science program with my colleagues, and I've witnessed first-hand the value and impact of our district's education.

My professional and parental experiences provide me with a unique understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by those that make our schools great — our employees. Through this distinctive lens we can ensure the success of all students.

What are your thoughts on employee hiring and retention?

Our district's salaries are becoming less competitive with many of our surrounding districts, and we are losing teachers to neighboring districts.

Many of our neighboring districts have headquarters to the world's largest companies, which gives them a tax advantage over our district, which is primarily a bedroom community.

Over the long term, this will affect the quality of our programs. We must find a way to be more competitive if we are to maintain our place as one of the top-tier high school districts in the country. Our community values quality education and takes pride in the performance of our schools.

How can the schools better address student mental health?

In addition to providing on-site mental health counseling and guidance, we must continue to provide opportunities within our elective programs to meet the needs of and provide outlets for students outside the academic classes.

Students often find relief from daily stresses when they have a class like band, drama and the arts to look forward to on a regular basis.

It is vital that we retain and expand

these types of classes and encourage students to participate in them.

What is the role of board members?

I'm a believer that the school site is the best place for most decisions to be made, as the people at the school site have the best understanding of the needs and culture of the school.

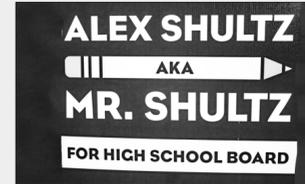
Certainly, the school board can facilitate discussions that help develop a consensus of opinion that finds the best solution to the problem.

Do you support renewing the parcel tax?

Yes, I think the best — and perhaps the only — way for us to compete for top notch talent at all positions within our district is a larger parcel tax. We need to be sure we retain and attract quality teachers for today and the future. In order to raise our compensation for all employees, the community needs to consider raising the parcel tax.

What are your other priorities?

Introducing a new coding curriculum:



FALCON // ATRÉY DESAI

I would like to partner with "coding boot-camps." The schools can provide physical space in exchange for spots for district students in the program. It might be possible for students to graduate from high school and go directly into the workforce in Silicon Valley.

Launching mentoring program for new teachers: I'd like to schedule an extra prep period for new teachers allowing them to work directly with an experienced teacher in their assigned subject area.

It would help them become integrated into their department faster as well as give them a better understanding of the school culture. ♦

Behind the scenes: How the district found a new superintendent and high-level staff

by LynnDai & JonnyLuo

The Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District (LGSUHSD) welcomed Bill Sanderson as its new district superintendent on July 5 after an extensive search process conducted by Hazard, Young and Attea (HYA) search consultants Diane Siri and Carolyn McKennan.

The process, which sourced applicants from all across the country, involved a detailed collaboration between HYA and the school board.

Board president Katherine Tseng said the board immediately began the process of hiring a new superintendent after former superintendent Mike Grove announced his retirement in April due to chronic health concerns. This process is the only hiring decision that the board makes, (hiring of all other staff members is relegated to the superintendent), which makes hiring the right superintendent vital to the district's success, she said.

The process involved surveying and interviewing 458 certified staff (teachers with credentials), classified staff (support staff members), administrators and students.

These interviews and surveys were used to determine what traits the community valued in their next superintendent.

"Sometimes we would joke that the community wanted so many things that we needed a saint to become our new superintendent," Tseng said.

Working with HYA, the school board posted job openings in forums across the country. After screening each individual with the consulting firm, they began a three-round interview process for selecting the next superintendent.

"We held meetings and check-ins with our HYA counselors nearly every other day," Tseng said. "We wanted to ensure that all stakeholders — principals, community members and staff — were included in the process to help determine the best talent to fit our school leadership profile."

The school board and other stakeholders also took an extra step beyond the three-round interview by conducting a site visit to the superintendent candidate's school district, where they met with the candidate and their superiors. In the meantime, Superintendent Grove worked until the day the new superintendent came into office to ensure a smooth transition.

Grove was also in charge of hiring interim employees who would fill in any empty positions while the new superintendent searched for long-term employees to fill those positions.

Superintendent finalizes district hires after important departures

Going into the summer, the district faced significant staffing challenges because of retirements and relocations.

These key losses included former executive administrative assistant Jane Marashian, who retired after serving under multiple superintendents over the past 17 years, and former associate superintendent Carrie Bosco, who announced her departure to take a job as an associate superintendent at the Los Altos Mountain View School District after 10 years in LGSUHSD.

Additionally, human resources director Brian Safine returned to work at Saratoga



High as a guidance counselor, leaving a significant opening to fill. In order to fill these positions, Sanderson assembled a diverse hiring panel.

"We want to make sure the hiring process is inclusive and diverse, so the panel includes teachers and staff from different parts of the district," Tseng said. "We want new talent to reflect our district, so we formulated our hiring panel to be diverse and recruit people that can reflect our students."

"We want to make sure the hiring process is inclusive and diverse."

BOARD PRESIDENT Katherine Tseng

Mike Ramer is filling in for Marashian as executive administrative assistant until Oct. 31, when Tricia Zarevich will permanently fill the position. Zarevich has previously served as the Administrative Assistant in both the Carmel Unified School District and the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District for over ten years.

Additionally, on Aug. 31, the district announced the appointment of three new members to its leadership team.

Deepa Mukherjee, who previously served as Director of Curriculum, Instruction, English Learner Services and Alternative Education for San Jose Unified School District, is the new assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

Mukherjee also previously served as the principal and assistant principal of Leland High School and has over two decades of experience in high school education in the San Jose Unified School District.

Paul Belzer, who previously served as the assistant principal in the Half Moon Bay and

San Mateo Union High School Districts, is the new Director of Human Resources.

Most recently, he was the principal of Mills High School and Burlingame High School, and has over three decades of experience in public high school teaching and leadership.

Casino Fajardo is also joining the district as the Director of Facilities, Maintenance, and Operations, with over 20 years of experience in construction management. Previously, Fajardo has served as the Director of Construction and Modernization in the Morgan Hill Unified School District and has most recently worked in Dublin Unified School District.

Sanderson aims to foster relationship with community

Before serving as the new LGSUHSD superintendent, Sanderson taught in San Francisco and in his South Carolina hometown, where experiences with segregation in his childhood education have largely come to shape his philosophy at work.

Sanderson witnessed the impact of segregation and tracking (putting students in fast or slow courses based on perceived aptitude) first-hand at the middle school he attended.

Alice Burning Middle School split students into three tracking groups, with the most advanced group consisting of only whites and the least advanced group comprising nearly all African Americans, with the exception of Sanderson.

However, Sanderson and a few other students from his tracking group were pulled out privately by a teaching assistant to receive a preliminary assessment on the mathematical concepts they were supposed to understand, and if they did well, they would move to the advanced group.

"I don't know why we were chosen to be assessed, but [having the opportunity to be

formally assessed on my skills] changed my life," he said.

Being exposed to the possibilities of improving his livelihood through education, Sanderson was inspired to pursue a career in education.

Early in his career, Sanderson held roles at different middle schools in South Carolina, serving as a biology teacher by trade, assistant principal and later principal of Northwoods Middle School in Charleston.

In 2003, Sanderson was encouraged by friends to apply to become the principal of Burton High School in San Francisco.

He worked as an assistant principal and principal in the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) until 2014, when Sanderson started developing the curriculum and instruction division in the school district, eventually helping increase graduation rates, especially among Blacks and English language learners.

"Burton High School really inspired me to become the educator that I am today," Sanderson said. "The relationships that I was able to build with the students, families and teachers really inspired me to do that work because I'm able to engage with these young people on a different level. Even as I've moved into leadership positions now, I still

schedule to be in schools at least two days a week to stay connected."

Sanderson said he is strongly motivated to work in education because of the impact that education has had on his life, having grown up with parents who hadn't graduated high school.

"I deeply believe that public education is a cornerstone of our democracy," Sanderson said. "I came out of multi-generations of poverty, and education changed that trajectory for me; we should give every single student that same opportunity. That's why I do this work and that's why I've done it for over three decades." ♦



Sanderson

Graphic by LYNN DAI

Merit-based college aid needs rethinking

In 2017, more than half of eligible need-based aid applicants in 10 states, including Illinois and Delaware, did not receive any financial support for college. The students in those states are not alone: In the same year, more than 900,000 qualified financial aid applicants in the U.S. were turned away due to a lack of state funds.

While financial aid is not the only way to pay for higher education, the alternatives — qualifying for merit scholarships, working during school, taking out unsubsidized student loans or delaying going to college entirely — are not always feasible paths for students looking at bills in the tens of thousands.

While spending on financial aid by colleges increased by 21% pre-pandemic between 2014 and 2017, the money spent on merit scholarships grew nearly double that, increasing 37% in the same time frame. The problem is that this merit aid often takes away financial aid from those who truly need it.

According to a 2019 report by the National Center for Educational Statistics, "students in the highest 25% income range received a greater amount of third-party, non-federal, merit-based aid (\$11,300) on average compared with all other income levels, including those in the lowest 25% income range (\$7,500)."

Many merit aid programs assess students based on inequitable standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT, which the UC system dropped the use of in 2021 after they were proven to discriminate against certain groups.

According to the Washington Post, in 2013, SAT test takers whose families earned more than \$200,000 a year had an av-

erage combined score of 1714 out of 2400, while test takers whose families earned less than \$20,000 a year had an average combined score of 1326. Additionally, Asian and white Americans achieved far higher scores than other ethnic groups.

Students with less affluent backgrounds are at a disadvantage as wealthier students generally come from better-funded schools which prepare them better for standardized tests, and wealthier students are also able to afford test-preparation services.

Other factors that impact merit-based scholarships, such as GPA and extracurricular activities, are also problematic. High performance in class correlates with a high GPA — but it is also known that expensive private schools tend to have higher grade inflation than public schools.

The same is true for extracurriculars: While some students may have time to work on their nonprofits (which hopefully don't suddenly disappear after college applications) or study for academic competitions, others may have to work or help around in the house to support their families, and thus may not be exposed to such opportunities.

In theory, tuition discounts, an often proposed alternative to merit scholarships, should help college become more affordable to students.

However, with discounts, colleges should lower tuition for every student, and the high costs still disproportionately hurt less affluent students, so the money used by colleges to lower tuition would be better spent on need-based financial aid.

Determining eligibility for



ANNIE LIU

scholarships based on merit requirements is simply unfair to lower-income students who are not only hurt in the college admissions process due to the emphasis on standardized tests but also continuously hurt after entering college due to the popular "bait-and-switch" model, where financial aid shrinks significantly after freshman year.

A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research revealed that the HOPE scholarship, a form of merit-based aid offered to Georgia residents, actually increased ethnic and racial gaps in enrollment. Similar results occurred in other merit programs, such as New Mexico's Lottery Success Scholarship and Tennessee's Education Lottery

Scholarship. The research proved that merit-based aid actually exacerbates the racial gaps in college attendance rates, since low-income, non-white students are less likely to qualify for the aid and thus pay higher costs.

Federal programs, colleges and institutions offering merit-based scholarships should change their current systems. All programs should enforce an income ceiling as an eligibility requirement. It has been shown that throwing money at wealthy students does not do much for enrollment or graduation rates, but by funding financial aid programs, the money will actually go to helping worthy students who need it. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief
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Shaan Sridhar

Opinion Editors
Avani Kongetira
Nilay Mishra

Writer
Sarah Zhou

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 23-6 in favor of this article.

College visits do not live up to expectations

by AtreyDesai & MinsuiTang

"Students interested in learning more about [insert college name], please report to the College and Career Center at the beginning of the tutorial."

Students eager to depart from their second-period classes are often greeted by these monotonous declarations during daily announcements. On paper, these college representatives' visits provide insights regarding a particular university and help seniors establish a list of colleges to apply to.

In reality, they are usually unproductive. Not only do these sessions turn into 40-minute advertisements for the schools, but their structure often means they are least beneficial to their primary users: seniors.

The bad: generic information

Finding generic information about a college is as easy as searching on Google for the name of the university followed by "general information" or "student life." Representatives do not need to spend the bulk of their time talking about the structure of different colleges or, even worse, abstract ideas like the school motto. All of this can be found on the school website.

For those who argue that students shouldn't be expected to

know this information ahead of time, simply attach relevant key facts to the calendar invite on Naviance. Students need to reserve a seat in the College and Career Center anyway, so getting a 2-minute summary or an on-line pamphlet beforehand can allow representatives to cover more niche aspects of the school and answer more student questions, such as giving a more insightful picture of what life is actually like there by, for example, having a current student walk us through their typical day in college.

In addition to this, representatives should replace the cliché "just be yourself because we love diversity" mantras with useful application tips: What types of essays are not recommended? What has stood out to you in the past? Should the SAT be self-reported or sent in an official score report? Prioritizing this type of information realistically reduces the burden on students and the time needed to find out niche tidbits that actually make or break an application.

The worse: overcrowded rooms

Speaking of seat reservations, the entire structure of college visits at the school needs to be reevaluated. The CCC was remodeled for the express purpose of housing college visits in a convenient



MIN SUI TANG

location. Yet, crowded conditions mean students end up peeking in through the windows and sitting alongside the sink in the back.

There already exists a larger, more acoustically viable place to house visits on campus: the McAfee Center. The first big college visit — from USC — was housed here, but future events all went back to the CCC.

The school can institute specific policies to alleviate some of these grievances. For example, moving all visits to the McAfee and reserving the CCC exclusively for one-on-one or group advising sessions can allow students to actually hear the representatives and have enough seats for everyone.

Even if opening the McAfee isn't feasible every day, the administration should prevent overcrowding by restricting the sessions to seniors by actually enforcing the Naviance-based registration system.

