



Finding harmony in SHS through feng shui



As '90s Asian immigration increased, racial tensions flared



Which gym is best? A guide for high school students



# THE saratogafalcon

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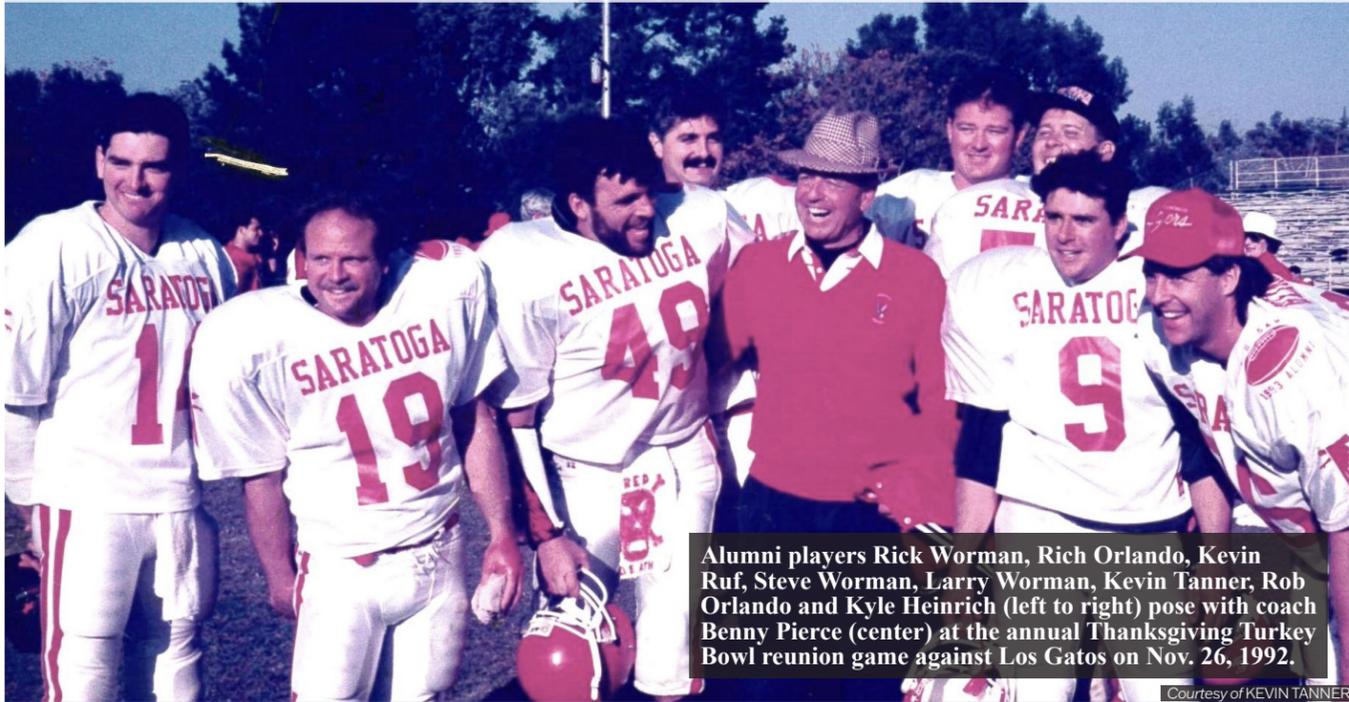
Friday, March 24, 2023

Saratoga High School | Saratoga, CA

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*'He turned average into remarkable.'*

— former assistant principal Karen Hyde



Alumni players Rick Worman, Rich Orlando, Kevin Ruf, Steve Worman, Larry Worman, Kevin Tanner, Rob Orlando and Kyle Heinrich (left to right) pose with coach Benny Pierce (center) at the annual Thanksgiving Turkey Bowl reunion game against Los Gatos on Nov. 26, 1992.

Courtesy of KEVIN TANNER

## Benny Pierce, the school's legendary longtime football coach, dies at age 89

BY Tara Natarajan

The first time former assistant football coach Kevin Tanner heard the name Benny Pierce was years before he was in high school. During a fourth-grade Little League game, Tanner collided hard with another player at the plate. As he lay slightly shaken on the ground, he heard his father call at him from the stands, "Get up right now if you ever want to play for Benny Pierce!"

Pierce was the head coach of the Saratoga High football team for 34 years, from the school's founding in 1959 to his retirement in 1994.

His impact was such that the school named the football field after him. Over the seasons, Pierce led the team into 269 wins, 84 losses and four ties. He had 31

winning seasons, 16 league wins and four CCS championships. When he retired and for several years thereafter, he was the coach with the most CCS wins of all time, according to the Mercury News.

Pierce died of natural causes at 89 on Feb. 11. He is survived by two children and a generation of students, colleagues and friends whose lives he influenced during his time at school and after.

To those who knew him, Pierce was more than a coach — he was a consummate teacher. His legacy is defined not just by a legendary record or a stacked list of accolades and achievements such as CCS victories and powerhouse teams, but by the thousands of lives he touched during his time at the school and after.

Tanner was one of those people.

Tanner, who graduated from SHS in

1981, ended up not just playing football for Pierce, but later working with him as an assistant coach. In his sophomore year, he joined the varsity football team and played as a right defensive tackle for 23 consecutive games until his senior year, where he switched to offensive tackle for 13 games. He went on to play for Santa Clara University. In 1989, Pierce asked him to be a defensive coordinator for the team. Tanner saw the team through the final years of Pierce's career and for 18 years after that.

"Coach Pierce was truly a special person," Tanner said. "He was probably the man who most influenced [the person] I ended up becoming."

>> BENNY PIERCE on pg. 6

## Baseball field renovations completed

BY Saachi Jain & Daniel Wu

Fresh green turf shines on the newly remodeled \$4 million baseball field as Falcon players step between the foul lines this spring.

Refurbished dugouts are packed with players awaiting their walk to home plate, where they stand ready and proud with the word Falcons written in large red text on the turf behind them.

To sophomore varsity player Samanyu Ram, the new field has boosted the pride of the team.

"It's great that we now have something to call home territory," Ram said. "We feel even more motivated to defend it against opponents."

The old field featured noticeable dips and imperfections which often led to injuries.

Captain Lucas Dennis, a senior who plays shortstop and is also the team's top pitcher, said the new field also greatly improves upon player safety. The old grass field that dated back to the 1960s featured noticeable dips and imperfections, which often led athletes to trip and sustain injuries such as rolled ankles.

"From a safety standpoint, the new turf is a lot safer than grass, and we expect to see fewer field-related injuries this season," Dennis said.

In addition, Dennis said the field was completed at the perfect time given the unusually heavy rain this season. With the old field, a rainstorm would put the field out of commission for days as the surface would be deemed too slippery and muddy to safely conduct practices or games. With the newly renovated field, the turf can dry in a matter of hours or even minutes because of vastly superior drainage.

>> BASEBALL on pg. 3

## School seeks new assistant principal

BY Christina Chang & Carolyn Wang

A job listing for a full-time assistant principal position at the school was posted on EdJoin, the nation's No. 1 education job board, on March 1.

According to Los Gatos Saratoga Union High School District Public Information Officer Tanya De La Cruz, one current assistant principal will be leaving, and a new one will be hired to begin serving at the start of the 2023-24 school year.

The district declined to say which of the school's three assistant principals will not return or why that person is leaving. The

school's three assistant principals are Abra Evanoff, Brian Thompson and Matt Torrens. None have made an official announcement regarding resignation or departure.

According to 44951 of the California Education Code, if a district decides to release a faculty member or administrator, notice must be given by March 15 of the preceding school year.

The posted annual salary for the assistant principal position varies based on experience, but is estimated to range between \$175,644 to \$197,690. The deadline to apply for the job is March 26. De La Cruz said applicant screening and interviewing will take place thereafter. ♦

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 newsbriefs

**A COVID-era landmark: Inspire testing terminates**

The end of California's State of Emergency and decreased usage led Inspire Diagnostics to end their PCR testing service on Feb. 28 due to low revenue. The school will still provide free take-home tests.

District Nurse Lisa Tripp attributed the drop in test numbers to the convenience and accessibility of free, at-home COVID-19 tests provided by the district. The district is planning to place an order for more tests to provide students, families and staff with free, readily-accessible tests until the end of the school year, as the local County Office of Education will no longer be receiving tests from the government.

Following updated California Department of Public Health quarantine guidelines, the school has changed quarantine policy to allow students to return to school after five days of isolation, with day zero being the day a student tests positive.

Students must feel well, have improved symptoms and be fever-free for at least 24 hours before returning to school. Students must wear masks upon returning to school until day ten, and they can take off masks after two sequential negative tests at least one day apart. ♦

— Jonny Luo

**Atmospheric river brings severe damage to facilities**

Saratoga was drenched in heavy rain Tuesday, March 14, as California saw yet another powerful atmospheric river — a type of storm "named for their long, narrow shape and the prodigious amount of water they carry," according to the New York Times. This follows a previous atmospheric river that loomed over the state last week.

The National Weather Service issued a High Wind Warning for the San Francisco Bay Area at around 12 a.m. Tuesday morning. Saratoga and its surrounding area saw gusts of wind 55 to 70 mph. The conditions are forecasted to continue until 11 p.m. Tuesday night.

With heavy winds toppling trees and powerlines, some families reported power outages. However, Saratoga High still had electricity; principal Greg Louie announced the Student Center would be open until 6 p.m. Tuesday night for student use.

As a safety measure, students were required to eat indoors during lunch so as to remain protected from the strong winds and falling tree branches. Some campus activities, such as swim and Speech and Debate practice, were canceled due to the inclement weather and power outages. ♦

— Christina Chang

**ASB officers for 2023-24 school year announced**

Voting for the 2023-24 ASB officers opened on March 9 and closed on March 10. All freshmen, sophomores and juniors were able to vote through the election link sent to their school emails.

The winning candidates were announced on March 14: Junior Taylor Chu will be the next ASB president, junior Emily Ta will be the next vice president, junior Scotty Rich will be the next treasurer and sophomore Anisa Taymuree will be the next secretary. The two club commissioners will be juniors Carine Chan and Joshua Ta.

To be eligible for ASB candidacy, students must have one year of experience in the leadership class. Those running must submit a self-nomination form one week prior to campaigning week, where candidates can put up physical posters around campus and post promotion videos online via social media. As future ASB president, Chu said one of her main goals next year is to increase school spirit.

"I plan to keep everyone involved so they feel like they are all a part of the student body," Chu said. "I want to organize more food truck events as well as encourage participation in rallies." ♦

— Victoria Lin and Zack Zhang



Photo by EMMA FUNG

March Madness | Senior Mateusz Palusinski scans the court for a pass over junior Kali Duvvuri and sophomore Caleb Yu on March 16 during a March Madness basketball game at lunch in the large gym.

# New coaches train Guard for 'Eclipsed' performance

By Kathy Wang

A wave of orange and blue flags flashed across the Arcadia High School auditorium as a team of 24 students — one half dressed in an ombre blue Winter Guard uniform representing the moon, and the other half dressed in an orange uniform representing the sun — performed their show "Eclipsed" on March 11, their third competition of the season.

Led by senior co-captains Juliette Hsieh, Brendan Sharp and Mika Tippetts, along with four new coaches Russell Crowe, Annika Le, Everett Henrie and Tiffany Au-yeung, the Winter Guard team placed second.

Winter Guard's first official performance, or "eval," took place at James Logan High School on Jan. 21. An eval is a show where Winter Guard teams can showcase their choreography to the California Color Guard Circuit (CCGC).

**An "eval" is a show where Winter Guard teams can showcase their choreography.**

Based on the judging, the Winter Guard teams are placed into these two divisions in descending order, Independent and Scholastic. Independent: Independent World Class, Independent Open

Class, Independent A Class. Scholastic: Scholastic World, Scholastic Open, Scholastic National A Class, Scholastic Regional A, AA, and AAA.

At the eval and their previous three competitions, Winter Guard performed "Eclipsed," which follows the story of the sun and moon as they fall in love. "Eclipsed" consists of partner work between eight sabres, eight flags and eight dancers.

With the four new coaches, Winter Guard feels that they have improved a lot. Sophomore guard member Diya Kapoor said that the new coaches give tips that are straight to the point, apply to the practice well and encourage members to push themselves to the best of their abilities.

"The addition of new instructors and leadership makes Winter Guard feel more cohesive, as if we are reaching a new era," Kapoor said. "They often encourage us by saying, 'It's a marathon, not a sprint.'"

Since Winter Guard performs the same show for each competition, they're able to improve their technique each time by improving dance positions and staying more in sync with one another. As of now, they spend most practices working on "cleaning" — refining the dance so it becomes more organized and pristine.

Though the performance and

placement itself is important, a big goal for members is to have fun with the show and pull the audience in, ensuring that everyone feels connected and "flows with the same harmony."

"I feel like for the first competition, I was performing a lot and wasn't too focused on choreography," Kapoor said. "But at the last competition at Fremont, I was focusing on choreography and not performing. I hope that for the competition, I'll be able to do both."

To maximize their performance quality, the Guard team practices on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"Though it seems like it takes a lot of time, practice is really something that I look forward to, and it's not really energy-sapping at all," Naveen said. "At the end of the practice, I feel happy and satisfied."

Their practices typically consist of stretching, practicing dance techniques across the floor, individual practice and finally, piecing everything together for the competition performance.

"Winter Guard is so much fun because you form so many strong friendships and such a close knit environment because you spend 15 hours a week with these people," Naveen said. "We never feel like we're being judged, and there's a healthy type of pressure that encourages us to do well." ♦



Kapoor

# Scholastic Art and Writing Awards: 47 students earn regional recognition for 2023 competition

By Sam Bai

Many students enter the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards competition — dubbed "the nation's longest-standing, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens" — every year.

Of the thousands of students across the Bay Area who entered the competition this year, 11 Saratoga High students received regional writing awards and 41 received regional art awards. Those who earned gold keys were automatically advanced to the national competition.

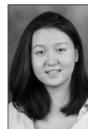
Writing award recipients included freshman Jane Lee; juniors Maithreyi Baharathi, Lynn Dai, Sanjoli Gupta, Grace Li and Anais Sobrier; and seniors Christina Chang, Channie Hong, Dyne Lee, Shannon Ma, Carolyn Wang and Adam Xu.

Inspired by her own experience learning music, Dyne Lee wrote a flash fiction piece titled "Imperfect Authentic Cadence" about a high school senior's relationship with her teacher during her last piano lesson before leaving for college. The piece earned an honorable mention. "The title refers to a type of cadence in music, which is a sequence of chords at the end of a phrase," Lee said. "It's based partly on my experiences learning music since elementary school and also my mixed feelings as a senior getting ready to leave home in a few months."

Despite the challenge of being limited to 1,000 words while also staying true to the spirit of flash fiction, Lee said she was still able to express the characters' emotions by drawing from her own experiences.

"I wasn't expecting to win anything because this was my first time submitting to a writing competition, but I also wasn't too surprised because I've worked on fiction writing and improved a lot this year in Creative Writing," Lee said.

A number of students also won art awards, including freshmen Nicole Hao, Jena Lew, Amy Miao, Celina Ren and Daniel Yu; sophomores Aiden Chen, Michelle Ho, Solbee Lee, Timothy Leung, Zozan Liao, Amy Pan, Natalie Poon, Anushka Tadikonda and Samyuktha Tundlam; juniors Maithreyi Bharathi, Lynn Dai, Danni Deng, Sanjoli Gupta, Kayla Jung, Isabella Kelly, Andrew Lin, Angela Luo, Eric Miao, Hannah Shaw, Eric Shi, Anais Sobrier and Angela Zhao; and seniors Samika Agarwal, Jenny Chan, Christina Chang, Channie Hong, George Huang, Carolyn Pyun, Apoorva Talwalkar, Liya Wu, Adam Xu, Kexin Yang and Carina Yee.



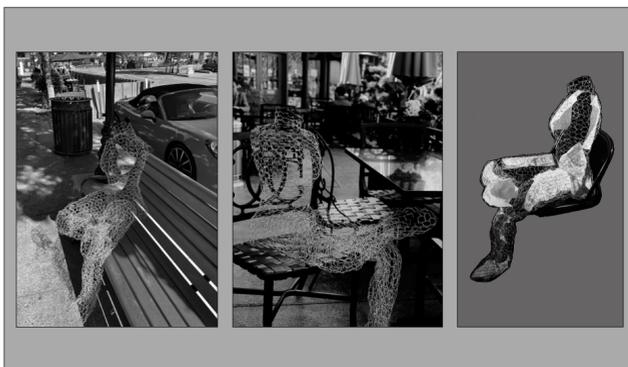
Yang

**"I think art is able to break the boundaries between people."**

SENIOR Kasie Yang

Kasie Yang said she found inspiration for her pieces through lots of experimentation.

"One time, I saw a toilet seat and I thought it looked a lot like a purse. So, I put a logo on it and wore it like a purse out on the streets," Yang said.



Courtesy of KASIE YANG

Kasie Yang's "Quarantine Lifted" wire sculpture placed on various benches next to a street.

This was submitted as part of her AP Art portfolio last year, and upon submitting it to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, earned her a gold key. She also received honorable mentions for two sculptures, also from her portfolio: "Sweet Memories" and "Quarantine Lifted."

"Sweet Memories" is a bike sculpture covered in gummy bears of all different colors and uniform size around the plastic frame of a bike.

It is meant to provoke a nostalgic feeling of childhood memories. The pedals and handles were covered with blue gummy bears, while the seat, gears and wheels had none at all.

"Quarantine Lifted" was another life sized sculpture made of wired mesh in the

form of a body sitting down with the right leg crossed over the left. At first, it was just another experiment in which Yang tried to create something large using wire. After crafting it, Yang decided to carry it downtown to take photos in well-populated areas, such as cafes.

"At first, it felt awkward to carrying such a large thing around. People were looking at me, but it was also amusing to see people's reactions," Yang said.

Yang remembers one group of people who came up to her and thought the sculpture looked very "really cool."

"I think art is able to break the boundaries between people. Sometimes you can create really interesting things from messing around with random objects," Yang said. ♦

**BASEBALL FIELD**

continued from pg. 1

"We've lost minimal playtime, which is really beneficial to our training, and it definitely sets us up for an advantage over other teams which practice on grass fields," Dennis said.

Sophomore pitcher and outfielder Aiden Chen also found the dugouts to be a big improvement from the ones in the old field, which were often small and unable to fit everyone's belongings.

"It has an almost pro-style design to it, and it is super exciting and fun," Chen said. "With more space, the atmosphere has become much more comfortable."

As the team showcases its skills on the new field, Chen said he wants to make baseball as widely celebrated as football is.

"We can hold our own against anybody, but the crowd's energy feeds us even more. Let's get as many people out to games as possible!" Chen said. ♦



Photo by ISABELLE WANG

Renovated baseball field open for players.

# PTSO urges donations to help staff

By Jonny Luo & Michelle Wan

As the second semester winds down, leaders of the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) have been hard at work raising funds and trying to balance its budget — which has a shortfall of \$15,215 as of early March.

This year, the PTSO set aside \$71,450, with the added donations carried over from the previous year, to help fund classes and programs on campus. The PTSO helps fund lunches with teachers, grants that help teachers buy necessary school supplies, school library needs and senior graduation night.

While the PTSO receives funding from its memberships and matching donations, it relies primarily on donations of \$150 from families, said Lingling Sun, the group's current president and mother to a class of '21 alumnus and a current freshman.

This year, the program received a total of \$39,785 in donations from 246 families, an increase from the 209 families that donated in the 2021-2022 school year. The target was to reach \$55,000 in donations, which is equivalent to donations from around 400 families, a third of the student population.

"I've realized that there are some parents who don't really feel the need to donate, while there are some that will donate regardless, and others that do not even know the PTSO exists," Sun said. "It was different at Saratoga Elementary — parents seemed more involved and this informa-

tion was shared amongst the community. It doesn't seem that way here."

As such, the PTSO has been attempting to solicit donations through PTSO emails, Friday letters and messages through platforms like WhatsApp, WeChat and Facebook to target parents active within the community. They have also been hosting fundraisers, such as a Hong's Gourmet Fundraiser on Jan. 18, which raised over \$400.

**"I hope I can motivate families to pay more mind to the PTSO."**

PTSO PRESIDENT Lingling Sun



With less money in its coffers this year, PTSO had to cut and downsize on multiple planned events. For example, the organization normally hosts mental health seminars called the Parent Education Panel for parents, and they had hoped to budget around \$2,000. However, since speakers normally cost \$2,000 to \$10,000 and they were unable to reach their target goal, they had to stop the program.

The organization has instead been leaning more on the school's mental health program to educate parents, given the difficulty of bringing in speakers.

Inflation has also affected the program,

with events costing more than it had in previous years. Usually, it costs the school around \$2,000 to host the teacher's lunch for Lunar New Year, but it ended up actually costing \$3,000 this year. For the Holiday Lunch at Saratoga Inn, which was an event for parents to come together and get to know one another, the cost totaled to approximately \$2,500 while the budget was set to \$2,000.

Although the school eased back into in-person learning over two years ago, lingering effects of the pandemic have continued to impact the PTSO's outreach efforts, as fewer parents are aware of the PTSO or what the organization does, Sun said.

This slow ease back into everyday schedules and lack of donations has led the year to conclude with a shortage of funds. Sun urges families to pitch in small donations so that the PTSO can continue providing financial support to improve the quality of the school's education. Parents can donate through the school website or support fundraisers that various sports and programs organize in order to fund the rest of their seasons. Students benefit greatly from these donations, improving their educational opportunities and school experience.

"I hope more parents can become more involved in their children's education through donations," Sun said. "As a parent myself, once I started donating money, I began to pay more attention to where that money went. I hope that I can motivate families to pay more mind to the PTSO and our own students too." ♦

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*This story has been shortened for print. To read more about Winter Guard's performances this season, scan the QR code to the right.*



>> falconfigures

246 families donated \$39,785 in the 2022-23 school year

37 more families donated this year than the previous year

33 percent of the student population needs to donate for PTSO to reach their goal

2 years after COVID-19, PTSO still struggles from pandemic effects

## Clubs aim to engage school in 'food fight'

BY Sanjoli Gupta

The school's LEO Club and Hunger at Home Club will lead participation in the first "Food Fight" competition hosted by Martha's Kitchen — a non-profit soup kitchen that works to alleviate food insecurity — during April. The goal is to promote awareness and encourage volunteers to combat food insecurity.

After LEO Club packaged 270 sandwiches for Martha's Kitchen on Jan. 25, they wrote back: "It was a joy to work with Saratoga High's LEO Club. The sandwiches they made were the highest standard that we have had delivered by a high school club. So many thanks for their dedication and attention to details."

