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Junior develops app to help air quality predictions

IN-DEPTH 18



College counselor begins a 'second puberty' as a trans woman

SPORTS 21



Junior recruited to play DI soccer program at U.S. Naval Academy

THE Saratogafalcon
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Zhang wins state 100-meter fly race

BY Nicole**Lee**

Freshman Kelsey Zhang left her mark in the school's athletic history when she won the state CIF race in the 100m butterfly with a time of 52.94 on May 13. She defeated 17 qualifying swimmers for the victory.

She was also part of a successful relay team consisting of freshman Emma Geng, junior Meher Bhatnager and senior Zeynep Tokuz who raced in the 200-yard medley relay and finished 30th out of 40 teams participating in the preliminary round.

In addition to her recent CIF championship victory, she was nominated for athlete of the week by Mercury News on May 12.

Eight days before the state meet, Zhang had also won first place in CCS with times of 1:59:03 for the 200-m individual medley, in which swimmers compete with

each of four strokes (butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle) for 50m, and 52.62 seconds for the 100m butterfly.

"I think we're all really happy for her and really proud of her," assistant coach Kristen Thomson said. "Obviously, she's worked so hard for this her entire life."

Zhang's records indicate the continuation of an illustrious career, marked by her qualification in 2022 for the upcoming Olympics trials with a 2:13.18 in the 200-meter butterfly. Even so, Zhang's goal at the CIF state championship was not to win, but rather to enjoy the time with her team members.

"I was at States [CIF state championship] to have fun and talk to my friends that I haven't seen for a long time, which was nice," Zhang said. "I was just mostly happy for my relay team that we made it to the States."

Zhang started swimming at age 5 at Saratoga Star Aquatics (SSTA). She then

switched to PEAK swim team when she was around 6. She swam at the Santa Clara Swim Club from 6 to 10 years old, and switched to Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics (PASA) four years ago.

At just 14, she made it into the Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics team's National Group and swam a qualifying time for the Olympic Trials. Since then, Zhang has been training hard to improve her skills even further.

She practices six days a week, with 6-hour practices each day on Monday, Wednesday and Friday — each starting at 6 a m

On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, she starts at the same time but instead practices for three hours at a time. This often meant that she couldn't make it to many of the practices held at the school and mostly competed at meets.

>> KELSEY ZHANG on pg. 21

Track and field closed for summer renovations

вү Kathy**Wang**

Due to safety concerns expressed by the administration and athletic director Rick Ellis, the school board has OK'd summer renovations of the school's track and Benny Pierce field. As a result, the track and field area will be closed from June 12 until Aug. 17, the first day of the 2023-24 school year.

Large cracks posing safety hazards have accumulated on the track since its last renovation in 2011. The turf field has also worn out from overuse, and a large dip has also formed on the edge due to recent storms.

The district did not respond to requests for information about the cost of the project in time for publication.

The turf failed the most recent GMAX test conducted in June 2022, which measures the ability of a playing surface to absorb shock or kinetic energy from a collision.

Large cracks posing safety hazards have accumulated on the track since the 2011 renovation.

"The track and field gets used daily and it is open to the public," maintenance supervisor Paul Weir said. "Our community enjoys it, but that also contributes to accelerating wear, so 15 plus years is when it's ready to be replaced."

According to assistant principal Mathew Torrens, the renovation project will involve excavation and replacement of the underlayment for the turf, along with installation of a new turf surface that "has been used in other areas of the school and is confirmed by the state as safe." The top layer of the track will also be resurfaced and restriped, meaning new number and line signals will be painted on it.

"When you're doing a construction project, you're gonna have to balance safety, usage, the utility as well as cost, so all these factors are at play," Torrens said. ◆

ChatGPT usage raises alarms

ву Andrew**Lin** & Kathy**Wang**

From May 5-12, 53 AP U.S. History (APUSH) students came under suspicion for using ChatGPT to complete a collection of four review assignments. Following an investigation by the administration, 25 students were found to have not cheated while the remaining 28 received zeroes and referrals.

Although the APUSH incident received the most publicity, it is just one of many AIrelated academic integrity violations in humanities courses this semester after the controversial technology debuted in November. In recent weeks, the English department has also faced similar troubling issues with students possibly using ChatGPT on essays and other assignments.

For years, the school has used Turnitin. com to check Canvas assignments, an internet-based plagiarism detection service, which recently gained AI-detection functionality in April.

However, the nascent nature of AI means Turnitin.com's AI-detection is unreliable. Turnitin.com claims that its model "may not always be accurate so it should not be used as the sole basis for adverse actions against a student"

>> CHATGPT on pg. 6

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2022-23 valedictorian and salutatorian announced

Lisa Fung will be honored as this year's valedictorian and Anushka Sankaran is the salutatorian. They received these honors because they have the highest weighted academic GPAs among the senior class.

Fung took 18 AP and multiple honors courses throughout high school. She also participated in girls' volleyball and was a captain of the track and field team, on top of competing in Olympiad math competitions and doing science research. Sankaran took 10 AP and five honors courses. She also serves as the president of the speech and debate team. Fung will attend Stanford and major in computer science while Sankaran will attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and major in math and computer science. ◆

— Mitchell Chen

Course changes for next school year announced

Five elective courses in this year's schedule won't run next year while six others have been added to the course list for the 2023-24 school year. Courses generally didn't run if they received fewer than 20 sign-ups, school officials said.

The classes that won't run are Introduction to Digital Animation, Creative Writing, Creative Writing 2 Honors, Japanese 3 Honors and Marine Biology.

The added classes are AP Music Theory, AP 2D Art Design, AP 3D Art Design, regular Statistics, AP Japanese Language and Culture and Stage Technology and Design 2.

Senior Kunal Singh, who is a teaching assistant for this year's only period of Digital Animation taught by Alex Hemmerich, feels that there is no real substitute to the class.

"The removal of the class is tragic since it is a gateway into a fairly unknown industry, so a lot of future talent may be squandered," Singh said. "As a result, there is a loss of potential in the field for students, and many now will not be able to find out if it might be a path they want to pursue." ◆

Prom held at beach made an amazing experience

More than 500 juniors and seniors dressed in handsome tuxedos and intricate prom dresses filed onto buses that would take them to the combined prom held on May 20 at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Students were allowed on all rides and games after paying with their reloadable game cards, which had 21 credits (\$21). Some also chose to reload their cards with their own money in order to go on additional rides, as some popular rides like Typhoon cost up to \$8 of credits each.

Attendees who chose to have a calmer night took a peaceful evening walk with their friends or went with a date along

the sandy shores as the setting sun shined upon the horizon Senior Allison Tan, the senior class president, felt this year's prom was held far more efficiently than last year's prom, with a multi-course meal with desserts and enough tables. Last year, the venue only offered finger foods, and there enough tables for everyone. In addition, combining the junior and senior proms helped the school save \$14,000.

"I really like the prom this year; the decorations, food and venue made for a really amazing experience," Tan said. ◆

— Mitchell Chen and Neal Malhotra

Correction: In the previous print issue (April 7, 2023), the story "Dance team takes home back-to-back trophy without coach" did not report the adults who had been taking care of the dance team as advisors and choreographers, including Julia Peck and Monique Young, long-time dance team advisors; both went to Anaheim with the dance team, along with Toni Glover, who had also helped dance team clean all their dances and medium jazz dance last year. Other adults who helped dance team with choreography and cleaning are Nikki Schulte from USA Dance, who had helped revise all choreographies, and Morgan Wahl, who had choreographed the large pom dance. Additionally, Kaitlyn Thompson, previous dance team captain (Class of 2020), assisted the dance team during nationals and with all choreography.



www.saratogafalcon.org







Falconpuff | Freshman Keatyn Spendlove falls to the ground as senior Brianna Lee attempts to pull her flag. The freshmen, with their higher numbers, eventually won 0-0 because they ended with more yards.

MAP teachers Hemmerich and Muñoz leaving Saratoga High

Muñoz

tween positions.

As the school year comes to an end, the Media Arts Program is saying goodbye to two teachers: longtime MAP, Digital Animation and Photography teacher Alex Hemmerich and MAP and Ceramics teacher Moving forward, Hemmerich will be teaching tra-

ditional and digital arts at La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park, while Muñoz has been offered positions at other school districts closer to home — Palo Alto, Fremont, and Maynard Academy — and is deciding be-

Hemmerich will teach at Menlo Park mid-

Hemmerich, who began teaching at SHS seven years ago, has since become integral within MAP. He was heavily inspired to become an educator by his independent study

teacher in high school, whom he described as kind, empathetic and immensely passionate about teaching. "Upon graduating, I immediately knew I had to a fraction of what he was and meant to me for another student, it would make all the blood, sweat and tears

Hemmerich said he has become a better educator during his time at the school, learning a lot from the creativity of his MAP colleagues especially. He has enjoyed teaching each subject for its own reasons.

"I loved introducing conceptual projects in photography, analyzing morphs and motion smears in animation and watching my MAP students collaborate on interdisciplinary proj-

Hemmerich has made fun memories with his colleagues and students over the years and even has multiple tattoos inspired by students, one being a llama inside a pyramid because a student thought "illuminati" was spelled "il-

However, Hemmerich noted one downside to teaching at the school was how the academic environment puts excessive pressure on students.

"While it's been wonderful to teach in such an academically rigorous environment, it's proven to be challenging at times when it comes to grading, Hemmerich said. "I've had countless students over the years care more about the letter grade they receive than the content they've produced or knowledge

Next year, Hemmerich will be teaching traditional and digital arts at La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park. He also hopes to introduce filmmaking and graphic design classes for students there.

MAP junior Rishab Melkote praised Hemmerich as being both skilled and helpful in his teaching and emphasized Hemmerich's approachability and willingness to help any student who needed it.

"He's achieved the perfect balance between genuinely helpful and extremely entertaining," Melkote said. "On top of that, you can tell

he's really passionate about what he teaches. His disposition and energy has made the school a much better place to exist in."

Muñoz seeks a school that is a better fit

This year, Muñoz, who was new to the school this year, taught two Ceramics classes and two Media Arts classes at the junior level. The fall semester got off to a challeng-

ing start when Muñoz caught COVID-19 and faced difficulties with using Canvas and applications like Premiere Pro for Media Arts.