These rep visits are easily de-

railed by the non-seniors allowed in. While some underclassmen are curious about a specific college, seniors should get priority as they are prospective applicants.

Most likely, these non-seniors come to establish the wonder child of college admissions: "demonstrated interest," or how interested a student is in attending a specific institution.

We hate to break it to you, but the majority of universities don't consider demonstrated interest. Underclassmen and juniors should be banned from visits from colleges that don't even consider this factor; attending random college information sessions a year before applications even open is simply unnecessary and inconsiderate to seniors who are in the midst of their applications.

College visits have the potential to be invaluable, but in their current form, they remain a redundant source of information at best and a waste of time at worst. ♦

togatalks

Are you happy with the changes the district has been making?

"I'm excited for Sanderson. I don't think he has forgotten how to be a teacher, which is encouraging."

Science teacher **Lisa Cochrum**

"I was very happy to have time to work in my classroom before students showed up."

Chem teacher **Kathy Nakamatsu**

"I can't say whether I'm happy or sad, but I'm adjusting [to the new district changes]."

Special Ed teacher **Brian Elliott**



We wish the COVID-19 pandemic was over; it's not

By Nikhil Mathihalli & Anthony Wang

On Aug. 31, the FDA approved updated booster shots in an effort to mitigate threats posed by new Omicron variants. Despite this, many Americans aren't scheduling their boosters and seem to have dismissed COVID-19 as no longer a threat.

This past summer was filled with travel and social get-togethers — after two years of COVID-19 uncertainty, many people decided to leave the country, attend sporting events and even go to crowded concerts and rallies. In truth, the threats from COVID-19 are far from over as much as we wish they were. Immunity from both vaccination and past exposure continues to decrease, and new COVID-19 variants will continue to appear, throwing uncertainty into whether the established systems of protection against the virus are sustainable.

When it comes to preventing the spread of the virus, the CDC has decided to not pursue a policy of complete containment of the spread of the virus, shortening the isolation times for those who test positive to five days and lifting the requirement of self-isolation for those exposed to the virus, despite the steady daily cases. As such, the U.S. is heading toward a future in which the disease becomes endemic, turning into a recurrent seasonal phenomenon like the flu.

This decision by the CDC is sensible: It is very difficult to completely stop the transmission of highly virulent diseases like COVID-19. Zero-COVID policies like the

one currently in place in China significantly stunt economic growth, something undesirable for Western capitalist countries like the U.S.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, over 14 variants of COVID-19 have been discovered — the most recent being the Omicron BA.5 variant. As such, the threat of a new and possibly stronger variant of COVID-19 still largely exists. Just because the current variants are less dangerous than some of the original ones does not mean the world is safe.

Just because the current variants are less dangerous than the original ... does not mean the world is safe.

To contrast, look at the flu. Estimates of COVID-19's mutation rate vary wildly but generally lie in the range between 0.0005 and 0.002 nucleotide substitutions per site per year, comparable to the 0.0005 and

0.0026 average of Influenza A and B. Nevertheless, COVID-19 remains more than 10 times as deadly, with the biweekly case fatality rate, the ratio between deaths and cases, fluctuating between 0.5% and 1%, and the case fatality rate of the flu being around 0.06%.

Thus, these seasonal outbreaks are far less lethal than COVID-19. In fact, experts predict that even if the pandemic terminates by the end of 2022, it will likely still take another year for the mortality rate to be comparable to the flu.

Before that time, though, it is necessary to remain cautious, especially as our immunity begins to wear off. Recent studies have also shown that a COVID-19 vaccination shot is only highly effective for about three months after it is administered.

Despite this, only 69% of people who have been vaccinated in Santa Clara County have received their first booster shot, compared to an 87% vaccination rate for the first and second doses. Only 60% of the Santa Clara County population is protected from the current Omicron variants of COVID. As new variants appear and immunity wears off, this number will continue to drop.

So what should be done in order to continue minimizing the risk of COVID? For starters, it's important to limit the number of "heavy-contact" social gatherings. Yes, we are at the point in the pandemic where social gatherings are generally safe and allowed, but with the current vaccination rate and the possibility of stronger COVID-19 variants, superspreader events such as social gatherings are one of the largest reasons for an increase.

In addition, it is vital that the unvaccinated get vaccinated and continue receiving booster shots in order to keep our immunity high. Booster shots need to be advertised on a larger scale — pharmaceutical companies and local health offices have the power to encourage these booster shots and should do so.

Vaccination programs should be carried on with continuous support instead of letting their funding dry up. We cannot be apathetic and let a preventable wave or variant arise.

At this point, the threat of the virus is steadily decreasing. Let's do the best we can to ensure that this threat dies down as soon as possible. ♦

» falconfigures



Releasing Brittney Griner should only be the start

By Zachary Zinman

Fearful, crushed and remorseful, Brittney Griner, one of the WNBA's greatest talents, spoke through the bars of her prison cell. As she apologized for her illegal possession of four vape cartridges containing hash oil in Russia, her eyes repeatedly drooped to the ground, her voice monotone with utter defeat. Tightly clutching the bars of the cage, Griner visibly fought back her tears.

"I want to apologize to my teammates, my club, and the fans for the mistake that I made and the embarrassment I brought onto them," Griner said. "I never meant to hurt anybody. I never meant to break any laws here."

At face value, this exchange seems fair — though, with some research, the swap starts to become questionable.

Griner, a 7-year veteran of a Russian women's basketball team called UMMC Ekaterinburg, has been detained since Feb. 17, after being arrested at the Sheremetyevo International Airport outside of Moscow. (Sadly, female professionals go there during their offseason to earn the bigger money they don't get in the WNBA.)

As she pleaded for the ruling not to "end her life" in the prison of Khimki, Russia, on Aug. 4, she heard the court's decision: a prison sentence of 9 years.

She was charged for breaking Article 229.1 of the Russian Criminal Code, which forbids the trafficking and smuggling of illegal drugs.

Griner clearly does not deserve her lengthy prison sentence because of the small quantity of marijuana that she claims she took accidentally.

Putin's regime is exploiting Griner, a prominent figure in the U.S., as a political play aimed at highlighting the limitations of American power; President Biden needs to alter his approach to free her by offering a different prisoner exchange to Russia and working to help all detained Americans there.

Though it's natural to feel sympathy for

Griner's plight, it's also easy to lose sight of the difficult position the basketball star's actions have put the U.S. in.

If the Biden administration fails to get Griner freed, the Russian regime could successfully humble the president by showcasing his foreign limitations, reflecting negatively on the U.S. as a world power.

If the Biden administration frees Griner, he will face the domestic backlash of deprecating the 40,000 Americans within its borders incarcerated for marijuana offenses, according to Forbes.

Biden has approved a prisoner exchange of convicted arms dealer Viktor Bout in return for the release of Griner and Paul Whelan, a former U.S. Marine who has been imprisoned in Russia for over three years on espionage charges.

At face value, this exchange seems fair — though, with some research, the swap starts to become questionable.

In 2012, Bout, nicknamed the "Merchant of Death" as one of the world's most infamous arms dealers, was sentenced to 25 years in a U.S. prison for terrorism charges.

He attempted to sell missiles to a Columbian militant group, Michael Braun, former chief of operations for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, called Bout "one of the most dangerous men on the face of the Earth" in 2010.

Looking deeper into the details of the prisoner exchange, it is imperative for Bout to stay in prison. It is not worth giving up a dangerous asset to terrorist organizations around the world for a high-profile athlete and former Marine.

In addition, there are other Americans stuck in Russia who deserve the president's attention.

Around six months before Griner's arrest, Marc Hillard Fogel, a teacher and lecturer who taught the children of U.S. diplomats for over 10 years, was arrested in the same Russian airport for possession of a one-half ounce of marijuana in different forms.

Though his possession of medical cannabis was approved by a doctor in the U.S., he was still sentenced to 14 years in a Russian prison, five years more than Griner.

However, the president only approved the exchange for Griner and Whelan, ignoring Fogel's imprisonment even though it



Graphic by ZACHARY ZINMAN

happened before Griner's. "I support the swap," Michael McFaul, a former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, wrote on Twitter. "I just hope they include Marc Fogel in the deal."

Griner should not receive special attention from the U.S. government because she is a high-profile basketball player. As Fogel himself wrote in a letter, "teachers are at least as important as ballers."

It is important to mention that Griner has written to the president directly, asking him to not forget about the other American detainees.

Griner's advocacy for the other American prisoners abroad is commendable, but it does not change what has actually been proposed.

The president has not mentioned any sort of push to free Fogel — in this case, actions speak louder than words.

Now if the president's efforts to #FreeBrittney — pun intended — succeed, he

should spend just as much time attempting to free the 40,000 Americans in jail for marijuana offenses. Perhaps the federal government should direct its attention to the fact that more than 5 percent of arrests in the U.S. are for marijuana possession, according to Newsweek.

Just like any other person, Griner is more than her occupation. She is a wife, a friend and an inspiration to many young female athletes.

"I miss my wife!" Griner said in her letter to President Biden. "I miss my family! I miss my teammates! It kills me to know they are suffering so much right now."

Griner clearly does not deserve her extremely harsh prison sentence, but releasing Bout in exchange for her freedom would be an error.

Her mistake of bringing marijuana into Russia, should not be compounded by a diplomatic blunder from the president. Let's not have one mistake lead to another. ♦

ComedySportz wins crowd over with puns

By Victoria Hu & Sarah Zhou

At lunch on Fridays, 10 students in ComedySportz — the school's comedy improvisation team — meet in the ThermoDrama Center to practice the skill most needed for their success: thinking on their feet.

From cracking puns to thinking up funny skits, the members — freshman Beni Mercurio, Jo Begar and Apollo Burgess; sophomore Jay Louie; and juniors Vivienne Brooks, Ryan Cagliostro, Angeli Delacroix, Arushi Maheshwar, Ashly Henry and Ariana Tootoonchi — face off against each other in scene and head-to-head games.

"In acting, we have to be comfortable stage-fighting on the spot."



JUNIOR Vivienne Brooks

In preparation for performing their first public official game, however, the team practiced every lunch day in the week leading up to their performance.

The show took place on Oct. 7 at 7 pm in the ThermoDrama Center, with \$5 student tickets and \$7 adult tickets sold at the door.

The show's format was based on the comedy TV series "Whose Line is it Anyway?" and lasted around one hour, with 5 to 8-minute segments. Brooks said that improv topics were taken from audience sug-

gestions.

During the show, the 10 students were split into five-member "red" and "blue" teams, led by Brooks and junior co-captain Ryan Cagliostro. Team members competed both individually and together throughout the show. Points for the game were awarded based on which side the audience deems funnier by a vocal vote, which is refereed by a professional member of the adult San Jose ComedySportz team.

In addition to the intra-school game, the school team, advised by drama department head Benjamin Brotzman, also occasionally competes against other schools in the larger ComedySportz high school league. Since there are only roughly nine schools participating in the Bay Area, Brooks hopes to expand the league's reach.

"One of our goals for this year is to compete against more schools and help Los Gatos High start their own ComedySportz team," she said. "It would be fun to establish more connections with other high schools and even start an annual tournament."

In preparation for potential future competitions, Brooks is working on her own delivery as well as honing the skills of the four new members and five other returners. Leading alongside Cagliostro, she gives feedback and works collaboratively with members of the team to develop improvisation skills.

"Scenes and ideas come a lot more naturally to me now that I've been on the team for a while," Brooks said. "I'm still learning, and it's always cool to meet professionals and see what lots of time and practice can get you. Acting also made me close with my fellow teammates because we have to be comfortable stage-fighting each other on



Courtesy of VIVIENNE BROOKS

On Oct. 15 in the ThermoDrama Center, juniors Ashly Henry and Ariana Tootoonchi and sophomore Jay Louie practice stage fighting alongside the other ComedySportz members.

the spot without prior warning."

Though she found that being in a leadership position can occasionally be stressful, Brooks finds it enjoyable nevertheless. One of her favorite memories was during her first show as a captain with Cagliostro last school year.

"We decided to come [onto the stage] with [Cagliostro] on my shoulder, and as he was getting off he tripped on his cloak and fell over while last year's blue team captain was giving a speech," Brooks said. "The entire audience laughed, and the poor blue

team captain had no idea what was happening either."

Junior Ariana Tootoonchi, a member of the red team, describes ComedySportz as a fun and free space where she has been able to gain experience in the entertainment industry, an area she wants to pursue in the future.

"The improv and performances help with acting skills and it's a really fun and great space," Tootoonchi said. "I just want to make more memories that I'll always remember and laugh at in the future." ♦

Roc Marciano proves rap isn't just for young artists

By Vinay Gollamudi

Rahkeim Calief Meyer, better known by his stage name Roc Marciano, has been a respected figure in the underground hip-hop scene since the early 2000s. However, in a genre dominated by increasingly younger artists, the 44-year-old Long Island rapper has managed to deliver one of his most impressive efforts yet with his album "The Elephant Man's Bones."

The album, released Aug. 26, was a collaboration with The Alchemist (Daniel Maman), who is widely regarded as one of the best producers in the genre. Maman — who garnered attention for producing two songs, "Thug Musik" and "The Realest," for New York duo Mobb Deep in 1999 — manages to recapture the gritty sound of 1990s East Coast hip hop nearly 25 years later.

While hip hop albums have been getting longer, Marciano opted to make his album just 38 minutes. This was a smart decision, as the album sounds consistent throughout — there are none of the filler songs present on so many of the hip-hop albums released recently.