About a week later, Martha's Kitchen invited the school again to participate in the competition. High schools, including Bellarmine, Presentation, St. Francis, Valley Christian and Notre Dame, will also participate. The competition uses a points system, with points attributed to different actions. A website will be updated weekly tracking each school's progress, and the one with the most points at the end will be declared the winner.

The month will include opportunities for schools to earn points. Food donations are four points per pound. Containers will be placed near the front of the school at the foyer of the gym, the McAfee Center and the music building. A food list will be sent out for shelf safe items such as rice, beans, cereal and canned fruit to help students find suitable donations.

Eight points are awarded for each hour of community service. LEO Club president, senior Christina Chang and Hunger at Home Club president, junior Sam Bai plan to host two on-campus events to bolster student engagement. One will be a sandwich packaging event like one LEO Club hosted in January. Another will be to decorate meal service bags. Monetary donations are also accepted at one point per dollar.

To promote the competition, marketing will be directed toward freshmen in the school's Health and Driver's Education program — a course requiring students to get involved in community service. Additional volunteer shifts were created for the month in light of the school competition; students may volunteer during the first, second, third or fourth week of April. There will also be school-specific QR codes around campus for sign-ups.

"We are really excited to participate in friendly competition with other schools since all the work is toward a great cause," junior LEO Club vice president Naina Tallak said.

Volunteering shifts are two hours, morning shifts are three hours and volunteering is mostly indoors. Masks, aprons, hairnets and gloves will be provided.

While the final reward is still to be determined, Martha's Kitchen has suggested the school that wins may receive a certificate and have the school mascot printed on their vans.

"Food is something that brings people together to share and enjoy, and we think it's important that everyone has the opportunity to unite in this feeling," Tallak said. ♦

## Veteran robotics team qualifies to Worlds after regional tournament

BY Saach Jain & Martin Xu

After months of preparation, two of the school's FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) teams qualified and competed at the FTC Northern California Regional Championship over the weekend of March 4 at Kathleen MacDonalds High School.

Five teams — including one from Saratoga High — will advance to the prestigious FIRST Championship in Houston from April 18 to 22.

While the Cuttlefish have advanced to the Worlds' Championships, the school's FIRST Robotics Challenge's (FRC) robotics team, 649 MSET Fish are competing on the weekend of March 18 at the FIRST Robotics San Francisco Regionals (with an additional competition on April 7) for their chance at qualifying for the FIRST Championship.

This year, the three-team robot game alliance and Inspire Award runner-ups advanced to the FIRST Championships.

### 6165 MSET Cuttlefish

The 6165 MSET Cuttlefish, the school's flagship FTC team, had high hopes for both the robot game and award selection after organizing various outreach initiatives and continuously improving parts of their robot.

**"Our drivers stayed calm under pressure — something they practiced a lot for especially before regionals."**

SOPHOMORE Asheeka Noronha

Senior software lead Matthew Song said unforeseeable factors led to a disappointing performance at the competition. Song works on the autonomous section of the robot, a 30-second period where robots operate using only pre-programmed instructions and sensor inputs.

"Though [our autonomous] was working pretty well a few weeks before the competition, it was very inconsistent at regionals," Song said.

Song also mentioned that because their field tiles were older, it was much squishier — which allowed the robot to move faster than if it were on a firmer field. The robot often slipped on the fields at regionals, deviating it from its original path.

Despite issues with their autonomous



Courtesy of ELLIOT SHEM

While playing on the same alliance during one of their matches, the MSET Cuttlefish and Bettafish teams race to stack blue cones on top of poles that are stationed around the field.

period, junior hardware member and driver Naomi Hsieh was confident to make it into Division finals with their alliance partners 8872 Robopocalypse and 11311 Paragon. By the time the team had reached the semi-finals, the autonomous period had been adjusted to fit the new field.

But an unexpected defeat happened. They had lost 226-224 due to what Hsieh believed to be a misscoring by one of the scorekeepers, costing them 20 crucial points.

The next match, the team was rotated off for team 11311 Paragon to compete for their alliance. Hsieh and her teammates lost hope as the match continued to move toward what seemed to be a decisive loss. As unexpected as the first match, Hsieh and her team looked up with disbelief — their alliance partners had won the match due to a massive 80 points of penalties incurred by the opposing alliance.

The team went on to win the third match and headed off to division finals where they lost 2-0. They were awarded the Inspire 2nd Place Award, placing them second in the advancement slot to Houston.

To prepare for the FIRST Championship, the team plans to do more driver practice and develop game strategies as they go. In addition, the team hopes to retune their autonomous software to fit a firmer field.

"I think one unique part about FIRST is that we're able to talk to all these other teams and make friends with them," Song said.

### 7641 MSET Bettafish

For the rookie Bettafish team, the regional competition was a learning experience in terms of the robot building, engineering portfolio, as well as students' presentation and interview skills.

"Our drivers stayed calm under pressure — something they practiced a lot for especially before regionals," sophomore hardware lead Asheeka Noronha said. "They would even blast memes to practice keeping their focus during their many driver practice sessions, and it showed."

As the day progressed, the Bettafish experienced wins and losses, most of which were against the top teams in the region. However, the team continued to think ahead toward the next match and their potential strategies, rather than dwelling on losses.

"When we finished a match, it always gave the drivers a few minutes of rest and relief, and I could always learn something from the gameplay of our opponents to apply in the next match," Hu said.

During alliance selection, the Bettafish accepted an invitation to join the second-place team in their alliance.

"Our slides broke toward the end of qualification matches, and we weren't sure if teams would be as inclined to pick us then," Noronha said.

After their elimination from the robot game, the Bettafish began looking to the awards ceremony as their advancement to Worlds. However, the entire ceremony passed without them receiving any award. Despite this disappointment, they are now looking to learn from the gaps identified during Regionals and improve their outreach going into the offseason and next year.

"I feel great pride in what came out of this competition because the result is literally the embodiment of all the hard work we had accomplished over the season," Ko said. "All of our hard work paid off for us to make it this far into the season as mostly rookies." ♦

## Soundings puts on its first exhibition

BY Isabelle Wang

As warm light streamed into the school library on March 3, live music filled the room, setting a soothing ambiance. Students and parents walked around to see a collection of photographs, digital and traditional art hung on the walls with colorful ceramics and writings displayed along the tables.

Soundings staff members, the school's art and literary magazine, organized the event to showcase student-produced writing and art. About 90 people attended the showcase.

In the recent past, the staff has produced two online issues and one print edition each year. The Soundings program began in the 1980s; in the past four years, has been advised by English teacher Amy Keys and students in her Creative Writing class.

This year, the Soundings staff held their first ever art and literary exhibition and auction to raise money for their magazine.

"The goal is to provide a forum of publication for students beyond their classroom, so they can celebrate and publish their work to inspire others," Keys said.

Because a lot of students submit to

Soundings, the staff hopes to print roughly 1,000 magazines, coming up to \$4,000 with an addition of the \$500 grant from PTSO.

In previous years, Soundings used profits from the yearbook's advertising to fund their magazine. However, after COVID-19, profits from yearbook sales dropped.

"The fundraising is threefold," Keys said. "One is to raise the money but also to raise the profile of the arts, along with giving writers and artists an opportunity to share their work to publicize it for an audience that's more than just their teachers."

Around 20 pieces were auctioned, and six pieces were sold. Chang's "Chasing Dreams" and "Koi Fantasy" watercolor paintings were sold for \$20 and \$5.55, respectively. Junior Lynn Dai's "Looking Back" charcoal drawing and "Summer Creek" oil painting; sophomore Isabelle Wang's "Beach" pastel; and senior Yash Pai's "Fast and Furious" photograph were all auctioned for \$20 each.

The exhibition also gained revenue by selling ceramics donated by ceramic students. Three \$15 mugs were sold, along with four other \$10 miscellaneous items such as an owl figurine and feather room decor.



Photo by ISABELLE WANG

Soundings staff set up their art and writing exhibition in school's library on March 3.

With a startup cost of \$100, the Soundings exhibition raised a total of \$1,928.80: \$838.80 from food, auctioned works and tickets sold at the door, \$240.00 from tickets sold online, \$575.00 from their GoFan and \$275.00 from the Webstore.

"I'm really proud of our staff who put this exhibition together and students who presented their works. I'm also thankful for all who attended our event," Chang said. "The exhibition was a successful start to a new tradition future staffs can carry on for years to come." ♦

March 24, 2023

## A testflight at age 11 plants a seed for pursuing pilot's license in high school

BY Kathy Wang

Senior Anand Agrawal's parents gave him the gift of three demo flights for his 11th birthday. Six years later, he is now licensed to fly a Cessna 172 plane on his own.

His first three flight lessons took place at the flight school AeroDynamic Aviation in East San Jose. During the lessons, his instructor allowed him to conduct simple control over the plane once it was 5,000 to 6,000 feet in the air.

"Ever since I took those three lessons, [flying] has always been in the back of my mind, but I've never really had the opportunity to go back," Agrawal said.

Since the minimum age to get a pilot's license is 17, he couldn't pursue flying until he reached high school. Meanwhile, he sometimes visited San Francisco Airport to watch planes. His favorite viewing spot is BayFront Park, where there's a clear view of planes taking off 200 to 300 feet away on four runways.

After turning 17 last year, Agrawal decided to begin taking lessons in July.

To attain a pilot's license, the first requirement is to pass a written exam, which has around 40 multiple choice questions surrounding all federal aviation regulations and functions of a plane. Trainees are also assigned to a Chief Flying Instructor (CFI), who teaches them how to fly a plane for a required number of hours, which varies depending on the flight school and whether



Courtesy of ANAND AGRAWAL

Senior Anand Agrawal checks the fuel quantity in his Cessna 172, AeroDynamic Aviation.

the CFI thinks the trainee is ready. Once the trainees have completed the required number of hours flying with an instructor, they are ready to fly solo, and can begin training by themselves.

"The big thing about flying is that it's so much more different from getting a driver's license," Agrawal said. "First of all, there's a hard set minimum on the amount of hours you have to do along with just knowing how to functionally operate the plane. You have to know every rule and regulation surrounding flight, and how your plane works."

Agrawal's CFI was Bradley Collins. After training with Collins for 30 hours, Agrawal was able to fly solo in November.

## SpeakEasy: Student wins contest creating speech app

BY Anirudhlyer & Daniel Wu

As a demonstration for The Falcon, junior Grant Hough recently typed the sentence into a computer: "Our bald forefathers told the Eskimos to enjoy the Christmas season." A few seconds later, a miniature blue icon in the corner of his screen turned red, alerting him about the nuance errors in his sentence and offering him a more politically correct alternative: "Our European ancestors told the Inuit people to enjoy the holiday season."

This example showcases just a sliver of Hough's latest software project, SpeakEasy. SpeakEasy functions as a downloadable browser extension that uses AI to detect potentially offensive content in real-time and suggest alternative wording.

After completing SpeakEasy, Hough entered the 2022 Congressional App Challenge, a competition where over 10,000 students nationwide compete to build an application. Competitors enter through their congressional district, and the district's representative nominates winners. Hough placed second overall within the competitive CA-18 district of Silicon Valley and received a personal letter from Congresswoman Anna Eschew.

Hough said he was inspired to create SpeakEasy after noticing a disturbing trend: As online communication has exploded, much less was being effectively communicated.

According to Pew Research Center, 7 of 10 social media users say they feel stressed during conversations surrounding politics and worry what they say will unintentionally offend others. Ineffective digital communication carries numerous consequences that can jeopardize personal and professional relationships.

"I knew this problem was more serious than ever and that an AI-powered browser extension could offer an effective, autonomous solution," Hough said.

SpeakEasy is a client-server application; the client layer — the medium through which users interact with the extension — is programmed with HTML, CSS and Javascript. The client layer receives user text input and directs it to a PaaS server. The server constantly listens for requests from the client-layer.

Altogether, Hough implemented three AI engines to accurately rephrase user input. He first developed a custom LSTM neural network with TensorFlow trained on thousands of Twitter tweets flagged as controversial and non-controversial. The neural network processes tokenized words in the form of numeric values into nodes structured similarly to neurons in a human brain — hence the name "neural network."

Hough's neural network is used jointly with Perspective's API, an AI interface that analyzes text and predicts its perceived impact on conversations. If Hough's neural network and Perspective's engine deem a user sentence to be potentially controversial, the sentence is sent to OpenAI's GPT-3.5 to rephrase the sentence to be less controversial. Finally, the sentence is returned to the user.

Hough is marketing SpeakEasy at zero cost to a wide customer base, from writers and journalists to students and social-media users. "I created SpeakEasy so it could be used by anyone, which is partly why I decided to build it as a browser extension rather than a full-on app," Hough said. "Nearly every device has a built-in browser, whereas applications are often limited to certain operating systems."

Hough faced numerous challenges while creating SpeakEasy. For instance, he was not accustomed to programming extensions or implementing such an elaborate network of AI systems.

"I see SpeakEasy as an important milestone going ahead, and I'm going to keep building apps that bring a strong, net positive impact to society," Hough said. ♦

## Junior wins prestigious CubeSat satellite award

BY NatalieChua & Sanjoli Gupta

Junior Sannidhi Boppana's love for STEM stems from its analytical nature. Computer science's ability to keep her thinking and looking for solutions to complex problems is why she loves working on computer science projects.

This love eventually translated to hard work which won her awards: Boppana received an Honorable Mention award from the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) in January for a portfolio of coding projects that she compiled over the fall semester, including the MIT Beaver Works Summer Institute CubeSat competition and the Synopsys Science Fair.

"I prefer logically analyzing to memorizing," Boppana said. "Computer Science has always come very naturally to me just like math."

**"The biggest challenge was connecting the actual satellite to the ground station."**

JUNIOR Sannidhi Boppana

During Synopsys, Boppana presented a poster entry on reduced precision neural networks to a panel of judges who assessed her work.

In the CubeSat competition, Boppana worked with a team of five high school students to build a mini satellite.

The team, which also included two other Saratoga High students — sophomore Samanvi Boppana and junior Ameya Saund — faced multiple challenges as they advanced through every round of the competition.

then the trainee cannot pass the test.

By flying three to four hours a week and spending 400 hours intensively studying for his license, Agrawal was able to pass the test on his first try and attain his pilot license on Jan. 22.

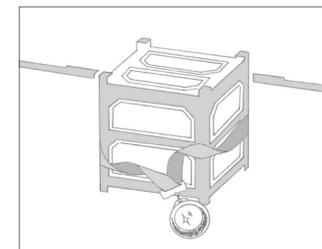
"Flying is really relaxing, even though there's a lot of multitasking going on," Agrawal said. "There's just something about being in the air at 6,000 feet by yourself. It's just an unmatched feeling."

Agrawal's pilot license is rated to fly a Cessna 172, a single engine plane that has under 200 horsepower and can seat up to four people. His favorite landing places include Half Moon Bay and the Norman Y. Mineta San Jose Airport.

"The approach onto Half Moon Bay is just beautiful because you have the entire ocean to your left and the mountains to your right," Agrawal said. "San Jose Airport is also really nice to land because it has huge runways and you're landing next to big commercial jets that are right in front of you."

Though Agrawal doesn't have plans to become a professional pilot, he does plan on studying aerospace engineering in college and getting more instrument, commercial and twin ratings, which are official skills to attain as a pilot.

"I can't see myself going down that [airline pilot] career path," Agrawal said. "But a pilot's license is a lifelong skill in my opinion, and it's something that I really want to be able to enjoy for the rest of my life." ♦



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

The ultimate goal of the CubeSat contest, which took place in May 2022, was to create a satellite that'd take pictures of the ocean and detect plastic; then, it would send those images back to the ground station to let contestants know about the plastic content in a specific area.

Participants presented their final designs for a sustainable satellite, along with a prototype, to a board of judges, who then chose the best design.

The group said that the biggest issue they ran into was coordinating times to work on their project, as all of them had busy schedules.

"In terms of the competition itself, the biggest challenge was connecting the actual satellite to the ground station because of the large distance between the two," Boppana said. "It needs to be able to go over a really long distance and be able to transfer the data without bluetooth."

By experimenting with different softwares, the team finally discovered a solution and went on to win second place overall. Sannidhi compiled her projects into one mega submission that ultimately won her recognition from the NCWIT.

"The award came as a complete surprise, and it was so unexpected I started to cry," Boppana said. "I thought I couldn't compare to the people applying and believed it was a long shot, so I am especially grateful." ♦

**BENNY PIERCE**  
*continued from pg. 1*

**A formidable coaching career**  
Pierce's love of football began when at Los Gatos High. A rare four-sport athlete, he earned 12 varsity letters (each commemorating a completed season of a certain sport) in football, basketball, baseball and track by the time he graduated in 1951. His high school football coach, Al Sonntag, was an important influence in Pierce's decision to become a coach.

Pierce went on to attend San Jose State University and play quarterback on its football team, even throwing passes to a young tight end named Bill Walsh, who would later go on to win three Super Bowls as the coach of the 49ers.

He eventually returned to live in Los Gatos and married his high school sweetheart, Mignon Pierce. In 1959, a small new school opened in the neighboring town of Saratoga. Pierce was soon hired as its first head football coach and a PE teacher.

At its inception, SHS had about 300 students, consisting of only freshmen and sophomores, but soon developed distinguished varsity and JV teams. During his first few seasons, the young Falcons had to be bused to LGHS to play home games because they didn't have a field.

Soon, under Pierce's leadership and with an abundance of talented athletes, Saratoga began to dominate its league in the '60s and '70s. Former players said Pierce's coaching was defined by a pursuit of perfection. He would often run the same play over and over, more than 20 times if necessary, until the players got it right.

Whether in the weight room, on the football field or in their lives, Pierce encouraged his players to become "just a little bit better," Tanner said.

Pierce's coaching talent was legendary — people often wondered why he didn't go on to coach college football or join a more competitive high school. The answer to that was simple, according to Tanner.

"He knew he was doing good for other people, and enjoyed what he did," Tanner said. "He didn't see a reason to change that." Pierce's offensive style — a run-heavy Wing T offense — was so iconic that when one of his successors, Tim Tramp, changed the offense during his 2-year stint following Pierce's retirement, there was a community uproar.

As the team's demographics changed in the 2010s, former athletic director Tim Lugo, the head coach at the time, modified the team's offense to better serve undersized but athletic players who would be less successful at executing run-heavy plays.

In 2012, he opted for a version of the pass-heavy Air Raid offense formation. Although it was a smart decision that helped the Falcons beat bigger teams, even then Lugo received flack for diverting from Pierce's run-focused offense. The experience made one thing clear to Lugo: Benny Pierce's name and influence were synonymous with Saratoga football.

Lugo first met Pierce when he interviewed for the head coach position in 2008 — Pierce was on the interviewing panel. When he got the job, he said Pierce was always available to help. The retired coach dropped in on games often, and the two men developed a friendship. They often watched Valley Christian football games together (Pierce's prodigy, Mike Machado, who coached briefly at Saratoga, was a head coach there), and Lugo recalled how Pierce's "coaching instinct" never went away.

"His mind was always so sharp for the game," Lugo said. "Watching games with him and hearing him [analyze] plays was an amazing learning experience."

**The lessons for a lifetime**

To those who knew him, Pierce was more than just a coach. Tanner said everything he did was a lesson to those around him: To help people become better versions of themselves was integral to his nature.

"He was a kind man with a sense of humor — there was nobody more wholesome than he was," Tanner said. "He had no vices."

Karen Hyde, who worked as an assistant principal from 1976 to 2012, said teaching was central to Pierce's identity. He took it upon himself to impart not just athletic skills but a strong sense of ethics, discipline, respect and pride to each student he coached. At a time when football teams were notorious for "ill behavior," Pierce's non-nonsense attitude and grounded values system kept his players under check.

She recalled a time when she saw one of

the football players running a lap around the field during a game. When she asked him what was going on, the student replied that Pierce made him run laps after he swore on the field — to Pierce, disgracing the uniform with bad behavior was "the sin of the century," Hyde said.

The closest Pierce ever got to profanity, according to both Hyde and Tanner, was throwing his clipboard on the ground and exclaiming "Fiddlesticks!" when he ran an unsuccessful play.

Pierce was a role model for both his students and his colleagues not just in football, but also in morality and integrity. Pierce remained in touch with his players even decades after they graduated. The bonds he built endured throughout the years.

Lugo witnessed this impact firsthand during an alumni football reunion in 2017 at a home game. Along with the players, the 30 men gathered in the locker room before the game in anticipation of one of Pierce's famous pep talks.

They eagerly relived their high school football days through excited chants and pregame huddles. When Pierce entered the room, the men's eyes lit up in reverence in a way Lugo had never seen.

"The way they looked at him was just different," Lugo said. "It was like they were 16 again. The love and respect they had for him [seemed to say] that despite being adults and having kids of their own, he was still always their coach. It was the greatest thing I've ever seen in coaching."

Hyde remembers how Pierce's compassion for his players was exemplified by an interaction with a dyslexic boy on the Saratoga football team.

When given plays to memorize and execute, the player would often confuse his left and right side and execute the plays incorrectly. When Pierce realized what the problem was, he marked "L" and "R" on the student's left and right shoe to help him reorient himself after each play. He also began changing his calls to make it easier for him to understand.

"He taught thousands of kids over the years, and they all came away with the same things: Be true to yourself, honor those around you, always strive to be a better version of yourself," Hyde said. "There are so many people who would walk on fire to help him because of what he did for them."

**Pierce's legacy**

Today, whenever crowds turn their eyes toward the scoreboard during home games, they see Benny Pierce Field proudly em-

**>> falconfigures**

- 31 winning seasons
- 16 league wins
- 4 CCS championships
- 12 varsity letters while an athlete at Los Gatos

blazoned. SHS has only had a true football field complex since 2013, though the team stopped playing games at Helm Field at Los Gatos years earlier.

The pristine stadium and turf field stand upon what used to be a simple grass practice field with a rickety bleacher on each side. Pierce's family and friends have planned a celebration of life on March 25 at Venture Christian Church in Los Gatos. Tanner, Hyde and Lugo will all be in attendance, along with hundreds of others.

Many are flying in from out of town for the occasion. Tanner said that following the service at the church, many ex-players will meet for a reception afterwards at "the field."

He did not mean Pierce Field but rather Helm Field, where many alumni had shared dozens of their most precious moments together at home games before Saratoga had a field of its own.

Hyde, who helped plan the service, recalls a flurry of messages and voicemails from many alumni in the days following Pierce's death. Many of the emails were signed off with "Red pride forever," a saying that originated during Pierce's time — he kept the team in red and white uniforms despite the school's official colors being scarlet, gray and navy blue.

Hyde plans to wear red to the memorial service, and she speculates that many others will as well.