By the spring semester, however, Muñoz had setbecome an educator," Hemmerich said. "If I could be tled into the school and its systems and was happy with the projects students were able to create in h Media Arts and Ceramics.

Muñoz overall had a good experience teaching at SHS, happy with the students' work and community. Though Muñoz was not heavily involved in the Adobe applications aspect of Media Arts, Muñoz particularly enjoyed the community aspect of MAP and watching

students bring their ideas to life in films such as the American Story project.

Comparing the two different classes, Muñoz liked teaching Ceramics more than Media Arts because of the freedom to plan the curriculum and the way students dove into their pieces and incorporated personal

aspects into them. "Their work was excellent," Muñoz said. "In Ceramics, students sometimes made pieces that have a deep personal meaning, and I am honored that they felt safe enough to do that work here at school."

In the future, Muñoz will continue to focus on teaching ceramics, sculpture and other kinds of hands-on art and possibly also Media Arts.

"I have been blown away by the creativity, ingenuity, camaraderie, kindness and work ethic of my students," Muñoz said. "I did my best to build a safe and creative class atmosphere, inspire students, communicate the curriculum and teach well." ◆

MSET Fish make finals at Championships

THIS YEAR WAS THE TEAM'S SIXTH APPEARANCE AT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

June 2, 2023

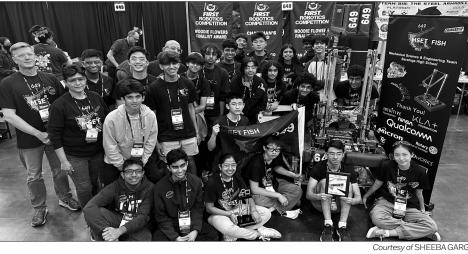
The Saratoga Falcon

On April 19, 27 of 47 students from the school's FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) team, 649 MSET Fish, boarded a plane to Houston to attend their second FIRST World Championship in a row - capping off the team's most successful season yet.

For the rest of the week, the team competed in the George R. Brown Convention Center, swimming their way to the finals. Within their assigned division — the Curie Division — the team's countless hours of work and modifications came to fruition: They seeded 17th out of 78 teams, and were picked to play with the first ranked alliance.

Hours of countless work came to fruition as the team had their most successful season yet.

The team qualified for the World Championship after winning the regional Engineering Inspiration award at the Silicon Valley Regional (SVR) as a result of nearly every student on the team giving time to organize and volunteer at the outreach program's various initiatives.



The team gathers for a group photo on April 27 after their final match of the tournament.

The three days the team had between when regional competitions ended and when the robot was shipped to Houston were dedicated to maintenance on the drivetrain and electronics, adding a slope on the plastic covering the drivetrain to prevent game elements from getting stuck, with a focus on software improvements. The team prioritized tuning autonomous paths. adding a 180-degree orientation lock for ease of scoring and pickup as well as programming a dunking routine in the arm for nigher scoring accuracy.

"I've seen the new autonomous paths increase flexibility for our strategy," said junior Govind Buttar, the team's software lead. "We were less restricted to our middle starting configuration, and scored more points during the autonomous period [at the World Championships]."

At the beginning of the season, the team chose to give priority to driver practice, so autonomous aligning was put on hold, and Kasnavi and Liang manually aligned the robot for both scoring and pickup. But after their second regional, the team found that the manual alignment process was taking too much time during matches, restricting the number of elements they could score.

Once the software changes were made, MAP Annex to the band room to fit a full-

When the team arrived at the Curie Division Tournament — one of eight World Divisions in Houston — they seeded 17th of 78 teams and formed an alliance (a group of three teams that play together, chosen round-robin-style for playoffs but random-

with the first and second-seeded teams team 5940 BREAD from Design Tech High in Redwood City and team 1756 Argos from Limestone Community High in Peoria, Illinois. Although the team fell to the lower bracket of two during the double elimination-style playoffs, they still found their way to the finals after achieving a record-high score during their last semifinal match.

The team made it all the way to their division finals, just two wins away from reaching the Einsteins tournament — a separate division where all eight initial division winners compete to bring home the title of "World Champion."

However, the team lost their first finals match with a score of 204-207, making their next match a make-or-break.

With alliance captain team 5940's help in quickly manufacturing new parts, the team was able to replace their intake before the next deciding match. During that match, however, the robot suffered a hard drop as a result of accelerating off of a jointed threepiece bridge in the middle of the field and suddenly began to spin out of control, ending the team's FRC season just a hair away from reaching Einstein's.

Nevertheless, this year, the team got further than ever before in its two-decade his the team moved their playing field from the tory of competing in FRC, which is credited to the team's countless hours of work and efficiency in prioritizing necessary changes.

"Overall, I would say that the robot performed better than initially expected," Buttar said. "The team was able to use the lessons learned from [our first regional] effectively and utilize our remaining time to solve our biggest weaknesses going into ly generated during qualification matches) SVR and the World Championships."

Student speaker SED talks | African American panel capture power of language

Over 50 students from different schools in the Bay Area and Saratoga residents gathered in the community room of the Saratoga Library on April 22 for the bi-annual speakers series SED Talks, hosted by the Saratoga Library Teen Advisory Board and Saratoga Youth Commission. SED Talks — which mimics the style of TEDx talks — invites local community leaders to speak about their experiences based on a rotating theme; past themes have included sustainable energy, environmental awareness and mental health.

This year, the topic was Words for Impact. SED talks hosted speakers such as Saratoga mayor Kookie Fitzsimmons, retired West Valley College English professor Susan Glass, Sierra Club advocate Susan Gupta and senior Christina Chang, both members of The Falcon staff.

The event focused on exploring how various mediums of the English language such as creative writing, poetry and journalism can be used to spark change.

Sophomore Manlin Zhang, who helped plan and organize SED talks as part of the Teen Advisory Board, hoped the event would raise awareness for local and international issues.

"Our events explore different perspectives — professional, student and advocate — so that everyone leaves SED Talks with enough information to form their own opinion [about the impact of writing]," Zhang said. "I think everyone left with a real sense of curiosity [on the topics discussed]; [hearing from local speakers] is an entirely Saratogan experience you can't get anywhere else."

The event's two student speakers — Gupta and Chang — both focused on their experiences at the Falcon as well as Chang's time on Soundings magazine and Gupta's work writing stories for national contests such as National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and blog posts.

Additionally, Glass — who is blind spoke about her experiences telling her own story and within literature studies. She read some of her own poetry, which incorporated imitated bird chirping.

Hinton also added the perspective of a visual artist using photography as a form of advocacy and storytelling.

Growing up during the Vietnam War, Hinton participated in advocacy against war efforts, and more recently has advocated for foster youth and homeless people facing displacement from construction projects.

Hinton, who also works for nature conservation, presented photography from a project about Saratoga Creek.

Gupta decided to speak at the ent because she believes that it is important to share why she loves language and help spread this love with the community. Compared to previous public speaking events

Talks to be more personal and engaging. "I didn't feel like I was giving an intense speech, but rather talking to the people in front of me," Gupta said. "I also really liked the Q&A panel because I could ask other speakers questions about their interests,

Gupta participated in for clubs such as

Model UN, Gupta found presenting at SED

and how they became involved in writing." During her own talk, Gupta discussed the impact that moving from Sunnyvale to India and in the fifth and eighth grades had on her relationship with language, and other experiences that shaped her passion for reading and writing.

"I love [words] because they have the power to captivate everyone — even children in preschool," Gupta said. "I talked about how journalism and other forms of writing can be a means for changing a community and help create a community of people who are working towards the

discusses racism realities

Over 100 students and staff members gathered in the library on April 26 to listen to a panel discussion about the implicit and explicit racism experienced by Saratoga's small African American community.

The panelists were sophomore Dylan Wilson, senior Nadine Cobourn and community members Byran Wilson and Tammie Marshall as well as Lindsay Harris, who works in human resources for the district.

Activities director Kristen Cunningham collaborated with the Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF), counselor Brian Safine, district director of climate and culture Jamal Splane, assistant principal Matt Torrens as well as the panelists to help plan the event.

"I wanted to have an event where people could listen to more perspectives."

SENIOR Taylor Wilson

"The purpose of this event was to provide an opportunity for African American members of our community to share their personal backgrounds and experiences with racism," Cunningham said. "The administration and planning committee all hoped this event would provide an opportunity for our community to better understand how they can play a role in combating racism at Saratoga High School and our wider community."

Taylor was originally contacted by Torrens to collaborate on an ambitious plan for Diversity Week, which was from April 24-28. However, they were forced to settle with a panel due to a lack of time.

As the emcee, Taylor had less speaking time than panelists but was also able to share his experiences.

many opportunities in our community to be highlighted," Taylor said. "I wanted to have an event where people could listen to more perspectives." For this reason, Taylor pointed to the community member panelists who shared

speak a few times, and I wanted other Af-

rican American people who haven't had as

their experiences with racism outside of the Saratoga community. Making up slightly more than 0.1% of Saratoga's community Black community members' experiences are often diminished and disregarded. "I've only had experience with racism

here," Taylor said. "I thought it was important for people to get insight about how racism can manifest outside of our commu-Aside from discussing institutional and

systemic racism, members also shared personal anecdotes of being discriminated against. Harris recalled that when she need ed medical care, she would worry about her appearance, fearing discrimination if she didn't look presentable at the hospital.

"Normally, you hear about [instances of blatant racism on the news or social media, but when you get to hear it from people a few feet away from you, you can understand it better," Taylor said.

Senior Arshi Chawla, who attended the event, was especially impacted by hearing Byran Wilson speak about how racism could potentially lessen or even end in young people's lifetimes, due to the normalization of interracial or intercultural marriages and the increasing number of multiracial people.

By speaking out, Dylan's goal as a panelist was to highlight the importance of understanding the African American ex-

"I wanted people to understand that the African American experience is different from that of the average person," Dylan said. "I hoped people could leave the event with a better understanding of the experience and the harm that microaggressions "I think I've had the opportunity to can cause." •

'Mamma Mia'

Teachers concerned over attempt to enforce more school time work hours

& Zack**Zhang**

During the public comment section of a board meeting on May 9, 13 teachers questioned an apparent attempt by district leadership to require teachers to be on campus for longer hours each work day and also sign in and sign out if they have to leave early.