The album opens with "Rubber Hand Grip," which sets the tone of the album with its eerie sounding beat. While not one of the standout tracks, it transitions perfectly into the second track, "Daddy Kane," performed with fellow New York rapper Action Bronson. Both Marciano and Bronson deliver hard-hitting verses, which create imagery with their inventive similes.

The next two tracks, "Deja Vu" and "Quantum Leap," have a luxurious yet gritty sound to them. In the former, Marciano dismisses his age with the line "The crest on the Gucci knit embroidered // In my forties, I'm still looking boyish" reminding the listener that despite his age, his verses are more polished than most younger artists.

The title track, "The Elephant Man's Bones," is another standout. The Alchemist's piano beat conveys a reflective and nostalgic mood, making it one of the most

replayable on the album. Two of the tracks that are most reminiscent of the old-school sound are "Liquid Coke" and "Trillion Cut." On both tracks, Marciano delivers rhymes that remind the listener of '90s mafioso rap albums such as AZ's "Doe or Die" and Rakwon's "Only Built 4 Cuban Linx."

Behind the Alchemist's production, he manages to make a nearly 30-year old subgenre sound fresh and original. Marciano closes out the latter track by saying, "The scarf was a gift from Pablo Escobar // These ain't no regular old bars, this a five star restaurant," further contributing to the album's luxurious feel. Keeping in with his previous albums, it wouldn't sound out of place in a fancy restaurant or lounge.

In a genre dominated by increasingly younger artists, Marciano delivered one of his most impressive albums.

While the latter half of the album doesn't have as many standouts as the first, it manages to stay consistent and there are no truly weak tracks. "Zig Zag Zig" features a simplistic beat that shows Marciano's rapping ability at its best, and "Zip Guns" has a spookier sound — created by a piano chord in the background — that makes it sound as though it wouldn't be out of place on a horror movie soundtrack.

On the final track, "Think Big," Marciano boasts about his seniority, claiming that he's "still dominating the league after ten seasons." The track brings the album to a satisfying close that makes the listener want to go back and replay it.

Though it likely won't receive much mainstream attention, "The Elephant Man's Bones" sets the bar for high quality hip-hop in 2022. In a year filled with high-profile releases, Marciano's arguably tops them all. ♦

Marvel spirals downward into a formulaic cinema

LATEST RELEASES LIKE SHE-HULK GIVE INSIGHT INTO THE FUTURE INSTALLMENTS OF THE CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

By Divya Vadlakonda

Marvel's most recent show streaming on Disney Plus is "She-Hulk," a series centered around Jennifer Walters — the attorney cousin of Bruce Banner — played by Tatiana Maslany. She navigates through her personal and work life in the wake of a life-changing transformation.

While I like the show objectively, it is just one of the many shows that the well-oiled Marvel machine has pumped out recently, leaving the superhero market oversaturated.

It doesn't give viewers the same excitement as Marvel movies used to, reinforcing a question that has been looming since the release of "Avengers: Endgame": Is the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) losing its magic?

Marvel's Phase 4, comprising the films and shows set to be released from 2021 to 2022, has given me mixed feelings about the future of the franchise.

Putting out movies like "Eternals" (2021), "Thor: Love and Thunder" (2022) and "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" (2022) along with a multitude of television shows has left Marvel fans such as myself with a plethora of content, but the quality of the shows has been increasingly unsatisfying.

For the first time in a long time, I find myself not wanting to watch the next MCU release.

Just from 2021 to 2022, Phase 4 outnumbered the releases in Phase 1 to 3. However,

these shows seem like factory filmmaking: The studio puts out a bulk of content just because they can, and because they are so influential in the industry that they know millions of diehard fans will watch regardless of quality.

But recent projects aren't contributing to an overarching goal in the way that movies in Phase 1 to 3 were all built upon each other, working toward one big narrative in "Avengers: Endgame."

This is not to say that Marvel has been exclusively missing the mark: "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" is a great movie that portrays Asian Americans in a relatable and authentic way, with epic action scenes and solid lore that left me wanting to know more.

Additionally, "WandaVision" explores new facets of those characters and has satisfying and unexpected twists and turns.

But looking at what is to come in the MCU does not strike me with a sense of excitement anymore.

I'd like to see more films with scripts that don't make me cringe when I hear some of the lines, be amazed by the effects and fight scenes in a way that I haven't in a while and feel thrill when I hear that a new release is coming.

Perhaps Marvel's prime has passed.

Maybe it is a sign that we should say goodbye to the age of superheroes and make way for other cinema to dominate the scene.

All good things must come to an end, and Marvel is not an exception. ♦



She-Hulk



Shang-Chi

SPOOKY SPOTLIGHTS

TRICK-OR-TREAT: MY CHILDHOOD

BY BeverlyXu

Not once have I regretted spending three hours on the Halloween Eve of 2018 cutting out rounded cardboard rectangles, covering them with glossy poster papers scavenged from my grandpa's dusty bookshelf and then squeezing all the orange ink out of my poor Crayola marker for my sushi costume.

Dressing up for Halloween and trick-or-treating has always been the highlight of autumn for me — not the over-glorified pumpkin spice lattes (they taste like cinnamon-scented candles), nor the dry, flavorless turkey Americans stuff themselves with on Thanksgiving.

So please, don't be ashamed.

You're never too old to put on a costume and get a taste of some free candy. Trust me, it's sweeter when you don't have to pay for it yourself.

Since my parents decided to zip 4-year-old me up in a particularly disagreeable lady-bug costume, I have never in my life, not even once, skipped dressing up for Halloween and have always made my own costumes each year. From kindergarten to the beginning of middle school, my costumes ranged across the full spectrum of Disney characters: Snow White, Cinderella, Chip the Chipmunk and Snoopy — you know, the type.

In seventh grade, however, I had to be more creative, so I decided to start making puns (fun) from my own name (I

know I'm hilarious). So far, I've been the embodiment of Beverly Hills and a beaver (Beverly to Beaverly to Beaver), and the list goes on.

For me, Halloween is that one day where you don't have to be self-conscious and worry about what you're wearing. When everyone is either some variation of a blow-up dinosaur, a cat or best of all, a minion, who's to judge? And to those of you who are too embarrassed to be decked out in a wholly ridiculous costume, dressing up as a group with your friends is also a great alternative.

Plus, whether it be with themed costumes or not, trick-or-treating is even better together (rhyme intended). My favorite memories from Hal-

loween are always trick-or-treating with my friends, the precious moments of knocking on neighbors' doors, taking an utterly unhealthy amount of candy and then trading them with each other afterwards — or in my case, accidentally borrowing some from my sister.

Oh, you don't like Airheads? Gimme. I have some Reese's, does anyone want them? Of course not. Put them in the pile for mom.

For the rest of my high school years and for as long as I can, I'll be dressing up and going trick-or-treating, no matter what. I'll never be too old for Halloween. I refuse to be that boring adult who wears a button saying "This is my Halloween costume." ♦

'NIGHTMARE' AT WILDWOOD PARK

BY KavayaPatel

It was a normal-as-ever idyllic late-October Wednesday in middle school, and I was walking with a group of middle school friends to Wildwood Park.

My sister, a high school senior at the time, offered to give me a ride home from the park, so I had no worries at how the day would turn out. But as the day passed, the group of middle schoolers I was with started to leave Wildwood. Eventually, I was left alone, waiting for my sister on the steps outside the park.

My worst fears began to collide in my brain, and I realized how vulnerable I was. Keep in mind, I'd probably have fallen with a single tap back then — despite my many years of learning Tae Kwon Do, I had no self-defense

skills whatsoever. I wasn't worried at first, but after constantly spamming my sister to come pick me up and getting no reply, I became convinced that I would get kidnapped and disappear without a trace.

In full panic, I texted my mom, asking her to pick me up, but she had just left work, which was 30 minutes away.

As the minutes passed, I felt myself living my worst nightmare: being alone in a secluded park just before Halloween. The scene felt as if it was straight out of a horror movie. Fall leaves scattered around the parking lot. The wind taunted me with its whistling noise while suspicious-looking cars zoomed by.

I stared down at my feet, clenching my fists with sweat starting to precipitate my face. I

tried to focus on the homework I had left to do for the day, but that only stressed me out even more.

"I'm going to be fine," I kept repeating in my head. "I can fight. I can fight. I can fight."

When I heard the crinkling of leaves coming from my left, I immediately shot up into a sparring stance, awaiting my chance to defend myself against a possible abductor.

Petrified beyond words, I shot up with my fists protecting my face and belted "AHHHHH" at the top of my lungs.

However, what emerged was not some Freddy Krueger-like abductor, but instead a middle aged man who seemed as terrified of me as I was of him. He clutched his heart in response to my scream.

"JESUS CHRIST!" the fright-

ened man yelled.

He paused while my face became plastered in red and my hand went to slap my mouth in an attempt to hold back tears of embarrassment.

"I'm not going to kidnap you," he said, seeming to read my mind.

I simply nodded, my mouth glued shut with humiliation. Seconds later, my mom finally pulled into the parking lot, a perfectly timed escape from the embarrassment of falsely believing a harmless man was about to abduct me.

As I hopped into the car, I began to explain the whole situation to my mom, watching as the man disappeared down the park steps. Ever since my traumatic experience, I have never dared to even think about being at Wildwood Park alone, not wanting to experience terrors like this again. ♦

TOP 10: TEACHER COSTUMES

- Brandon Peterson (APCS).** The easiest teacher to dress up as: You just need a sweater, an extra large beanie to cover your forehead and an oversized mask.
- Kirk Davis (physics, business).** Dress up like Isaac Newton with a long coat and a white wig to represent our amazing physics teacher.
- Marcos Cortez (English).** A mohawk is essential to capture his essence. Wear casual jeans with a nice button up to finish off the fascinating look.
- Michael Tyler (journalism).** I don't think I've ever seen Tyler in anything but a red T-shirt and khaki pants. No jacket. I repeat, no jacket because Tyler thrives in the Arctic climate otherwise known as the Journalism Room.
- Amy Keys (English).** Think cute, eclectic English teacher with good vibes. Wear a white cardigan or a blouse, with a low bun, slim-fit jeans and classy shoes.
- Lisa Cochrum (science).** If you want to wear something fun and bold, Cochrum's outfits are perfect. Cargo shorts are a must with entertaining scientific graphic shirts. Don't forget sandals, as her shoe game is on point.
- Michael Boitz (music).** All you need is a casual suit (preferably blue with dark gray pants), a caffeine addiction from Phil's coffee and a bright smile on your face. Don't forget the sleep deprived look, but students are already professionals in that area.
- Jerry Sheehy (history).** I guarantee you probably already have the costume, especially if you are a teenage boy. Wear a Warriors jersey and bright, neon basketball shorts. Then you will be in a golden state (pun intended).
- Archie Ljepava (campus supervisor).** Has Ljepava ever worn anything but Falcon merchandise? His outfits always scream school pride. The long-sleeved jersey and shorts combo is unforgettable. Don't forget the iconic bright, red/white coat. For extra accessories: a golf cart.
- Erick Rector (English).** Rector's outfits give me Yogi Bear vibes. The classic tie and cardigan combo is unmatched with his snazzy dress shirts. Receding hairline preferred, but not required.

>> Anika Kapasi

HUNGRY GHOST FESTIVAL: 'CHINESE HALLOWEEN'

BY KevinYang

When I moved from China to the U.S. in eighth grade, one of the biggest holidays I looked forward to experiencing was Halloween. It looked so exciting to dress up in different costumes and go trick-or-treating with friends. American kids take this holiday for granted. I didn't.

While kids in the U.S. are overjoyed as they dress in their fancy costumes at the end of October, most Chinese students are studying for midterms. Not a trace of Halloween can be found in China, except for some people selling cheap Halloween items, hoping to make quick money from young kids. That being said, people in China aren't completely deprived of holidays celebrating the supernatural.

The Zhongyuan Festival, or the Hungry Ghost Festival, stems from the belief that ghosts will awaken and visit from hell on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month. The month is called Ghost Month

and the day is called Ghost Day, which was Aug. 12 this year.

On this day, people bring food to their ancestors' graves and burn ancestor money, also known as zuqian, hoping to get their blessings. They may also offer money and food to those who don't have a grave. In some cities, people will also light up a lotus lamp so it flows toward the center of the river and acts as guides to the ghosts who died in the water.

This particular night is abnormally quiet for most people. Adults finish their ritual activities and sleep as early as time allows. Even the most rebellious of children will obediently stay in bed. Why? Because this is taboo for the Hungry Ghost Festival: The belief is that anyone who stays up late will be possessed by ghosts or see abnormal things.

Some of the other most prominent taboos of the festival include:

1. Hanging wind chimes on the bedside: Chimes at-

tract ghosts, and a person is most vulnerable to ghost invasions when sleeping.

2. Night tours with no specific goal: Why would you be out if you don't have to be?

3. Burning paper on non-specific occasions: Don't burn paper at some places such as weddings. It will bring ghosts to these places.

4. Taking anything meant for the ancestors and ghosts: This might seem obvious, but if you take from them, you will end up in huge trouble.

Despite these taboos, the Hungry Ghost Festival is still meant to connect families to their ancestors. But because people are less superstitious and more scientific now, fewer people are practicing the traditions of the Zhongyuan Festival. Compared to Halloween, Zhongyuan Festival is more serious, in which people will dress up with decent clothes and worship their ancestors instead of dressing up with fancy costumes and asking

Student band Peach Fuzz plays at school events

BY Shreya Rallabandi

A crowd gathered in front of a band set-up during the annual Falcon Food Truck Fest on Aug. 16 as the drumline to “Sofia” by Clair began. Student band Peach Fuzz grabbed the attention of students, drawing fest-goers from food trucks and backyard games to the corner of the visitor parking lot. Peach Fuzz consists of seniors Anirudh Iyer on keys, Woody Li on bass, Noah Marquez on guitar, Anastasia Ramirez on vocals and Zach Zinman on drums.