"Coach Pierce was a mentor, a true teacher," Hyde said. "Somebody who climbs inside your head and heart and makes a difference. He turned average into remarkable, and we were all the best versions of ourselves around him. There is nobody in the world who can replace who he was." ♦

**THIRD PERIOD**  
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The Saratoga Falcon is published 9 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

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**WiFi filtering should allow online games**

Want to practice puzzles on minesweeper.online or play games during tutorials or between classes? If you're using the school's WiFi, you're increasingly out of luck. Since 2002, the school has been working on filtering access to non-educational websites. This year, these filters blocking gaming sites have been further tightened according to District Director of Technology Julie Grenier.

In a recent update, websites such as [jstris.jezevec10.com](http://jstris.jezevec10.com), [tetri.io](http://tetri.io), [fanfiction.net](http://fanfiction.net) and [2048.org](http://2048.org) have been blocked at the school. Even applications on phones such as Wild Rift and Team Fight Tactics have been prohibited for anyone trying to access them through the school WiFi.

Why is this increased filtering happening? It's apparently because the sites violate the district's acceptable use policy, which states that technology should be used for educational purposes only and not be disruptive. Another reason for the added restriction are complaints from staff and parents about students playing video games or streaming movies on campus.

Like many restrictive policies, however, this attempt to stop students from playing video games isn't airtight and also comes with costs and unintended consequences. Like many times in history, blocking access to a thing will not decrease the use of it, but rather incentivize seeking ways to sidestep the new rules.

For example, students with strict parents who enforce screen time limits on their electronic devices already know that while limited screen time might be intimidating at first glance, it eventually turns into nothing more than just a tiny inconvenience. If an app blocks Instagram and Snapchat, students turn to Discord or Facebook to communicate with friends. Assuming all else fails, they can buy a burner phone from their friends to use behind their parents' backs.

Similarly, to bypass these filters is easy. On the front page of Steam, there are hundreds of video games that enable offline play. Students can just turn to playing games like Minecraft or Bloons Tower Defense, which don't use WiFi. For certain websites like [jstris.jezevec10.com](http://jstris.jezevec10.com), they can first be loaded using home WiFi and then be played in offline mode.

The other effect is to force students to use mobile hotspots, which, while lower in quality than school WiFi, still work. Students should be the ones responsible for how they handle their time at school. For some students who have studied all night the day before an important test, a short video-gaming break might be just what they need to destress. During tutorials, they should be allowed to engage in "socially and emotionally relevant" activities: For some, that means streaming a movie or playing video games.

Breaks are important parts of



getting through long, sometimes tedious school days. After going to two 85-minute classes in the morning and then eating lunch, many students battle to stay awake in the afternoon as the post-lunch food slump eventually hits. To combat such energy slumps, there is no better feeling than having a short two to three minute break in between classes where students can play games, watch sports highlights, chat or even take a quick power nap.

Blocking gaming and related websites on the WiFi doesn't solve the problem. Even if such websites are blocked, students who are overly distracted with and addicted to video games will continue to waste their time regardless of such restrictions. If students do end up playing games during class or other inappropriate times, they will have to deal with the consequences themselves. It will have to be up to teachers or rather the students themselves who can learn to manage their time efficiently. ♦

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Sam Bai

*The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 28-7 on this editorial.*

**Reddit and Reels: Tech has made teens unable to focus for longer than 15 seconds**

By Sam Bai

Lying on the right side of my bed, I hold my bright phone a foot in front of my face, scrolling through Reddit or Instagram reels because I haven't devolved to the point of downloading TikTok — I refuse to believe I've downgraded to using the most addictive app in the world, even if I'm doing the exact same rabbit-hole scrolling on other, less notorious apps.

According to my parents, I should have been asleep four hours ago at 10 p.m., but due to my short attention span, I struggled on homework as I felt inclined to take constant breaks — whether that was snacking, playing video games or checking Discord.

If I encounter any video over 30 seconds, my eyelids start to droop and I scroll to the next video to keep myself awake.

Thirty minutes later, I'm telling myself the same thing, phone in hand, continuing to scroll.

As technology becomes more ingrained into everyday life, it seems our concentration levels and attention spans have been decreasing year by year. While many joke about having the nine second attention span of a goldfish, they might be surprised to learn that this is no joke — the average person's attention span is even shorter, at only eight seconds.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the time we spend in front of screens has mushroomed, with an average person clocking in over

seven hours daily. As a result, we find it difficult to focus in most settings due to becoming overly accustomed to being stationary for prolonged periods of time with our eyes glued to one electronic device.

As my attention span has decreased, I have found it increasingly difficult to complete mundane tasks in one sitting. Back when in elementary school, before I had my own laptop or phone, I eagerly read multiple books a week. Now, I read only about one book a month, and most are assigned in English class rather than voluntary reading.

AP U.S. History homework, which typically only consists of around 12 or so textbook pages, takes me over an hour to complete. I often catch myself reading mindlessly, skimming words without actively comprehending their meaning, then needing to go back and reread multiple paragraphs. It's scary that my brain can slip into entertainment so easily while I do tasks like homework.

When reading online comics, for example, I have stopped reading every single word. Instead, I enable auto-scrolling on my mouse and skim through the chapters, relying mostly on images instead of words. How else would I be able to read hundreds of chapters in a night and keep up with all the new series coming out?

My high social media usage and constant engagement with photos and videos have made me

into a visual learner. Why read a history textbook when I can watch a 10-minute video on YouTube to gain the same knowledge in a fraction of the time? I now comprehend images much better than text because images take a much shorter time to comprehend; my brain is trained to find the shortest way to grasp information.

**It's scary that I can slip into entertainment so easily while I do tasks like homework.**

My increasingly short attention span has also started to impair my memory retention, which has hindered my test-taking abilities. After reading a word problem that might contain a total of three sentences (very long word problem indeed), I now need to reread the problem multiple times to remember what it is even asking.

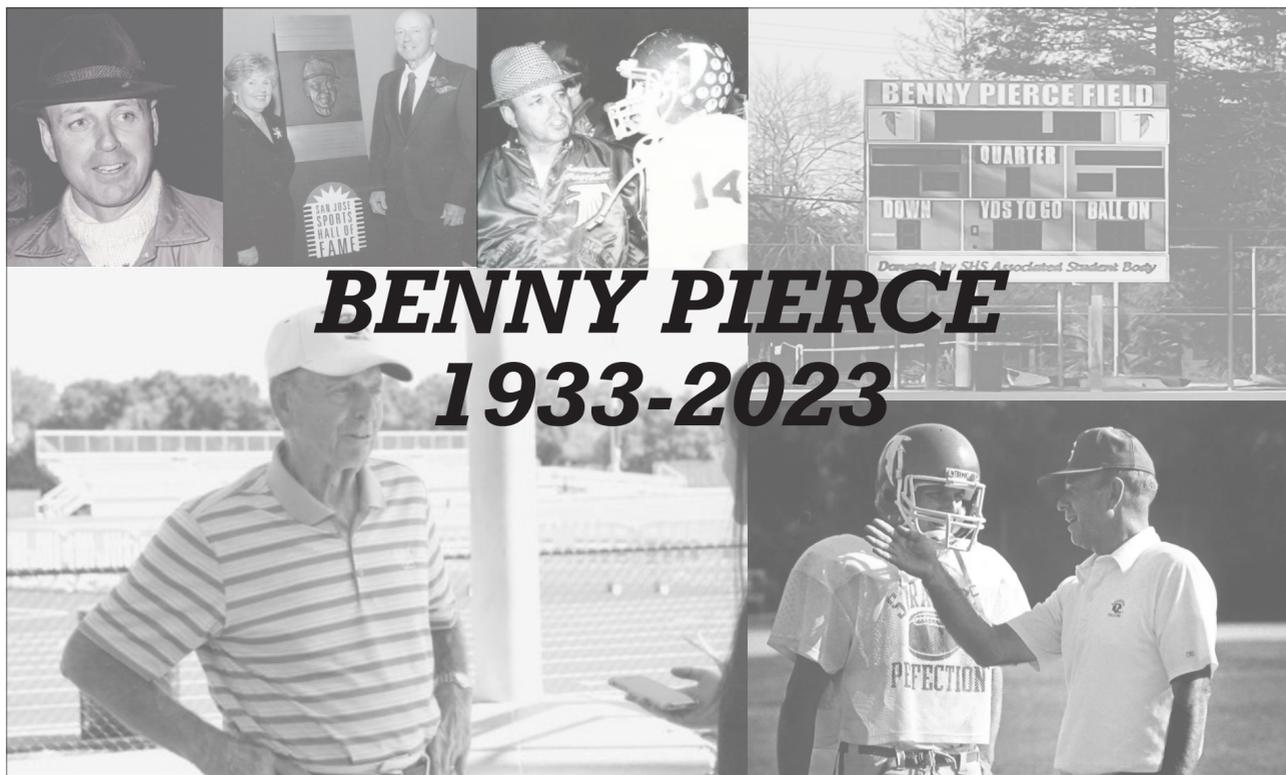
Another reason for the decreasing attention spans of teens is the extra stress in their lives. With so many tasks to complete — from hefty amounts of homework to extracurriculars to college applications — they often find themselves either multi-tasking or rushing to accomplish as many things as possible. The increasing strain of extracurriculars forces one to spend less time on each activity while still striving to maintain the same

quality as before.

Instead of trying to combat the decreasing attention span, a student could use it to their benefit. They could push themselves to become more productive within those short time frames. Or, they could switch to another activity that will cleanse their mind instead of one that will lead to a rabbit hole of procrastination; for many people, once they pick up their phone, it'll take hours to put down. The next time Minecraft's newest snapshot update threatens to distract me, it's probably smarter to stand up and take a walk instead of impulsively indulging.

One successful change I made recently was moving my workstation to face the window. This way, when I become tired, I can instead look at the greenery outside. My imagination and appreciation of nature are healthier activities than engaging in entertainment-based screen time.

As technology becomes more and more ingrained in everyday life, attention spans have become the shortest they've ever been. Students have a harder time focusing during in-class lectures and when doing homework. They end up sleeping later at night, making up for the lost sleep in class when they should be focusing on lectures instead. Without an easy way to revert back to the attention span we used to have, we need to learn to adapt and find ways to work effectively with a shorter attention span. ♦



**BENNY PIERCE**  
**1933-2023**

All graphics by NATALIE CHUA and EMMA FUNG

# Diet culture should have a healthy middle ground

By AndrewLin

Modern culture seems to gravitate toward the extremes, and online diet advice is no exception. Social media is heavily populated by content creators or influencers showing off their perfect bodies, getting their audience to believe they can attain this physique by eating the same foods shown on the screen.

Instead of a sensible response to this cacophony of performance-enhancing drug abuse, plastic surgery, product placement and outright lies, diet culture has triggered the other extreme: the fat acceptance movement. Individuals who are hundreds of pounds overweight and clearly struggle to perform basic functions such as walking trumpet the message that "big is beautiful" and blame everyone other than themselves for their struggles in society.

While beauty is subjective, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and organ failure are not. Neither are the gastrointestinal problems, developmental problems, fainting, anxiety and depression brought about by eating disorders stemming from social media's unrealistic body image standards and a misguided preoccupation toward health.

It seems like people have to choose the lesser of two evils when deciding their attitudes about food. On the other spectrum, there lies the scourge of anorexia and bulimia, which affects millions of Americans. Eating disorders are well documented and remain a highly prominent issue for people of all ages.

Because our society is hyper-fixated on weight loss and dieting, influencers can easily gain starry-eyed followers by promoting sham diets with inadequate nutrient profiles. Sugar, carbohydrates and fats have been demonized and the unfor-

tunate masses are instructed to adopt highly restrictive diet plans to attain an arbitrary standard of thinness.

Not only is being skinny a perceived sign of attractiveness, diet culture has made it an indicator of a person's character. Overweight people are still implicitly deemed "lazy" or "undisciplined" since the classic beauty standard is so ingrained in our minds.

Hence, influencers effectively take advantage of our insecurities and desperation to fit in by endorsing self-imposed starvation in the pursuit of superficial appearances. With the mental and physical strain that comes along with it, this lifestyle is far more harmful than a few pounds of belly fat.

Additionally, with the resurgence of online fitness content during and after quarantine, influencers have also added another layer to their business model. Rather than just encouraging weight loss, influencers appeal to people aiming to build muscle and lose body fat. Much of their audience are teenagers with little experience in fitness, and as a result they do not have realistic expectations for the amount of progress they can make in a given amount of time.

Some of the misinformation is fairly harmless, such as the myth of the "anabolic window."

This concept purports that one must consume protein within 30 minutes of finishing a workout in order to build muscle.

However, other influencers encourage their followers to consume extreme amounts of calorie-dense food, much of it loaded with sodium and unhealthy fats, in a so-called "dirty bulk." Although it will successfully pack on mass, dirty bulking places trainees at a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity.

The wider issue with diet culture is the sheer prevalence of misinformation online. Most influencers are not licensed medical professionals, and it's a good bet none of them care much about you as a person, or know anything about your personal health. Influencers say what they say because they have something to gain, whether it is ad revenue or profits from selling supplements, diet plans or workout routines.

Because thousands of videos are posted online every day, large-scale fact-checking is impossible. The only people you should trust when it comes to dieting are certified medical professionals.

However, not everyone has the time or money to consult a doctor for a simple diet, so there are some

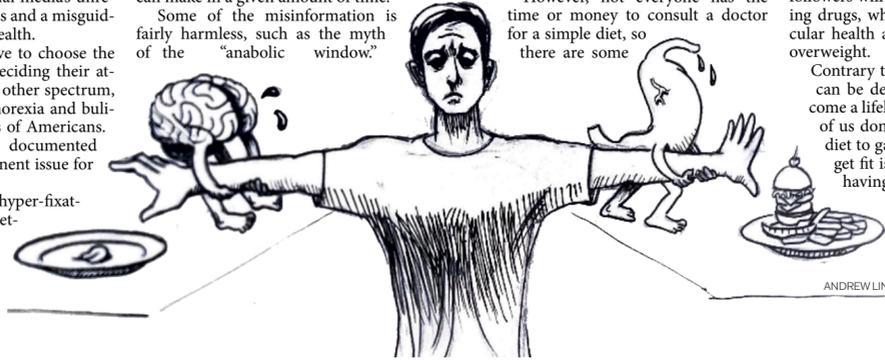
things one can keep in mind when considering the reliability of an online source. If the creator of a video cites studies or other scholarly sources to support their claims, you can look up those studies yourself to check their validity.

While there are plenty of influencers with large followings that give terrible advice, large influencers also fall under higher scrutiny from the general community. If the general consensus from other online creators is that the influencer in question makes reputable, science-based content, it could be worth listening to them. Of course, one should take everything found online with an enormous grain of salt.

Predatory influencers also pander to instant gratification. They offer strange diets and ineffective workout routines, spewing promises such as toned abs or bigger arms in just 30 days. Making noticeable progress in the gym takes months of planning and sustained effort, so when these online diets and fitness routines don't deliver on their promises, many beginner trainees give up.

In rare cases, influencers or desperate followers will turn to performance enhancing drugs, which are as bad for cardiovascular health as being hundreds of pounds overweight.

Contrary to popular belief, healthy food can be delicious, and eating it can become a lifelong habit. Truth be told, most of us don't need to follow an elaborate diet to gain or lose weight. Wanting to get fit is an admirable goal — simply having that goal places you above the majority of Americans. Self-hatred shouldn't be the motivation. Instead, it's best to see dieting as one of the greatest acts of self-love. You can't be heal thy at every size, but you can safely and smartly pursue your health goals. ♦



ANDREW LIN

# Throwing food at paintings is not an effective activism

By NicoleLee & IsabelleWang

In recent months, some climate change activists have gained notoriety by throwing smashed cream pie into the face of King Charles's wax statue or flinging mashed potatoes on a Claude Monet painting.

The trend began in Paris's Louvre museum on May 29, 2022 when a man attempted to smash the bullet-proof glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa." He then smeared cake onto the glass and threw roses everywhere while telling the audience to "think of the earth."

A few months later, more of these stunts went viral when Just Stop Oil, an environmental activist group, threw tomato soup at Vincent Van Gogh's "Sunflowers." They then glued their hands to the wall and accused the audience of caring more about the protection of a painting than the planet. In the U.K., protesters with Just Stop Oil have been blocking roads around London as show-cases of "civil resistance," which the group claims to have resulted in 576 arrests.

## Activists have resorted to these extreme acts because they are desperate to capture the public's attention.

We do need to acknowledge that activists have resorted to these extreme acts because they are desperate to capture the public's attention and spread a sense of urgency. And some of these issues definitely worth paying attention to.

Still, according to a study by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, only around 72 percent of Americans believe that global warming is happening.

Even worse, not all of them even know the reason for global warming: 57 percent believe global warming is caused mostly by human activities and 64 percent think it is affecting the weather. Climate activists don't have an easy job of spreading awareness about these serious topics, and have thus turned to extreme ends to gain attention.

Our planet is indeed in danger. Since 2021, global average sea level has risen 12-13 inches and is expected to reach 13 feet by 2150. Combined land and ocean temperatures have also been increasing at an average rate of 0.14 degrees Fahrenheit per decade.

Today, around 11 billion metric tons of carbon are added to the atmosphere each year due to human activities like burning fossil fuels and clearing forests. If this trend continues, global temperatures are expected to increase at least five degrees Fahrenheit by the end of this century.

However, performing violent — even childlike — acts doesn't gain any sympathy or spark a willingness to solve climate change; it only elicits disgust, annoyance and negative association with climate change activism.

For example, Just Stop Oil believes in opposing fossil fuel licensing and production agreements in the United Kingdom, so expressing their points by trashing Van Gogh's painting is completely irrelevant to their intended goals.

While their stunts were certainly shocking to the viewers, their effect has been minimal.

A select group of climate change activists have also taken a different approach by promoting veganism through violent means. In 2018, militant vegans in France harassed butchers through death threats and throwing fake blood on butcher shops.

The militant vegans in France had also strayed from their initial cause. Their initial goals were to promote greenhouse gas reduction and lower energy consumption, but they now break windows, spray graffiti

and utilize violent means to communicate their beliefs. Some butchers have even asked the French government for protection from constant threats.

This new wave of activism begins to question where to draw a line at acceptable forms of protest like sit-ins, boycotts and marches.

Many believed that the militant vegans' form of activism was too extreme. Instead of raising awareness of climate change, their behavior has raised infamy, and many audience members quickly lost respect for the activists and their movement, a dangerous attitude that can inevitably affect non-violent activists too.

Activists need to stick to traditional non-violent protests that spread their message without damage. Objecting to the negative impacts of pollution shouldn't be done by more negative outbursts, instead, peaceful ones that garner positive attention that would gain more respect and support.

A well-known example occurred when Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in 1955. Simple and peaceful yet clear acts such as this led to a larger movement, the Montgomery bus boycott, with the Supreme Court eventually ruling segregated public buses as unconstitutional a year later. These peaceful movements are what allow changes to happen, whether through boycotts, sit-ins or marches.

While climate change activists were successful in capturing attention, these new damaging methods of activism brought no good benefit to their cause. Throwing food onto paintings and sending death threats doesn't benefit anyone and it hurts how activism is perceived by the public.

Although the climate crisis is highly pressing, committing crimes and other unwarranted acts of harm toward paintings is still not accomplishing climate activists' goals. These food-throwers should instead follow the footsteps of non-violent activists.

One such activist, Elizabeth Wanjiru



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

Wathuti, has planted over 30,000 tree seedlings in Kenya to encourage the youth to discover and care for nature. Younger activists such as Greta Thunberg initiated a solo protest outside of her school, which led her to attend the United Nations climate conference in 2019 to express her thoughts. Many other student organizations, including Saratoga High's Green Committee, are also implementing activities within their community to help raise awareness for the cause.

Such actions have garnered respect rather than emotional reactions. They effectively convince people that change is needed without inflicting unwarranted harm or destruction of property. While it is necessary for the public to learn more about climate change, activists do a disservice when their otherwise sound messages go too far. ♦

# Medical misinformation and its role in the pandemic

By SaachiJain

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world for the last three years, many people looked to medical professionals to answer numerous questions. Who does the pandemic affect most? What is my chance of getting COVID-19? And most of all — are the vaccines safe, and do they work?

Though there is an influx of "answers" available on the internet, most are false. Both disinformation, defined as deliberate hoaxes and lies spread with malicious intent, and misinformation, which is false and inaccurate information, are spread for a number of reasons, including social media platforms that place them in false limelight regardless of whether it is factual.

In some cases, even responses suggested by a medical professional included information that directly contradicted the content in messages broadcasted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As a result, the state legislature in California began taking more extreme measures to prevent the deception of citizens by professionals: Bill AB2098 makes misinformation a punishable offense. However, without the proper distinction between misinformation and disinformation, the bill can hinder the ability for doctors to openly discuss different theories without being legally punished, a key process to ensure scientific rigor and accuracy.

## History of medical misinformation

Prior to the pandemic, medical misinformation was still prevalent in our society, with people turning to both certified and uncertified sources like Healthline, WebMD and medical content creators to diagnose and treat symptoms. While much of the information on these sites is accurate, some is not, and others may easily be misinterpreted by readers. Countless medical claims common on the internet have been disproven by scientific studies.

A recent article by Heathline debunked the myth that eating apricot seeds can cure cancer, for example. Between 1921 and 1974, the dental company Listerine falsely advertised that their mouthwash could cure colds and sore throats, a claim that was also disproven by the Federal Trade Commission in the 1970s.

## Due to the endless stream of data, people were overwhelmed by the number of opinions and sources.

One of the most publicized cases of medical misinformation is the belief that the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (MMR) causes autism, a misleading correlation that led many individuals to opt out of taking it. In actuality, the signs of childhood autism often appear at the age that the MMR vaccine is administered, and therefore makes many parents assume that the events are linked.

This casted doubt is considered the catalyst for what would come to be known as the "anti-vax" movement, a collective group of people refusing to take immunizations for fear of poisoning themselves, opting for natural treatments instead. The spread of misinformation regarding the MMR vaccine and vaccines in general led to the rallying of a group of people who turned it into a disinformation campaign that continues to affect communities till this day.

A study conducted by Web of Science in March of 2018 assessed the spread of misinformation on prevalent social media platforms such as Twitter. It found that false medical information, regardless of the source, was three times more likely to spread than information which was accepted as true. This phenomenon can be attributed to the right-winged nature of some media algorithms: When a news story is published,

it is shown on people's feeds by auto-generated software that matches content to users' personality and interests. However, shocking medical discoveries that are oftentimes not true are spread by humans, who repost it and share it with people they know.

In the rush to publish more medical information during the pandemic, the spread of this misinformation has increased so much that the World Health Organization (WHO) coined a special term for it — the "infodemic," representing the spread of too much false information.

## Misinformation surrounding COVID-19

Following the outbreak of the pandemic, varying and outdated information on major news outlets from healthcare professionals contributed to a loss of public confidence and unity in combating COVID-19, placing lives at risk.