The teachers said this change would affect their work and personal life balance.

"I came to this district because teachers were treated with respect and had some amount of autonomy in organizing their work day," science teacher Cheryl Lenz said. "Being able to decide how and when, where I engage in course prep or collaborative meetings with my colleagues is of utmost — taken away.

"It's the message that goes behind that [is] just simply insulting."

TEACHER Stephanie Pierson

District leaders have been negotiating with the District Teachers Association, the union that represents most teachers, in recent weeks over various issues, and one proposed change was contract language related to workday expectations.

Since teachers do not have classes during every period (a full-time schedule means they teach five classes), some were confused about the reasoning be- insulting." ◆

hind the possible change in policy and expectations that most have operated under for years.

At the meeting, many teachers told the board they felt disrespected that such an idea was even brought up by district leaders, most of whom are new this year.

A mix of teachers from both Los Gatos and Saratoga — including math teachers Kelly Frangieh and Seema Patel, science teacher Cheryl Lenz and English teacher Amy Keys - spoke in favor of the traditional work conditions

Frangieh said that when teachers have more control over when and what they work on, they feel more organized and are able to manage their own productivity better than when that control is

'Teachers feel motivated when they have a large measure of control over their lives and are engaged in positive relationships," Frangieh told the board. "When people are controlled, told what to do and aren't experiencing positive relationships, their motivation will decrease and they will be

Other teachers like Stephanie Pierson, the leadership class advisor from Los Gatos High School, said teachers' hard work and professionalism demonstrated in past years were completely "disregarded" and "underappreciated" during the negotiations.

"We already [stay at school] until 3:45 p.m.," she told the board. "That's not my concern. If you want me to clock in and clock out, I will. It's the message that goes behind that [is] just simply

Freshman creates brand new map for Saratoga downtown as Eagle Project

ву Derek**Liang**

Since the day Larry O'Brien joined Boy Scouts in 2019, he envisioned himself one day becoming an Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouts of America

Four years later, the freshman achieved his dream. The Eagle Service Project is an opportunity for scouts to demonstrate leadership abilities while also benefiting the community outside of the BSA, in a non business or commercial sense.

For O'Brien's Eagle Service Project, he decided to create a new map for downtown Saratoga. The previous map of downtown was severely outdated, partly due to COVID-19 shutting down many businesses.

O'Brien recruited help for the project by reaching out via email to 21 of his fellow scouts in Troop 566 to work on the project with him. Together, they collected various types of data on businesses in Saratoga downtown. This information would come to form his map — and included the location of buildings, roads and parking, as well as the names of the businesses and the services that they provide.

After the data collection was complete, O'Brien began making the map in Adobe Illustrator, which in itself was a novel process since he had previously never made a map or used the software extensively.

The project took roughly a year to complete.

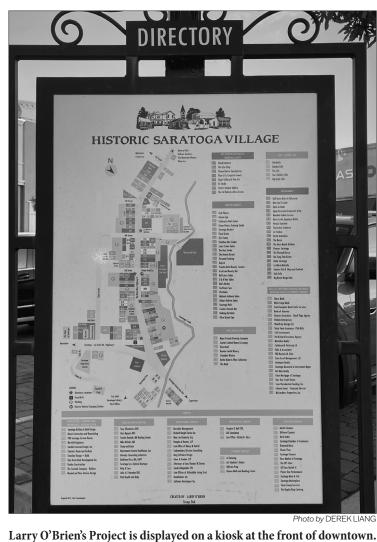
"There were definitely some struggles figuring out the tools on the software at first, but with the help of outside resources, the process went relatively smoothly,"

After completing the map, O'Brien sent his final product to the city council in 2022. The map was quickly approved and the city proceeded to display the map in kiosks downtown, where people are now able to reference them to help find stores and attractions

For O'Brien, earning his Eagle

rank after years of Boy Scout service has been immensely reward-

"Being a Boy Scout has taught me a lot of lessons that I can implement into my life," O'Brien said. "I think my favorite part of being a Boy Scout has been becoming a leader in my troop, hanging out at campouts and earning awards, such as my Eagle rank." ◆



picked up earlier in the week from the participating schools — to create food kits for and LEO clubs. Martha's Kitchen invited

Throughout April, the school participat

ed in the first ever Martha's Kitchen Food

Fight, a competition among six Bay Area

schools to help feed those in need. Students

and staff earned one point for each dollar

donated, four for each pound of food and

earned around 12,500 points, just shy of

rector Kristen Cunningham wants students

to focus less on the points and competition

and more on the spirit of giving itself.

By the end of the month, the school had

Despite the high placement, activities di-

"I'm a firm believer of — and have ex-

perienced myself — [the fact that] giving is

an extremely rewarding feeling, especially when it's to someone in need," Cunning-

ham said. "As both a parent and a teacher,

my motto is always to give more than you

receive, and that's a value that I really want

to instill in our youth before sending them

Two large food containers were placed

around the school, one each in the quad and

school entrance, and the district office also

helped package sandwiches for the organi-

zation, decorated bags to hand out food in

Assistant principal Matt Torrens also led

two volunteer shifts during Spring Break;

however, due to low participation, Cun-

ningham decided to take 21 leadership stu-

dents on a field trip to Martha's Kitchen on

April 28, the last day of the event, to encour-

age students to continue volunteering in the

There, they used the canned food -

and filled up their own food bin.

off into our community.

eight for each hour of volunteering.

Valley Christian's 14,000 points.

Employees at the District Office pack sandwiches together for Martha's Kitchen on April 25.

After their volunteering session, one of the shift leads at Martha's Kitchen also shared her story on how, as a child, she had gone every day to the food bank with her brother because her family was food insecure. Her experience inspired her to work

In SHS's first Martha's Kitchen

Food Fight, school places second

"We definitely have a lot of privilege at Saratoga, and I think that being able to go and open our eyes to the fact that not everyone has a hot meal was really eye-opening for a lot of students," Cunningham said.

The event was organized by a collaboration between the school's Hunger At Home

SMASH'N shaping to be 'Out of This World'

the school to the event after the two clubs packaged 270 sandwiches with the "highest standard" for the organization.

Hunger at Home had also previously hosted another food donation event in De-

"I really hope that the school can continue this work [volunteering and community service in the future," Cunningham said. "Not just once a year with Martha's Kitchen Food Fight or during seasons of giving, but year-round. Having that spirit of giving embedded in the culture of Saratoga can really make a huge impact in our communities, and I want to encourage students to contin-

p.m. show on May 6.

SENIOR Anastasia Ramirez

BY Anamika**Anand**

On the most special night for the MAP, the McAfee Center will be lit with blue fairy lights and outer space-themed decorations as formally dressed MAP teachers, students and family file in, taking pictures and creating a lively buzz of anticipation.

Each year in MAP, dozens of films, 2D art and projects of various genres are created by students of all grades. To celebrate students' work, the formally dressed yet fun event Saratoga Media Arts Showcase Night (SMASH'N) brings together the MAP community and caps off the year.

This year, SMASH'N will occur on June 2 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m., with doors opening at 6 p.m. and attendance free for anyone.

SMASH'N is set up to run like the Oscars, with different award categories that have nominees selected by teachers and industry professionals. Snippets or pictures of each nominee are displayed before the winner of the category is announced and played fully for the audience. MAP Curriculum Coordinator Jason Friend said the first SMASH'N happened about a decade ago.

"I don't think people understand just the many, many hours of work that go into creating the show."

MAPTEACHER Jason Friend

MAP boosters."

According to senior SMASH'N co-head

Miranda Yee, the planning kicked off at the

beginning of the second semester.

The event has since evolved as students contributed new ideas, award categories have changed and projects have seen overall improvement with each passing year.

Friend anticipates a successful show with roughly 400 attendees filling the McAfee Center, a common sight in pre-pandemic years. After coming back from the pandemic in 2022, MAP has been functioning at



its highest level all throughout this year, he an "Out of this World" theme to unite the said. The various awards include the MAP 9 different aspects of the event, such as the Curricular Project, MAP 10 Be the Change space-themed posters, decorations and 30documentary, MAP 11 Video Poem, Senior page script that weaves the awards together. Capstone Project and 2D Design, along with Since most of the show happens on the grand prize, the Industry Award. This screen, Media Arts teachers Joel Tarbox and Alex Hemmerich take over most of the vidaward recognizes the student with the top project of all nominees, determined by five eo editing. The show will open with a fun judges who are professionals in the field of introductory video called the "Cold Open," media such as filmmakers and animators, followed by awards and nominees intro-

some of whom are even MAP alumni. duced by volunteer emcee students. The biggest challenge in planning was Friend emphasized that SMASH'N takes a lot of effort and many people have to work the budget, Yee said. It was tough to know together to make the show run seamlessly. how much to spend on what, and decora-"I don't think people understand just the many, many hours of work that go into creating the show," Friend said. "It's basically

tions such as fairy lights turned out to be quite expensive. However, the planning has overall gone smoothly; staff are now setting an all-year collaboration between the stuup decorations for the actual show. dent-led committee, the teachers, and the "It's our biggest production year yet [in

terms of preparation]," Friend said. "I want to give a shout out to the student-led committee this year, who has been incredibly on top of it and putting in a ton of work behind This year, SMASH'N will incorporate the scenes all year long." ◆

overcomes double casting challenges вү Kavya**Patel**

The lighthearted movie musical "Mamma Mia!" was originally released in theaters in 2008 and starred Meryl Streep as Donna, the single mother of bride-to-be Sophie, played by Amanda Seyfried.

In the musical, Sophie invites three past lovers of Donna to her wedding in Greece, hoping to discover which one is her father. The plot follows the dramatic chaos that ensues as the wedding draws nearer while Sophie works toward finding her biological dad.

Due to its high appeal, the dra-ma department decided to perform "Mamma Mia!" for the spring musical. The six performances in late April and early May were performed by two casts - the Bjorn cast and the Benny Cast.

Show days were split between the two separate casts: the Bjorn cast with sophomore Niraali Garg playing Donna and senior Anastasia Ramirez playing Sophie — performed on April 29. May 5 and the matinee on May 6, while the Benny cast — starring sophomore Jo Bejar as Donna and sophomore Diya Iyer as Sophie — performed on April 28, April 30 and the 7

"The play felt like a lot less pressure and the harmonies were so fun."