Ramirez

The band, originally composed of just Marquez, Ramirez and Zinman, formed after being asked to play together in October 2021 for a Culture of Consent rally. Although their busy schedules led to the trio stop playing last year, the band resumed practicing shortly before the food truck fest with the additions of Li and Iyer, who were both recruited by Zinman. The day prior to their performance, the five members rehearsed for several hours nonstop at Zinman’s house. Zinman explains the story behind the band’s name as an interesting one — Zinman and Marquez decided they were

in the imminent need of a band name since they were performing at the food truck fest, so Zinman sat down with his parents and asked for their suggestions.

“They asked, ‘What words do you associate with the vibe of the band?’ he said. ‘And I said ‘Well, I like peaches.’ So, our name was decided as Peach Fuzz because it makes fun of teenagers both unironically and ironically at the same time.”

Marquez said he feels that they are completely in tune with one another. The rest of the band has also naturally adapted into each other’s playing styles which contributes to an uplifting rehearsing environment, Ramirez said.

Playing live, however, is a different experience. At the start of a set, Marquez, Ramirez and Zinman have found performing to be stressful; it takes around a song for the band to fully get into the groove. Once the initial obstacle is gone, the aura completely turns around, Ramirez said.

“Sometimes, it’s a little stressful at first,” she said. “But once you’re really in the group, it’s a euphoric moment. It’s like you’re really living in the present.”



Peach Fuzz performs in front of the McAfee during the Falcon Food Truck Fest on Aug. 16.

The community has responded excitedly to the budding band, with students gathering to watch them perform at the fest and the annual schoolwide barbecue later in August. Ramirez recalled that a pair of underclassmen students once approached soon after the fest and asked if she was the Peach Fuzz vocalist, before walking off, whispering to one another. In addition, they garnered positive feedback at the Homecoming rally in September; students and teachers held raised flashlights on their phones, cheering

on the band. They also performed at the seniors’ Homecoming quad day on Sept. 23. In the near future, they hope to start booking paid gigs outside of the school. They have their sights set on 924 Gilman, a nonprofit music club in Berkeley where bands can get on their feet, play, meet other artists and gain recognition.

“When we were getting back to school, I thought performing would be fun,” Ramirez said. “I hadn’t performed with them in a while. I was missing it.” ♦

Teachers decorate to keep students engaged

Room 1010: tinfoil and chemistry puns

When students walk into chemistry teacher Janny Cahatol’s classroom, they see doodles on the whiteboard, lab equipment scattered around the room and a large periodic table hanging on the wall.

The most eye-catching part, however, is the “memory wall,” filled with pictures surrounding a colorful “I took AP CHEM” lettering in the middle of the collage.

Lower on the wall, where Cahatol places more recent photos, students can find many familiar faces.

Within these various pictures, past students hold up a whiteboard with chemistry jokes such as “Don’t trust atoms, they make up everything” or Cahatol’s well-known phrases such as “Late! Late! Shame on you!”

“The things that students write on their board are either making fun of me or them remembering the fun they had in this class,” Cahatol said. “I want students who are coming into this classroom totally intimidated by the curriculum to know that we’re going to have fun.”

Cahatol takes memory wall pictures for her students at the end of each year — instead of trying to have the most beautifully decorated room, she aims to capture memories for herself, incoming students and past students to look at.

“I enjoy teaching my students a lot and I love it when they come back from college or after graduating to see pictures of themselves as well as their friends,” Cahatol said. “They get so happy, and that makes me remember how much they have grown as a person.”

Another valued part of her classroom is located at the top portion of the left wall, where there are various airplane, ball and spoon shaped objects made out of aluminum foil, representing the time when Cahatol taught Chemistry Honors. ♦



Chemistry Teacher Janny Cahatol’s “memory wall” displays dozens of photos of her past students.



English Teacher Natasha Ritchie’s decorations mostly depict scenes from books students read in her class.

Room 002: exemplary student paintings

Colorful paintings pack the walls of English teacher Natasha Ritchie’s classroom, lighting up the room along with big windows on the left which are almost perpetually unshaded.

Ritchie enjoys showcasing her students’ past work, believing she has some of the most impressive student art decorations at the school.

Most of Ritchie’s decorations come from a creative final project she assigns at the end of the year, for which many students choose to make 2D art.

“I decided to use mostly student art for my own aesthetic pleasure and because I often reference them during the units,” she said. “I can be like, this exact painting was based on the scene.”

Additionally, Ritchie has received some “thank you” paintings from students.

One MAP senior project group gave her a painting of the beach, which is currently in Ritchie’s office, as a gift for mentoring their project which had several scenes at the beach.

There is also a poster reading “A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only once” at the front of her desk, and the decorations behind reflect this attitude.

Most of the decorations are about fantasy books that she feels transports her mind to a different place and time.

Her decorations are an essential part of her welcoming classroom ambiance, Ritchie said.

In addition to celebrating iconic literary works and the efforts of past students, the artwork makes for colorful walls and a visually engaging environment.

“When my room was unpacked and there was nothing on the walls, it just felt like such a sterile environment — to me, that’s not conducive to learning,” Ritchie said. “I think students can zone out and look at the paintings and still be listening. If you have a lot of things to look at in your environment, it’s stimulating and helps keep engagement.” ♦

Room 303: movie and sports memorabilia

Room 303, also known as the J-room, looks drastically different this year compared to previous years since English 9 teacher and Falcon adviser Michael Tyler has not been able to put all of his decorations back up yet. Despite some barren wall space, however, students can still see student-inspired and student-signed movie posters all along the left wall of the room, as well as a 2022 yearbook cover and a sign that says “Talisman Dr. on the top right corner of the whiteboard.

“I really like having the yearbooks in the room,” Tyler said. “If I had a little bit more time, I would try to get more of the old yearbook covers and make sure we have every single year covered if possible.”



Journalism Adviser Michael Tyler’s classroom features memorabilia related to his past publication classes.

Though Tyler mostly decorates his room with things that are loosely journalism-related, he also tries including items referencing pop culture and sports such as San Francisco Giants and Golden State Warriors memorabilia. Many of his decorations are posters from the yearbook printing company, souvenirs from events or items he found in thrift stores.

In the following months, Tyler plans to put up the journalism program’s award plaques and a toilet seat decoration from a class of 2006 alumni. He also might bring couches back into the journalism room for the first time since before the pandemic because he believes they make the room feel more like a home.

Despite this, he said he will never get the room set up exactly the way it was before construction.

“The room feels more like a home when you have a few decorations, but it’s not so bad to start over in some ways too,” Tyler said. “I think a lot of teachers used the construction as a chance to do a refresh or reset. It was not a typical year because of the construction, but I also think the move in went better than anyone expected.” ♦

— All stories by Howard Shu

Library relies on technician's daily diligence

BY Sarah Zhou

For 15 years, from 7:30 a.m. to after 4 p.m. on school days, library technician Lee Tapley has been working in the library, handling various tasks such as opening, closing and organizing the collections, helping students find books and coordinating parent volunteers during textbook distribution. This year, she does this work alongside other library technicians Cynthia Cheng and Nada Macesic, who primarily handle textbook distribution and collection.

Running the short-staffed library

Since librarian Kevin Heyman’s retirement at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the district has chosen to save money by not employing a credentialed librarian — someone who specializes in helping students and staff with information technology. This decision has left more of the day-to-day responsibility of running the library to Tapley, and frustrated teachers who have continually called for the district to re-staff the position and reprioritize the importance of the library and research on campus.

Tapley, too, feels the frustration, as the lack of a certified librarian creates more work for her as it results in her being the only one staffing the library.

“I feel self-conscious about being absent or having my doctor’s appointment during school hours,” Tapley said. “I feel sorry when some teachers or students ask me for

something only certified librarians can do.”

Though she is not a credentialed librarian, Tapley has assumed many of Heyman’s responsibilities, such as ordering and cataloging books, taking care of library furniture and leading efforts for student book distribution at the annual Falcon Fests.

Tapley noted that, this year, there were many students who had not returned items before Falcon Fest, hindering the library’s ability to prepare for distribution. However, she felt that parent and student volunteers greatly helped overcome these difficulties.

“The whole textbook distribution process was a wonderful experience,” Tapley said. “Most teachers brought their classes on time, and students had their ID cards ready — it was like watching an orchestra. Without the parent and student volunteers’ help, we couldn’t have finished the job. Whenever I see parent volunteers in the school, I feel proud and grateful that I belong here.”

Maintaining an organized environment

When the library generally hosts only a few students during class periods, Tapley busies herself shelving returned books and searching for new books to add to the library catalog based on student recommendations. In addition, Tapley maintains the library’s website, Destiny resource page, the school’s research databases and resources for English and Creative writing classes.

The library currently owns 18,347 books and has loaned out 84 books since the school



Library technician Lee Tapley works on cataloging books at the front desk on Sept. 13.

year started. 59 of these books are overdue and 184 books are lost from last year.

Through PTSO funding, the library is also able to purchase roughly 200 new books each year, and students are able to purchase books on their own to replace lost or damaged books.

In her 15 years here, Tapley has observed that with the rise of textbook prices, students have become more attentive and caring for books, so the number of lost books has decreased yearly.

Tapley said she hopes that the library is a safe and comfortable place for students to study and read, and she works toward making the library a safe space for students to re-

lax. Through her time working at the school, she has also gotten to know students better. One of Tapley’s favorite memories was when she stopped by a Subway sandwich shop on Saratoga Avenue about 10 years ago: While waiting to receive her order, she encountered a student with their parent.

“She had a broad smile and told me it was great to see me,” Tapley said. “I couldn’t recognize her for a moment, but she told her father I was one of her favorite librarians. I felt very thankful for what she told me. I did not think I treated her differently from others, but she was kind to say that to me. The encounter might be nothing to others, but it was an unforgettable moment for me.” ♦

Redwood math club adjusts without Yim

BY Skyler Mao

Groups of Redwood Middle students gather on Redwood’s campus for a weekly meeting at Toga Junior Math Club (TJMC) Tuesdays at 7 p.m. TJMC is the RMS math club taught by high school volunteers. It is split into four groups separated by difficulty: black, blue, green and yellow (listed in decreasing difficulty). Each group covers math-contest topics throughout the year. With Saratoga High students serving as coaches, TJMC has been an integral part of the Saratoga math community — many current TJMC coaches attended the club while in middle school.

Math teacher PJ Yim has volunteered as the TJMC adviser for the past 12 years. Having moved to California in 2001, Yim became the adviser for several schools’ math clubs across the region, such as Lehigh High and Bret Harte Middle. In 2008, he began teaching at SHS. After hearing about TJMC, Yim stepped up as the adviser in 2010, leading a previously parent-run club.

“When I was in high school, I knew a teacher, Mr. Stengle, and he did more than was expected of anybody for the school’s math club,” Yim said. “I was trying to pay it forward by being really involved with the math club here.”

However, Yim has stepped down from his position after the 2021-2022 school year. “I was spending time that I could or should have been spending with my children,” Yim said. “I decided that 20 years helping

out with math clubs is enough.”

With an open position for TJMC adviser, Steve Hamm, RMS’s principal, became the club’s fill-in adviser since no one else has stepped up for the position. This switch has led to several changes. First, TJMC’s location has moved from the SHS math quad to the RMS campus — specifically the library and rooms 7 and 23.

According to senior and TJMC Liaison Nilay Mishra, due to having been in the same location at the high school many years, this switch has been a little bit disorienting for veteran members.

In addition, many of the club’s responsibilities, previously handled by Yim, have shifted to the high school coaches. Mishra said that he and other coaches now take care of much of the club’s logistics, including writing placement tests, printing notes and grading tests. Parent volunteers also contribute to the club by posting announcements and coordinating competitions.

“There’s more work to take care of,” Mishra said. “And the challenge is trying to ensure that everything goes smoothly like a normal year.”

Yim hopes that TJMC continues to be a place where motivated students are not afraid to express their passion for math.

“I don’t want people to see the club as a means to ‘get ahead,’” Yim said. “It’s there for people who love math, and I want it to continue to be a safe place for people to do math.” ♦

Jazz, rock and bossa nova: Abe drums through different genres

BY Sarah Thomas

When social studies teacher Kirk Abe first tried playing on his friend’s drum set in fifth grade, he discovered a lifelong passion.

As the years went by, he began to play big band music, such as Maynard Ferguson, and continued playing his favorite songs from middle school to adulthood.

Although his musical focus has evolved throughout his life between a variety of genres such as jazz, rock and bossa nova, his love for playing the drums has never dwindled.

Abe noted his passion for music “blossomed” after his first year of playing instruments at the age of 13.

He began developing his skills through private drumming lessons with Terry Carleton and Dave Batanides. Abe began playing jazz drums in middle school, where he joined his school’s jazz band to learn to play in a group.

He especially enjoyed jazz be-

ery song] as a bossa, a swing or as a ballad.”

Around the time he started high school, Abe also developed an interest in ‘70s to late ‘90s rock music.

As a result, he formed a band with his high school friend and neighbor to cover their favorite songs — with Abe on the drums, and the other two as a guitarist and a bassist who also provided vocals.

“My first gig was a talent show at my high school,” Abe said. “I played with my friends. It was fun.”

The band booked studio time at TRS, a studio in Sunnyvale, and recorded a few of their songs, although they never formally released an album because they didn’t have sufficient content.