Confusing narratives regarding the spread of COVID-19 also led to a sharp decline in visits to outpatient care facilities as well as hospitalizations for non-COVID-19 related emergencies, even when they were in

grave danger. Due to the endless stream of data and flood of information, people were overwhelmed by the number of opinions and sources. More popular home remedies for COVID-19 emerged, such as the consumption of highly-concentrated alcohol-based cleaning products, leading to the deaths of more than 5,800 people who weren't even hospitalized for the virus in the first

place. Disinformation about vaccines and variants also continued to rise during the pandemic. For example, USA Today reporter Ingrid Jacques claimed that wearing a face mask is ineffective in combating the spread of COVID-19, despite the fact that the use of masks were proven effective in several studies and authorized by the CDC.

At the beginning of the pandemic, countless media sources also said that COVID-19 was not any worse than the flu, a claim that was later disproved.

Misinformation can also emerge at the source — scientists — though they may not do it intentionally. Looking for more publicity and acceptance of their work, scientists have been found to unmaliciously present their information more vaguely to the media, which then harps on the gaps and creates their own, shocking narratives around it.

More recently in January, people on social media speculated that NFL safety Damar Hamlin's cardiac arrest was caused by the COVID-19 vaccine, a theory that spread like wildfire within minutes of his collapse.

Despite efforts by the WHO — including changing social media policies and guidelines, as well as implementing easier ways of reporting misinformation — to raise public awareness about medical misinformation, it is still unclear to many about specific people and groups they can trust.

Information and knowledge about the pandemic was evolving at such a rapid rate that information online could be outdated as soon as one day after it was published. In March of 2021, AstraZeneca, one of the biotech companies in the race for creating a COVID-19 vaccine, was found

## bigidea

### Medical Misinformation

What are the effects of questionable home remedies?

The consumption of these home remedies have resulted in the deaths of around 5,800 people who weren't even hospitalized for COVID-19 in the first place.

Other than the media, where else can misinformation come from?

Scientists can be a source of misinformation, either intentionally or unintentionally.

Was California Bill AB2098 effective?

Although it was made with good intentions, the Bill is ambiguous about what medical professionals can and cannot say.

Other doctors arguing against the law cited the violation of their First Amendment Rights, and quoted other accountability systems already in place for doctors who spread misinformation directly to their patients. For example, medical boards in Florida and Idaho sanctioned eight physicians for spreading misinformation.

His sentiment was echoed by other medical professionals and attorneys, including lawyer Greg Dolin, who is representing a group of doctors arguing against the law. Dolin called the law an attempt to silence doctors whose views aren't aligned with that of the state government and a violation of the 14th Amendment, which states that "no state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of the citizens of the United States."

## Biotech company AstraZeneca was found using outdated data from their clinical trials.

Other doctors arguing against the law cited the violation of their First Amendment Rights, and quoted other accountability systems already in place for doctors who spread misinformation directly to their patients. For example, medical boards in Florida and Idaho sanctioned eight physicians for spreading misinformation.

The law fails to distinguish misinformation from disinformation. Allowing doctors to express their personal views of a certain issue allows for the discourse that has continuously ensured scientific rigor.

## State and Government Action

Though the California bill was created with good intentions, it does not clearly outline what medical professionals can and cannot say. Rather than generalizing the punishment to "all [sources of] misinformation," the bill could specify that if a medical professional is found saying something that is blatantly accepted as false, they should be punished. However, once someone's word is passed through countless sources — especially the news — it can be spun in ways against them and be deemed as "against the law" later.

Another, more conservative method of combatting disinformation is to address it at its most likely source — social media and news media. With countless people on the internet spewing their opinions as fact, true medical information becomes hard to find and invalidates the work of medical professionals speaking the truth.

Misinformation during the pandemic resulted from a number of reasons, including the fast progression of COVID-19, quickly-outdated information and an overflow of seemingly reliable sources presenting contradictory information. However, this misinformation quickly became disinformation, two very different inaccuracies that the California bill fails to distinguish. If physicians are unable to distinguish if what they are saying is against the law, a more centralized and specific approach needs to be taken in order to enact real change. ♦



Graphic by ERIC SHI

Graphic by ERIC SHI

# PRICE OF THE IVIES

## Mental health needs to be accounted for

BY NicoleLee & AidenYe

On Nov. 30, five current and former Yale students filed a lawsuit against Yale University alleging that school officials discriminated against students suffering from mental health issues. In one example from the lawsuit, officials recommended that Hannah Neves, a student recovering from a suicide attempt, drop out without a medical notice or be involuntarily removed from the school.

According to the Daily Pennsylvanian, the official student publication at the University of Pennsylvania, at least 14 Penn students have taken their lives from 2013 to 2018. There's a common denominator in all these situations: Instead of trying to help students who are battling mental health issues, many Ivy Leagues instead resort to kicking them out of the school.

In the process of looking for a college to apply to, major points of consideration for applicants are the school's reputation, academics and teaching quality. However, another factor which is just as important is how the college actually treats and values mental health. Ivy League schools push students with mental health problems to take leaves of absence. When these students do decide to give their minds a break, however, many colleges instill additional steps into their process in order to prevent students from returning to school. At Yale, for instance, students trying to return after leaving due to mental health issues must submit two letters of recommendation, a personal statement and a reinstatement application form.

Colleges are often vague about why they enforce such policies for students struggling with their mental health. The effect of these mental health policies, however, is that colleges wish to tell students who have any mental health history that they aren't welcome back. If their goal is to lower the percentage of mentally ill students on their campus to make their statistics look better, they are succeeding thus far.

Instead of hiding away from the per-

vasive issue of mental health and only addressing it when the issues are brought to light, schools should be accepting of mental health problems and promote more wellness programs to help their students.

Because of flawed business-oriented models, many colleges' main concern is ultimately their reputation and bottom line, not their students' well-being. By reducing the number of students with mental health issues, the university appears to be a school with positive student health.

### Schools should be accepting of mental health problems and promote more wellness programs.

Since a "poor mental health" reputation can result in a lower yield rate and can negatively affect the school's rankings and overall reputation, universities try their best to artificially manipulate their numbers at the expense of their struggling students.

While Yale claims to have improved its policies for medical emergencies, officials' refusal to be considerate toward mental health-related problems persists.

To its credit, Yale has removed the mandatory interview that returning students had to pass, but the process required to take a break from an elite school is unnecessary and seems to purposely discourage students from taking a leave.

According to *Surviving Ivy*, Ivy students may be up to three times more anxious than the average student because of their schools' stressful environments. In researcher Miriam Heyman's paper "Mental Health in the Ivy League," which graded student mental health levels at each Ivy League, no school scored above a D+.

Harsh treatment toward students certainly makes matters worse. Instead of accepting their students' issues, most Ivies treat mental health as an inconvenience.

Mental health problems don't just exist in Ivy League schools, but many are exacerbated through their teachers' and peers' high expectations of them.

Students who find themselves underperforming in an overly harsh environment have no way of focusing on self-improvement or learning.

We see this issue at ever-competitive Saratoga High too. Constantly comparing ourselves to others — in terms of test scores, grades, extracurriculars and more — only promotes a less healthy culture.

Applying to prestigious colleges is tempting. Getting in and choosing to commit to said college is even more so.

However, before applying to the most prestigious colleges that come to mind, students should consider existing rankings for ivy league's mental health and ask themselves: "Is this really the environment I want to spend college in?" And "do I have a safe place to recharge?" ♦

## Middle class suffers most from tuitions

BY ZackZhang

In an ideal world, tuition should not be a factor that affects students' choice of college. Sadly, though, many lower- to middle-class families save up for years, only to find college costs too much. The tuition for Ivy League schools range from \$57,410 to \$65,146, without the living cost. Additionally, when compared to the national average of public and private colleges' annual tuition — \$25,620 and \$34,740 respectively, according to ValuePenguin — the Ivy Leagues are among the most expensive colleges in the country. Though many believe low-income students face challenges with tuition, in reality, middle-class students suffer the most from high costs and the inadequate financial aid system.

The policies made by elite schools should cover all students' needs, instead of pretending that they help their students by only assisting a number of low-income families. Take Harvard University: "Nearly one out of four undergraduates comes from a family whose annual income is \$75,000 or less. Harvard provides a \$2,000 'start-up' grant to each of these students in their first year," The Harvard Gazette reported. In great contrast, "upper-families with incomes above \$156,000 will be asked to pay proportionately more than 10% [of their income] based on their circumstances," according to Harvard's financial aid policy.

Although Ivy Leagues like Harvard specify that those who earn more than \$150,000 may still qualify for financial aid, these middle-class families rarely qualify because they are just slightly above the income cutoff line.

Colleges will always prioritize students with the lowest income for financial aid. Yet middle-class students, whose income can range from as little as \$47,189 and up to \$141,568, make up more than 67% of Harvard's population. The financial aid system is unfair for those who are between low and high income.

According to Princeton University's official finance report, the college's 2020 operating budget revenue was \$2.33 billion, with the category Endowment Payout and Sponsored Research (equivalent to donations) making up 72% of their revenue.

The amount of income Princeton made from students' fees was approximately \$401 million, which only holds up around 17% of the school's total annual revenue. Why

charge students an above-average price when they do not need this portion of income? While only financially supporting a small number of students whose family's income is below average, these universities' claims to help a larger number of middle-class students don't seem possible. With a little over 8,500 students, Princeton has fewer students compared to other Ivies; the situation is likely to vary between schools. But because elite schools do not rely upon the tuition to operate, it is time to consider whether unaffordable tuition is necessary.

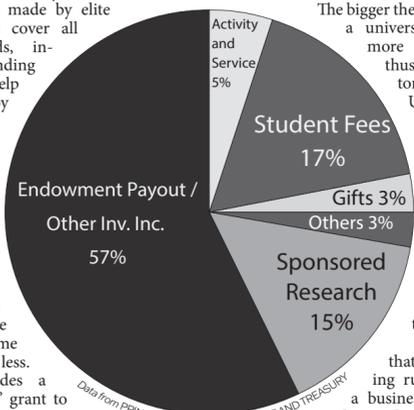
The Ivy Leagues have remained wealthy over the years because more than \$616 billion worth of endowment assets in the U.S. go to only a few schools — for example, Harvard receives \$39.2 billion.

The bigger the endowments a university has, the more power, and thus more investors are drawn. Ultimately, it seems an endless stream of income will be invested into these elite universities because of their prestige. The fact that college is being run more like a business instead of a place to learn and refine knowledge is truly concerning.

Despite the seemingly reasonable low-income financial aid policies, the terms and requirements to qualify for financial aid are not easily met by middle-class families. Aside from a few fortunate individuals who may be granted a tuition reduction through receiving merit scholarships or negotiating with the financial aid office, the rest of the student population will either have to give up on a certain college because of the high price or reach out for student loans, which tend to be harmful in the long term.

Despite the Ivy Leagues aiming for their students to graduate debt-free, their efforts aren't effective so far. Still, I do acknowledge that elite schools have such a high price because of the high demand and short supply. Students are applying to receive elite college educations around the globe.

However, a big reason why Ivy Leagues charge more is to distinguish themselves from other colleges, which points to the highly business-oriented nature of many colleges nowadays. Despite the top-tier resources and quality of teaching that elite schools provide for their students, with so much money in their endowments, Ivy League schools should help middle-class students can't afford tuition without mountains of debt. ♦



Data from PRINCETON OFFICE OF FINANCE AND TREASURY

### >> falconfigures

- 10 Columbia students committed suicide every year since
- 20 year-old students committed suicide most often
- 4 times higher suicide rate at MIT than national average
- 25 percent of Harvard students had thought of suicide

Data from THE DAILY PENNSYLVANIAN and SURVIVING IVY

All graphics by LEYNA CHAN and ZACK ZHANG

# High school dos and don'ts for dummies

TWO SECOND SEMESTER SENIORS SHARE THEIR TIPS ON HOW TO SURVIVE THESE FUNDAMENTAL FOUR YEARS.

BY JasonCheng & HannahLee

Been there. Done that. That's the claim two seniors like us can make as we move closer to graduation.

High school's a series of ups and downs: first loves, heartbreaks, proms, quad day dances, all-nighters, lifelong friendships — you've got it all. What follows is our advice about what to do and what not to do to get you through these four special years with your sanity intact.

### No. 1: Wash your hands

Soap and water. Please. Seeing people walk out of the bathroom with the mustiest hands on earth is truly disturbing and makes us want to run away from you. That dirty pizza grease from lunch rubbing on our hands is the worst feeling in the world, not to mention the ounces of grease and sweat that pile up on our school supplies. Don't get us sick before our AP Lang midterm or we'll come for you. Let's all do our part in preventing remote learning 2.0.

### No. 2: Get your license

Do you really want to put off getting your permit until you're a license-less second-semester senior? Being a passenger princess is

great and all, but making your friends drive you around everywhere is probably driving them crazy (literally). Also, being able to drive to and from school while going off campus during lunch is probably going to become the best part of your day, so go get that license at 16, kiddos!

Oh, and whatever you do, don't crash.

### No. 3: Attend school events

We get it. Staying in and taking a fat nap might sound better than being at school longer than you have to, but these school events become key memories and experiences. This doesn't mean you have to attend every basketball game or spirit rally, but attending at least a few events a year will be a valuable opportunity to show support for your classmates and create memories. You'll feel a part of something larger than yourself.

If anything, take a short FaceTime call or video game to the event. Contribute to rekindling the school spirit we severely need — and you won't regret it.

### No. 4: Avoid being a freeloader

There's always a freeloader in every class, or so it seems. We're not naming names here, but please, do your part financially in a group. It's a team effort, and slacking off while your classmates reluctantly cover for you does absolutely nothing for your learning experience and social reputation.

Moreover, when you venture off to college, it's a player-versus-player world. Develop some good habits now, and you won't be left in the dust when you're stranded thousands of miles from your parents with no one to whine to in college. Sorry, not sorry.

### No. 5: Don't be an NPC

NPC: Non-player character. Sometimes, we have our off days. We don't feel like communicating or conversing, but it's generally more acceptable to be slightly more outgoing in front of peers. We're not telling you to be an extreme extrovert and speak every second, but try to be approachable at the bare minimum. High school does revolve around sched-

ules and routines, but break out of the loop sometimes and try something new.

Not everyone's the main character they make themselves out to be, but you don't have to be the side character in the story either. Make life enjoyable for yourself, and at the end of the day, do what makes you happy in order to follow your dreams beyond high school.

### No. 6: Please avoid PDA at all costs

We're saving our most passionate rant for last, and believe me, no one, and we mean no one, wants to see kissy-kissy in the hallways. Forget lip-on-lip action — also, get your hands off of one another. Is it really that hard to keep your hands to yourself?

Bring back social distancing. We know you're dating. We know you're in love. We know you have deep feelings. We know everything. But we don't need a physical demonstration at 10 in the morning before a physics test. Back-to-back traumatic experiences within an hour — dear lord.

Now, there are certain aspects of this guide that might not suit everyone's needs or sensibilities. From personal experience, we can assure you that we have all the credentials to ensure a smooth high school experience, but in the end, no guide is the be-all and end-all of guides. ♦



# Seven off-campus lunch locations to savor or skip

BY MichelleWan

Speeding through the streets, students try to reach their restaurant destinations and return to campus in the allotted 45-minute lunch period.

"Going off" with friends is a tradition for many upperclassmen. As an avid "going-off" myself, I have strong opinions about what the best options are.

### Cafe LaTTea is only an option for experienced and speedy drivers.

### Safeway

Overall rating: 3/5 Falcons.

When you arrive, it is almost impossible not to run into at least five other students crowded around the deli and sushi section.

The self-checkout usually gets congested by a blockade of students, all carefully monitored by watchful workers. Safeway is an incredibly popular lunch option as the location is less than a mile of a drive from school.

The wide variety of food options also offers students a surplus of different snacks, and it's a good choice for those on a budget. There isn't much excitement in going to Safeway, but its popularity still lingers nevertheless.

### Saratoga Bagels

Overall rating: 4.5/5 Falcons.

Well known as the holy grail of bagels, sandwiches and smoothies, Saratoga Bagels, a small shop owned by a sweet family from Cupertino, serves as a home to many regulars who make a stop every day.

During lunch, the small parking lot fills quickly with the cars of Saratoga students, all lining up in anticipation to receive their orders on time.

Its offerings are on the pricey side, with a plain bagel and cream cheese costing \$4.25. Regardless, the quality of food and shop's

ambiance are worth the price, making Saratoga Bagels a friend group favorite.

### Taco Bell

Overall rating: 4/5 Falcons.

From Crunch-wrap supremes to Doritos Locos Tacos, Taco Bell offers an exquisite array of options. The foods are just enough to satisfy a craving and their Baja Blast Freeze makes the school day just a little bit better.

Not to mention, the prices are affordable, making the store a popular option.

On the downside, it's farther away and Saratoga Avenue traffic is often congested, so those who go need to plan out their time well or run the risk of being late.

### Cafe LaTTea

Overall rating: 3/5 Falcons.

Cafe LaTTea is a boba shop that not many students consider an option — and for good reason. Located on Stevens Creek Blvd next to Mainstreet Cupertino, Cafe LaTTea is only an option for drivers with serious green-light mojo or a heavy foot that risks speeding tickets.

Despite the store being a 10-15 minute drive away, ordering ahead makes the long drive a better bet.

Although they are mainly known for their boba, the popcorn chicken is heavenly. The price is reasonable considering the amount of chicken you get, so it can be a nice treat once in a while.

### Super Duper

Overall rating: 1/5 Falcons.

Super Duper can only be considered an option if attending your next class period isn't set high on the priority list.

Their choices of traditional American food, although made very well, are not going to be ready in time to make it back to school on time.

Not only is there traffic at the location, but the actual wait time for food lasts for ages,

forcing students to pick: food or school. In conclusion, Super Duper is not a super wise decision for lunch.

### Starbucks

Overall rating: 4/5 Falcons.

The most "chain" of chain restaurants, Starbucks, lying in the heart of Argonaut Center, is always bustling with students when the clock hits noon.

With people barging through the doors and online orders filling up the queue of the coffee shop, lunchtime is imaginably a nightmare for the poor workers unlucky enough to have that shift.

Their broad assortments of sandwiches and pastry items, without even counting their popular caffeinated drinks (which are an absolute necessity for any average teenager), seem to be the most appealing items for all.

### Chipotle

Overall rating: 3.5/5 Falcons.

Yet another popular chain restaurant, Chipotle, located 5.7 miles away on Blossom Hill Rd, also draws crowds: a bowl and chips with a side of guacamole can be just enough to keep a student from starving to death after AP Biology.

However, its tight parking lot poses a large risk of car crashes, specifically hit-and-runs. The wait time can also be long. Go there at your own risk.

### Its tight parking lot poses a large risk of car crashes, specifically hit-and-runs.

### Honorable mentions:

Lastly, some other potential destinations for students that haven't made the main list include: Five Guys, McDonald's, Mod Pizza, Super Chix, Trader Joes, 85, Yogurtland, ToGo's, Pho & Jazen Tea, Fire Wings, Panda Express, Pizza my Heart and Ikes. ♦

## Off campus lunch location ratings



Safeway: 3 Falcons



Saratoga Bagels: 4.5/5 Falcons



Taco Bell: 4/5 Falcons



Cafe LaTTea: 3 Falcons



Super Duper: 1 Falcon



Starbucks: 4 Falcons



Chipotle: 3.5 Falcons



All graphics by ANJALI PAI

# THE GREAT TOGA COOKING SHOW

## The Ground Rules

In a battle of culinary creativity, four ambitious young chefs, split into teams of two, competed in an ultimate cooking showdown recently. In a span of two hours, and with a \$40 budget, the chefs — sophomores Sunny Cao, Emma Fung, Saachi Jain and Kathy Wang — managed to whip up exemplary three course meals including an appetizer, the main course and dessert. Although not an easy journey, with dedication and help from Kathy's home kitchen, we were able to put together two hearty meals for the judges — fellow sophomores Nicole Lee, Amy Luo and Isabelle Wang — to evaluate and enjoy.

## Emma & Kathy

Inspired by our cultural backgrounds, we decided to prepare two Asian dishes. We served the classic miso soup, a traditional Japanese soup with miso paste, soft tofu and seaweed, as our appetizer. For our main course, we prepared one of our all time favorite traditional Chinese dishes: zha jiang mian, a dish consisting of wheat noodles coated in a savory black bean sauce. To finish it off with dessert, we decided to go for a common American comfort food: an ice cream sandwich with creamy vanilla ice cream stuffed between two soft, mega-sized chocolate chip cookies.

To our surprise, everything went smoothly, considering that we were inexperienced in the field of culinary arts. Starting off with the cookies, we stirred up a \$5 cookie mix into a buttery, doughy concoction. However, due to our general lack of experience, we overestimated the amount of dough needed and ended up baking six very large cookies.

Fortunately, the cookies still turned into a mouthwatering delight, and with \$6 vanilla ice cream sandwiched in between, it was pure perfection. While the cookies were baking, we started making our blackbean sauce for our zha jiang mian. To make the sauce, we started chopping our \$4 dou fu gan (a type of firm, dry tofu) and \$5 pork sausages into tiny cubes.

After stir frying them in a giant pan, we added our \$9 black bean paste along with water to de-thicken the sauce. Finally, we topped the sauce onto our \$7 boiled wheat noodles and mixed it to fully coat the noodles. We also added a side of \$5 sliced cucumbers and \$3 chili oil. Saving the best for last, we finalized our cooking expedition with our hearty appetizer: miso soup. The miso soup was relatively simple to make. We added \$5 miso paste to boiling water and allowed it to simmer with leftover tofu and \$3 seaweed. Finally, our three-course meal was ready for the judges to score.

Miso soup



Zha jiang mian



Chocolate chip cookies



## TRY IT YOURSELF

### MISO SOUP

**Ingredients:**  
- 4 cups dashi (or vegetable broth)  
- 1 sheet nori  
- 3-4 tbsp miso paste  
- 1/2 cup green chard (chopped)  
- 1/2 cup green onion (chopped)  
- 1/4 cup firm tofu

### Steps:

1. Place the dashi or vegetable broth in medium sauce pan and bring to a low simmer.
2. Place miso into a small bowl and add hot water, whisking until smooth. Set aside.
3. Add chard, green onion, and tofu (optional). Cook for 5 minutes. Then add nori and stir. Remove from heat and add the miso mixture, stir to combine.
4. Add more miso or a pinch salt if desired.

### MANGO STICKY RICE

**Ingredients:**  
- 1 cup sweet rice  
- 1 1/2 cups water  
- 1 can coconut milk  
- 1/4 teaspoon salt  
- 5 tbsp brown sugar  
- 1 to 2 ripe mangoes

### Rice:

1. Soak rice in 1 cup of water for 20-30 minutes.
2. Add 1/2 cup water, 1/2 can of coconut milk, salt, and 1 tsp of brown sugar. Stir well. Bring to a gentle boil, then partially cover with a lid. Reduce heat to get a gentle simmer.
3. Simmer 20-30 minutes. Turn off the heat with the lid on tight. Allow it to sit for 5-10 minutes.