All funds collected via ticket sales and concessions for the play were pooled into the drama program's budget for the 2023-24 school year.

Auditions began in early February. Production was led by drama teacher Benjamin Brotzman, who served as the main director for both casts, as well as stage directors sophomore war and senior Dragon Neal.

According to senior Anastasia Ramirez, who played Sophie in the Bjorn cast, the production was difficult to pull off due to the high number of 27 songs that were packed dance num-

Actors also struggled to navigate two casts. As a result, many students like Ramirez were unable to practice as much as they would've liked to.

"I don't think we will be double casting in the future, a blessing and curse as the leads will get more attention, but competition is high," she said.

For Ramirez's shared role of Sophie with sophomore Diya Iyer, Ramirez said that it was difficult to get into character. As a singer, however, Ramirez was very excited to play a character with lots of singing solos.

Ramirez's favorite part of the musical was the opening number in Act II titled "Under Attack," a humorous number in which Sophie experiences a nightmare when her three potential fathers appear as creepy ghosts and her fiance is wearing her wedding dress.

"Being in an ensemble is so enriching because you get to work with a team and understand why a show is nothing without a chorus. The play felt like a lot less pressure and the harmonies were so fun," she said. ◆

AP 2D and 3D Art and Design to be offered as courses next year classroom as AP Drawing, the respective allow students to explore art in different

BY Divya**Vadlakonda**

When one of art teacher Joel Tarbox's AP Drawing students expressed interest in creating an AP 2D Art and Design portfolio, Tarbox could not oblige the request because the course was not offered here this year.

While unsuccessful in the short term, the request spurred Tarbox to add AP 2D Art and Design and AP 3D Art and Design as part of the upcoming year's course list. After submitting a course request to the administration in October, both were accepted be-

"I wanted to give the students an opportunity to allow themselves to go a bit deeper with their exploration of various mediums," Tarbox said. "It's not like [the school] had to hire any new teachers, so I thought it would be a good idea to offer them to students." Each course will allow students to ful-

fill 10 credits in the visual performing arts AP 3D Art and category for graduation. The courses will Design take place as separate, smaller sections of AP Drawing for AP 2D Art and Design and Ceramics 1-3 for AP 3D Art and Design. Although those in AP 3D Art and Design must take Ceramics 3 beforehand, students interested in AP 2D Art and Design will not have to take AP Drawing as a prerequisite.

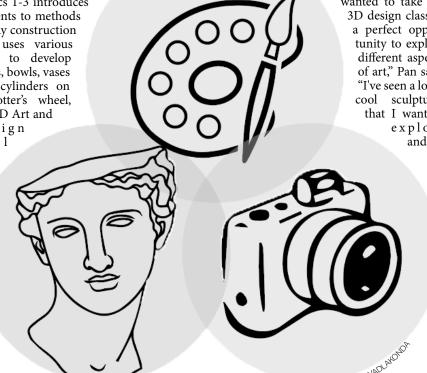
AP 2D Art and Design has three sign ups while AP 3D Art and Design has four — which is the main reason Tarbox decided to offer them as subsections of the existing AP Drawing and Ceramics 1-3 courses. For a school as small as Saratoga High, Tarbox figured that it was more reasonable for a smaller group to be embedded in more popular classes like AP Drawing.

Although AP 2D Art and Design will run during the same periods and in the same

students will work with vastly different mediums and art forms, Tarbox said.

While students in AP Drawing focus more on "mark making," or the creation of lines, patterns, textures and shapes through mediums such as paint or pencil, students in AP 2D Art and Design will focus on other modes of creating art on two-dimensional surfaces such as graphic

design, photography or print-Similarly, while Cestudents to methods of clay construction and uses various tools to develop mugs, bowls, vases of art," Pan said. and cylinders on "I've seen a lot of a potter's wheel, cool sculptures that I want to



want to try new things like fiber art." 3D disciplines such as sculpting, metal work mediums of art, the courses will tap into

the budgets allocated for Ceramics 1-3 Sophomore Amy Pan, who is enrolled in and AP Drawing. Initially, there will be no AP Drawing this year, has signed up for the new funding, unless students require new AP 3D Art and Design course for the freedom it provides in working with new mediums and expanding her art portfolio.

does not already have — in which case My art portfolio currently con-Tarbox will look to sources like the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) and sists of painting and drawings, but 3D art has always donations from students' families. As with any art course, the students been interesting to me, so I decided that I will put together a portfolio that follows 3D design class as based on a concept that they build upon for the entire year. The goal is for students to demonstrate experimentation and developtunity to explore different aspects

ment as well as cohesion of ideas within the "The expectation is that you've done enough art before and you understand enough about it that you can succeed with the support of a teacher," Tarbox said. "It is an experience of an advanced art class where you're choosing the medium of the art, the subject matter and the concept that

In order to finance these various new

supplies for their projects that the school

The students in AP 2D and 3D Art and Design will spend the first month of school working out ideas for their sustained investigations, and after students begin work on their pieces, there will be regular group check-ins where they are graded on progress and quality.

Tarbox is anticipating a positive response from the students who have currently signed "I'm just glad that there is excitement

from the students," Tarbox said. "I'm happy to be able to offer a little bit more to those that would benefit well from the courses." ◆

Fun activities planned for graduation week

Following extensive planning, the senior class is eagerly anticipating a graduation week filled with numerous fun and memorable activities.

And it will be one with no COVID 19-related restrictions, unlike the past three years.

The week will commence with an activity-filled "field day" on Monday, June 5, followed by a barbecue at Blackberry Farm in Cupertino the next day.

On Wednesday, the senior class will participate in a life skills day seminar at school along with graduation practice on the football field. Finally, the long-awaited graduation ceremony and Grad Night will occur on June 8.

A senior class meeting will be held at the McAfee Center on June 5 at 9 a.m. to discuss the week's agenda and provide an opportunity for students to ask questions.

The seniors will have access to the Saratoga High pool where they will be supervised by lifeguards and be able to swim until

The senior class officers also purchased inflatable basketball hoops and an inflated volleyball net.

June 8th June 5th June 7th Blackberry Farm Barbeque dinner

The Graduation week schedule is shown with the six different events taking place.

"With all the activities we have planned, I'm sure that the field day will be a very enjoyable experience," senior class representative Seth Hulme said.

"I'm super excited to be released from all academic stress and just focus on having fun with my friends?

Because this year's prom occurred at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, where the senior class has previously gone for celebratory day, they will instead go to Blackberry Farm on June 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. There,

they will enjoy food provided by the Farm as well as have a chance to roam around the

To avoid the risk of overspending, the senior class office has decided that transportation to the farm must be arranged on an individual basis.

In addition, there will be a \$10 entrance fee to the event that will cover the expenses of renting the farm.

According to senior class president Allison Tan, an issue that arose during the plan-

ning of the barbecue event was the inability to find lifeguards to monitor the pool at the

"We really wanted to be able to have an opportunity to swim, so instead of booking lifeguards for the barbecue, we secured them for the field day," Tan said.

After the barbecue, seniors will continue celebrations with an invite-only award ceremony at 6 p.m., celebrating recognized seniors who were awarded scholarships as well as those nominated by teachers for awards.

June 2, 2023

On June 7, the seniors will attend the annual life skills day from 9:15 a.m. to 11:40

This year, Class of '22 alumna Sadaf Sobhani and Kaylie Wong, in addition to two other to be determined alumni will come to SHS and share advice on topics pro-

"Because COVID has been officially declared over, we are finally able to invite all of our family members to come to graduation,"

"I'm super relieved as a couple of years ago for my older brother's graduation we had to reserve seats which was pretty tough.'

Following tradition, the themes and activities of grad night aren't to be disclosed

Class of 2023 Senior Assassin results in controversy

Senior Assassin is a game where seniors compete in pairs for a cash prize, with rules that vary by school and often by class. For the class of '23, Senior Assassin became a topic of contention throughout the game. The organization of the game began toward the end of the first semester, and the role of moderator was originally held by senior Jacquelyn Ryu, who had already decided not to participate in the game.

The incentive of the game was \$1275 in cash as a prize, which was funded by the \$30 entry fee to play per team.

Each round lasted from Monday morning to the end of Saturday evening, and teams were tasked with "assassinating" both members of an assigned team that was given to them on the Sunday night before the round ended to advance by shooting them on video with a water gun. Teams could be eliminated by being assassinated or failing to assassinate their target.

The rules laid out "safe zones" where no participants could be killed. In addition, players could wear safety items that would protect participants from being killed if worn correctly — with the exception of

purge days. Safety items included helmets, swim goggles and pool floaties, while safe zones included the school campus and parking lots or a location where someone is participating in a sport or other school ac-

"People became more competitive and came up with 'gray area' kills."

SENIOR Jacquelyn Ryu

Purge days were days throughout the round in which competitors could not use safety items; additionally, teams could eliminate people who weren't their targets.

The rules regarding what kills were valid or not were a source of conflict for many teams, and communication was difficult as Snapchat was used for their location as well as communication within teams, while Instagram was used for the moderators.

"This year, Snapchat was a really big

location, but many people forgot to keep opening the app."

Over the course of three rounds, eliminated players argued over the validity of their kills, and the number of questions along with the updates and organization that the game required prompted Ryu to ask Arnav Garg, another senior who wasn't participating in the game, to serve as a co-mod-

"Because our cash prize was so large, people naturally became more competitive, and came up with more 'gray area' kills that were ambiguous to the rules," Ryu said.

The first round began on April 3 and the final round began on May 2.

Finalists included seniors Anand Agrawal and Erin Sun in one team, seniors Ryan Jain and Jason Cheng in another, and Isha Jagadish and Julian Berkowitz-Sklar as soloists as their teammates had been eliminated.

The structure for the final round of the game was that the person with the most kills would be the winner, which was different from the game's structure last year.

Ryu shared that last year, the winners were chosen through the total number of

One possible solution is having students

hand-write the beginnings of their assign-

ments in class and type the rest at home, al-

lowing teachers to check the typed version

against the handwritten version's writing

downside of handwritten, in-class essays is

that they severely limit the possible

"Beloved" to analyze, students may

class or handwritten.