Further, Abe began playing gigs with various bands:

After his first gig at a talent show during high school, Abe continued to perform around UC Davis, his alma mater, with other bands.

Abe continued lessons in college with Dave Haddad, Scott Morris and Peppe Merolla, practicing songs by bands such as Rush and The Police.

Although Abe’s band continued to cover bands such as U2 for gigs post-graduation, he soon transitioned toward new groups and genres — one of the longest bands Abe had been a part of was called Sidelines, a band of teachers consisting of four players: Abe,

former SHS English teacher Dan McBride, Jon Klemm and Abe’s brother.

In 2006, Abe also auditioned and joined a band, Samboseros, after the original drummer was unable to continue playing with the band.

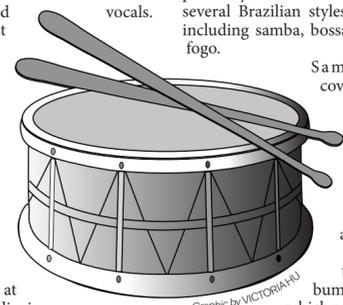
He joined four other members — a bassist, brass player, guitarist and singer — in the group, which primarily focused on combining several Brazilian styles of music, including samba, bossa nova and fogo.

Samboseros covered and recorded several popular songs from the ‘60s and ‘70s, such as Meditação, in their album Gabiroba, which was released

in 2006. “I was a little intimidated,” Abe said about his experience recording Gabiroba. “The recording engineer was this unbelievable drummer from Brazil, so I was a little out of my depth. Bossa Nova wasn’t my strength, but it was really fun.”

Although Abe doesn’t have a specific band that he practices with now because he mainly focuses on jazz music, which doesn’t require a set group, he continues to play with independent musicians in the Bay Area.

“I love playing for people who appreciate music,” Abe said. “The people I play with, we have a communication and connection with the music. I’m so grateful that I started playing drums, because it changed my life and has helped shape me into the person I am today.” ♦



Graphic by VICTORIA HAU

“The people I play with, we have a connection with music.”

SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER Kirk Abe



BOYS CLUB NO MORE

STEM ORGANIZATIONS TRY TO OPEN OPPORTUNITIES TO ALL

By BeverlyXu

From 1970 to 2019, the number of women in STEM occupations in the U.S. increased by 8%, but as of 2021, women still only make up 28% of the STEM workforce — even though they make up 50.5% of the U.S. population.

One reason for this discrepancy is the lack of role models for female students, especially teens.

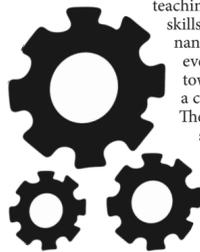
Research has shown that because specialized STEM classes are optional in high school, role models during these four years are pivotal to the development of long-term interest in STEM. Several clubs and organizations on campus are seeking to reverse these tendencies.

Among them are MSET Robotics, Females for Finance (F3) and Girls Who Code (GWC). In 2021, senior Eva Ruemmler decided to launch an F3 club with senior twins Samantha and Elizabeth Stoiber. All three of them participated in a spring females-for-finance course taught by Yale students. The course inspired them to become ambassadors for the program.

Introduction to SGM centric clubs

“There’s a huge gender gap in the financial field,” Ruemmler said. “In terms of typical finance buyers, [for example, private equity firms and hedge funds], women investors are a minority. We’re trying to educate female students earlier on in high school so they know what career path they want to go into, and can have more exposure to that path.”

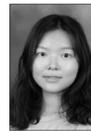
Ruemmler explained that the goal of F3 is to bridge inequalities in the finance industry by empowering gender minority high school students through teaching the necessary skills to increase financial literacy and even take steps towards building a career in finance. The club hosts speakers, teaches fundamental finance knowledge and runs a stock market simulation. The simulation pro-



Juniors Ameya Saund and Nidhi Vadlamudi and freshman Parnika Kamath-bond during a weekend MSET meeting to prepare for an upcoming competition.

vides members with hands-on experience to practice what they’ve learned.

So far, the club’s gender distribution has been around 90% to 100% gender minority out of 15 regular members, which has allowed more students who identify as such to feel welcomed to the club. Junior Saemina Kim is a member of F3 and recalls joining after being intimidated by male-dominated clubs as a freshman. “I remember on the first day there were few girls, so I kind of ran away and didn’t go there anymore,” she said.



Kim

“I was a freshman, there were a lot of people, it was online and I had little knowledge about coding, so I couldn’t confidently ask questions or share opinions.”

Kim and other members enjoy the comfort they have in the club. Since F3 is smaller than other finance clubs at school, Kim has been able to participate and contribute more, allowing her to better understand each industry.

She also joined Girls Who Code for many of the same reasons. Girls Who Code was started in 2014 to educate female students about cybersecurity and programming.

As a branch of the international Girls Who Code nonprofit, members have access to a ready-made curriculum, videos, newsletters and summer programs, as well as presentations given by club officers on various computer science topics. Club president Anika Verma has seen how the lack of male students has alleviated any STEM gender stereotypes in the club.

Establishing new norms can be hard

However, at a more established club like MSET Robotics, gender inequalities are much more difficult to address and change, some members say.

MSET, the school’s largest robotics team, was established over 20 years ago, and although the gender distribution in the club has improved significantly, from 10.91% non-male members in 2010, to 34.07% in 2021, subtle gender stereotypes still persist.

Toward the beginning of 2022, seniors Druthi Palle and Mahati Kotamraju brought the problem to the attention of Sheeba Garg, the First Robotics Competition (FRC) team’s lead mentor. The mentors then held a meeting for all female and gender minority students on the team to discuss their own individual experiences with misogynistic comments. Garg told The Falcon that “in MSET any student irrespective of gender who wants to learn and participate has an equal opportunity. “Whenever concerns are raised around inequality on any grounds, mentors have addressed them with students.”

Palle recalled the meeting with Garg and others and said the stories from female in the program were “eye-opening,” adding, “The fact that so many of their experiences were so similar made it very obvious that this issue needs to be addressed.”

Palle pointed out that the misogynistic

comments she has heard from male students at robotics that are sometimes justified as “jokes.”

But she thinks the barbs can be particularly hurtful, especially when they’re made in open conversations during club work sessions. Discrepancies in female and gender minority student participation between technical and non-technical subteams, such as hardware and outreach, has also been raised as a discrepancy. Palle describes how stereotypes that female students are more fit for non-technical tasks, and a lack of female peers in technical subteams push them toward non-technical subteams.

For example, in 2021, 18% of the hardware and 36% of the software subteams were female or gender minorities, while 77% of the outreach subteam was. Efforts have occurred to deal with these imbalances, but Palle has been disappointed by the lack of progress.

“I have not seen any effort to change from anybody,” Palle said. “We fall short as a club by not going past that point of recognizing the issue.”

Taking action is essential for growth

Because the club strives to be a student-led organization, Palle believes that the path to change lies with changing the mindsets of student leaders. Instead of making redundant presentations about how to respect teammates, or having discussion with only the female and gender minority students, she urges club members to have casual conversations that are both respectful and professional, in order to stimulate genuine communication and understanding.

However, while clubs directed specifically to girls in STEM can help female students find their footing in those male-dominated fields, the female-focused goals and naming conventions of those clubs can dismantle and discourage gender minority students, especially in higher education. Society of Women Engineers (SWE) — an advocacy group for women in engineering (with a branch in MSET) — has been particularly unwelcoming to non-



Ispasoiu

binary people. The organization allegedly prevented them from applying for scholarships, contributing to the relentless struggle against heteronormative cultures in STEM fields.

Senior Jasmine Ispasoiu, who prefers not to put a label on their gender, said that STEM spaces need to work toward accepting all gender. They believe that increasing gender diversity in STEM fields requires broader inclusion to bring together a wide range of individuals facing gender discrimination to collaborate to increase gender diversity in STEM.

While working at Kode with Klossy (KWK), a free coding summer camp directed at

female and nonbinary students, as an instructor’s assistant, Ispasoiu had the chance to discuss gender inequities with students.

“It was really insightful for me, to hear what my students thought and what they had to say about inequities they’ve experienced,” Ispasoiu said.

The reason Ispasoiu decided to work for KWK was the welcoming and comfortable community that they had found there as a student in the summers of 2020 and 2021. During one of their discussions, a student of theirs brought up the lack of queer representation in STEM spaces, which Ispasoiu has also observed in many classes and clubs outside of school.

“While clubs for women in STEM are amazing and are doing so much good for the world, excluding nonbinary people is an issue,” they said.

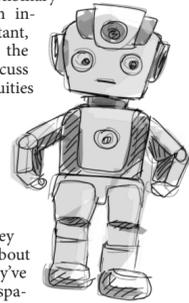
“Including them as an afterthought, or grouping them as trans men in women’s spaces, implying that they’re not men, is just as problematic.” Ispasoiu believes it’s important to distinguish between clubs made specifically for female students and clubs for gender minorities, so as to avoid exacerbating the lack of gender minority representation by ignoring it.

“I’ve not seen effort to change ... we fall short as a club by not going past that point of recognizing the issue.”

SENIOR Druthi Palle

Through their experiences, Ispasoiu has found that a club focused on both female and gender minority students can develop interest in STEM more constructively by welcoming all minority genders in such male-dominated fields.

“It’s time to stray away from the ‘girlboss steminist’ narrative that has always centered cisgender white women, and show STEM to gender minorities as something integral to our community and society the same way it is to cisgender men,” Ispasoiu said. ♦



WHAT’S ON THE BALLOT?

★ ★ ★ THE FALCON'S GUIDE TO 2022'S MIDTERM PROPOSITIONS ★ ★ ★

By William Norwood & Sarah Zhou

From securing abortion rights to expanding gambling laws, seven propositions are on the ballot for California voters on Nov. 8. For many seniors, the midterms will be their first time voting. Here are the pros and cons of those seven initiatives.

Proposition 1: The right to abortion

This proposition — introduced by Gov. Gavin Newsom, state senate president Toni Atkins and state assembly speaker Anthony Rendón — would amend the state’s constitution to prevent the state from interfering with or denying a person’s reproductive freedom.

The term “reproductive freedom” includes both the right to contraceptives and abortion.

After the overturning of Roe v. Wade in June by the Supreme Court, abortion access in more than a dozen states has been threatened.

Supporters believe that such medical decisions should be made between the patient and provider as opposed to the government. They also support equal and unrestricted access to reproductive health care.

Opponents believe that the money spent on abortions — especially with late-term abortions — should instead go to California schools and infrastructure.

Endorsements: National Health Law Program, Planned Parenthood affiliates of California, The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the California Medical Association and others.

Opposition: American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists, California Catholic Church, California Republican Party, Knights of Columbus, William Jessup University, Christian Medical and Dentist Association, The International Faith-Based Coalition and many others.

Proposition 26: In-person sports betting

If passed, this proposition would legalize roulette and dice games at casinos on Indian land, legalize sports betting at casinos on Indian land and at licensed racetracks, as well as generate 10% tax profits from sports betting, in turn providing the state with additional millions in funding.

Supporters of Proposition 26 argue that allowing tribal casinos to host sports betting would increase jobs and generate more revenue for tribal education and health care, while also increasing state revenues by tens of millions annually.

Opponents say Proposition 26 would increase animal abuse by expanding gambling to horse tracks and also give five dominant tribes a monopoly over gambling to exploit employees for labor.

It also introduces potential and current gambling addicts to a wider and more dangerous range of ways to go into debt.

Endorsements: 27 of the state’s Native American tribes.

All casinos in the state are owned and operated by tribes, and the majority of casino-owning tribes support Proposition 26.

Opposition: Association of the United

States Army of Northern California, California Animal Welfare Association and Small Business California.

Proposition 27: Online sports betting

Similar to Proposition 26, Proposition 7 would legalize online sports betting for people age 21 and older.

The proposition would generate a 10% tax profit from revenues and licensing fees, which would then be dedicated to other causes: Homelessness programs would receive 85% of this funding, and 15% would go to supporting the Tribal Economic Development Account.

Supporters believe that the increase in funding will reduce homelessness numbers and create a permanent monetary source for all California tribes.

Opponents believe the proposition will increase underage gambling and encourage gambling addiction. They also believe that the majority of funds gained through online sports betting will go to out-of-state companies as opposed to helping tribes.

Additionally, the proposition requires tribes to give up sovereignty to qualify for an online sports betting license.

Endorsements: Online sports betting companies such as Betfair, DraftKings, BetMGM and Penn National Gaming Inc. These four companies make up over 70% of the campaign funding.

Opposition: More than 50 of California’s Native American tribes, California’s Teachers Association.

It is important to note that while Proposition 26 only legalizes in-person sports betting at Native American Casinos and three authorized racetracks in the state, Proposition 27 allows sports betting to occur anywhere, and allows gambling to be available on any electronic device.

Further, both propositions are completely independent of each other — for instance, if Proposition 27 passed and Proposition 26 failed, online sports betting would be legalized, but in-person sports betting would still be illegal.

Proposition 28: Funding for the arts

The proposition would require K-12 education programs to allocate at least 1 percent of the total state and local revenues they receive under Proposition 28 to art and music programs.

The district is funded under the basic aid program, unlike most other California school districts, meaning the school is primarily funded by local property taxes rather than the state’s average daily attendance funding formula.

The school currently spends a “minimal amount,” according to music director Michael Boitz, but if Proposition 28 was passed, the amount of funding for art and music programs would rely less heavily on booster support and both programs would be able to grow.

A “yes” vote on this would require all K-12 public schools funding for arts and music to be at least one percent of the total state and local revenues.