### Sauce:

1. Warm the remaining coconut milk over low heat. Add 3 tbsp brown sugar, stir to dissolve. Add more sugar if desired.
2. Scoop some rice into each serving bowl, arrange mango slices, and finish with a drizzle of coconut sauce.

## Recipes of the day:



Bruschetta

## The Final Judgment

Our judges arrived two hours after we started the cooking process. They were presented with a table full of food, six dishes in total per person, and were quite overwhelmed by the amount of food presented to them. The four chefs observed with anticipation as the judges tasted the food one by one, offering their reviews of each dish.

To summarize the details, Luo's favorite dish ended up being the bruschetta from Team No. 2. Wang's favorite was the zha jiang mian by Team No. 1, and Team No. 2's sweet sticky rice with mango won Lee's heart. (She devoured the whole plate.) Each dish was rated out of 10, and the judges gave their opinions on taste, texture and presentation. In the end, the totals were super close, with Saachi and Sunny earning a total of 80.5/90 points, and Emma and Kathy obtaining 79/90 points. The 1.5 point difference in win by Saachi and Sunny meant that everyone did an amazing job.

Given the limited time and budget, both teams came up with impressive dishes. And, of course, the full table of delicious food was the best part of the process. After the judges had given their shared opinions, the competition was cast aside as everyone sat down and tried each other's dishes. Next stop: Hell's Kitchen. ♦

## Sunny & Saachi

Spanning many cuisines and textures, we opted for a flexible meal that included a classic Italian bruschetta appetizer, followed by a Korean-inspired miyeok guk soup and ending with a Thai dessert of mango sticky rice.

Between figuring out recipes, staying under the budget, coordinating ingredients and bringing pots and pans, spices, measuring cups and tools, it was a lot. But everything came together last-minute and the cooking process was pulled off mostly without a hitch.

The preparation for bruschetta was simple enough: chopping up a \$7 bunch of tomatoes proved little trouble, and after that, it was simply a matter of getting the ratio of balsamic vinegar to olive oil right, which were both ingredients we already had at home.

The bright red of the tomatoes paired excellently with the mild beige baguette, and accompanied with the perfect crunch, it tasted great as well.

As for the miyeok soup, we split the work between cut

ting \$8 veggies, soaking the \$12 dried seaweed (a high cost as we purchased it in bulk) and watching the soup. This dish was slightly more challenging.

The broth to water ratio had to be precise; the dried seaweed had to be soaked with warm water before being put into the soup; the tofu had to be put in at the right time and with the right temperature to avoid it breaking apart; and the miso (which we borrowed from the other team) also had to be right, or else it would be too salty. Nevertheless, with it being neither of our first times cooking, we breezed through our dishes with ease.

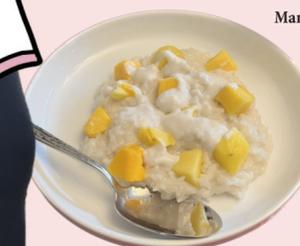
Dessert was simple enough. We made some rice in a rice cooker, heated up sugar and two cans of coconut milk for \$10 each, waited for it all to cool, poured it over the rice and topped it with some \$2 fresh mango.

We all felt the anticipation slowly bubbling as the time limit crept closer and the dishes came together. As each team began to put the finishing touches on their dishes and setting the tables, the judges arrived.

Miyeok guk soup



Mango sticky rice



## origin stories

REVIEWING SERIES  
WE READ AND  
REREAD FOR FUN

## 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid': Just read volumes 1-10

By Saachi Jain

Sitting in the series section of my expansive bookshelf is a row of colorful books with "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" written in lanky font on the spine. The series by Jeff Kinney published its first book in 2007 and sold millions of copies worldwide. With one installment published per year, it became a tradition for me to put the newest Diary of a Wimpy Kid book on my Christmas wish list.

The series started out marvelously — lanky, socially awkward pre-teen Greg Heffley was in sixth grade alongside his immature and naive partner-in-crime, Rowley Jefferson. We explored the "Cheese Touch" throughout the first novel — a slice of cheese rotting on the school's basketball court which all the students are afraid to touch — and got

to see Greg struggle through friendships, relationships and middle school in the next seven books. However, with the addition of book nine titled "Long Haul," the series began its unfortunate downfall.

Until this point in the series, every novel seemed grounded in fresh ideas, though it began to feel as if Kinney was running dry. Regardless of the weaker plot, the book is still as funny as the others. This remained true for the 10th book "Old School." Just like its prequel, "Old School" is just as entertaining and quirky, though the plot runs thin.

In an interview with the Baltimore Sun, Kinney described being at a crossroads after publishing the 10th novel and did not know whether he should start a new project or continue on. Inevitably, he decided that the large audience and joy that his books brought to

young children was worth his continuation, and it would simply require him to expand his creative realm.

However, the next seven books went on to lose their original charm, and it seemed like Kinney was making a story out of nothing. Take book 11, for example, entitled "Double Down." It is about Greg fantasizing his life as a reality show, and that's it.

Though I stopped reading the books after book 13, I continue to reread the first 10 and immerse myself in the carefree and childish world of Greg and his friends.

He begins by overcoming the cheese touch when Rowley eats it. Greg resolves conflicts with his brother Rodrick in "Rodrick Rules" while pushing his younger brother Manny's buttons in "The Last Straw." He becomes a dog owner and lifeguard in "Dog Days," try-

ing to impress pretty girls all summer long.

In "The Ugly Truth," he goes through puberty and comes to accept his reality. Trying to get on the nice list, he enjoys a winter season with his family in "Cabin Fever." "The Third Wheel" and "Hard Luck" watch Greg go through a period of questions about his choices and how he turns to fate to make decisions for him. Finally, we see Greg wrestle with the dynamics of traveling in "The Long Haul" and "Old School" the penultimate and final installments of what I believe to be the old era of Diary of a Wimpy Kid.

Regardless of how long the series runs on, I will forever love the first 10 novels. They allowed me and countless others to have a relatable literary friend who would always mess something up and allow us to laugh out loud. ♦

## 'Dork Diaries': a perfect escape for 10-year-olds

By SunnyCao

There's really nothing else that can catch an average 10-year-old's attention as quickly as a book with a bright cover featuring animals, stick figure drawings or some kind of magical entity surrounded by sparkles. I'm sure every kid had that one book or series that was the defining factor of their childhood. For me, it was the "Dork Diaries" series.

The "Dork Diaries" series by Rachel Renée Russell is a collection of fictional diaries — as alluded to in the title. It follows the tale of main protagonist Nikki Maxwell in a series of 15 books. With endearing characters drawn in silly, cartoon formats and a totally relatable plot line where your crush likes you back, it certainly was captivating to

your average 10-year-old.

The series follows Maxwell's nerdy and comical adventures through high school, including an incessant rivalry with the school's Queen Bee, MacKenzie, who emanates the cliché admired but snobby persona which establishes her as the "mean girl."

Although it is a series, each book is able to stand alone and follows separate events from Nikki's life. "Tales From A Not So Happily Ever After" features Nikki hitting her head in gym class and somehow becoming a Disney princess while she's down, only to wake up and find that it was all fake. "Tales From a Not So Popular Party Girl" showcases an exciting party that develops into a big catastrophe when Nikki tries to go to three parties at once because she was simply



I'm sure all of us have related to Nikki's complaints at some point.

However, as I grew older, the series lost its appeal. The characters seemed bland and unexciting. MacKenzie, who once felt like the meanest human being, now seems like a one-dimensional character whose only goal was to make Nikki's life as miserable as possible. Nikki's constant whining and obsessiveness over unrealistic ideals also got annoying to read after a while.

With all that being said, I still respect the book for making up such a big part of my childhood. The series is still good for an occasional nostalgic read. With its cool art style and relatable diary structure, it's the perfect choice for when you're craving for simpler childhood days. ♦

too scared to tell her friends that she had other plans, spiraling into a big disaster when she gets found out, but then her crush goes out of his way to comfort her. Like I said, totally relatable, right?

"Dork Diaries" has definitely been instrumental in

shaping me into who I am today, as it helped me feel better about my life when everything seemed bad. Watching a fictional character scream into a diary with silly drawings and cute, albeit trite, fawnings over her crush was certainly relaxing and entertaining to read.

## 'The Magic Tree House': a nostalgic book series

By KathyWang

I remember breathing in the scent of worn out paper while my 7-year-old self browsed through my local library's crowded bookshelves. My feet would lightly tap the dark blue carpet as I impatiently scanned past different book titles. But there was always one book series that'd catch my eye: "The Magic Tree House."

The series is written by Mary Pope Osborne, 73, and is still adding volumes to the popular franchise. The series is the No. 1 New York Times Bestselling children's historical fantasy chapter book series of all time, with the first book "Dinosaurs Before Dark," published in 1992.

Currently, there are 37 books in the series, which all revolve around two siblings, Jack and Annie, as they discover a tree house filled with books that magically whisk them away into adventures taking place during the historical past.

My younger self's obsession with the series started when I read, "Mummies in the Morning," where Jack and Annie used a book of Egypt to journey through their third adventure with the magic tree house. Throughout the book, the siblings helped a ghost queen find a volume of magic spells to help her travel to the afterlife. The book details historical events, cultures and traditions such as the Egyptian

royal funeral processions, a mummy wrapping process and treasures buried inside ancient tombs.

I remember experiencing every scene as if I was one of the characters, whether it be feeling the rush of adrenaline when the tree house spun Jack and Annie into a sandy Egypt or going through the same horror the siblings felt when encountering an unbandaged mummy with protruding bones, rotting flesh and empty eye sockets.

With each historical event, the book teaches educational facts such as the traditional preservation of mummies with salt and oil.

One of my favorite aspects about the series is that regard-

less of whatever dangers they may encounter through their adventures, Jack and Annie always make it home safely to the magic tree house, filling me with an immense sense of comfort and satisfaction.

The "Magic Tree House"

is a series that lets you fall in love with reading. There are a plethora of historical and magical events to choose from. Without a doubt, they will always leave young readers hungry for another adventure in another time. ♦



## 'Let's Start Here': a psychedelic time machine

By AndrewLin

Lil Yachty, a member of the XXL 2016 freshman class (the annual listing of up-and-coming rappers by XXL magazine), is a major player in the trap scene. His signature mumble rapping style has garnered both appreciation and derision.

However, his latest album "Let's Start Here" is a complete transformation of Yachty's sound while still retaining his laid-back vocals. Contrasting with his previous works, much of the album employs live instrumentation, as opposed to electronic or sample-based beats. While its genre is undeniably psychedelic rock, Yachty's vocals are a reminder of the album's rap background.

The album opening, "the BLACK seminoles," samples Pink Floyd — the outro of the song is just a distorted version of "The Great Gig in the Sky." It masterfully sets the tone for the album, with its meaty bass line and crisp electric guitar, paired with simple yet effective drums.

Perhaps because the previous song set such a high standard, the second song on the album, "the ride-," is noticeably weaker. Guest artist Teezo Touchdown's crisp voice provides a nice contrast with Yachty's. However, Yachty's verses become rather mind-numbing quickly.

This slight interruption precludes seven tracks of pure greatness. "running out of time," one of the best songs on the album, juxtaposes its bouncy bass line and brass section with lyrics about the end of a relationship. Justine Sky, the feature, provides warm vocals on the track to complement the sunset imagery.

"pRETTY" is another standout. It exudes sensuousness, and guest artist Fousheé contributes to the intro, the outro and a short but sweet verse.

"WE SAW THE SUN!" closely resembles the previous song's laid-back vibe in its nearly minute-long intro, but transforms into an otherworldly banger with an intoxicating chorus. With background vocals by Ant Clemons, an angelic bridge leads to a distorted outro sampling Bob Ross.

An upbeat, soul-inspired beat immediately hooks the listener in "drive ME crazy!" Guest performer Diana Gordon delivers a sharp intro that precedes a chorus by both Gordon and Yachty.

"IVE OFFICIALLY LOST vISION!!!!" is another peak on the tracklist. A vintage beat creepy intro slides into hard-hitting electric guitar with lyrics referencing an acid trip. Diana Gordon returns for a soulful repose from the pandemic before the anthem starts back up.

Almost like two parts of the same song, "sAy SOMETHING" and "paint THE sky" are both psychedelic ballads about uncertain love. The songs have clear distinctions with the latter taking on more of a vapor-wave aesthetic.

Following this pair is another pairing that seamlessly transition, "sHouLd i B?" and "The Alchemist." In "sHouLd i B?," Yachty questions why he continues to forgive a lover that mistreats him, over an instrumental that evokes driving on a highway during sunset.

Completing the arc of the story that has happened over the past three tracks, "The Alchemist" is an aggressive proclamation



Courtesy of SPOTIFY

of self-confidence. Heavily contrasting with Yachty's verses, Fousheé contributes a mellower interlude and outro. Unfortunately, the incessant drumming overpowers and distracts from Yachty's vocals.

Despite that slight bump, the album ends strong with "REACH THE SUNSHINE," a 6-minute masterpiece with a prominent Radiohead interpolation sung by guest artist Daniel Caesar. The instrumental makes way for Caesar's melancholy vocals while he is singing but swells to epic proportions between his verses, finally dying down into a barren synth leitmotif.

Yachty has released something very unique. The composition of each song indicates his deep respect for psychedelic rock. Though somewhat unremarkable as always lyrically, the album creates an intoxicating atmosphere, and despite the wide variety of

songs, each track coheres to all the rest.

However, despite its polished sound, "Let's Start Here" is derivative of existing music and does not contribute anything new. Yachty's unique vocals fit well, and there aren't any other artists in the rap industry who are making projects like this, but this soundscape had already been explored decades ago. As a result, even though the songs on the album boast high quality, they end up blending together to the point where some lack character.

Nevertheless, this is not a big downside. Even if it's been done before, Yachty's distinctive voice and the album's phenomenal production make the album a transcendent experience and a serious contender for album of the year. Even if you aren't a rap fan, you will likely find something unique on this album. ♦



Graphic by LEYNA-CHAN

## JPEGMAFIA: a hidden gem of the hip hop genre

By ArnavSwamy

Hip hop contains a mind-boggling number of subgenres, from conscious to drill to cloud hip hop. Chances are that if listeners are looking for a certain flavor, they will find it. While these classifications have helped me find some of my favorite music, something that irks me is how late I discovered JPEGMAFIA.

JPEGMAFIA, whose real name is Barrington DeVaughn Hendricks and is known as Peggy among his fans, is a 33-year-old artist from Baltimore who makes some of the best experimental hip hop available.

Attempting to filter him into one of these subcategories is difficult given the volatility that his music spans. His records are all masterfully handled solo, from production, lyricism, rapping and creative direction for the project.

I started listening to Peggy's discography with "Veteran," his 2018 breakout album, where he delivers a trippy array of beats alongside acute social commentary as he details his experience in the military, his childhood of neglect and his thoughts on frivolities in society.

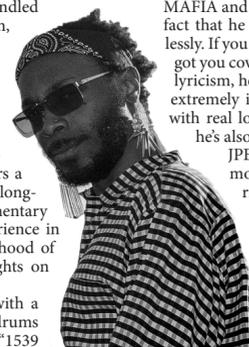
The album starts with a groovy mix of clicky drums and smooth synths on "1539

N. Calvert" as he delivers smart, self-affirming lyrics. This low-key intro, while enjoyable, would not have prepared me for the next track, "Real Nega," which features a sample from rapper Ol' Dirty Bastard's "Goin' Down" of him wailing indiscriminately into the distance. Peggy loops the sample, layers some pounding drums on it and simply raps animatedly over it as he asserts his loyalty to only himself.

Across the rest of "Veteran," Peggy introduces the listeners to his gripes against an innumerable amount of social concerns. From blond Kanye to the alt-right, Peggy showcases his fearlessly confrontational energy against the superficial interests that American society fixates on.

What impresses me most about JPEGMAFIA and his various eccentricities is the fact that he pulls all of them off so seamlessly. If you need a song to go crazy for, he's got you covered. If you instead want sharp lyricism, he's got you covered. If you want extremely innovative production, themes with real longevity and ludicrous humor, he's also got you covered.

JPEGMAFIA by far is one of the most creative hip hop artists right now, providing a breath of fresh air to a genre that has been slightly monotonous as of late. A common theme among Peggy's albums is spitting those who never believed in him, but to be honest, I can't agree with him more. ♦



Courtesy of SPOTIFY

## 'Wave to Earth' sprinkles indie through Korean pop

By HannahLee

With a rise in popularity of Korean culture in Western media and a growing subset of artists venturing into a chill, indie rock style, wave to earth is the next big thing. The highly melodic, classic indie rock band feels like the perfect ending to the day with its satisfying, softly layered instrumentals and raw vocals.

Wave to Earth debuted with their single "Wave" in August 2019 and currently consists of three members: 25-year-old vocalist Daniel Kim, drummer Dong Q and guitarist John Cha. The Korea-based indie-surf rock band boasts a small but mighty discography, with a majority of their lyrics in English.

Their debut single "Wave" sets the tone of the band's discography perfectly, with a chill, smooth listen. Wave to earth's soft sound as a whole feels very ambient and atmospheric — every song has depth with a lingering element. And "Wave," is just that.

"Light" was the first track from the band that I came across, and it remains one of my all time favorites. The instrumental composition feels light and summery combined with beautifully written verses and a sweet composition all around, "Light" is the perfect love song to play for the girl you love.

Despite the band standing at just two EPs, every song remains a welcoming listen. Wave to earth's lowkey and mellow indie sound seamlessly emulates images of the beach, sun and ocean.

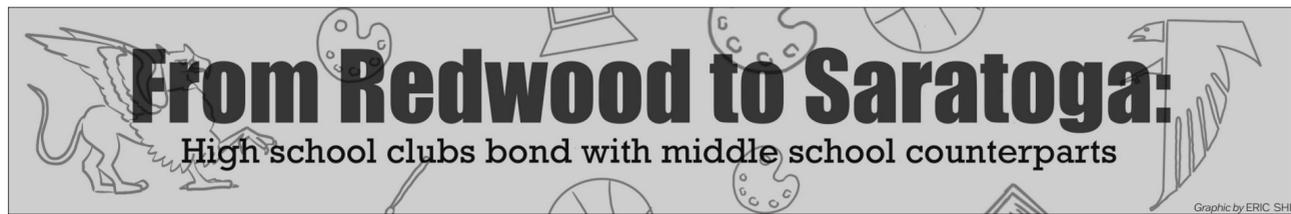
Their first 2020 EP "wave 0.01" includes

two of their previously released songs and four unreleased songs. "Gold," one of the two title tracks, is delightfully jazzy (though not entirely pure jazz) and leaves a warm lingering feeling after listening. Kim boasts his warm, soothing vocal range with several ad-libs, and the song is reminiscent of something you'd hear in a coffee shop.

## The band's first comeback was with the gentle single "Light," one of their most popular songs.

Later that year, the band released their second EP, "Summer flows 0.02." The second track "ride" sets the album's mood, with dual electric guitar melodies overlapping one another. "Seasons" slows things down with keyboard introduction met with a subdued drum kit and bass guitar. As the longest track on "summer flows 0.02," this song will transport you onto a sandy beach, with a warm sunset, light breeze and calming waves, as you sway in a hammock with a warm sunset, light breeze and calming waves.

With their uniquely sweet and melodic sound, wave to earth is perfect to listen to anywhere and everywhere. If you're in need of some dreamy indie rock in your life, or are simply looking for something smooth, I recommend giving wave to earth a listen. ♦



## Cuttlefish mentors Redwood teams

Starting last September, members of Saratoga's MSET Cuttlefish robotics team began weekly outreach sessions with their middle school FTC equivalents, providing feedback on their game strategy, proofreading their code and working through often complicated design processes.

For example, at the beginning of this year's season, one of the middle school teams' robots had difficulties with their pick-up mechanism and the orientation of their cones, which are moved in order to score points. The Cuttlefish team was able to help them orient them properly.

"We interact a lot with the [middle school] FTC and Vex teams, especially near the start of the season," said junior Kai Otsuka, Cuttlefish software member. "We discuss strategies, game mechanics, prototyping and iterate over previous designs."

In addition, the team also gives presentations during the summer to help middle

schoolers learn more about robotics and host their own tournaments.

While the main goal of all these endeavors is to help the middle school teams, Otsuka said they have the added benefits of helping middle schoolers learn the values of the high school team and easing their transition into the upper level robotics scene.

When he was a middle schooler, Otsuka was visited by the high school MSET team members, including current team lead and robotics co-president senior Trevor Leung. This outreach motivated him to continue with the program as a high schooler and later engage in efforts to help the middle school teams.

"The game [in high school robotics] is hard, so these programs allow us to mentor the middle school teams, inspire them to join high school robotics and teach them our values of gracious professionalism and hard work," Otsuka said. ♦



Courtesy of TREVOR LEUNG

Sophomore Anusha Guha reviews engineering notebook with a Redwood robotics member.

## S&D gives presentations at Redwood

Although the middle and high school speech and debate organizations are separate, they collaborated on Feb. 2 to showcase the high school speech and debate team.

Middle schoolers were invited to a dinner with their parents to encourage high school club participation.

"We presented mock debates and individual speeches and all the middle schoolers could toggle between speech and debate to see what they were interested in," said junior Naina Tallak, who competes in Original Interpretation. "The high schoolers talked with the mid-

dle schoolers to see if they were interested or not."

Speeches covered an array of events: Dramatic Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Original Oratory, Original Advocacy and Original Interpretation. Debate performed their Public Forum debate topic regarding right-to-work laws in the Student Center. High school club members later answered any questions that the middle schoolers posed.

The event also served the dual purpose of helping high school speech and debate members practice speaking in front of an audience. ♦



Courtesy of CAMERON NGUYEN

Speech and debate members pose after a successful presentation to middle schoolers.



Photo by ANTHONY WANG

Senior Anthony Wang gives lessons to students on Toga Junior Math Club's black team.

## Young mathletes advance with help

On Tuesdays from 6:30 to 8 p.m., 15 to 20 students from the Toga Math Club go to Redwood Middle School to coach middle schoolers as part of Toga Junior Math Club (TJMC), with the coaches split between four groups: black, blue, green and yellow.

"For each group, you have a head coach, one or more assistant coaches and rotation coaches," senior math club liaison Nilay Mishra said. "Rotational coaches are first time coaches; they rotate between groups in an equal amount of time to get an idea of which group they'd be the best fit for."

In addition to regular coaching, 12 to 15 middle schoolers are chosen to join a Mathcounts squad that practices together throughout winter break, taking tests and reviewing problem solving strategies with more experienced high schoolers. Along with the regular Tuesday meetups,

they also study together on Wednesdays and Fridays.

"Not only do middle school students benefit, high school mentors also get valuable experience," Mishra said. "Teaching allows high schoolers to understand and build empathy for their students while also forcing them to wonder, 'how can I best explain what I already know?'"