With a challenging book like

struggle to meet writing stan-

dards if all assessments are in

"I would be disappoint-

English teacher Natasha Ritchie said the

vent ChatGPT use in the future.

style and ideas.

depth of ideas.

 (\odot)

obstacle for us," Ryu said. "You needed ev- kills, which worked because people utilized erybody to be active on Snapchat for their purge days to kill people that weren't their

"We couldn't do that [this year] because people didn't really use purge days," Ryu said. "It made sense for us to do a free-forall, and the winner would be the person with the most wins." Some argued that the single-person competitors were at an advantage going into the final: in a two-person team, you and your partner can only kill a maximum of four other people while a single competitor would be able to eliminate

The first competitor to be eliminated was Berkowitz-Sklar, who met his fate at the hands of Jain and Cheng.

After that, Agrawal shot Cheng at Jamba Juice, but since the video was unclear and Cheng claimed that they shot at the same time, both kills were invalidated.

Sun and Agrawal were upset by the decision of the moderators to invalidate both kills and decided to allow Jagadish to shoot both of them, eliminating the possibility of Cheng and Jain winning, in exchange for splitting the prize money with their team. Jagadish ended up with 635 dollars, and Sun and Agrawal split the other 635. ◆

CHAT-GPT

continued from pg. 1

In investigating the incident, the APUSH teachers used several AI detection models, such as Turnitin and GPTZero, and also manually looked at students' submissions to see if it matched their writing style.

In some instances of the APUSH incident, ChatGPT use was obvious — one student did not remove the gray highlight on the text that often comes wifth directly copying and pasting from the ChatGPT in-

"I would be disappointed if we have to change everything to in-class essays."

Initially, students in history teacher Faith Stackhouse Daly's class whose work was detected as above a certain threshold percentage written by AI were called into her class ment is discussing during tutorial, and she spoke individually viable ways to pre-

to them, either clearing or confirming their

After a large influx of flagged assign-

integrity problem, and any student whose assignment was detected as any percentage AI-composed on Turnitin.com was then asked to speak to an administrator.

Meanwhile, history teacher Margarita Morelle's APUSH students who were flagged were directly sent to the ad-

However, 61010101019 students who 0101010 were found 0. to have used given a chance to rescue their grades through an alternative assignment offered by Daly and ENGLISHTEACHER Natasha Ritchie Morelle, raising their grades for assignments in which they used ChatGPT from 0% to up to 70%. Meanwhile, the

English depart-

nents, however, other teachers overheard APUSH students bragging about how they lied to Daly to get their assignments cleared. This created a more serious academic

ministration.

90

ed if we have to change everything to inclass essays, and like that," Ritchie said. According

in a recent email to APUSH students, technology like ChatGPT will

I think there'll be some students who won't perform as well on the spot

principal Greg Louie

Graphic by KATHYWANG force students to

contemplate the kind of students and people

"Like calculators, SparksNotes, the internet, and mobile devices, AI and GPT are more than likely here to stay; how we incorporate the resource and teach our students responsible and ethical use will be up to all of us," Louie said.

Saratoga High is not alone in this struggle to figure out AI issues.

Across the country, colleges have been using various solutions to combat ChatGPT use, with mixed results. Some are getting rid of take-home

assessments, while others are placing more emphasis on oral assessments and group work or assigning essays with more complicated prompts that ChatGPT may struggle with.

The best way to prevent cheating ChatGPT remains an open question for humanities teachers, but the effects of cheating on students and teachers remains

"I think most students don't think that it's personal when they do this, but teachers take it extremely personally because they take time away from their families to engage with students," Keys said. "When a student phones it in and outsources it, it feels like a punch in the stomach." ◆

opinion

ChatGPT cheating issue warrants changes to class grade weighting

It is not uncommon to see so, not to mention the frustration upperclassmen with only AP and honor classes in their schedule. Sadly, to handle that extreme load, some students resort to cheating

The Saratoga Falcon

SARATOGAFALCON NEW**EDITOR'S**

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June 2, 2023

And the problem and temptation of cheating has suddenly gotten worse thanks to ChatGPT.

Recently, 53 students were caught using ChatGPT to cheat on a series of four AP U.S. History (APUSH) review assignments.

These students were flagged by ChatGPT detectors, which are notoriously inaccurate and produce many false positives. After an investigation, administrators determined that 28 out of 53 students had used ChatGPT to do the assignment and were punished.

Suddenly, teachers and administrators are scrambling to figure out what to do to stop what may be a wave of potential AI-assisted cheating.

ChatGPT usurps the learning of basic critical thinking and argumentation skills in students, so to minimize its use, classes must place more emphasis on in-class assessments or projects while making careful completion of homework and classwork necessary to do well on said assessments and projects.

Essays assist critical thinking

do the homework.

several reasons.

First, making every assignment a project is unrealistic. And even if students work in groups, few would want to constantly do

among students about the work split between members.

necessarily cover all the import-

The fundamental reason behind cheating is simple: preoccupation with grades. Too often do students walk up to teachers holding an assignment, arguing for a grade they felt they should've gotten. And unfortunately, some stu-

Some argue that if ChatGPT

is able to complete a regular homework assignment, then that assignment is not worth the student's time. They expect teachers to challenge students' creativity in every assignment with projects. The idea is that AI is not creative, so it wouldn't be possible to use it for such assignments.

Students should have a real reason, outside of just the grade, to

This interpretation is weak for

Moreover, projects do not

ant skills to learn. Not all projects force students to think critically, an aspect that's directly challenged with, say, analytical essays about literature. While writing literary analysis essays is not relevant to many jobs and might be duplicated by AI, these kinds of open-ended writing assignments strengthen students' ability to think critically and create cohesive, persuasive arguments and formulate original insights, skills that are vital beyond school as-

dents view AI as the perfect tool to achieve ideal grades due to its accessibility and subtlety compared to plagiarism or copying off friends' work. The current lack of regulation of ChatGPT allows for a tempting way to cheat, evidenced by the APUSH

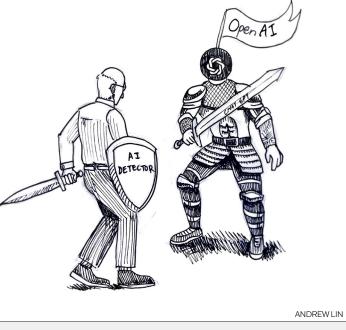
Even if it is possible to cheat your way through high school, doing so would also cheat yourself of the critical decision-making skills necessary for real-life

Allowing AI to make judgments at the high-school level doesn't teach fundamental decision-making skills that are required beyond the walls of high

School policies need to be used as a way to encourage learning. The prevention of cheating comes in two forms: deterrence and incentive.

Deterrence means making the risk of cheating outweigh the potential reward, and it is simple enough for in-class assignments. In the worst-case scenario, humanities teachers can just make all assignments of the pencil and paper variety, which is already

the case in most STEM classes. However, it is more difficult to regulate ChatGPT use in home-



work assignments. Even if pencil and paper submissions were required, students could just manually copy ChatGPT responses onto their

The current methods the school has to regulate cheating via ChatGPT — AI detectors and meeting with teachers or administrators — are arduous and impractical for the rate at which incidents are likely to happen.

The week-long investigation into the APUSH cheating incident makes clear that trying to prevent students from using ChatGPT by threatening punishment is ineffective and only drains the school's resources.

So how could the school lessen cheating through AI? This is where incentive comes in: Students should have a real reason, outside of just the grade, to do homework and classwork. Scoring high on assessments is the ultimate proof of proficiency in course content, so by changing grade weighting in classes like classes than they can handle.

APUSH and English 11 Honors to favor assessment grades, consistent with other AP classes like AP Calculus BC and AP Physics 1 and 2, students would be incentivized to use homework and classwork to fully digest concepts and score well on assessments, projects and essays.

This policy might be highly unpopular with students who depend on classwork and homework grades to boost their grade. However, the fact that most students are not getting A's on tests or essays and still feel entitled to an overall A grade sends a concerning message about the school's academic culture and

While the school may not be able to combat all AI-assisted cheating, these policies of deterrence and incentive can ensure students actually learn from these classes. And, as an added benefit, these policies might also help discourage students from taking more APs and honors

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief Lynn Dai Victoria Hu

Opinion Editors Sam Bai Tara Natarajan Kavva Patel

Reporter

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 31-11 in favor of the article.

MOSAICs need to be shortened

BY Parav Manney

As the year closes, I think it's appropriate to recall the article I wrote last September criticizing the school's implementation of Making Our School a More Inclusive Community (MOSAIC) before it even really started.

class's strategy of swapping tutorial time with a session for dumping wisdom onto highschoolers. Essentially, most useful wisdom can only be earned through life experiences, and when it is transmit-

ted by other means, it should be

I discussed the pitfalls in the

done in a concise manner. It logically followed that MO-SAIC would render itself another but the plenteous time spent ana-

waste of time like advisory. And after actually experiencing the monthly-occurring course,

I can say with full certainty that those points aged like fine wine. MOSAIC is, at its best, a minor

inconvenience, and at its worst, a sequence of tedious exercises. The class spent extensive time

stretching out life lessons such as time management using online calendars, why sleep-deprivation is bad (pretty obvious), the importance of being nice to people (taught using a random YouTube video social experiment study),

messages themselves weren't what made the class bad,

lyzing every angle of them was. Even though each session only lasts the duration of a Blue Day tutorial, simple concepts are strung out for far too long.

So much of these classes didn't even need to happen. The school could just give a short slide-show to students twice a year that includes all the lessons MOSAIC aims to impart, but in condensed bullet-points.

These shorter presentations would get the same points across more quickly.

The sheer length of MOSAIC is what makes it a chore, not the content which can easily be compressed.

From what I saw, most students

didn't even engage with what was taught in these classes.

They were either talking to friends, on their phones or doing school work, which is why I think MOSAIC has fulfilled the role I anticipated.

It's become a requirement at our school akin to jury duty: You relinquish your time for something you're not necessarily willing to do.