In addition, schools with over 500 students would require 80% of the allocated

funding to be used for employing teachers and 20% for training and materials in the arts and music departments. This proposition will also require a report to be published on how the money is spent.

Supporters argue that this increase in funding will ensure arts and music education in public schools while ensuring accountability to administrations by requiring them to use at least 1% of funding for these opportunities.

Endorsements: Los Angeles Unified School District, California Teachers Association (CTA).

Opposition: None.

Proposition 29: Dialysis clinic regulations

This proposition would require dialysis clinics to have either a Physician, Nurse Practitioner (NP) or Physician Assistant (PA) present at a clinic while patients are being treated. It would also require them to report data on dialysis-related infections to the state and not discriminate based on a patient’s source of payment. In 2018 and 2020, similar propositions failed with an overwhelming defeat.

Dialysis, a medical procedure that removes waste products from the body when a person’s kidneys do not function properly, is a key part of the lives of over 80,000 Californians.

Supporters argue that dialysis technicians are overworked and requiring physicians onsite would reduce some of the burden, as well as increase transparency for clinics.

Opponents say passing this proposition could hinder existing treatment options. They argue the proposition will force more than half of the state’s dialysis clinics to cut back on services or shut down.

Some experts suggest that the price of dialysis treatment may rise, adversely affecting patients, as a result of the increased requirements to employ more physicians.

Endorsements: California Democratic Party and California Labor Federation.

Opposition: California Medical Association, the American College of Surgeons, the Renal Healthcare Association and the American Nurses Association of California.

It is important to note that two corporations — Davita Inc. and Fresenius Medical care, which combined, own and operate nearly 75% of dialysis clinics in the state — have bankrolled a significant amount for the “no” campaign.

Proposition 30: Taxing the 1% for climate funds

Prop 30 will increase taxation on the top 1% of Californians by 1.75% to raise funds to combat climate change. The revenue will be dedicated to

“zero emission vehicles” and infrastructure. This funding would be placed into the Clean Cars and Clean Air Trust Fund (CCATF) and then be allocated to three sub-funds: Zero-Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Investment Plan, Zero-Emission Vehicle and Clean Mobility Sub-fund and the Wildfire Green House Gas Emissions Reduction sub-funds. These funds would aid the state in building charging stations and electric car infrastructure, and in hiring and training firefighters.

Supporters argue that we need to act as soon as possible to reduce air pollution from vehicles, which in turn will reduce California’s increasing number of wildfires.

Opponents believe that the funding will allow companies to build or fund electric vehicle initiatives through taxpayers’ money rather than work towards decreasing air pollution levels.

Endorsements: Lyft and the Democratic Party of California.

Opposition: Public officials such as Newsom, who said in a press conference that “[Lyft is] taking advantage of [Californians], hundreds of millions of dollars a week they’re putting in their pockets, lining their pockets at your expense, and then polluting this planet.”

Proposition 31: Banning flavored tobacco products

Proposition 31 would uphold the CA Senate Bill 793, which banned flavored tobacco products from being sold. SB 793 was passed in 2020 without much opposition in the state Assembly.

Supporters argue that the sale of flavored tobacco products is directed toward youth, citing the use of flavored products as a “gateway drug” for youth to develop lasting nicotine addictions.

Studies indicate that four out of five teenagers who regularly use tobacco began with a flavored product.

Additionally, sale of flavored vape products is considered a direct assault on Black communities, referring to the widespread push of minty menthol cigarettes in these communities over the past few decades.

Opponents argue that it is already illegal to sell tobacco products to people under the age of 21 — implying that these flavors are not marketed to children’s tastes and preferences — so the ban is an unnecessary prohibition for those aged 21 and older.

Endorsements: Newsom, the NAACP, the CTA, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the Cancer Action Network, as well as other major medical organizations and associations.

Opposition: Big Tobacco companies, the California Republican Party. ♦

PROP 1

\$9.2M

\$70k

PROP 26

\$123.4M

\$49M

PROP 27

\$169.2M

\$214.7M

PROP 29

\$7.5M

\$86.3M

PROP 30

\$37.1M

\$12M

PROP 31

\$6.2M

\$22.9M

Donations For & Against Propositions

Davey returns to coach boys' basketball

By Neal Malhotra
& Andy Zhu

With the school basketball season approaching rapidly, longtime history teacher Mike Davey has accepted the job of coaching the boys' varsity team — a position he also held from 1992 to 2006.

After previous varsity head coach Patrick Judge and JV head coach Devin Southerland both left the program in the off season, the team had significant coaching vacancies to fill.

Athletic director Rick Ellis described the departure as a mutual understanding and said Judge "decided to go his own way" and that "after seven years in a program, it was time to part ways."

Although players were surprised by the change, most are making the best of it by staying committed to working hard in preseason workouts under Davey's direction.

Senior varsity captain Niveydh Pai said Davey, who has been a teacher at the school for 30 years,



Davey

has already established a strict regimen with open gyms after every Blue Day. He believes the open gym is great for their team chemistry, something the team was unsure they could build before the season started.

According to Pai, it is essential for the team to be working in the off-season, especially since the team moved from the B-league to the A-league this year and will be facing tougher opponents.

Davey's style of coaching is different from Judge's in that he is much more defense-oriented — as a result, the veterans are still adjusting away from last year's offense-oriented game plans.

"He has been keeping the intensity very high," Pai said. "Everyone is appreciative of [Davey] taking us to lift and run to get ready for the A-league."

One of Davey's main philosophies is organization. Instead of letting players play an unstructured style during games, he said he expects them to run multiple different plays for different situa-

tions. Davey's new playbook consists of 54 plays, a significant increase from previous years.

"It's kind of like a fire drill," Davey said. "We're gonna have to put a whole new system in play on offense and defense."

On the offensive end, Davey is making adjustments to have power forwards and centers play more in the paint in contrast to the old system of driving to the paint and moving the ball around for open 3-point shots.

Besides having a successful run as the boys' coach years ago, Davey coached the girls' varsity basketball team starting in 2008 and established stability in the then-shaky program, leading them to winning seasons and CCS success before he eventually stepped down in 2017.

Davey grew up in a basketball family. His father, Dick Davey, predominantly coached at Santa Clara University, mentoring several future professional basketball players there, including basketball legend Steve Nash.

Growing up, Davey accompanied his father and attended doz-



Junior Bryan Wang dribbles the ball up against Gunn High last season.

ens of basketball camps, including going to yearly camps in Montana.

Davey's father was inducted into the Santa Clara Broncos Hall of Fame in 2016 after a 15-year career coaching the team.

"The Falcons will face a challenging preseason schedule, but he believes that there are many talented players on the roster and each is willing to play hard. With

the move to the highly competitive De Anza division, Davey said he is prepared to get the best out of the team by Oct. 31, when the winter sports season starts.

"Davey has 30 years of coaching experience so I'm happy that he's our replacement," junior forward Kali Duvvuri said. "It's hard to find a replacement this late into the year, but he's a good coach." ♦

Junior volleyball setter named 16U All-American

KALI DUVVURI AND HIS CLUB TEAM, BAY TO BAY VOLLEYBALL, WIN THE AAU BOYS' NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Tara Natarajan

Serve Volleyball Club team from Hawaii.

"When we dropped a set for the first time, it really woke us up," Duvvuri said. "We doubled down and started playing really well after that. We didn't lose a single set for the rest of the tournament."

On the afternoon of July 1, Duvvuri walked onto the court to play the championship match against Balboa Bay Volleyball Club — their toughest opponent in the tournament, and a team that Bay to Bay had never beaten before. Despite their previous losses, they won both sets in a surprising victory against Balboa Bay — scoring 25-23 and 25-22 — winning the championship.

"Our team is very talented," Duvvuri said. "No matter who we face, I always have good expectations for us. This tournament was difficult because it was national, and each team brought their best game [against us]."

Winning the championship wasn't just a landmark achievement for Duvvuri and his team: He was also individually awarded the prestigious title of AAU All-American for his accomplishments as a setter.

For Duvvuri, winning All-American represents years of tireless commitment to competitive volleyball. His cousin Prathik Rao, a Monta Vista High graduate, was the first in the family to play the sport, and his older brother, class of 2020 alum Mohan Duvvuri, took an interest in it soon after.

However, Duvvuri was reluctant to follow his cousin and brother, until his father took him to his first volleyball tryouts at the age

of 9 under the pretense of going out for ice cream. Until that point, he had avoided the sport ardently, having been convinced throughout elementary school that volleyball was a "girl's sport."

"I remember I was crying because I didn't

want to play volleyball, and my dad pretty much dragged me out of the car and told me to stop being a little brat and go try out," Duvvuri said. "So I tried out. It took about 10 minutes to fall in love with the game."

Duvvuri joined Bay to Bay Volleyball Club, his current club, in 2017. To sharpen his skills, Duvvuri often sets a volleyball against a wall at home 1,000 times in a day as solo practice, followed by a 10-pound medicine ball, which he also sets against the wall hundreds of times.

The club volleyball season takes place in the summer, fall and winter, with a break for the boys' high-school season which typically lasts from late January through April. During this off-season, Duvvuri plays as a setter and captains the varsity boys' volleyball team.

Although the school team is not as selective and accomplished as the club, high school volleyball has been an equally enriching experience for him due to familiar faces and team chemistry found in school athletics. Because of his love for simply being on the court during an action-packed game, he enjoys being able to play regardless of whether it is for school or club. On a more social aspect of playing competitive volleyball, Duvvuri enjoys being able to travel and stay in hotels with his team, visit different parts of the country and form a tight-knit network of friends and teammates.

"So I tried it out. It took about 10 minutes to fall in love with the game."

JUNIOR Kali Duvvuri

Duvvuri also experienced struggles with school athletics when he was temporarily placed on academic probation. Last spring, he was suspended from playing on the varsity team for three days due to a missing AP Computer Science A project. Although he was able to resolve the problem and return to the team when he turned in the assignment, the incident pushed Duvvuri

to increase focus on his academics — especially with junior year and college athletics around the corner.

This year, Duvvuri has also been navigating the college recruiting process, intent on receiving a Division I offer by next year. He would like to stay in California, though he is currently in talks with coaches around the nation from Penn State, NYU, Pepperdine, UC Irvine and UC Santa Cruz.

He is familiar with the process, following in the footsteps of his older brother who plays for UC Santa Cruz. Regardless of what school he decides to attend, Duvvuri has committed to improving both his grades and his game during junior year to raise his profile in the recruiting process. Although academics and athletics can strike a difficult balance at times, he hopes to improve both substantially.

"I'm mainly just trying to be a much better student this year, because at this point, the primary reason a college wouldn't want to accept me is because of grades," Duvvuri said. "When it comes to my game, I think I need to work on my defense and my serve. My serve isn't aggressive enough, and I also need to improve my lateral quickness and speed to the ball."

As Duvvuri enters what may be the most important year in both high school and volleyball, he is supported by his family, including his parents, brother and cousins, who have encouraged him throughout his volleyball career.

Duvvuri said that his parents attend every tournament he plays, traveling with him across the country for important matches. His older brother and cousins, who were an early inspiration for him in the game, are always ready for friendly competition.

Although he doesn't yet know whether he wants to play professionally after college, Duvvuri knows that his passion for volleyball will only increase over time, and looks forward to the opportunities future seasons will provide.

"No matter where I end up, being able to play volleyball and being competitive is what I love the most," Duvvuri said. "Winning nationals and All-American is my proudest accomplishment by far." ♦

Senior makes U.S. men's junior field hockey team

By Anthony Wang

Only a day into the U.S. Men's National Team Talent Identification and Training Camp for field hockey in August, senior goalkeeper Siddharth Kamannavar felt a sharp pain in his thigh as he returned to his dorm after an evening scrimmage.

"As soon as I hurt it and put weight on it, it hurt so much my head was spinning," Kamannavar said.

Determined to complete the camp — which would give him the best chance of being selected for the U-18 men's training squad, a group of 24 high schoolers from around the country — Kamannavar immediately wrapped his leg in an ice pack to ease the pain as much as possible right after returning to his dorm.

The next day he was back on the field, trying his best to persevere through the pain. His love for field hockey, communication skills and attitude were thoroughly tested through more scrimmages, intensive drills and tactical training sessions requiring players to judge the replays of professional players.

His toughness paid off a month later: On Sept. 9, the national team's coaching staff announced that Kamannavar had been selected as a member of the training squad.

Kamannavar had previously been invited to the selection camp in summer 2021, but did not make the cut then. He attributes his success this year his determination during the camp and practice throughout the year — but also growth in his character.

"Second time around, I put in effort to change some things about myself personally," Kamannavar said. "It's not just about the skill; they're looking for specific personality traits, like being able to tell defenders, 'Hey, you got to be there.'"

Kamannavar started playing field hockey

at age 10 after being inspired by the Hindi sports film "Chak De! India." After joining the Stanford Lightning field hockey team in Palo Alto, Kamannavar found a vibrant, closely knit community of field hockey players that supported his ambitions for the game. (Field hockey has an only girls' team at SHS and other Bay Area schools, but is a popular sport for men on the East Coast and elsewhere.)

His first coach at the Lightning, Yadh Sidhu, has helped him for nearly a decade, staying involved in his club, mentoring him and chaperoning him to events.

"He taught me how to hold a hockey stick," Kamannavar said. "And he was one of the first people I told about my selection."

Currently, Kamannavar practices and plays with UC Berkeley's collegiate team after volunteering to step in for their goalkeeper on days when he is injured.

Kamannavar believes that this spot on the training squad will be a stepping stone for future success in his field hockey career, propelling him further through a sport traditionally associated with women. He plans to continue his field hockey career in college, although he says he likely will not be getting a scholarship.