Through coaching middle school students, many of the high school coaches are able to give back to the community.

"A lot of the head coaches and the normal coaches are former TJMC members," Mishra said. "They have participated in the clubs and they learned from high schoolers when they were younger. They have this sense of wanting to give back, wanting to teach the new generation and wanting to use the same ideas and principles to guide them." ♦



Courtesy of SARATOGA MESH

Senior Carolyn Pyun helps middle-schoolers rehearse violin as part of the MESH program.

## MESH program hosts tutor sessions

The Music Education with Saratoga High (MESH) Program hosts yearly benefit concerts with their middle school counterparts and, more recently, began tutoring middle school students in music. The program is split into two divisions: band and orchestra.

The student-run program was founded in 2010 by alumnus Walter Hsiang and hosts a yearly benefit concert where high school students mentor middle school students through rehearsals.

The money raised goes toward the Bay Area Harmony Project, which helps low-income families pursue musical educations in the future.

"[Through the benefit concert], we're able to advocate for musical education at a local and regional level," senior violinist and orchestra head manager Carolyn Pyun said.

For the past three years, MESH has also been tutoring middle schoolers, many of whom are new to their instrument.

According to Pyun, there are roughly 40 mentors and 120 students who meet for the

combined band and orchestra divisions.

The high schooler volunteers used to physically attend middle school music classes and tutor in-person. During COVID-19, the program shifted to one-hour private online tutoring sessions, and as restrictions eased, changed to a hybrid format during the 2021-22 school year, where mentors and mentees chose online or in-person teaching. This year, all lessons are done in-person at the high school music building or in mentors' houses. Pyun, who mentored students during her junior and senior years, found the experience to be "incredibly valuable and insightful."

"The goal of the program is ultimately to encourage students in middle school by giving them high school mentors and an opportunity to ask about high school music life," Pyun said. "By connecting that way, the students are better equipped for high school and also have an upper class mentor to talk to in high school, encouraging them to continue their musical experience." ♦

Story by SAM BAI and JONNY LUO

# Finding harmony in SHS through feng shui

By Lynn Dai

Saratoga High is not typically known for its beautiful architecture; some may find irony in the fact that the school was purportedly designed by an architect who also designed prisons. Even so, the placement of structures in and around the school makes it particularly auspicious and well-designed according to the theory of feng shui.

Feng shui, which literally translates to "wind water" in Chinese, links the destiny of the inhabitants of a place with their surrounding environment. It is a Chinese geomantic practice that uses the flow of energies, or *qi*, in the home to create harmony and good health, combining Chinese astrology with the shape, direction and age of structures.

The purpose of designing a building that abides by feng shui is to collect good *qi* and let it stay, move and grow within the place. As students and staff move throughout the school, they bring the energy to different areas of the school. Thus, the circulation and growth of *qi* within a building depend on its inhabitants, who in turn receive beneficial energy.

In recent years, feng shui has become a popular practice for both Asians and non-Asians. Feng shui experts are part of the growing field of home design consultants who take on specific tasks of interior design such as deciding the wall color, art installations and aromatherapy. There have also been cases in China where the malignment of feng shui has instilled a \$30,000 penalty: In April 2019, a Chinese court fined a media company for publishing an article that implied a building in Beijing had violated feng shui.

The technique has been used for over 3,000 years and shares characteristics found in Chinese philosophy that are rooted in the "Yi Jing," a divination text among the old-

est of Chinese classics. The "Yi Jing," also known as the Book of Changes, encodes the fundamental concepts of yin yang wu xing in Chinese philosophy. In simple terms, the yin yang theory states that everything is governed by opposing, yet interdependent forces, and the wu xing theory perceives the world as dynamic states of constant change.

### Feng shui of the school campus

Like the theory of *yin yang wu xing*, feng shui also changes yearly with the directions and energies. However, the proper design of a structure may better allow *qi* to come in and circulate throughout the property, and the design of the campus ticks more than a few boxes:

SHS has an enclosed border, which allows energy and *qi* to stay and circulate. This prevents the risk of energy dissipating outside campus borders.

A row of trees enhance the "border" on the Western and Northern sides of the school. In feng shui theory, the West and North are associated with yin and cold *qi*, which should be kept out of the campus. The trees lining the Western side of campus help block out busy activity along Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road.

In contrast to the Northern and Western sides of school, the campus is more open to the residential Southern and Eastern sides, which are associated with yang *qi* and good energy. The design of the Southern parking lot allows *qi* to easily enter into the school through the circular and cyclical nature of the lot design, as cars have to circle around to exit. The pool is placed in the middle of campus, which directly follows feng shui theory because water, or shui, is retained. The quad placement near the center of cam-

pus allows *qi* to enter, circulate and stay. The open design of the quad allows *qi* to come in through abundant sunlight. *Qi* is also retained as the quad is enclosed by classrooms on all four sides.

As students move in and out of the court into classrooms, *qi* from the quad spreads throughout the classroom wings. Each wing also has its own court and tree, which allows *qi* to reside there. There is a clear division between the Northern parking lot and the rest of the school, which keeps the "colder" energy from the North outside of campus borders.

There is a clear division between the athletic area (East) and classrooms (West), which is also facilitated by the school's excellent site planning. The athletic area is placed on the Eastern side of school, which is associated with positive energy as the sun rises from the East.

### Feng shui of individual classrooms

Individual rooms can also be evaluated independently through their flow of energy and relative juxtaposition with the surrounding environment. Within a school campus, feng shui prioritizes the lighting and ventilation of classrooms over administrative offices and service facilities.

On campus, the journalism room at the back of the school uniquely facilitates both collaborations between students and a peaceful working environment due to its structure. The L-shape, with a longer section at the front and a shorter tail section, allows for two groups of students to work at the same time without disrupting each other. Conveniently, the teacher's desk is placed right behind the intersection of these two branches, allowing for a full view of all

classroom activity at any given time.

The placement of windows in the classroom also abides by a key concept in feng shui: the requirement for bright lighting and open, spacious ventilation throughout the room, originating from the philosophy of "zuo bei chao nan." The J-room only has windows lining its Southern and Eastern sides and blocks out the western sun and negative *qi* from the north through stone walls lining its Western and Northern sides.

Additionally, the placement of extra wall sections blocking a view inside the classroom through the open back door, a feature common in all buildings near the back of campus, helps shield out distracting movement and noise from the back parking lot.

Similarly, the library also has large windows facing East and South, as well as skylights that have a brightening and enlarging effect on the interior space. It's also spatially sound — in regards to the entire campus, athletic fields included, it's located near the center of the school. According to the principles of bagua, an energy map comprising eight life areas, or levels of yin and yang, that form the basis of feng shui, the center placement is the pinnacle of balance between yin and yang energy, conducive for learning.

Like other concepts found in Chinese culture, feng shui is highly specific to each structure and must take into account a variety of factors. Its personalized nature, connection with Chinese philosophy and abundance of factors makes the practice extremely complex: True feng shui experts typically charge \$100 to \$400 an hour, compared to the average \$100 per hour cost for most housing consultants in the U.S.

Whether you believe in it or not, feng shui has merit in its philosophy that health and well-being are intertwined with the surrounding environment. A positive and energetic environment can, after all, support the people living in it. ♦



Photo by SANJOLI GUPTA

Left to right:  
1. The library's skylights brighten and enlarge the study area, and its central location makes it perfect for learning.  
2. The school quad is in the center of campus, allowing *qi* to enter and stay.  
3. The Journalism Room has windows lining the Southern and Eastern sides while blocking negative *qi* from the North.

# Juniors write for prestigious NCTE competition

By Eric Shi

Junior Sanjoli Gupta remembers seeing the prompt for this year's NCTE annual National Teachers Council for English (NCTE) writing competition and being intrigued. A few weeks later on Feb. 5, she learned she was one of two juniors whose pieces were chosen to be submitted to the competition. The other was Maithreyi Bharathi. Twenty students wrote for the competition.

The NCTE competition is a prestigious writing competition for 11th grade students. Schools nominate a select few students, making getting past the first phase of the competition an extraordinary achievement.

This year's prompt for the competition was just two words: "Education First." The theme was particularly relatable for many students because of its close connection with the high school experience.

"The prompt is important to me because education is such a vital part of our lives, especially as teenagers and high schoolers, so exploring that through a piece that I really connected with was my motivation to write for NCTE," Gupta said.

Additionally, the broad nature of this

year's prompt allowed students to branch out and explore.

"For my piece, I used short vignettes to explore the different ages at which I experienced learning and how they had an impact on me," Gupta said. "I also explored the wonder and curiosity that comes with being a child, and how learning is integral to our growth."

Bharathi took a different approach to the prompt, instead writing a story loosely based on her own experiences.

"I explored the wonder and curiosity that comes with childhood."

JUNIOR Sanjoli Gupta



Although both stories were mainly driven by personal experiences, Bharathi's essay, titled "inheritance," primarily drew inspira-

tion from her family, while Gupta's piece, titled "The Magic of Knowledge," was largely based on her personal experiences.

"I remember waking up one morning and just having the idea to explore the use of short vignettes to convey my ideas," Gupta said. "I then wrote the piece before school."

Both writers, spurred by their love for writing, had an overall good time crafting their essays, with minimal hiccups during the writing and revision process.

Gupta finished her first draft by February and did revisions with English 11 Honors teachers Amy Keys and Natasha Ritchie for two weeks. She emphasized Keys' and Ritchie's importance in helping her revise her essay.

"Ms. Keys and Ms. Ritchie were both extremely helpful during the process and both of them gave me feedback on my pieces, helped me get through the revision process and create a stronger, more compelling piece," Gupta said.

Bharathi echoed Gupta's praise of the English 11 Honors teachers, citing how their methodical suggestions involving grammar, style and the overarching message of her

piece helped widen her scope on how she viewed the topic, which ultimately helped her craft a far better final product.

Additionally, Bharathi stressed Keys' contributions in helping her through the

"Ms. Keys helped me through the revision process and gave me concrete things to work on."

JUNIOR Maithreyi Bharathi

few rough patches she encountered in the process.

"I wrote the rough draft the day before it was due, so the revision process was pretty stressful and took a while because I wrote it in one go. Ms. Keys helped me through this, and gave me concrete things to work on," Bharathi said.

For both, the competition was a way for them to write about their life in and out of school, as well as look back at their memories and heritage.



### 1990s saw huge increase in Asian students, remaking school's demographics and culture

By Kathy Wang

Growing up in San Francisco, former assistant principal Karen Hyde recalls living in a multicultural neighborhood and attending a diverse school. However, after becoming an assistant principal at Saratoga High in the 1970s, she was shocked by how almost 97% of the students in the school were white.

During Hyde's 40 years at the school, the Asian American population here increased dramatically, particularly in the 1990s. In 1968, fewer than 2% were Asians, according to data gathered for the school's accreditation process through the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Fast forward to 2012 and that year's report showed that approximately 34% of students were white and 57% were Asian.



Skelly

#### 'AP, baby' controversy

The changed demographics of the student body showed up in the school's increasing emphasis on top-flight academics. And in the 1990s, tensions between some whites and Asian Americans rose, according to guidance counselor Eileen Allen, who was a student at the school from 1997 to 2001.

As tougher courses were added to the curriculum and more students took them, a cycle of increasing academic competition grew. Many students, whites in particular, started to feel intimidated by the competitive environment, which they attributed to the influx of Asian American students, Allen said.

One of the first incidents where school administrators became aware of racial tensions occurred in 1996. According to Hyde, several Asian American students formed an "unofficial gang" and

would dress in yellow shirts with the term "AP," standing for Asian Pride. They would commonly say the phrase "Asian Pride, baby."

"It's interesting because I think you have this [targeted aggression] from the white community, and then there was a pushback in the other direction from the Asian community to set themselves apart and have pride with what they brought to the school," Allen said. "It's like that was their protective mechanism and their defense against feeling like they were being rejected in the community."

After eight Asian students wore yellow "AP" shirts to the 1999 senior group photo, the school administration started banning colored shirts, distinct clothing and hand signs in future senior photos.

"The incident wasn't malicious. Wearing the AP shirts wasn't a statement of power," Hyde said. "It was a way for a bunch of Asian kids to say 'this is our color.'"

Another incident that took place between 1995 and 1996 was the geographical parking lot division between Asian American and white students. Many Asian students would park in the back parking lot near the math and science buildings, areas now reserved for staff, while the white students would park in the front of the school near the track and gym. Most of the separation resulted from the lack of intermingling between the two races.

Former assistant principal Kerry Mohnike, who retired in September 2021 after working 30 years at the school, said there was "bound to be some sort of tension following a significant population shift in the environment."

"It's like jockeying for your societal status, and there are certain people that fall into that kind of

competitive nature," Mohnike said. "It doesn't really matter what culture you're from. It's just like, 'I'm not going to do that because they do that or I'm going to do this because my group does this.'"

#### Asian population increases

The development of Silicon Valley accelerated in 1961 when the invention of integrated circuits triggered an explosive growth in the number of high-technology jobs in the area.

The number of high-tech jobs increased from 18,000 in 1959 to 117,000 in 1971 and 268,000 in 1990. More than 230,000 high-tech jobs were created in Silicon Valley from 1992 to 1999, many of them filled by immigrants from countries like Taiwan, South Korea, India and China.

Allen recalled that the average academic performance of the students started soaring during the term of former principal Kevin Skelly, who served at the school from 1993 to 2004. She remembers Skelly as always very enthusiastic about the academic aspect of the school, and he strongly believed in having a rigorous curriculum.

In an interview with The Falcon, Skelly, now retired, said that "the students [during that] the school has always been a great school, but during that time, it became a world-class school." He said nothing has changed the school's rise toward academic excellence.

Allen noticed that the transition to a world class school spurred the change of the school's demographics.

"As we grew this reputation of being really strong academically, it almost became a destination for families seeking to provide a great education for their kids, including ones from mainland China and Taiwan," she said.

#### Influx of Asian Americans changes the school's culture

In the recent past, 855 out of the school's 1,322 students were Asian Americans (roughly 65% of the school's population), according to the 2018-2019 WASC data.

The number of whites enrolled at the school dropped by roughly 900 students between 1968 to 2012. This was at least partly because of "white flight," a phenomenon where whites move out of areas that hold an increasing minority population.

As Asian students filled the school's hallways, the nature of the

school's academics followed.

In 1984, the school implemented AP courses such as AP Biology, AP US History and AP Statistics. During 1997 to 1998, they also eliminated the prerequisites for honors and AP courses, where students had to receive a teacher's recommendation or an A in a previous class.

This shift in course curriculum meant that more students in advanced classes and certain competitive programs such as speech and debate tended to be Asian. An observation from the 2011 to 2012 WASC data said "Asian students take more AP classes than all other ethnicities" and consequently cited a "drop in white students."

"There was sort of this feeling that 'now Saratoga High School has become super academic all of a sudden, and I'm under all this academic pressure that wasn't there before,'" Allen said.

#### Racial tensions improve

While many racial tensions in the '90s came to the surface, today's campus shows an increased intermingling between races during break and lunch, and of course, no more separation in the parking lot or creations of racially motivated exclusive groupings. Though the racial composition of classes hasn't changed, the school has put a great effort into creating a diverse blended environment over the



Allen

years.

According to principal Greg Louie, the school has strived to promote equality, diversity and inclusion through wellness center events, Speak up for Change and participation in national weeks like "United Against Hate Week," which is dedicated to rejecting hate to promote equality.

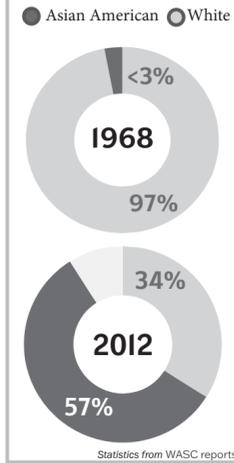
During his term as principal in the 1990s, Skelly said the school made an effort to make the Asian American community feel welcome.

He recalled visiting Asian parents in their homes to talk about the different school cultures in their home countries and in America, as well as how the school wanted to make them feel comfortable in participating in school activities and organizations such as the school site council and the Parents Teacher Association.

Additionally, Mohnike recalls the school inviting professional development speakers in the early '90s to talk about differences

#### falconfigures

School demographics flipped as more Asian immigrants took on high-tech jobs.



between the Asian American and white communities and conduct diversity training for students and staff.

She also said as students became more used to the diversity within the school, they grew more comfortable with each other.

Senior Taylor Wilson, who is of Black and Korean descent and part of the core team of the Anti-Racism Task Force, which began during the pandemic, described seeing measured progress in key areas.

While Wilson said he sees intermingling between races and finds it "common to see students with different identities and ethnic makeup gathering together," he still finds many friend groups lack racial diversity.

"I feel like the intermingling between races is almost an expectation," Wilson said. "It does disappoint me that this is even being highlighted as a significant achievement."

Wilson praised Bombay in the Bay (BNB), which he said promotes unity and outreach across several races in the school environment. While BNB celebrates traditional Indian dances, it allows non-Indian students to be involved in the performances.

"I understand there is comfort in what's common," Wilson said, "but the hope is always for people to love others for their character as opposed to their appearance." ♦



#### myama-zhang culture



Zack Zhang

"Xin nian kuai le!"

My family greeted two other friends' families at the dinner table in celebration of Lunar New Year here in late January. It's the most special time of year: Red paper lanterns hang from the ceiling and intricate traditional paper cuttings of *fu*, or the Chinese symbol for luck, stick to the windows. Several younger children, thrilled, jumped in excitement to receive red envelopes filled with money.

Still, this celebration was muted compared with what we experienced in China. Unlike there, nothing but silence and darkness pervaded outside. The red decorations here attempt to be similar, but in place of the universal warmth and popularity of the celebrations typical in China — where whole streets and communities are covered in red lanterns, for instance — gatherings are fewer and smaller in a land thousands of miles away and across an ocean.

This is only my third year in the U.S. after immigrating to the Bay Area in 2020, but that sense of emptiness when celebrating traditional festivals in a different cultural environment sometimes reminds me of the struggles of being caught between two worlds.

On the other hand, my younger siblings, who are ages 6 and 9, have readily assimilated into American culture and treat the Chinese traditions I hold dear with relative indifference. They grow increasingly distant from our traditional culture — they can't read or write Chinese, and they question why we still keep and treasure many ancient practices today.

To them, traditional festivals do not hold any special meaning; rather, it is just a day when they can enjoy a grander family dinner and have some extra free time.

While the reality upsets me, it also inspires me to learn more about the growing distance between immigrants and our traditional culture and how we can prevent it.

#### My father's journey to the U.S. — assimilation and tradition

My father Heng Zhang, now 44, experienced the most dramatic change of his life when he immigrated to the U.S. with my family three years ago. To this day, the new language, environment and way of living in America still challenge my family.

When my father moved to the U.S., he made friends he believed would help him recapture the familiar Chinese culture he left behind. However, despite most of his friends sharing the same cultural roots, their unified cultural identity — the sense of belonging to a particular group based on a deep understanding of various cultural practices — had been eroded over time by Western culture.

"Before coming to the U.S., I had imagined numerous times how immigrants of my culture would keep the celebration of festivals and cherish the traditions," my father said. "But shockingly, the reality is so different from what I expected: Immigrants who have parted from the old culture for a long time have little regard for the traditional festival, and some of them don't even know the dates [of cultural holidays]."

To my father, traditional culture is not just the clothing, cuisine or language of a group. At its core, culture comprises the values and practices passed down from generation to generation.

As such, although my father still keeps in touch with groups who have lost their cultural understanding, he makes closer friendships with those who celebrate and cherish culture like him.

"Losing connection with one's own culture is scary because tradition embodies important values and beliefs that are shaped over generations," my father told me. "When these values are lost, society may become more individualistic and lacking in social cohesion."

#### Use of language to strengthen connection to traditional culture

At such a young age, my siblings have to adapt, learn, accept and balance two different cultures simultaneously and struggle from the pull of acculturation, which has led them to detach from their traditional culture.

As the oldest child in my family who spent 13 years in my home country, watching my two younger siblings integrate into the U.S. so quickly makes me feel exceptionally happy. Yet, it's also frightening for me — for one thing, they've forgotten how to speak their mother language in just a little over three years.

#### "Tradition embodies important values and beliefs that are shaped over generations."

FATHER Heng Zhang

I feel upset, worried and powerless to reverse the change, having experienced the arduous and gradual process of losing cultural connection with my siblings. It begs the question: Is there a way to prevent the younger generation of immigrants from losing connection with their culture?

One way to help young immigrants engender a closer connection with their culture is through language — a key gateway to culture as it intertwines with its traditions, values and beliefs. My father, worried he would lose touch with his children if they became distanced from their Chinese heritage, also brought classical Chinese readings, a practice that has since become an enjoyable family pastime. By learning their cultural language, the younger generation

can gain a deeper understanding of their heritage and the practices associated with it.

For young immigrants who may feel trapped between two cultures, learning their mother language not only helps build a stronger sense of cultural identity, but also improves communication with family members who speak little to no English. By understanding and embracing traditional culture, the younger generation can feel more grounded and confident about themselves.

As an older brother, I try to engage them in more Mandarin at home. I am relieved my siblings were able to engage more in family conversations, connect closer with our grandparents and further appreciate the cultural norms.

Personally, I find it helpful to consistently practice my Mandarin and learn Chinese history through historical documents. During this process, I re-establish my relationship to my culture.

#### Maintaining a balance between assimilation and tradition

While some slight changes in the way people celebrate festivals are to be expected over time, my father sees the necessity for later generations to keep in mind what elements can be changed or compromised and what should not.

"I am also trying to find a way to balance assimilation and tradition for myself as I stay longer in the U.S.," my father said. "Much different from my younger children's situation, assimilation is harder for me than keeping hold of the traditions; I have spent half of my life in China and, essentially, since I do not have an immersive environment for language and culture in the U.S., it is challenging for me to fit into non-Asian groups."

New immigrants like myself may find it challenging to recreate the same excitement from their home country. The population of another country is, after all, a minority in the foreign country; my family and I face the reality of attending smaller and more intimate celebrations. As a result, the heterogeneity and preservation of my culture are sacrificed. I can only try my best to preserve the most important elements of traditional practices to blend with components from the new culture.

To me, finding a balance between assimilation and the preservation of traditional culture is especially important because it allows individuals and communities to maintain inherited cultural identities while adapting to new environments. Having experienced the difficulty of trying to fit in, I know the process is slow and painful.

I had my first ever American school experience at Miller Middle School on Feb. 26, 2020; the haunting memory of introducing myself in front of the whole class and making sentences out of only a few English words left a scar on my confidence even till this day.

Coming to a foreign country without the ability to communicate in their language was scary,

but joining a school in the middle of the year made real friendships seem out of touch.

Ironically, the outbreak of COVID-19 that forced the school to shut down saved me from the unwillingness to go to school.