I hope the school considers my idea of improving MOSAIC by boiling it down to its essential parts. While it has good intentions, the class trades a large chunk of highschoolers' valuable time for lessons that could be delivered in a few minutes. •

June 2, 2023

More schools need to give a thumbs-up to American Sign Language education

BY DivyaVadlakonda

Hearing impaired individuals, spanning across a wide spectrum of hearing loss severity, constitute about 35 million people in the US, about 500,000 to 2 million of whom use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary form of communication.

ASL is the fifth most commonly used language in the country after English, Spanish, Italian, German and French.

However only about 1,000 out of 9,000 public schools in America offer the course.

It is the unfortunate truth that such a disparity exists, which is why the high school's decision to offer a dual enrollment ASL course after school through a West Valley College teacher, in which students can receive both high school and college credit, is undoubtedly the right decision for increased inclusivity and disability awareness.

By doing so, the language will reach a larger and younger audience, potentially bridging the gap between hearing individuals and the hearing impaired community.

But offering the course through the community college is only the first step of many ASL courses should be offered in more public high schools, including Saratoga

If SHS offered the course for language credits along with Spanish, French, Chinese and Japanese, more students will be aware of such an opportunity as they wouldn't need to take the steps to complete a dual enrollment application at the community college.

Offering the course is imperative in order to breach the communication barrier between users of spoken and visual languages.

The lack of effective communication access in a society that prioritizes spoken languages causes many obstacles for the hearing impaired — at its worst, the language barrier between the hearing and the hearing impaired can cause significant healthcare

Hearing clinicians who cannot effectively communicate with deaf or hard of hearing patients can unintentionally give poor assessments and medical mistreatments; deaf people are often deprived of quality health care and critical health information due to this lack of efficient communication.

TraciAnn Hoglind, the founder of national nonprofit organization Health Signs Virtual Care, recounts the moment where she was misdiagnosed because of a severe communication barrier with her doctor.

"It was evident in his physical shaking and awkward demeanor as he tried to engage with me," she said. "Although doctors have the best interests of their patients at heart, these same doctors are not always appropriately educated to become culturally responsive practitioners."

Additionally, a lack of ASL knowledge can raise future concerns for hearing parents of deaf children. With approximately 90 to 95 percent of deaf children being born to hearing parents, families often struggle to learn and teach their children sign language before they enter school.

The ignorance of hearing individuals to ASL will remain a problem and continue to negatively affect the lives of the hearing impaired if we do not advocate for an institutionalized ASL curriculum in schools.

It is the fourth most-studied language



Spanish — there is no reason that those languages are widely taught at high schools, while ASL largely is not.

Offering the course can also broaden students' opportunities for future jobs. Employment of ASL interpreters rose 46% from 2012 to 2020, and continues to be in high demand in places such as hospitals, courts, governmental agencies, community activities and state legislatures.

Offering this option means instilling high school students with a passion for sign language early and enabling them to pursue such career paths. By making access to this knowledge less

convenient, the school system alienates

driver, I

haven't got-

at a collegiate level along with French and them and future generations of access to a fully developed autonomous language with its own unique cultural identity, grammar, vocabulary and syntax — and most importantly, a chance to connect with those who

> But if ASL courses are made widely available in schools, hearing individuals can help reduce the stigma surrounding the hearing Christine Yoshinaga-Itano, professor of

> audiology at the University of Colorado at Boulder, put it the best — at its core, "Deafness is a sensory difference.

It only becomes a disability when the educational system fails the child and the

Destigmatize alternative pathways to college Taking other routes instead of going di-

& Kavya**Patel**

As college acceptance rates for 4-year universities get lower and lower, it has become increasingly challenging for students to be accepted into popular in-state institutions like the UCs and even previously "safe" state schools like San Diego State University.

Many who are unable to get into their preferred in-state institution are also turning to increasingly expensive — and still competitive — out-of-state schools.

However, in their pursuit of prestigious 4-year colleges, many students often overlook other post-graduation plans, such as taking a gap year or going to a community college, options that allow students greater leeway to explore their interests without suffering the exorbitant costs of traditional

Gap years allow students to take extra time figuring out what they want to pursue, travel or find a job

Community colleges, while less conventionally reputable than 4-year schools, also provide many of the same general or distributional requirement courses for the first two years for little to no tuition.

Taking other routes instead of directly attending 4-year institutions are surrounded with stigma in Saratoga.

Since some find the prospect of living with their parents after high school unappealing, students can also choose to attend colleges in other parts of the state, such as Santa Barbara Community College, allowing them to have more independence while enjoying lower costs.

Unfortunately, despite there being available options other than immediately going to a 4-year university, the pressure to do so remains overwhelming, especially for students at competitive schools in the Bay

rectly to a 4-year institution are viable options that communities like Saratoga have surrounded with a sense of stigma.

We as a community need to be more accepting and normalize taking these alternative paths.

Choosing to go to a 4-year college can have crippling financial consequences for families: Over the years, more and more families have been relying on loans in order to attend prestigious colleges, causing their financial burden to accumulate.

Although Saratoga families are generally in a higher income bracket and may not necessarily need to take out tens of thousands in student loans to pay for college, the skyrocketing college prices combined with ineligibility for financial aid can still leave a sizable dent in family finances.

By the end of college, some students will have paid hundreds of thousands of dollars

Though some private colleges offer scholarships, the practice is scarce and often not enough to make a substantial difference in tuition — in fact, many elite private schools such as the Ivies and Little Ivy liberal arts schools do not offer merit or athletic aid at

External merit scholarships like the National Merit and Coca Cola scholarships are extremely difficult to obtain, and cover a relatively small portion of tuition as a one-time

For instance, the \$20,000 Coca-Cola Scholarship would only cover about 25% of the out-of-pocket cost of attendance for one year at a scĥool like MIT.

Even if students end up going to an outof-state public school, the tuition is substantially higher and often parallels that of a pri-

In addition, going to college right after high school can pressure students to choose a major they aren't passionate about, a decision that often determines a student's lifelong career and one that deserves careful

Gap years are a solution to this problem: They serve as a period of self-reflection for students to figure out what subjects they are

nuinely interested in, away from being influenced or pressured by parents and peers. This will also allow them to prepare to do well in college and avoid burnout.

Taking a gap year also allows students to build their resume, which can help to make their application stronger if they want to reapply to their desired schools. For people applying to prestigious universities, having an extra year's worth of activities and Merced, UC Santa Cruz, UC Riverside or achievements can set them apart from other

However, many students might not want to take a full year off. For these students, community colleges can help students ease into college-style education and adult life while being significantly cheaper than

While the path to community college is significantly frowned upon here because community college has typically been associated with students who don't excel in high school, community college helps students who want to pursue careers that require costly graduate school, such as medicine, law or dentistry.

Attending community college allows

them to save their college funds for graduate school rather than pay exorbitant undergraduate tuition for the first two years of their college education, consisting primarily of general education courses.

As long as a student successfully completes the general education credits that community colleges offer, they are guaranteed transfer admission into UC Davis, UC UC Santa Barbara if they wish to continue their education.

Transfer rates from community colleges to UCs after two years are very high, and although Transfer Admission Guarantees aren't applicable to all majors, they are a favorable outcome for many students.

Those two years in between give students the opportunity to focus on other aspects of their life, like socioemotional development while still continuing their education.

As a community, we must be more sup portive of previously unconventional academic pathways: We need to prioritize wellbeing and fit over prestige and the outdated idea that success can only come from a traditional 4-year college experience. ◆

Driving earlier in life will prove to be a better decision

My car slowly edged down the street as I anxiously gripped the steering wheel and began my first driving lesson with my driving instructor calmly telling me directions in the passenger seat.

My fear was justified. Driving is a scary thing: In the U.S. alone, around 40,000 people died in 2020 due to car crashes, a fact I drive myself to that plagued my mind as the lesson pro-

It was one month after I turned 15 and a half, the cutoff age for receiving a permit.

Six months later, after dozens of hours of practice with my instructor and parents, I passed the license test (a short loop around Los Gatos Downtown), albeit with few mistakes. With a new driver's license in hand, I could drive around without bothering my driving inparents every time I wanted to leave the structor

might be Among other benefits, teen drivers enjoy one of the more freedom and earn their parents' trust only draw-(as long as the car doesn't crash).

from having to deal with the constant hassle of being your person decisions, so insurance they have graciously done for you since vou were born. Personally, and from my art classes, which saves my parents an extra half hour they used to spend on the road with are under 18,

Driving yourself can save your parents driving early — other than the hefty insurance that your parents will pay. Teens are more inclined to make rash

charge a pre-

ten into an accident yet (even though there may have been some close calls), so as long sleep-deprived or intoxicated speed, chances are that you'll be OK.

Take it from me: Driving as a sophomore is just better than driving as a junior when free time becomes scarce.

As a junior, you'll be under the weight of AP testing as well as heavy-load classes, on top of extracurriculars.

What better use to spend all that extra qualified time in your sophomore year than to learn driving?

After junior or senior year, the only time left before college to dedicate to learning to drive would be the summer after you graduate, as you would be busy with college and summer internships afterwards.

Additionally, you can be a chauffeur and drive your friends around after one year. As a full-fledged driver who got her license shortly after I turned 16, I can say it saved both me and my parents multiple trips back and forth from classes, school and other acand don't tivities.

All things considered, you'll be doing yourself — and your parents — a huge fa-

Calculus is important for many career paths

ву Eric**Shi**

As a fundamental pillar of higher mathematics, calculus is extensively taught in high schools across the world. And for good reason: Calculus is a genuinely useful subject — it not only lays the groundwork for advanced mathematics like real analysis, but it also enables tangible applications ranging from calculating the length of power cables connecting buildings to improving the acoustics of various rooms and instruments.

At Saratoga High, students have three main options for learning calculus through regular college prep Calculus, AP Calculus AB or AP Calculus BC. These courses are designed to build on each other

level calculus course while Calculus AB and BC are both college level courses, with AB covering the equivalent of Calculus I in college and BC covering both Calculus I and Calculus II material.

Content in each class somewhat overlaps and the more advanced AP courses cover a rocket into space at a perfectly constant material at a faster rate.

One of the main sciences with a heavy reliance on calculus is general physics. For example, calculus helps explain the movement of objects under the influence of various forces and fields.