"I know that wherever I go, as long as there's a [field] hockey team, I will be playing," Kamannavar said. "The schools that I'm applying to are places which are very conducive to guys playing."

But, while college approaches, the community that has brought this far will continue to be important in his journey. Kamannavar said that he has become close friends with many of those he met playing field hockey, especially at selection camps.

These players have also served as guides and inspirations for Kamannavar, showing him that it is possible to attend college in America and play field hockey at the same



Senior Siddharth Kamannavar defends the goal during a scrimmage at the selection camp.

time, whereas in the past, many players would go to Europe to play.

"They have already gone through this process already, becoming a male field hockey player in college," Kamannavar said. "Having seen others blazing that path, I know what to do now."

He also stresses that the Bay Area's community has been extremely encouraging.

"I'm very thankful that, at least in Saratoga, a lot of people have been very supportive and receptive," he said. "When they find out that I play the game, they always ask 'How was selection camp? How was Cal Cup [a field hockey tournament]?' I don't think you get that feeling in other high schools."

From Oct. 14-17, as part of his commitment with the training squad Kamannavar traveled to Spring City, Penn., to play against Canada's youth men's field hockey team in a best of three, after being selected out of the squad as a top player. Kamanna-

var also hopes to qualify to play at the Junior Pan American Championship in Barbados in April.

Although Kamannavar will likely be tackling the responsibilities of a college student in the next few years, he has not let that distract from his biggest aspirations.

"In terms of goals, the 2024 Paris Olympics," he said. "I would quite like to make that spot. And in 2028, we've got home Olympics in L.A."

Nevertheless, Kamannavar maintains that the supportive attitude of the community he has in Saratoga has been key in his enjoyment of the sport.

"Being a guy in field hockey, it forces you to build a lot of character and a thick skin," he said. "You have to roll with the punches, questions like 'Isn't that a girl's sport?' I'm very thankful that at Saratoga, there's a network of support that makes it easier for me to talk about it in a casual situation." ♦

Freshman maintains passion for volleyball

By Divya Vadlakonda

Sweat dripped down freshman outside hitter Jena Lew's face as she received a serve from Homestead's volleyball team earlier this season, the enthusiastic cheers of her teammates ringing loud from the sidelines.

This is just one of dozens of memories from her season as a key contributor to the JV team. Lew was introduced to volleyball in fourth grade at a volleyball summer camp, and mentors there were influential in her decision to take up the sport.

"There was a really tall volleyball player who was teaching us and she inspired me," Lew said. "I thought she was really cool and made me feel like I might want to start [the sport] later."

Fostering the hobby throughout her years in Redwood Middle School, she started playing volleyball in sixth grade but got more serious in eighth grade, making the school's varsity team. Though the coach was strict, he taught her the rules of volleyball and was significant in establishing her love for the sport.

In 2020, Lew started playing club volleyball at Stingray Volleyball Club. She joined the 13s last year, a team composed of players from 12 to 13 years old, and is planning to try out for the 14s team, with players from 13 to 14 years old.

Being part of the club team gave her a chance for more experience, even earning her an award last year for winning her team's bracket.

She said club volleyball isn't too time-consuming and has a manageable number of practices and games, sometimes presenting opportunities to travel to places like Reno and Sacramento for tournaments. Because the players in club volleyball have some form of prior experience, it pushes her to do better.

In August, she joined the JV team. Although the team has created a healthy environment, there is still a lot of pressure on the players during games, and her teammates are a constant source of support for her.

"You have to trust [teammates] and you also have to have some trust in yourself," Lew said. "You have to depend on yourself for a lot of stuff, but having your teammates there to support you is helpful."

The team's after-school practices have been a big factor for her improvement.

Particularly, she has progressed in passing and serving throughout the years as well as with her consistency.

"I plan to keep playing club volleyball and school volleyball throughout high school, and then maybe try to get recruited," Lew said. "I'm excited to see where this takes me." ♦

Fencer rises above insecurities

By Anika Kapasi

Before competitions, sophomore Vera Fung, a national-level fencer, tries to gain weight to have energy for her matches. Over the years, she has seen how this process has contributed to having issues with her body image and dysmorphia.

"Usually I will gain a lot of weight and then afterward, it will lead into a spiraling pattern of continuously skipping meals," Fung said. "[This leads me to] drop a lot of weight and then gain it all back, which ends up being really demoralizing because of the health problems that follow."

For a period of time, skipping meals led her to faint frequently during practice and experience dizzy spells, which took a large toll on her health for future competitions.

Fencing has also impacted Fung's body in some other ways she is uneasy with. She recalls that she was uncomfortable wearing shorts during the previous school year because her fencing stance caused her left quad to be larger than her right.

"Because of fencing, I'm a bit more muscular than I'd like to be," Fung said. "Some parts of my body are more toned and bulkier than other parts and I feel I can't wear clothes as freely as I like to."

Recently, Fung said she has found improvement in weight stability, getting a good balance of carbohydrates and protein. Though this lifestyle is challenging to keep up with at times, she has found success in staying loyal to a schedule of eating at least two



Sophomore Vera Fung poses with her former coach Bogdan Gurinenco after placing seventh at the North American Cup in Ontario, California.

meals a day.

Another struggle Fung faces in her sport is peer and family pressure. When facing her opponent on the strip, worries about her parents enter her consciousness.

"I feel I can't wear clothes as freely as I like to."

SOPHOMORE Vera Fung

"My mom has always been supportive, but sometimes [during competitions] she gets really frustrated," Fung said. "Because this is a very expensive sport that takes up so much of her time, I feel a lot of parental pressure to perform well."

Additionally, she has found that friendships within the sport are often based on the success of the members. This peer pressure

elevates the stress that comes with her performance.

She said it has been hard to maintain friendships but is thankful that she has finally found a set of friends to lean on, making competing a bit easier to deal with compared to previous years.

Fung has fenced for five years and has enjoyed significant success. In July, she traveled to Minnesota to compete in Nationals, participating in the year 14, cadet, juniors, Division 2 and 3 categories. Her most notable achievement was placing fifth in the D2 category out of 123 fencers.

Throughout her experiences, she has grown into a mentally tougher athlete, one more able to better block out the parental and peer pressure of feeling the need to be perfect during competitions.

Fung is happy that her body image issues and health have improved and, even more, her love for the sport has grown as she looks forward to fencing through college. ♦

WRAPPING UP FALL SPORTS

Graphic by NIKHIL MATHIHALLI and HOWARD SHU

FOOTBALL

Injuries lead to forfeit, 0-5 league record

By AnikaKapasi

After a 42-36 home loss against Fremont on Oct. 20, the football team is 0-5 in the Peninsula Lake league. However, the Falcons had one of their best games of the season, keeping the lead for the majority of the game. "We played really well for the cards that we were dealt with injuries and all, but it was unfortunate that we couldn't finish the game holding onto the lead," senior offensive and defensive lineman Aarav Badani said. Junior quarterback Shane Timmons had a remarkable throwing game with senior wide receiver Seth Hulme running an impressive 97-yard touchdown in the second quarter. However, when senior right

tackle Justin Schroeder dislocated his knee in the third quarter, Badani said it threw the team off but they pushed through, keeping the lead until the end of the fourth quarter. The team has been struggling with injuries after a 49-28 loss to South San Francisco on Oct. 6, when the team limped off the field with only 15 healthy players from the original 25. "Because we have a small team and athletes [who play both offense and defense], the players have to play a lot and it's taking a toll on their bodies," Badani said. Head coach Steve Matos made the tough decision to forfeit the following varsity game against El Camino on Oct. 14 to give time for the players to recover, willing to risk one game instead

of the remaining three they had left against Fremont on Oct. 20, Woodside on Oct. 28 and Lynbrook on Nov. 4. "Forfeiting has probably been the hardest decision for me, especially since we're trying to change the football culture [at the school]," Matos said. Low participation has also been a large issue for the team, posing a major problem in finding success. "It comes down to [the number of players]," Matos said. "I don't think we'll have a problem with this in future years, but it's something that we're [struggling with] right now." The team hopes they will be healthy enough to win their remaining games, especially on senior night against Lynbrook. ♦



Courtesy of SAMANTHA TIMMONS
Senior wide receiver Seth Hulme lines up on offense against Fremont High on Oct. 20. Despite leading early, the team ultimately lost 42-36.

GIRLS' TENNIS

Win streak boosts hopes of returning to De Anza League

By VictoriaHu

After piling up wins in recent matches, the girls' varsity tennis team now stands in third place in the El Camino league with a 7-2 record as of Oct. 19. After winning a home match against Milpitas on Oct. 4, an away match against Fremont on Oct. 6 and another home match against Santa Clara on Oct. 11, the team is peaking at the right time. All three victories were by 7-0 margins. In addition, the team won 4-3 in a rematch against Lynbrook on Oct. 13 — de-

feating a rival they had previously lost to on Sept. 22, Junior Sabrina Manea, the team's No. 1 singles player, attributes this win to an overall improvement in team skill. "These wins are simply because we've gotten better," Manea said. "They also helped instill confidence in a lot of people." The team's main goal for the season is to continue their momentum and move back up to the De Anza league next year — from which they dropped this year — by win-



Manea

ning their last few matches. Since the Falcons lost 6-1 to Los Gatos on Sept. 13, they needed to defeat Los Gatos in their rematch at the end of the season on Oct. 27 in order to win the league and return to the De Anza division next year. (Because of print deadlines, The Falcon cannot cover this match in the Oct. 28 print edition.) To accomplish this goal, they train every Monday and Wednesday with coach Florin Marica after school to solidify basic movements by

practicing serves and hitting drills. Manea noted that having strong freshmen additions to the team, such as No. 3 singles player Viki Toram and No. 4 singles player Mihika Singh, have helped the team. Senior captain Arshi Chawla said this year's season ultimately went "a lot better than last year" and hopes for a victory against Los Gatos on the team's senior night. "There's a lot of pressure," Chawla said. "We have a chance to win the league and move back up to the upper division, so my fingers are crossed." ♦

BOYS' WATER POLO

Late-season turnaround demonstrates unrealized talent

By MitchellChen & AnthonyWang

Though the Falcons were unable to repeat last year's success in placing first in the El Camino league, they saw tremendous improvement over the season, overcoming their early losses with victories near the end of the league season. After adjusting to their new coach, class of '22 alumnus Kendal Jarvis, they ended their season with a 12-11 home loss against Monta Vista on Oct. 20 and a win against Cupertino on Oct. 18, resulting in a 5-9 record. They placed 6th in the league. After a strong senior-led team graduated last spring, this year's team is com-

posed of mainly sophomores and juniors lacking in experience. Specifically, their ball awareness and game sense were not as developed as many of the other teams in the league. Even so, senior captain and lead scorer Keon Nikfar thinks there were many games they should have won. "Results have been disappointing for the team as many of our games were against opponents who were not as good as us. We just could not execute throughout the game," Nikfar said. With a small roster of 10 players, veterans like Nikfar and senior left wing Eli Tsives not only had to condition themselves to play for longer minutes, but also had to help coach the newcomers.

However, with steady progression, the boys were able to win three of the last four games they played.

"I am confident we will be in a winning position for next season."



SENIOR Keon Nikfar

"After our first win against Cupertino,

we realized what we were able to achieve by coming together as a team," Nikfar said. For now, the Falcons look forward to their league tournament from Oct. 24 to Oct. 26. Team parent Greg Bunker is set to replace Jarvis after he leaves for Navy Boot Camp on Oct. 24. While the team had its ups and downs throughout the season, Nikfar feels the team was always there for each other, bringing each other together and keeping their morale optimistic. "We had a really rough season, but I am optimistic about the team," Nikfar said. "After I graduate, I am confident the team can be in a winning position for next season." ♦

GIRLS' WATER POLO

Falcons end season on favorable note

By StephanieSun & SarahZhou



Courtesy of MICHELLE WANG
Junior wing Amaris Charton looks to pass to a releasing player down the pool.