Everything took a positive turn in my freshman year. Not only had my English skills made a leap, but there were also a number of students from other school districts just like me.

Once I found a middle point between the two cultures, I became more open-minded whenever I approach different situations or beliefs.

This balance between various cultures has improved in the last few years. My father believes these

traditions have recently made a resurgence, in part due to the increasing number of Chinese immigrants to the U.S., which peaked at over 2.5 million in 2019.

"Because the number of Chinese immigrants has increased over the years, many traditional cultures are restored in people's hearts again," my father said. "Especially after the California governor recognized Lunar New Year as a state holiday last year, I feel proud and glad the festival is being celebrated more widely. With more appreciation, I believe traditional cultures will grow back. I hope my children will pass down the traditions which were brought from their country by first-generation immigrants like me." ♦

#### The Zhangs' journey to the U.S.



2005 Heng Zhang gets married in Beijing

2007 Zack is born at a hospital in Beijing

2013 Zhang begins the immigration process to America in hopes of a better education for their children

Zack's younger sister, now 9, is born 2013

Zack's younger brother, now 6, is born 2016

Zhang completes the immigration paperwork, and he begins the steps to prepare for life in America 2019

2020 The Zhangs' moves to the Bay Area, months before the pandemic hits

2021 The Zhangs' celebrates their first Lunar New Year in America



A mix of students from the Class of 1999 cheer against freshmen at a rally.

1984	1992	1997	2012
SHS started implementing AP courses	230K high-tech jobs added over next nine years — many filled by Asian immigrants	Prerequisites for AP, Honors courses removed	Over the previous 40 years, the white enrollment dropped by 900

# AN ATHLETE'S JOURNEY: LEARNING TO QUIT

By Christina Chang

After eight years of playing basketball, my athletic career came to an end my junior year. Unlike the senior night celebration many high school athletes envision, my years-long journey was capped off with a game where I sat on the bench the whole way through — much like the rest of the season.

So I quit. As this year's girls' basketball season has come to a close, I've decided it's time I take the opportunity to reflect on that decision.

Many people talk about how quitting shows a lack of commitment. But by the start of my senior year, I realized quitting was actually the brave thing to do, and staying was the coward's way out — at least for me.

For me, it's easy to stay. I start something when I'm young; it becomes a hobby; I invest myself in it and spend dozens of hours a week doing it because it's what I love. And it becomes a routine — staying.

But quitting is straying from what's expected. It takes choosing to put yourself first and standing up for what's best for you. And that was my story with basketball.

## Early years: perseverance despite initial setbacks

Mine was the generic story of an athlete learning persistence and perseverance through a sport. And I think that's still true. I was always just good enough to make a team, but not good enough to receive significant playing time.

I'd play six days a week at one point, at least two hours a day. Over the years, I played on several club and recreational teams: Buena Vista, Fremont Youth Ball Club, Tri City, Top Flight Elite Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), National Junior Basketball (NJB) and Silicon Valley Basketball Club. The goal since I started? To play on my high school varsity team. And I achieved that in my junior year. I'm proud that I did.

On the surface, it seems like just the picture perfect story of someone achieving their childhood dream. But below the surface, I faced a number of challenges with the sport.

I was told by my coach in fourth grade that basketball wasn't my sport — that maybe I should try something else. But I was given a second chance, and decided to continue.

Then I tried out for my middle school team in sixth grade. With two years of experience under my belt, I thought getting on the team would be easy. Turns out, that was not the case.

Receiving the email that I was one of only a few girls who didn't make the team — despite my years of practice compared to many who were completely new to the sport — was a punch to the gut.

What made it worse was that the day after tryouts, other students asked if I was

going to practice. My cheeks flushed in embarrassment as I replied that I had been cut.

But as I dribbled on the sidelines during my older brother's practice (he was in seventh grade at the time), the coach — who happened to also be the coach for the girls' team — walked up to me and, ironically, asked why I hadn't tried out. In disbelief, I explained that I had tried out but didn't make the cut. He had me practice with the boys' team for the day and ultimately guaranteed me a spot on the following year's team, where he introduced me as "a valuable new addition."

That year, my teammate invited me to join an outside-of-school NJB team. I met coaches who, for the first time, believed in me from the very start — coaches who had confidence in me, who played me as a starter and who truly believed I was good at the sport.

## High school: the hard decision to quit

So when it was announced the NJB coaches would be the new JV girls' basketball coaches my freshman year, I was excited. I thought I'd find that supportive environment again and maybe even be a starter. But halfway through the season, I was benched. I felt like the only coaches who had ever believed in me had lost their confidence in me.

I took sophomore year off due to the pandemic. By my junior year, the coaches were hired as the new varsity coaches. I had played for so many years just to make the varsity team, and junior year was my chance to achieve that goal. I signed up thinking maybe it would be different — with the starting seniors graduated, maybe I'd receive more playing time. Then I was benched pretty much the entire season.

Yet even into my senior summer, a part of me wanted to continue with the sport.

It was the sunk cost fallacy; I wanted to finish off strong. When you play senior year, you're celebrated. You're given an honorable leave with a dazzling senior night: speeches in your honor, heartfelt gifts, crowds cheering you on. Quitting doesn't earn that level of respect.

Years of dedication and hard work meant I had to tie my

identity to basketball and my self-worth to the external validation of receiving play time on the court.

I cared whether I played; I cared whether I was good; I cared whether I could contribute to the team; and most of all, I cared about the fact that I cared so much. Because I cared, each turnover I made, each shot I missed and each foul I made slowly ate away from me.

I was the last to leave the bench and the first to get taken out of the game. And when I was benched time and time again, my self-confidence became depleted. I'd cry after most practices and games and lie awake late at night overthinking what occurred on the court. My mental health deteriorated. My grades fell.

The turning point was when I had a post-junior season 3 a.m. conversation with a friend about quitting. He brought up the questions: "This year, did you actually enjoy being on the team? Were there moments where you thought, 'This is why I joined basketball. This is why I play. This is why I love the sport. This is why it's special to me?'"

It stung when I realized I didn't have any of those moments during the season, and if I did, I must've forgotten about them since the bad very clearly outweighed the good. I didn't love being on the team as much as the idea of being on the team. I didn't want to play so much as prove to myself that I could accomplish my goal of making the varsity team.

The conversation closed with him saying I had two choices: 1) continue playing, maybe get benched and be sad or maybe get more playing time next year and be happy; or 2) don't play and escape the anxiety and stress that may come with it, but maybe feel bad about not finishing through high school and regret it in the future.

As painful as it was, I chose the latter. While a small part of me still yearned to have my own senior night last month as friends I've played with and against posted on social media about theirs, I've found solace in realizing I made the right choice for me.

Some of my most cherished childhood memories are of weekends spent commuting all across the Bay for tournaments. My teammates and I would sit along the sidelines munching on concession snacks like Furikake Chex Mix and butter mochi as we watched friends on other teams compete.

When it came our turn, we'd feed off the adrenaline rush and play our hearts out. We'd finish off the night celebrating victories with team dinners where we'd joke around, burst with laughter and use leftover food to try and mix the grossest concoction possible.

And when I look back at these experiences, it seems unfortunate that I didn't play through my last year of high school as a younger me had dreamed. However, in my more recent years of playing, I didn't find the same joy in the game that I had in before. Quitting both spared me

another year of disappointing myself and allowed me to redirect my attention to other activities that more closely align with my current interests.

## When you play senior year, you're celebrated. Quitting doesn't earn that level of respect.

I also found closure in my athletic career by knowing I had accomplished what I wanted with basketball — in fact, I accomplished more than what I wanted. I wanted to make my varsity team, and I did. I met new people — people who are still among my closest friends to this day.

And beyond that, I got to use my skills for good. I got to coordinate and direct a basketball camp for the neurodivergent community. I helped coach an NJB team teaching third- through fifth-grade girls fundamental basketball skills.

I got to scorekeep and operate the scoreboard for two NJB winter seasons so fifth-through eighth-grade boys could compete against each other. All these experiences were incredibly fulfilling.

## Development of this story: end of an era

I've written many variations of this story. It began as a Journalism 1 personal column assignment. I later added a 2 a.m. brain dump I had written in my Notes app in the summer going into my sophomore year. A 5 a.m. rant written in junior year directly after the aforementioned conversation I had with a friend is also woven in. Additionally, I included a few senior year insights I gained upon reflecting on my experiences for a college essay.

Each version contained a different ending. The first, written before my freshman season, reflected on my middle school experience: "Amazed that I could keep up [with the boys' team], Coach guaranteed me a spot on the next year's school team, where I ended up being a starter as well as 'a valuable new addition to the team.'"

Another, as I was heading into junior year, was "And now my first varsity season is approaching. So let the dream begin — I'm ready."

And yet another, written just after junior year — admittedly a bit cheesy — detailed enjoying the moments of joy amid the difficulties: "At the end of the day, it's not about how many points you scored, assists and steals you made or rebounds you secured; those are just numbers on a statistics sheet, and numbers don't tell the full story. It's about the memories you made — the good and the bad, both of which are equally important to represent the wholeness of life itself."

This story has grown with my experiences. As my high school years come to a close, it only seems right that I finally cap this story off. So I'll end it with this: Basketball served its purpose and more in my growing up. Sure, it was challenging at times, but it taught me a key lesson about moving on — that quitting is sometimes a testament to one's courage rather than one's cowardice. I still love basketball. I'm grateful for every experience I've had with the sport. But I'm proud of myself for understanding it's OK to grow out of something and quit when it no longer aligns with my current interests and future goals. ♦

# Which local gyms are best? Here's the answer

By Meher Bhatnagar

As an avid gym goer and self-proclaimed gymrat, I have spent a lot of time this past year in different gyms to get my workouts in. With the wide variety of equipment, price ranges and auxiliary benefits that different gyms offer, it can be overwhelming to choose the one that best fits your needs. To help with this, I visited popular gyms in the Bay Area to rate them based on a few specific factors in this review: environment, proximity, size and overall ambiance.

## Fitness 19 (Campbell)

Overall rating: 1.5/5 Falcons.

Starting off weak with the absolute worst gym I have been to is the Fitness 19 located off of Campbell Avenue. With the amount of people that go here, this gym is too cramped and has no air conditioning. It is always burning hot inside, making an effective workout nearly impossible (unless you're a fan of hot-box yoga).

The weights are all rusted and look like they have been rotting outside for decades. This gym is truly the definition of "you get what you pay for," with a low price point of \$14 monthly or \$50 annually. This is a big steal, especially if you aren't an avid gym rat who has time to go every day. However, if you plan on working out consistently, I would not recommend this gym because of the small space and minimal equipment.

Instead, a bigger gym with more space is a better investment if you plan to use the membership consistently. One pro is that Fitness 19 is only a convenient 10-minute drive away from school, making it accessible for many students.

## Crunch Fitness (Sunnyvale)

Overall rating: 3/5 Falcons.

Located just off Sunnyvale-Saratoga Road in a small shopping complex, Crunch Fitness has multiple locations dispersed throughout the United States and is a colorful gym with a blue interior. Starting at just \$15 a month for the basic membership, you have access to the full gym and all the equipment. For a "peak" membership, you pay \$25 a month for access to their group classes in the studio.

I have visited this gym twice, and in both of the times I've gone, the gym has been overcrowded, making it extremely difficult to find space for my workout. The gym isn't very big and all the equipment is packed together. The squat racks were shared by two people to make use of the space.

Despite the spacing issues, the equip-



Photo by MEHER BHATNAGAR

Clockwise from top left: Crunch Fitness, Fitness 19 Meridian Avenue, 49ers Fit and UFC Fit.

ment is very well-maintained for the number of people using the gym, and the price for the membership option is fairly inexpensive, making it a fine choice for those who want to save some money.

The location is pretty convenient since it's only a 5-mile drive away from the school, but make sure you go at any other time than between 4-8 p.m. Otherwise, you may not even find the equipment you need.

## UFC Fit (Oakridge Mall, Almaden)

Overall rating: 3.75/5 Falcons.

Significantly better than Crunch Fitness, UFC Fit is a United Fight Club-themed gym with blue and white equipment that provides a uniform atmosphere. The walls are plastered with motivational quotes and the gym is spacious for the number of people who go here. Every time I have gone, it hasn't ever been overly crowded.

The gym is well air conditioned with relatively new equipment to choose from. There are also different classes that members can join free of cost. The overall cost per month is relatively higher than Fitness 19, coming in at about \$59. Members can also upgrade their membership from "fitness" to "contender," which gives access to amenities such as spray tans, cryotherapy and red boot light therapy. Additionally, the gym has a smoothie bar with an extensive menu where you can purchase handmade drinks at the end of your workout.

The only downside is its distance: 9 miles may be too long a commute for Saratoga residents. However, considering the gym's high quality features, it's worth trying out.

## Fitness 19 (Meridian)

Overall rating: 4/5 Falcons.

The Fitness 19 off of Meridian Avenue is located in the Hacienda Gardens shopping center close to many restaurants. For the same cost as the one in Campbell, you have access to a gym at least four times the size and multiple rooms for posing and group fit classes.

Though it seems like the whole world goes here, the gym experience becomes that much more fun when you can run into people you know. It can be quite crowded, especially from 4-8 p.m.

The squat racks at this gym are dispersed throughout, which is a small downside for me, but the number of unheard-of machines near the wall of treadmills and stairmasters is a huge plus to this gym.

With a spacious, clean bathroom and amazing lighting in their posing room, this gym's affordability and cleanliness makes it one of my favorite fitness venues, even though it sometimes takes a bit of waiting to find equipment. For premium access to all Fitness19 clubs, the membership comes to \$25/month, making it very convenient to get your workout in no matter where you are while also providing various amenities like recovery and tanning — similar to UFC.

For most Saratogans, this gym is a bit far considering it is an 18-minute drive; however, the drive is worth it for the low cost and the quality which it provides.

## 49ers Fit (Westgate Center)

Overall rating: 4.5/5 Falcons.

Saving the best and most reliable for last,

## Local gym rankings

Fitness 19 Campbell: 1.5 Falcons



Crunch Fitness: 3 Falcons



UFC Fit: 3.75 Falcons



Fitness 19 Meridian: 4 Falcons



49ers Fit: 4.5 Falcons



# Shared interest in wrestling connect teacher and student

By Lynn Dai

Senior Tony Fernandes is a self-proclaimed class clown.

He admits he makes "dumb comments" every day in nearly all his classes, but especially in Kirk Abe's AP Government and Economics class, an openness he attributes to interactions with Abe outside of class in wrestling and Abe's friendly personality. Most of his top jokes in Abe's class push the envelope.

"He's a very friendly and open person, and he likes to banter with his students," Fernandes said. "Normally, I wouldn't pay that much attention to government and economics, but our friendship has definitely made the class more interesting and engaging to me."

Both Fernandes and Abe, who was the former head coach of the school's wrestling team from the 1990s to 2019, share a passion for the sport, an interest that's deeply ingrained in Abe's class culture. Whenever a student is caught with their phone out, for example, they're "required" to go to the open mat to witness wrestlers practicing for their matches.

Fernandes started wrestling last November in a spur of the moment decision — one of his friends, captain Sohun Bhan, had convinced him to try out the school's wres-

tling team for fun. Enticed by the prospect of "throwing people on the ground" and knowing that he didn't have much else to do over the winter break, Fernandes agreed.

## "Our friendship has definitely made the class more interesting."



SENIOR Tony Fernandes

He experienced the intensity of the sport in his first match, a milestone for beginning wrestlers. While it only lasts 6 minutes, wrestlers are required to go in at 100% of their strength and energy at lightning speed without much time to process their opponents' movements, an aspect of the sport that often throws beginners off-guard. Many are dead-tired by the end due to the heavy cardiovascular demands of the sport.

"Immediately, I forgot everything and then hoped for the best and pushed myself through it," Fernandes said. "I was super out of control, but Mr. Abe was giving commentary on the sidelines because it was a home

match. He told me to 'break a leg' before the match, and I thought it was really nice that he was actually there."

Unfortunately for him, Fernandes did end up breaking a limb — his left elbow — later on in his training, sidelining him.

Gaining the skills necessary to contend on the wrestling mat is no small feat. During the season, the team practiced for three hours in the wrestling room — a small room few students have ventured into — to improve their stamina. These practice sessions often consisted of workouts called "going live," where wrestlers fight match after match and search for new partners to train against.

Other workouts, like the Iron Man, which Fernandes cited as one of the toughest aspects of the sport, tests students' cardio and persistence by matching pairs to train continuously for five rounds.

Ironically, while he started the sport for fun, Fernandes stuck to it for its tough nature. He plans to continue martial arts in college and hopes to try judo or jiu jitsu, Japanese grappling arts with some resemblance to wrestling.

"It's fun because you get to throw people around, but the whole point of the sport is to literally dominate people," he said. "It's a really rough sport, especially in the beginning because you get beat up every day. But by

49ers Fit takes the number one spot for the best gym. Located off of Saratoga Avenue, 49ers Fit is a fully red themed gym that's located directly in Westgate Mall. Though this gym is costly, the \$59 monthly membership is worth it if you utilize it to its maximum.

The quality of the equipment is top notch and every machine is extremely clean. The members in this gym are friendly and will always encourage you to put in your best effort. Members are also particular about wiping down their machines after use to ensure cleanliness. This gym has all the machines you need for an intensive workout with spotless locker rooms, a yoga studio and HIIT workout rooms downstairs.

Since the gym is so large, it never feels too crowded. Personally, I wish there were more benches and squat racks because sometimes you have to wait for one to open up, but the majority of the time you can find one right away. The hours that I would avoid going to this gym are generally from 5-7 p.m. — it's way less crowded and a perfect workout environment at other times.

A certain downside is that guest passes are \$20 a day, which is quite pricey for one day of use. The location is quite convenient for students since it is just a 10-minute drive from the high school. ♦

## >> falconfigures

8 years of playing basketball

6 teams Christina played on

8 players on the girl's varsity basketball team

6 days of playing a week at one point

## BADMINTON

## Falcons find success after subpar 21-22 year

by SunnyCao  
& SaachiJain

The badminton team has leaped to a strong start. The Falcons gained a 19-11 win against Palo Alto High on March 16. Although they were whipped 24-6 by Milpitas on March 14, they beat Wilcox 16-14 on March 7, and Cupertino 18-12 on March 9.

Last year, the team ended with a 1-9 record, losing against every team except for Gunn. Many players attributed this to the highly competitive nature of teams in the higher-level De Anza league, which they are still in this year.

The team is looking to get a new strength and conditioning coach this season that will allow all players to improve on their individual skills. The Falcons are coached by Thom-

as Ching who has emphasized strength and conditioning.

So far, they've seen overall improvement in team spirit and performance, something junior doubles player Stephanie Chung attributes early success to the team's new lineup.

"You really get used to who you're playing with, whereas last year, the lineups changed every match, and you had to get used to your partner during warmups," Chung said.

Both this year and last year, the team has seen an influx in freshmen on the roster.

Senior captain Tony Guo, who plays boys doubles, said that many freshmen who are looking to get out of P.E. see the sport as an easy way out but have learned to like the sport.

"At first I wanted to get out of P.E., but

then I realized how many friends I could make," freshman boys doubles player Lucius Ko said. "It is a lot more challenging than I thought, but it has been really fun."

**"It is a lot more challenging than I thought, but it has been really fun."**

FRESHMAN Lucius Ko

On the other hand, several freshmen players with previous experience in the sport, including Ishir Gupta, who plays men's doubles, Kritika Kalani, who plays girls doubles and Eliza Lin, who plays mixed

doubles.

All these players have already established themselves as strong members.

"I think a lot of them might be new to the sport, and they might not have the basics down right away, but I think they all have a lot of potential and are adjusting really quickly," Chung said.

Though they won three of their first four matches, the captains have begun to scope out their upcoming opponents — some potential difficult challenges they foresee are against Lynbrook and Monta Vista.

"So far this season everyone's been performing extremely well," Guo said. "It's pretty impressive how everyone keeps their fighting spirits up till the last point, which is why we have so many great matches and a lot of tiebreakers," Guo said. ♦

## BOYS' TENNIS

## Early-season rain fails to dampen team's aspirations

by DanielWu  
& AidenYe

The boys' tennis season has gotten off to a slow start due to inclement weather conditions. The Falcons, coached by Florin Marica, were originally set to face off against the Gunn Titans on Feb. 28 and the Mountain View Spartans on March 9. However, both matches were postponed due to heavy rain.

Senior captain and No. 2 doubles player Julian Berkowitz-Sklar said that while the team has been unable to gain sufficient on-court practice, they have sought work-

arounds through asynchronous strength training.

As of mid-March, the team had played four matches, with a 4-3 loss against Los Altos on March 2, a 6-1 win against Homestead on March 7, a 5-2 win against Monta Vista on March 16, and a 7-0 loss against Cupertino on March 17. Two athletes — junior No. 1 doubles player Shrey Jain and Berkowitz-Sklar — on the 14-player team have been injured. Jain injured his leg during a Bombay in the Bay rehearsal and is unsure of when



Berkowitz-Sklar

he will be able to play again. For the time being, his No. 1 doubles partner Samik Pattanayak is playing with junior Luke Stratakos, who normally plays No. 2 doubles. Berkowitz-Sklar has elbow tendonitis from a lingering basketball injury but hopes to rejoin the team within the next couple of weeks.

Berkowitz-Sklar noted that new additions No. 1 singles Somei Ogata and No. 2 singles Nikhil Srivasta, both freshmen, have been performing well.

"It's very easy for freshmen to

come into a new school's varsity team and be immediately intimidated, but they are confident in their abilities and are really rising to the occasion," Berkowitz-Sklar said.

Counteracting the influx of new talent, the team also experienced a major loss in former No. 1 singles player junior Kosei Ogata who is now being homeschooled as he is pursuing competitive tennis. Due to the time commitment, he isn't able to play on the school team. However, he still provides tips and suggestions as team manager and continues to practice with the team.

"Once, there was a member on the team who had some shoulder pain and Kosei was able to walk over and provide corrections to their form, such as jumping higher on the serves and tossing the ball at a slightly different angle," Berkowitz-Sklar said.

Despite the uncertainty of future matches due to the unusual spring rain, Berkowitz-Sklar is confident the team will deliver a strong performance this year.

"The team is really balanced, with a mix of experience and new talent, and regardless of the weather we'll be ready to give it our all," Berkowitz-Sklar said. ♦

## BASEBALL

## Two early matches lost after rain delays season

by SaachiJain  
& AmyLuo

Due to heavy rains and unpredictable weather this month, the boys' golf team has seen several matches canceled and struggled to win when they've gotten onto the course.

As of March 17, the team had played three matches. A match against Lynbrook on March 16 ended in a tie at 189-189. In a home match against Los Altos on March 13, the Falcons lost 200-194. The team suffered a close 217-219 loss against Monta Vista on March 8.