One of the biggest examples in physics where calculus is important and necessary is when finding the work done on an object due to an external force. Without calculus, — regular Calculus is solely a high school a very select few problems can be solved

— namely those where the force applied is always constant. However, with calculus, a wider range of problems in this category can

This is not the case for most real-world situations. It is almost impossible to launch acceleration, for example.

Thus, calculus is needed to accurately find the work done on an object for a non-constant force. Other than coursework, calculus is an

integral part in the professional world, too. Consider structural engineering, where calculus is used to calculate heat loss in buildings, forces acting on complex structural configurations and structural analysis in seismic design requirements — which is

especially important here in California. Oncologists use more complex logistic

functions to analyze the growth of cancer tumors and pandemic epidemiologists can use them to track the spread of future diseases like COVID-19.

While calculus is an inherently difficult subject, learning it thoroughly matters more than the grade.

Even for non-STEM students, calculus can change the way people understand their world. Outside of academia, it is short sighted to assert that in the professional world, calculus is useless.

Far from it. Calculus, a key component in many jobs, will always be a foundational part of any worthwhile high school math

Merit-based aid necessary in colleges

Over 85% of students receive financial aid for colleges, most of them in households below the \$48,000 income line. In 2022, \$140.6 billion of grant aid and \$94.7 billion of loans were distributed to students.

These loans need to be paid back. While federal student loans interest rates were temporarily paused during the pandemic, those rates have since increased from an average of 4.12% to 6.36% in the 2022-2023

Merit scholarships offer another oppor tunity for struggling students to attend college, as increased rates on need-based loans have taken a toll on low and middle-income students going to college.

With recent inflation and rising tuition, low-income households are struggling to shoulder the financial costs of going to college because need-based aid needs to be paid back and isn't enough for a household to securely afford college tuition.

In other cases, students — up to a million across the nation — are turned away from high sticker prices they see, so they never apply for financial aid in the first place. For example, students seeing a \$30,000 tuition at face value may think their family would never be able to afford it and subsequently not apply for the financial aid that may have succeeded in getting them through the cost.

Another group of students suffering from the current aid system are middle-income students who reside in the so-called gray-zone. These students have a family income sufficient enough to not receive needbased aid, but will still be heavily impacted by out-of-pocket college costs, potentially leading to significant debt.

The average cost for college tuition and other college-related expenses is \$35,551 per year, with \$19,020 coming from tuition alone. This is problematic for middle-income families as government aid is on a sliding scale, so higher-income families will receive less aid.

For example, a household with an income of \$80,000 would receive some financial aid, but not all of it would be covered. They would have to spend anywhere from niddle-income families not far off from the financial conditions of low-income families.

These families are often forced to turn to private loans, which charge a high interest rate that usually ranges from 5% to 15% and can significantly damage their financial fu-

ise can't reach their full potential due to excessive financial costs. Another important factor that comes into play is social mobility. Because merit-based aid doesn't need to be paid back, it provides a better platform for students

to rise based on their skills and knowledge

As a result, many students who display academic excellence and intellectual prom-

rather than their parents' wealth or zip code. Moreover, the current college admissions process is far from equitable, and although merit scholarships are not a panacea for these pervading economic issues, they help level the playing field for low- to mid-

Colleges seek out students with a willingness and a capacity to learn, and many of these students come from low and middle-income families. Merit scholarships offer a solution — they allow colleges to ture. ◆

selectively pay the costs for students demonstrating sufficient learning ability. Even so, opponents of merit scholarships

point out that these grants mostly serve to benefit the wealthy, as the wealthy have greater access to a wide array of resources and programs. They cite merit scholarships that dispro-

portionately favor higher-income students. However, there are many merit scholarships exclusively available to low and middle in-10% to 20% of their income for tuition, a come families that are equitable and allow significant amount that would leave some these families to shoulder the financial costs For example, the Hagan Scholarship is

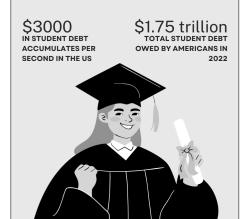
a merit based scholarship given specifically to low and middle-income students with a household salary under \$85,000. The scholarship has supported over 3,000 students in the past 12 years. With more similar programs, many students would be able to afford the high-quality education they de-

Although these efforts are beneficial, more action needs to be taken to make merit scholarships more equitable. As of now, merit scholarships are not perfect, but they do provide significant benefits for students. A study conducted by the University of Nebraska found that low-income students who received merit aid were 8.4% more likely to receive a bachelor's degree than those who did not receive any merit-based boost.

Holistically, these scholarships offer an opportunity for low- and middle-income households to apply and attend college without worrying about piling up a lifetime of subsequent debt. It creates the next step in reducing college inequality and kickstarts a worthwhile investment into society's fu-







June 2, 2023

June 2, 2023

Parent-controlled screen time is necessary for kids

During my middle school years, when the clock quietly struck 10 p.m., all the applications on my phone would gray out, nothing could escape the tight grasp of my iPhone 6's screen time control.

At the time, I thought unlimited access to my phone was my personal right. Not only was there downtime between 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., but my phone had a daily total of only 30 minutes of screen time, barely enough to watch a single YouTube video. After 30 minutes, I could only access necessary functions like making a phone call — not even texting — or taking a picture.

As I entered high school, my parents released their tight grip on my screen time, trusting that it was time for me to learn more self-control. Despite how unfair I perceived this screen time limitation to be when I was younger, I now understand my parents' decisions more.

The self-control that screen time taught me has allowed me to greatly improve my mental and physical health and have more discipline than friends who struggle to shut off their phone when it's time to study; according to Jai Medical Systems, reducing screen time can lead to a "healthy lifestyle by improving sleep habits, brain focus and physical posture."

Since its inception, electronics have become extremely addictive to everyone, no matter the age.

Many entertainment applications such as social media platforms or video games have been designed this way to attract the users to stay longer online. In fact, an article by Brill Mindz Technologies said that such apps are built "with the motive of offering different types of content to different

When people are hooked to countless online activities and lose track of reality, they do not realize that their brain struc- my parents' decision to build up a healthy tures are also changing simultaneously.

An article by the Specialty Clinic of Austin attributed this addiction to "brain chemical imbalances similar to what is seen with drug and alcohol dependency." Research in the article also showed that technology addiction may be related to a change in the brain's prefrontal lobe, which is responsible for "prioritizing life tasks."

However, self-control for a teenager whose brain is still developing is especially challenging. The same even happens for

In fact, the average screen time for American adults is 7 hours and 4 minutes them to not only develop creative, social per day, according to Jai Medical Systems.

100-WORD RANT:

reject me

Dear UCs:

please don't

n 2022, the San Francisco Chroni-

cle reported that 76% of Class of '22 Saratoga High graduates who ap-

plied to the UCs were admitted, many

to the top two UCs: UC Berkeley and

UCLA. This year, however, finding a se-

nior that has gotten into the top two is

Even though official SHS student

admission rates are vet to be released,

it's clear that the UCs are no longer the

safeties that students used to rely on

many years ago. While more seniors

as though the overall number of SHS me." ◆

have gotten into the other UCs, it feels UCs, please don't reject

almost impossible.

guardian interference is essential for chil-

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that 86% of parents of a child aged 5 to 11 limit the time locking me out until 7 a.m. the next day. of day or length of time their child can use No music, no social media, no websites — screens, while 80% say they take away their child's smartphone or internet privileges as punishment.

> Yet, on the other hand, parents and adults often see only evil in technologies: They may attribute electronic devices as the root cause of any failure for their child. But that explanation is too simple and ignores benefits such as improved problem solving and communication skills.

> Even after my parents removed my screen time restrictions, I maintained the same screen time.

> > **PRO**

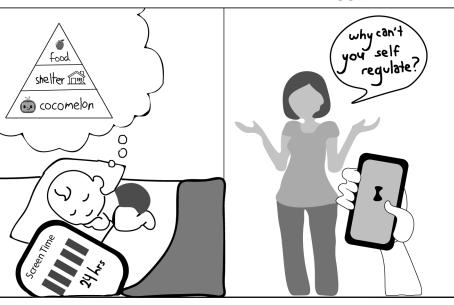
BY George Huang

When I was younger, I remember the frustration of seeing a white screen adorned with a black hourglass that interrupted many online gaming sessions and countless texting exchanges.

While implemented with good intentions, the screen time-limiting app hindered the natural development of my self-control, and I'm still suffering the con-

Screen time is a feature implemented into every Apple device. It lets parents set time limits or downtimes for their children's devices. Once the child or teen hits the time limit for certain apps or devices, they need parental permission via a password to continue using the device.

CON



Though I still play video games and watch short videos, I know when to stop and when to play them as a rest in between intense work. All of this can be attributed to mindset and attitude with technology for me from a young age.

While limiting screen time has helped me form better habits and self-control, it may not be a method that works on all

When parents consider restricting their children, it is essential to find a compromise that both sides agree with. Electronics and screen time are not inherently evil inventions; instead, what matters is how they

All children should be raised with a minimal screen time limitation that allows skills, but also a healthy, sustainable life-All of this suggests a certain level of style of self-control. ◆

admits has dropped

can't pay the \$60k tu-

ition for many private universities, yet don't fall

in any of the financial aid

brackets, the UCs are an

Unfortunately, ad-

missions rates for in-state

students have dropped to

a pitiful 64.4% in just one

year. Though many UCs

have shared their plans

as individual schools and

as a system to give prior-

ity to in-state students,

and to what degree these

to say to my future ad-

missions officer: "Dear

changes will come.

it is unclear how quickly

I have just one thing

enticing option for un-

dergraduate programs.

For students who

I have suffered through the annoying app since I received my first iPhone in seventh grade. Only recently did my parents agree to remove it. To be sure, I can see the allure of this

the illusion of controlling the time that seemingly out-of-control, weak-willed adolescents spend on their phone. However, this feature only provides a short-term solution and has negative long-

feature to concerned parents: It gives them

term consequences, the worst of which is impeding the natural development of children's self-control and independence. I'm not denying many teens are addict-

ed to screens. Some stay up late at night on

Others procrastinate on their homework as they play games or watch TV shows. By restricting time through the app, it's assumed these children will eventually learn to use their devices less habitually and

Screen time limits harm

children's development

This assumption is wrong. An outside force "helping" a developing child to control themselves means they no longer need to do it themselves.