On their Oct. 20 senior night, the girls' water polo team won 9-5 against Monta Vista. Two days earlier they captured a 5-2 win against Cupertino. The pair of wins gave them a 5-9 record in the El Camino division. The team was scheduled to play three more times in a league tournament on Oct. 24, Oct. 25 and Oct. 27. During the season, the Falcons adjusted to various challenges, including the absence of key players senior goalie Rosie Kline and junior hole set Ryder Gangemi

in several games due to injuries and prior commitments. The effects of the absences were exacerbated by the team numbers, with only 10 players in total making up the varsity team. As a result, many younger players found themselves gaining more experience and playing harder — including sophomore flat Cassidy Coghlan. "We've had some major skill improvements throughout the season, especially with new players getting more confident as the season has gone on — the great team chemistry really helps them," Coghlan said. One key victory was their game against Santa Clara on Sept. 22, when the team won

4-1 while missing key players like Gangemi, Kline and senior left wing Afsoun Modiri. Without subs, the team had to work harder. "I think I've really developed as a player and connected to the team," junior wing Victoria Le said. "Even though a lot of our players have been sick, people have really stepped up." Despite all the challenges, Le said their camaraderie and morale remained fairly consistent under the leadership of coach Mike Allegretti. "We have a lot of hopes for the rest of the season and for next year," Le said. "I feel like our future is in good hands." ♦

CROSS COUNTRY

Post-season warrants players to practice harder workouts

By GeorgeHu & KevinYang

With the season coming to a close, the varsity cross country team has just two races left: SCVAL league finals on Nov. 1 and CCS on Nov. 12. Few of the team's runners are likely to qualify for the state meet, but boys' team senior co-captain Wasil Khan probably has the best shot. To train for the postseason, the Falcons, led by coach Ian Tippett and his wife Kathy, have adjusted their practice regime to incorporate harder aerobic runs and workouts, such as hill repeats and interval repeats, which vastly differ from the early season training. With this increase in difficulty — called "tapering" in cross country — the team's weekly mileage is much less than that of their midseason training. Even before the team started to taper, most runners saw noticeable improvement — not only in their times, but also in strategically planning runs. "Since most of our varsity runners are around the same speed, we stay together in a group for most of the races," ju-

nior Steven Sun said. "Doing this helped us push each other during the race and thus, as the season progressed, our individual and team race placements have steadily gotten higher." An example of this occurred in the 2022 Artichoke Invitational on Oct. 1, where the boys' team placed 15th out of 30 teams and the girls' team placed 7th out of 18 teams, despite the boys missing their two best runners — Sun and Khan — and the girls missing their top runner — senior co-captain Elizabeth Stoiber. These top runners were resting for an SCVAL league race that occurred three days later at the hilly Crystal Springs Park course. In that race, the boys team placed 10th out of 13 teams and the girls team placed 9th out of 13 teams. If every athlete executes their desired race strategy well at SCVAL league finals, Khan said he feels that the team will place higher in the competitive league finals meet than in their early season races. "Our team is in Division 3, while all of the other teams in our SCVAL league are either in Division 1 or 2," Khan said. "So, if our team places in the top six at league finals, I'll be extremely happy." ♦

GIRLS' GOLF

Freshman No. 2 player focuses on tournament improvements

By AnamikaAnand

Freshman Millie Wang first tried her hand at golf when she was 10 years old — while she originally did not find the sport interesting, she continued playing due to her parents urging her to give the sport a chance. As she gained more experience, she fell in love with the sport and started practicing at the Pruneridge Golf Club in Santa Clara. While Wang played recreationally during middle school, she began dedicating more time the summer before her freshman year. She practiced every day and developed a long-term goal of playing Division I college golf. Currently, Wang is one of two freshmen on the girls' golf team and is the No. 2 player. So far, she has enjoyed playing for the school. "It's a new experience since I've never played in a team before," Wang said. "The team bonding makes golf a lot more enjoyable than playing by myself." On days with no school team practice, Wang often practices for three hours at Pruneridge. During a typical practice,

she takes videos of herself to analyze and alter her swing as needed, keeping previous tournaments in mind in terms of what exactly to focus on for each practice session. On weekends, she plays tournaments to continue gaining experience. "Tournaments are really time-consuming because the sport is really slow, but I'm sure it'll be worth it," Wang said. One tournament that she said she will always be proud of is the American Junior Golf Association tournament at Stanford Golf Course this past August. She was pleasantly surprised to qualify for it after she won the one-day qualifier event with a 2-under 69. Despite the time-consuming nature of the sport and other drawbacks — Wang described golf as a sport that can be inconsistent and have unexpected results — she said the sport's qualities help her grow as an athlete. "Golf is a game where one hole may go really badly but you must continue playing," Wang said. "It helps you train your mindset to stay calm and just accept what's going on." ♦



Wang

FIELD HOCKEY

Injuries hurt team's performance

By LenaAribi & SarahThomas

Earlier this year, low numbers forced head coach Jatin Sharma to merge the JV and varsity squads. In the weeks after, the Falcons increased their practice rigor in preparation for tough opponents. On Oct. 18, the team played Homestead for their senior night and left the field tied with a score of 0-0 after a seven-player, seven-minute overtime. Key junior center back Zinneerah Ahmed was out this game, which worsened the team's already weak defense. Senior captain Kayla Steele said the team sometimes struggled after moving up to the more competitive De Anza division.



Adams

Oct. 4 to Los Gatos. Their last win was 3-0 against Palo Alto on Sept. 29. "We had two wins over teams that we thought were going to be tougher matchups," senior captain and center midfielder Georgia Adams said. "But we really stuck together and pushed through them." Adams emphasized that the heavy practice rigor helped underclassmen who were formerly on the JV team steadily improve their skills. With the merging of both the teams, Adams said it was necessary to boost morale. But staying healthy was difficult for players like Ahmed, who injured her thumb, and senior half back Lucy Campbell, who suffered shin stress fractures. Regardless of these injuries, the team remained confident they would finish the season with their head high. "The younger players will really have to step up," Adams said. "A lot of these underclassmen can really be great." ♦

GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL

Falcons improve significantly from their previous season, finish 10-10

By DivyaVadlakonda & MaggieZeng

Showing a strong improvement from the previous season, the girls' volleyball team, under the direction of head coach Thomas Ching, concluded with a 10-10 record, a major bounce back from their disappointing 4-12 record last year. Players told the Falcon they were happy with the improvement, but felt they didn't reach their potential. "I think our energy wasn't good and we weren't actively trying to win or hyping each other up, so there wasn't a team effort," sophomore middle blocker Shreya Raghuvanshi said. Unlike other years, the team had four captains — seniors Maaheen Khericha, Lisa Fung, Noor Khan and Anika Koganiti — as opposed to the usual two due to the influx of seniors nominating themselves for the position.

Some consistent star players on the team were Koganti, Khericha and junior Ariel Zhou. However, some team members expressed concerns about the future of the program. Seven of the 12 varsity players will be graduating this year, leading to uncertainties about the team's playing and dynamic with only five returning players and many new incoming players. The loss of experienced players next year will present a heavy challenge, and the two juniors — Aarkoti and Zhou — along with the three sophomores on the team — Raghuvanshi, Emmy Pak and Daria Cirlig — will have to play larger roles on the team. "Our future varsity team will still continue to grow and always reach out to our upperclassmen," Pak said. "The idea of them graduating is a bit bittersweet but we'll take what they've taught us and help continue their legacy." ♦

snapshots



FALCON // KAVYA PATEL



FALCON // ALLISON TAN



FALCON // ALLISON TAN



FALCON // ALLISON TAN



Courtesy of SANDEEP MUJU

The cheer team energizes the crowd during the football team's 42-36 loss against Fremont High on Oct. 20.

Injured seniors Aarav Badani and Connor Call, junior Asad Khan and sophomore Keion Ashjaee-Marshall watch their teammates at the football game on Oct. 20.

The senior girls' water polo team huddles together for their underclassmen friends' speeches on Oct. 20.

ICAC officer senior Ojas Somani leads the dance flash mob at the school's first-ever Garba event on Oct. 8.

Drum major senior Petr Tupitsyn watches as the band prepares for their senior night performance on Oct. 14.

Adam Levine cheating scandal reveals society's immorality

Saratoga Falcons



(Sarah) Thomas and Zhou

On Sept. 19, Instagram model Sumner Stroh posted a video on TikTok accusing Maroon 5's lead singer Adam Levine of having a year-long affair with her. Stroh shared screenshots of Levine's Instagram messages with her, mostly consisting of Levine "complimenting" her body in an inappropriate manner. Since then, multiple other women have also come forward with similar allegations.

In one of the messages — mere days after Levine and his wife Behati Prinsloo announced they were expecting — Levine asked Stroh for permission to name his unborn child after her: "Ok serious question. I'm having another baby and if it's a boy I really wanna name it Summer. Are you ok with that? DEAD serious." Three minutes

later, he added a man-shrugging emoji to the chain of messages, 🙄.

Though disloyalty and infidelity are as old as marriage itself, Levine's disrespectful messages are just a glimpse into the depravity and immorality that have plagued society ever since social media became ingrained into our daily lives.

Three minutes later, he added a man-shrugging emoji to the chain of messages, 🙄.

In his message to Stroh, Levine included an emoji depicting a man shrugging. The offhanded nature and blatant indifference conveyed through the emoji prove how far Levine has strayed from his marriage and morals, providing imagery of Levine's possible actions at the moment he sent the message, a wicked grin spread across his overly whitened teeth.

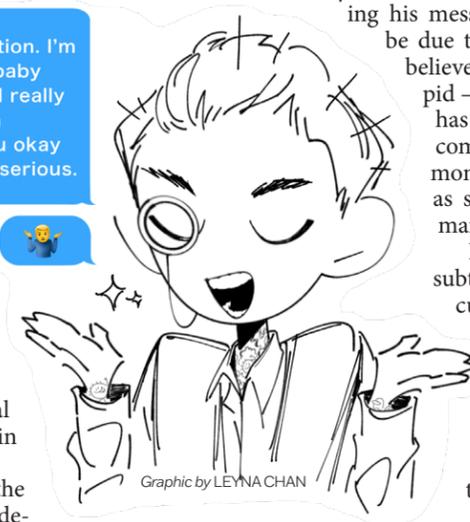
Ok serious question. I'm having another baby and if it's a boy I really wanna name him Summer. Are you okay with that? Dead serious.



Additionally, Levine's use of the pronoun "I" rather than "we" highlights how he excludes his wife from his life, and the anonymity social media affords him aids in his deception.

Levine also uses the phrase "serious" twice, depicting the crippling effects of social media on his attention span, causing him to repeat himself in one message.

Furthermore, his use of auto-capitalization on the word "DEAD" emphasizes the word "serious," hinting he believes Stroh



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

may have difficulty comprehending his message, which could be due to the fact that he believes women are stupid — or because Stroh has a history of not comprehending common concepts, such as staying away from married men.

His extremely subtle allusion to pop culture, coupled with his shortened memory span, concisely conveys the negative effects of social media on those who use it.

Levine's affair gives a warning to the reader: Avoid over-bleaching your hair, getting ugly tattoos and being active on social media well into your 40s. Then, and only then, can one actually maintain a healthy marriage. ♦

Grievances from a candy bowl on Halloween

Ama-Zeng Autumn



Maggie Zeng

It was hard to tell how much time had passed: The days blended into weeks, the weeks had blended into months and I — an ignored Halloween candy bowl — was growing tired from disuse. My orange paint was peeling, and the toothy black smile painted on me could not be more superficial.

Oh, to feel the delightful fulfillment of the night breeze, a feeling I've craved for countless days now.

Oh, to feel the delightful fulfillment of the night breeze, a feeling I've craved for countless days now. The pantry's top shelf got chilly — teasing me with a hint of what could be — but the air was suffocatingly windless, and dust continued to fill the void that was me. I laid there in gnawing

anticipation, boring holes into the door as I waited for that crack of hopeful lights.

But finally — a soft click jolts me out of my tearful reminiscence. Warm hands grasp me and bring me towards the light. I am Plato, dragged out of his cave into golden, genial enlightenment. Finally, I sit on my rightful throne in the patio, towering over the stone steps. I close my eyes — this is bliss.

Just as I let myself get comfortable, I suddenly feel pudgy fingers roughly dig into the candy depths of my soul. I scream at them to stop, but they continue to relentlessly rip out two, three, even four

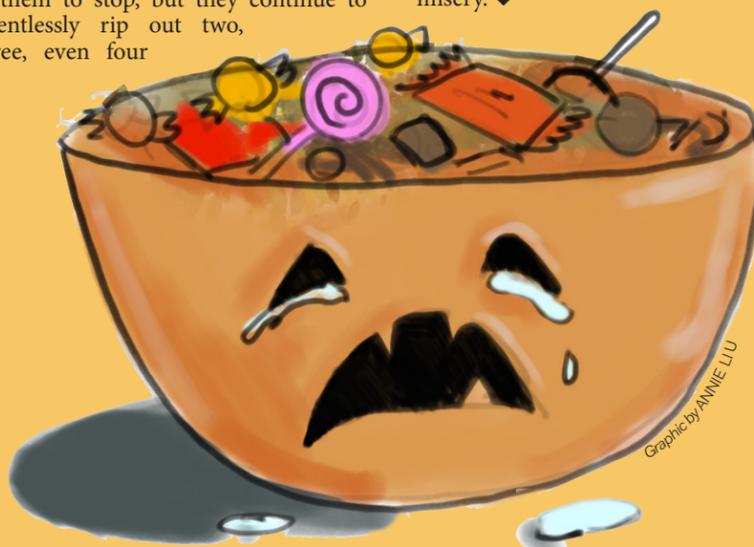
sweet organs at a time.

I cannot believe my eyes.

They pick me up and hang me over an endlessly dark pit, savagely shaking me over and over again until my insides are emptied out. As they turn around and run, they start eating the parts of me they hold in their hands!

After many long grueling hours of vicious attack, I lay there bloody, broken and bruised, devoid of my previous glory.

If there is a God in this world, please know that I was wrong — please end this misery. ♦



Graphic by ANNIE LIU

topten

SCARIEST THINGS

- 10 **The cafeteria line.** The horde of starving underclassmen is the reason all upperclassmen rush off campus.
- 9 **The parking lot.** It's survival of the fittest, but with Teslas and Mazdas.
- 8 **Yearbook kids pulling you out of class.** Let's be real: You want to be covered by the Falcon, not yearbook.
- 7 **Waking up at 8:19 a.m.** Sorry, Mr. Abe. We will not, in fact, be on-time.
- 6 **Being the 76th person in the library.** Only the first 75 can be socially, emotionally focused.
- 5 **Finding that your best friend stayed home from school.** Currently on FaceTime with her because she cannot survive without my presence.
- 4 **ASB cutting your club.** How will you get into college now? Just kidding, we all know you're still going to list it on your activities list.
- 3 **The "Euphoria" effect.** The senior class is going rogue — but thankfully we have Red Ribbon Day to combat alcoholism and drug abuse.
- 2 **Math teacher Seema Patel.** Imagine showing up to your AP Statistics class two minutes late with the wrong binder and no graphing calculator. Do Better.
- 1 **An A-.** We live in Saratoga. This is our reality.

>> Avani Kongetira