"The team is almost identical to last year, so we haven't lived up to expectations in terms of winning matches," sophomore No. 3 Aidan Smith said. "We've all been a bit nervous, and luck has also played some part."

SOPHOMORE Aidan Smith

Ultimately, making it to CCS finals is their ultimate goal. To achieve this lofty aspiration, the team aims to consistently encourage one another, as well as offer feedback and constructive criticism.

Relying on key players such as Smith, Asawni and senior No. 1 Howard Shu, the team looks toward an away match against Cupertino High School on March 27. ♦

Spring sports have just begun, and with it, the start of a new baseball season. Though the Falcons lost a tough 0-2 nailbiter to Menlo School on Feb. 24 to kick off their campaign, they followed that difficult game up with two dominating wins: a 7-1 thrashing of Prospect on March 1, and a 10-2 dismantling of Del Mar on March 7.

Coming off a strong 2021-22 season, where the Falcons went deep into the playoffs and finished with a league record of 9-6, this year's baseball lineup has high expectations for what's to come.

In the game against the Prospect Panthers, after three 2/3 solid innings, sophomore pitcher Doug Bettinger relieved captain and pitcher Lucas Dennis and struck out the final batter in the fourth inning. Junior pitcher Shane Timmons closed the game out with three stellar innings of his own and excellent variety in his pitches. With those three and sophomore lefty Aiden Chen, the Falcons' pitching group is a force to be reckoned with.

Saratoga's victory away at Del Mar played out similarly. Flame-thrower Shane Timmons wowed with his 14 strikeouts across a commanding seven innings. With 20 strikeouts across just 11 innings pitched so far this season, he ranks in the top five in the Central Coast Section (CCS). Key contributors to an impres-



Senior Lucas Dennis stands on second base in the game against Del Mar.

sive 10 runs at Del Mar were junior infielder Abhinav Kiran, who went 3-4 with three runs scored and an RBI, and sophomore Samanyu Ram, who crossed home plate on three separate occasions as well.

Next, the Falcons' game against Lincoln was postponed to a recent spell of rainy weather. They followed that up with a 2-0 loss at Homestead on March 11. On March 15, Mountain View thumped the Falcons 8-0, a forgettable game filled with errors on defense and unproductive at bats.

Even so, Saratoga has piled up runs in most games: Dennis, Chen, Timmons and Bettinger have shown themselves to be high-level sluggers, with the former two possessing over a .300 batting average in the 2021-22 season.

The Mountain View loss was

Saratoga's last preseason outing, and every future game will now be part of the league season, with results going towards potential CCS qualification. The Falcons' first league game is against Cupertino at home on Mar. 16.

This season has seen a major squad revamp - the team has suffered key losses to graduation last spring; the Falcons have a young squad this year, with five sophomores and one freshman on the 15-member varsity roster.

Dennis said the team has set the goal of qualifying for CCS as a more difficult target, but would definitely be aiming for a record comfortably above .500.

"I think this season, though it is my last, has the potential to be my best one," he said. "I'm really looking forward to playing baseball over these next couple of months." ♦



Boys on the track distance team run a three mile post-meet recovery run during practice on March 17.

Photo by NATALIE CHUA

## TRACK AND FIELD

## Track meets canceled due to severe weather

by NatalieChua  
& SanjoliGupta

After the first two meets of track and field season — which were originally scheduled for Feb. 28 and March 9 — were canceled because of heavy rain and wind, the team finally held their first meet at home on March 16.

Junior captain Jacob Merrill, who competes in the 800m (half mile) and 1600m (one mile), also cited safety as a concern for canceling meets. Wind can heavily impact sprinters' time because running against a headwind for a short distance of 100 meters can slow them down. For distance races, a strategy to conserve energy is to run behind people so they break the wind, putting faster runners at a disadvantage.

Due to the cancellations, the first meet of the season was combined into a double dual meet against Fremont and Mountain View on March 16. The varsity boys lost 87-40 to Fremont and 92-34 to Mountain View; the varsity girls won 63-54 against Fremont and lost 75-43 against Mountain View. The frosh-soph boys won 92-16 against Fremont and lost 110-6 against Mountain View; the JV girls won 60-13

against Fremont and lost 80-24 against Mountain View.

Their second meet will be combined into a double dual with Monta Vista and Santa Clara on April 6.

Stoiber runs long distance events — including the 800m, 1600m and 3200m (two miles). Due to the delays, the team has been able to get more practices in before their first competition. Some practices also had to be canceled. Merrill and other members made up for the lost practice by practicing indoors on treadmills, stationary bikes or in the weight room.

Freshman Kyle Li also runs long distance, including the 800m, 1600m and 3200m runs. Before the track season, Li ran cross country and played soccer, but this was his first time in track. Even though there were setbacks for practices and meets, Li was able to improve his running skills and adjust to the team through coach Tippet's Saturday "On Your Own" runs, which make distance runners jog for 60-85 minutes, a time frame that can accumulate to anywhere between seven to 11 miles.

"In the future, I think we can definitely win our future meets against the same schools," Li said. ♦

## SOFTBALL

## Despite lack of experience, players stay persistent

by NatalieChua  
& VictoriaLin

The girls' softball team initially struggled to start their season strong due to an influx of inexperienced players — with the loss of some key players to graduation and no JV team due to low enrollment, the team was forced to merge the JV players into varsity.

Since then, they've tried to bring all players to the same level by having varsity players coach a small cohort of one to three players who have little to no prior experience.

Their most recent game was against Palo Alto on March 22 (not covered here because of printing deadlines). On March 15 against Monta Vista ended with a 13-3 win. The softball team had their first game of the season against Leigh High on March 7 in which they rallied back from a 6-3 deficit to win 7-6.

Currently, some top performers are senior first baseman Lily Guzman and Irene Frazier, sophomore pitcher Saira Ramakrishnan, and junior third baseman Vivienne Brooks. As there are about five remaining veterans on the team, it is up to

them and coach Mike Davey to mentor the 11 newcomers.

"We've been trying to teach the new girls the basics and getting a positive routine to feel comfortable with the environment," Frazier said.

During practice, new players learn the basics in batting, sliding and tracking the ball on the outfield. When they make mistakes or are confused on the field, veteran players walk them through the steps of plays. For Vasquez, she had Brooks assist her at

The team plans to train more for base

## SWIM

## Small team size hinders Falcons' ability to win

by JonnyLuo  
& MartinXu

It was raining, windy and cold. Four swimmers lined up behind the block, ready to swim the 200 yard JV freestyle event at a dual meet against Los Altos on March 3. The only problem: There were no Saratoga swimmers in this event.

The four girls on the JV girls' team had all been moved up to the varsity team — meaning there was no team of a JV girls' division and costing the Falcons points.

This lack of swimmers is a symptom that has been plaguing the swim team for many years.

This year, the team only has 44 swimmers and two divers, meaning that Saratoga swimmers are often outnumbered in events.

The top five swimmers in each event are awarded with points (6, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively), and each school can only have three athletes score per event. In order to win an event and therefore the meet, a team must place a swimmer in first and another in either second or third.

For example, if the school has swimmers place first and third in an event, the team scores nine points, while the opposing team scores seven.

However, if the school has swimmers place first and fifth, the team only scores seven points, while the opposing team scores nine.

While recent weather has impacted many other sports, from tennis to track, swim practices have continued throughout the poor weather.

Unlike other outdoor sports, the pool remains within a consistent temperature range, according to Coach Michael Allegretti, who has coached at the school for

the past five years.

While swimmers continue to train in heavy rain, cold weather and strong wind gusts during practices, swimmers like Hong have noted that it causes certain difficulties in practices.

For example, practice on March 14 was canceled because the strong winds blew the pool covers into a tangle, preventing swimmers from swimming. When the weather allows, the team has been training techniques, such as learning open turns and practicing transitions between strokes for events like medley.

According to Allegretti, technique work involves utilizing a variety of drills to emphasize specific focal points within the strokes.

Allegretti would also like to encourage everyone to come out and cheer on their fellow classmates at their upcoming home meets on March 31, April 6 and between April 26-28.

With the last several years being impacted by COVID-19, Hong has noticed that the swim team isn't as close as he had hoped.

"A big problem in the last few years for us is just being a team instead of acting as individuals racing," Hong said. "We're trying to do a better job at [hosting more team bonding events]."

With more interactions at swim meets and after-practice team bonding events — such as eating out at Super Duper after the Los Altos meet on March 19, with more planned in the future.

"I think the swim season has been going very well considering the last couple of years has been through COVID-19," Hong said. "We're all slowly improving and as people continue to get in shape, we're all going to be better together. We all challenge each other and we all improve." ♦



Hong

## BOYS' VOLLEYBALL

## Falcons endure rough start in El Camino League

by AndrewLin  
& VictoriaLin

The reverberating blast of the whistle and the cheers of fans punctuated the gym during the boys' volleyball game against Los Altos on March 10. A missed serve by the Falcons at the beginning of the first set gave Los Altos the momentum to reach a comfortable 7-point lead. Juniors Kali Duvvuri and Eric Norris were able to reduce to four points, or 25-21, by the end of the set.

Despite the senior Seth Hulme's valiant efforts to gain an advantage with players making spectacular dives to save the ball on multiple occasions, Los Altos scored point

after point as the ball slipped through the Falcons' defense. The set ended with the Falcons losing 25-16.

The Falcons seemed to make a resurgence in the third and final set, tying the score with Los Altos several times. A controversial decision by the referee in Los Altos' favor led the stands to erupt with boos and jeering, but it didn't matter: The Falcons lost 25-22.

Despite the 3-0 loss, coach Lori Gragnola is optimistic about the rest of the season since the team dropped to the less competitive El Camino League last year for the 2021-22 season.

Junior team captain and setter Samuel Kau attributed the loss to their canceled pre-season, which left them ill prepared for their very first league game. "This was our first game, so we were a bit rusty. We'll pick it up though," Kau said.

Their next game was against Kings Academy on March 15.

Gragnola said the team's main focuses are to make serves and have a sturdier defense. They plan to work more on blocking in future practices. In a half-joking tone, she also said it would be nice if some of the players could grow a few inches.

In addition to technical skills, the team feels they could work on their mentality toward games. "It can be easy to dwell on the past, but we have to move on from our mistakes," Kau said.

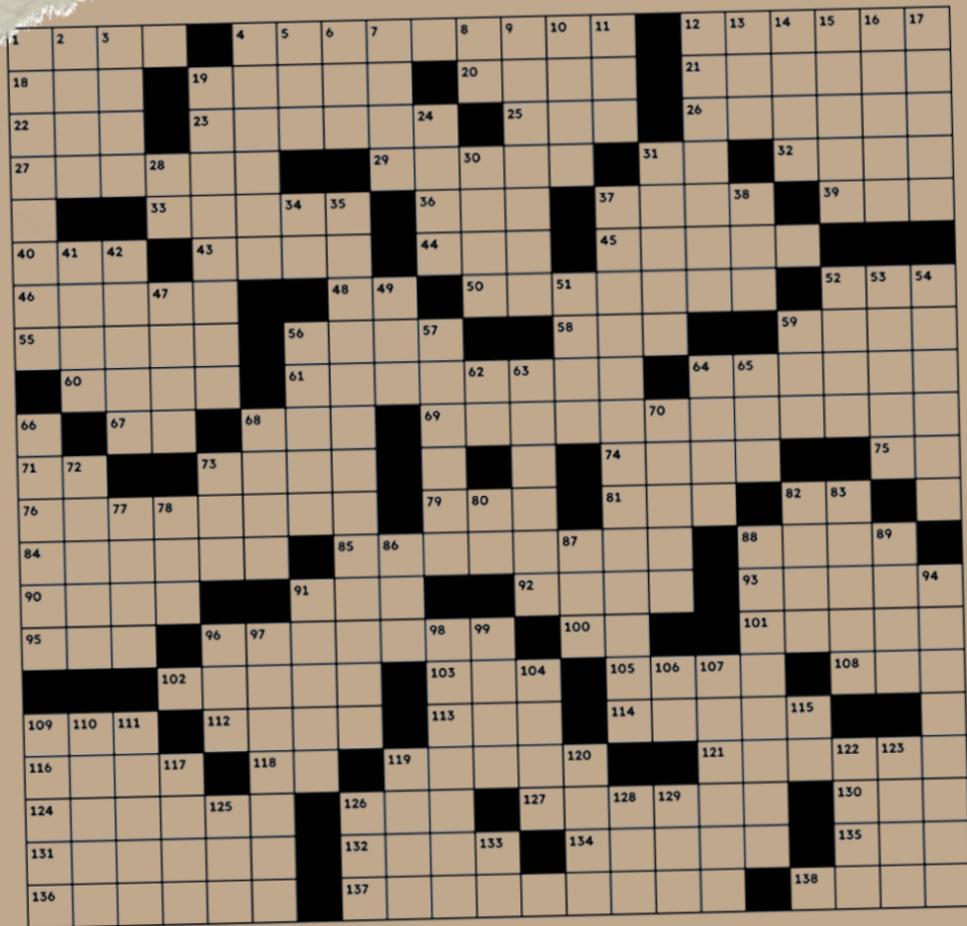
Apart from these challenges, the team has improved in other areas. Bad team chemistry, which Gragnola attributed to "weird dynamics between personalities," hindered the Falcons, leading to a winless season in the highly competitive De Anza league last year.

"This year is like a 180," Gragnola said. "They all get along great. We all are working as a family with two freshmen that we've brought in under our wings." ♦



Kau

# The Falcon March Crossword



BY ChristopherChen

**Across**

- 1. Slang for a good songs
- 4. Something all tragic heroes have (alliterative)
- 12. A dark igneous rock
- 18. To \_\_\_ is human, to forgive, divine
- 19. Formerly Malfoy house elf
- 20. Island country, has bottled water with a blue sleeve
- 21. At a particular location: \_\_\_
- 22. American TV network owned by Warner Bros.
- 23. Wealth
- 25. Prohibition
- 26. Los Angeles-inspired brand
- 27. Assigned in English class, everyone hates these
- 29. Pipe systems for waste
- 31. "The" in Spanish
- 32. City building simulators published by Ubisoft
- 33. A type of steak, aptly shaped like a T
- 36. A noise pirates make
- 37. Columbus's first ship

- 39. Time zone used by Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands
- 40. Previous name for MacOS
- 43. Generally black-colored gem
- 44. Allow
- 45. Country with pyramids
- 46. Pseudonym for Samuel Clemens
- 47. Trademark
- 50. Both... and, \_\_\_\_\_ nor
- 52. Athletic competition SHS teams need to qualify for
- 55. Insane, or un\_\_\_\_\_d
- 56. Dry and barren
- 58. Explosives (think Minecraft)
- 59. When birds shed feathers
- 60. Plural, ammunition for guns
- 61. Sports beverage
- 64. An ideal world
- 65. Chromosomes for most males
- 68. Acronym for uncompleted works
- 69. Singular, what ASB does after 2nd
- 71. Turn this on when it's hot indoors
- 73. \_\_\_ & Stitch
- 74. \_\_\_ you so
- 75. Manufacturer of computing goods, especially calculators
- 76. Merry-go-round

- 79. Throw
- 81. Also known as SCEA
- 82. Be \_\_\_ ease
- 84. To be half-asleep
- 85. An inhabitant of this country
- 88. Cain's brother
- 90. Dentists deal with \_\_\_ health
- 91. Abbr., a type of deal you can only get once
- 92. "\_\_\_ to the highest bidder!"
- 93. Cars drive in these
- 95. Norse god who sacrificed his hand
- 96. Sheldon Cooper's catchphrase
- 100. 3.14
- 101. A stand for paintings
- 102. The best instrument
- 103. Abbr. for account
- 105. Star \_\_\_ (not George Lucas)
- 108. Economic Research Institute
- 109. I don't know
- 112. Isle of \_\_\_, located between Great Britain and Ireland
- 113. <link \_\_\_="stylesheet" href="z.css"/>
- 114. Boats owned by the wealthy
- 116. British, refers to fools
- 118. "The" in French (masculine)

- 119. Sugary liquids
- 121. On indefinite \_\_\_\_\_
- 124. Desire to harm
- 126. Rapper who debuted with *Illmatic*
- 127. A bright source of light or inspiration
- 130. Informal suffix for somewhat
- 131. List of things to be addressed
- 132. Prefix meaning "flower"
- 134. Concur
- 135. Former name of Tokyo
- 136. A \_\_\_ statement says that you haven't incurred any damages
- 137. You need these to get into your home
- 138. Abbr., completing education

**Down**

- 1. Something very large
- 2. Shiny spheres
- 3. Everything has \_\_\_ and cons
- 4. In *Macbeth*: "Scotland hath \_\_\_\_\_ enough to fill up your will" (4.3.90)
- 5. American counterpart to BBC
- 6. Acronym used when admitting something
- 7. Plural affirmative votes
- 8. Abbr., surrender/forfeit
- 9. \_\_\_, égalité, fraternité
- 10. Slightly open (of doors, usually)
- 11. Opposite of an L
- 12. The science guy
- 13. First name of Bond girl Paloma's actor who also portrayed Marilyn Monroe in *Blond* (2022)
- 14. A long, dramatic story
- 15. Where gladiator fights happen
- 16. The Tower of Pisa \_\_\_ (present)
- 17. Fortune-telling cards
- 19. Skeletons in the Mario universe
- 24. US Navy \_\_\_
- 28. Two rivals are usually \_\_\_ odds
- 30. Brown birds mostly in the Americas
- 31. Seven \_\_\_ nine
- 34. Abbreviation for the state that has a well-known city with the same name
- 35. Statistical inference of a value
- 37. A principle that internet service providers should treat all content, sites, and applications equally
- 38. Yearly interest of credit cards
- 41. Moving in water (without drowning)
- 42. Drug used to treat anxiety
- 47. Rapper who released "Fancy"
- 49. A Massachusetts STEM university
- 51. \_\_\_ be like that sometimes
- 52. \_\_\_ and seethe
- 53. Last name Eastwood

- 54. The counterpart to elastic friction
- 56. Quick or light on your feet
- 57. Possible or achievable
- 59. More casual "Mother" (not British)
- 62. Acronym meaning currently
- 63. Jackal-headed god of the dead
- 64. The other non-Berkeley well-known UC
- 65. Influential videos from speakers
- 66. A name for the light-orange pellets in Pac-Man
- 68. Old people are often \_\_\_ because of their experience
- 70. Is there \_\_\_ to this suffering?
- 72. Support the weight of and move
- 73. Root meaning "play" or "trick"
- 77. The sound a lion makes
- 78. A bird with 270° head turns
- 80. Both... and, either... \_\_\_
- 82. A rhyme scheme with the 1st, 3rd and 4th lines rhyming (as in the last stanza of a villanelle)
- 83. Taut from nervousness or anxiety
- 86. Abbreviation for the first weekday
- 87. Shorter word for police
- 88. Russian and French World Chess Champion (1892-1946)
- 89. Stare creepily
- 91. O<sub>3</sub>
- 94. Describes a person who is careless and inattentive with their work
- 96. Sudden loud noise, seen in comics
- 97. An ornamental flowering shrub
- 98. The equivalent of a Mary Sue
- 99. A Taiwanese company, sells laptops like the Aspire or the Spin
- 104. A heavy, blunt weapon
- 106. Egyptian god of the sun
- 107. Plural, something you might hear if you shout into a cave
- 109. A series of martial arts films starring Donnie Yen
- 110. Ivan \_\_\_, an antagonist in the *Rocky* film series
- 111. Superman's birth name
- 115. British informal way to say thanks
- 117. Cuper \_\_\_
- 119. Miguel \_\_\_, MLB player formerly for the Minnesota Twins
- 120. The pinnacle, either of a mountain or of some ideal
- 122. A level in some ranking or hierarchy
- 123. Federal department primarily responsible for food and farming
- 125. Plural, spinnny discs
- 126. A more casual "no"
- 128. Some say it's not just a number
- 129. Babies do this a lot
- 133. Acronym, where you received this newspaper (probably) ♦

(Solutions will be posted on [saratogafalcon.org](http://saratogafalcon.org) on March 25.)

## Three other uses for the Falcon

BY SamBai & LeynaChan

You've just finished your second class of the day, and you grab a copy of The Saratoga Falcon on your way out. After totally reading every story in the newspaper — not just skimming the top 10 on the very back and maybe filling out part of the crossword — you're unsure of what you should do with the newspaper. You could just throw it away or use it as a doormat to one of your classes, but there's so much more you can do with it.

**Origami**

Printed on tabloids, the newspaper is the perfect size for a number of origami creations. Its large dimensions allow you to fold designs ranging from intricate dragons to the simplest paper crane, and the thin paper allows for easy ripping, meaning there's no need to lick a crease over and over again before being able to rip a soggy edge in half. You can even make a classic newspaper hat by folding it into a hollow cylinder and putting it over a light bulb to

create a lamp. Just by folding one corner to the edge and making a square, you open a world of new possibilities, from squishy balls to snakes.

**Impromptu raincoat**

If anime characters can do it, you can too. When it rains, you can hold a copy of The Falcon over your head as you dart between classes.

**Art**

The newspaper is also the perfect place to practice art skills. No need to drive 20 minutes to a stationary store anymore and spend 10 dollars on a sketchbook when you can use The Falcon!

Using the back of the Nov. 22 issue, you can turn the Backpage folding kit of a turkey into an actual turkey by soaking sheets of it into a bath of glue and then plastering it over a model turkey to create a paper mache. Or by cutting out squares of paper from the Life double page, you can create the best paper collage ever, fully in color with the most juicy stories. ♦



### top ten WAYS TO "WALK"

- 10 Regular walking.** The simplest way to get from point A to point B. Simple, effective, but bland.
- 9 Speed-walking.** Combining the efficiency of walking with the speed of running. It's the perfect middle ground for anyone wanting to go relatively fast, but not tire themselves out.
- 8 Sprinting.** Very fast and efficient. The quickest way to get from point A to point B. The only downside is that it gets exhausting real fast.
- 7 Walking without moving your arms.** You'll look like you're gliding across the ground, given that people don't look down at your feet.
- 6 The inchworm.** It's going to hurt your stomach, especially if you do it on something like concrete, but it's low profile and hard to mess up.
- 5 Bear crawl.** Get down on all fours and start moving forward using all of your limbs. It's a bit slow and hard on your hands and knees, but that's how a lot of animals do it, right?
- 4 Marching.** Walk like you mean it. Keep good form and make sure to follow a good rhythm.
- 3 Galloping.** It's fast and fun, but just a bit energy consuming. Make sure to keep a steady pace and swing your arms high.
- 2 NPC walk.** Get into a set pattern and embrace the animation you've been programmed to perform.
- 1 Dr. Livesy walk.** Thrust your chest up high, point your chin up, smile and walk with great swagger. Don't forget the arms. Keep them swinging in a rhythmic fashion.

>>> Eric Shi