While the time spent on screens will probably be lower in the short term, the result is an absence of natural self-control coming from the child themselves; as soon as the restrictions are lifted, children will have a harder time managing themselves on their own.

Eventually many teens will have to go to college, where they will have to manage everything independently. The more stringently parents restrict screen time in their teen's life, the harder the harder it will be for them to develop their own good habits.

This relapse from the potential effects of restricting your teen's devices is comparable to that of dieting. While some people come out of their diet and continue to eat healthy and stay fit, others relapse, at times binge eating uncontrollably and becoming even more unhealthy than when they started off. Restricting screen time often has the

After my screen time was finally lifted earlier this semester I found myself unable to stop browsing social media and playing games because they had been restricted for

It doesn't help that the Apple "Screen Time" function is full of holes either. If a child wants to use their devices after their time limit, the loopholes in the program are numerous, easily accessible with a single Google search. This makes it so that screen time becomes simply an obstacle children must work around rather than encouragement not to; consequently, it has the effect of developing qualities like sneakiness and disobedience over self-control.

While I'm not saying screen time is a function a parent should never use, I don't think they should rely on it as an easy fix for a teens self-control issues. While it seems counterintuitive, giving teens a little more room to be independent and manage themselves is the best way to help them naturally develop responsibility.

Parents could remind their teens once in a while of how much time they've spent on their phone that day or how much work they have yet to complete.

If they consistently sleep late, parents can help them plan out their time in the afternoon so they have a healthier sleep schedule.

But I wouldn't recommend just setting a screen time and assuming all problems have been solved. A little more trust in a teen's ability to learn and develop goes a long way. Sooner or later, teens will have to figure it out themselves anyway. •

100-WORD RAVE:

Exams before AP finals are a godsend

magine this awful alternative universe: It's the beginning of June. You're stressed Land, despite taking the AP exam three weeks ago, you have to keep studying for the final exam in, say, AP Chemistry.

You're burned out and exhausted. You should have crossed the finish line weeks ago, but here you are, still studying. Does this sound like hell to you, or is it just me?

This tragedy would be our reality if AP teachers gave their finals in June. Having finals right before the AP exam gives an incentive to study and helps with procrastination, which helps you on the final and is also valuable for the AP exam as well.

Once both exams are over, you're free to take a much needed break after a hectic semester, reducing stress later in the year for

upperclassmen as they end their senior plications.

Most AP teachers use the time for fun projects that further solidify the learning we do during the year.

For example, in AP Environmental Science students work together to create solar ovens and toast marshmallows, allowing friends to connect through experiential learning projects. Other teachers use the time to help students relax, like through movies.

It doesn't make sense to give another final after APs — after all, the AP exam marks the culmination of the course and provides a clean finish after two semesters of hard work.

More than that, you have time to relax with peers after trauma-bonding through your mutual AP experience. Having spent months obsessing

over the exam, it only makes sense for the last few weeks to be a welcome relief and opportunity to make new connections with the knowledge they've worked so hard to attain. ◆

> — Sanjoli Gupta All graphics by SARAH THOMAS

Unrooted: my induction into the gardening Hall of Shame

IT'S A SHAME THAT MY BELOVED PLANTS AND I DON'T STEM FROM THE SAME ROOTS

lifestyles

ву Beverly**Xu**

Plants are too easy to kill.

Not to sound like a sociopath, but ever since I took my first stab at planting, potting and pruning, I've learned that plants seem to wither at the mere sight of me. The irony of my Green Team membership aside, I now have a hard time be-leaf-ing that I can successfully raise any kind of photosynthesizing organism after plowing through four different plants over the course of five years.

It all started when I got a small packet of parsley seeds from a friend's birthday party, which I, as a big fan of cilantro, had mistaken for cilantro seeds. I planted and watered one until, a week later, a little green bud popped out, which I watched grow into a full stem and then, amazingly, a full-blown plant with a whole three-sectioned

But the more I watered it, the more yellow the leaves became, and so began a cycle of watering in exponentially greater volumes.

Within two weeks, my "cilantro" plant was out of thyme. If anyone doesn't understand the saving "crawl into a hole and die." then look no further than my beloved "cilantro" plant. I placed its remains — a wilted stalk flopped over lifelessly on damp soil — in a shady corner of my garden, leaving it to decompose in its final resting place. However, a week later, I walked

same place in the soil. So as the kind, considerate child I was, I walked over to tell her that reviving my plant was a hopeless task. But lo and behold, my "cilantro" plant had returned from the dead before my eyes.

It was completely unrecognizable, with its stems sprouting in every direction and its bright green leaves fluttering picturesquely in the breeze, like the reverse of a pomeranian getting dunked in a bath.

Since when do plants pick fa-

Later, after trying to cook and eat my beloved plant-child, I also learned that parsley looks a lot like cilantro, but tastes absolutely nasty. What a waste of water.

So I moved onto what I naivehoped would be a more fruitful plant journey: strawberries. In the first few months, everything was going berry well; I seedlessly transitioned my plant from pot to ground, where it grew to cover a square foot of soil. But all of a sudden, hungry garden pests rolly-pollied into the scene.

In my early years of elementaschool, everyone adored rolly ollies. There was something endearing about their way of curling up in a ball and popping up in the grass when we least expected it ike a tiny treasured pet. But I have never wanted to fling a rolly polly across my backyard as much as after they voraciously ate through

my strawberry leaves, leaving no and made sure to add it all to my

I tried every natural remedy and pest deterrent: fertilizer, mint plants (my third plant endeavor, dead after a few days), basil leaves and strongly-scented non-floral shampoo. But nothing could save my shriveled strawberry plant, so I gave up and held a moment of silence to say my goodbyes. Just a few days later, my mom

was once again watering my dead plant, so I walked over to check if her green thumb had worked its magic. My mother had truly revived my strawberry plant, and it was bursting with small green berries and leaves that I had never seen before. That was when I realized that if my mother's talent of raising plants can be called a "green thumb," then what I have must be closer to a "red pinky-toe," or whatever is the polar opposite of the talent she should have passed down to me.

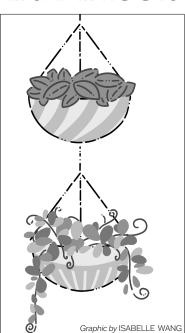
But I still wanted to watch something grow under my own care, so I decided to give raising a plant one last try. Fourth time's the

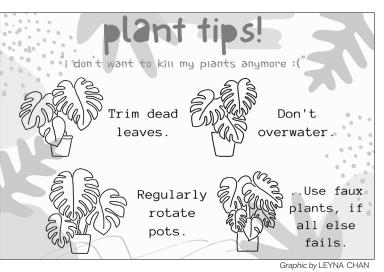
For my last shot at plant parenting, I chose the most hardy, robust and low maintenance plant: a succulent (for those of you who missed the succulent craze, essentially a family-friendly sized cac-I read up on the frequency be-

hind watering a succulent, the optimal sunlight exposure periods

daily routine. And it worked.But maybe a bit too well — my succulent grew so tall that I had to make a little structure out of toothpicks to prop it up. Despite my best efforts at structural integrity, my succulent was so bent over that I could have diagnosed it with severe scoliosis — I suppose spine issues were inevitable.

That soul-crushing moment ened my ascent to gardening nirvana. No matter how much time and effort I put into those plants, I got nothing in return, so as I learned from freshman year health class — it was time to put an end to those toxic relationships. Maybe plants and I were not mint to be, but at the very least, I was able to chloro-fill this story with plant puns! ◆





The time Covid claimed: bonding with grandparents

As summer rolls around, many second-generation Americans are gearing up to travel to their motherland countries, whether to meet their innumerable relatives or simply explore their native country.

Starting when I was 8, it became a family tradition for my parents to bring my older sister and me to China, specifically Xi'An, our parents' hometown. Unfortunately, I haven't traveled to China since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020 and have no plans to return.

My memories of these thrilling visits begin with my dad waking the family up at 6 a.m. to catch a flight that left at noon. My family and I crammed our overweight suitcases into an Uber, as my sister and I obnoxiously complained about our precious stuffed animals that we were inevitably forced to leave at home. Just to confirm, we definitely don't do this anymore because we're now "mature, considerate" children.

In a span of 14 hours and two connecting flights later from San Francisco to Beijing and Beijing to Xi'An, we finally reached our destination: my grandparents' small yet cozy apartment in Xi'An, a city of almost nine million people in north-central China.

As we woke up the next morning in our tough bamboo-layered beds, my grandparents whisked my sister and me out to a bustling farmers' market in the middle of town. Nudging through the crowds packing the streets, our stomachs rumble from the aroma of oily fried street food.

In the midst of this chaos, my grandparents spoiled my sister and me with an endless heap of our favorite breakfast youtiao (a type of Chinese fried doughnut), jian bing (a thinly fried crepe filled with meat and veggies) and finally, a variety of local grown fruits such as lychee, melons and oranges.

On our way home, my sister and I

begged our grandparents to stop by the public exercising parks — outdoor gyms built by the Chinese government — which are always crowded with elderly men and women. There, we tested the arrangement of colorful exercising machinery, rating each one by its "fun-ness." As my sister and I swayed on a rusty swing-like machine that supposedly resembled a treadmill, our grandparents chatted with their elderly friends, casual conversation disguising amiable boasting about their "wonderful, smart" grandchildren.

After my sister and I finally returned to their apartment, we spent the rest of our afternoon binging Chinese TV shows such as our favorite, "Xi Yang Yang," sheep." The popular animated series follows the life of goats that are constantly escaping a bad wolf. While I watched TV, my grandma braided my hair into a variation of braided hairstyles. I remember whining about the braids being too tight while she

told me that "pretty hurts" in Chinese. During the evening, my uncle took us to visit the famous Terra-Cotta warrior sculptures. Our parched throats ached from the dry weather as my nerdy sister enthusiastically examined the hulking, sturdy terracotta warriors. I, being the annoying younger sister I am, couldn't help but pester my uncle with questions like "When are we going to eat?" and "Is there a gift shop?"

To end our day in Xi'An, my relatives often hosted a gigantic family reunion at a high-end Chinese restaurant. While we waited at a round table with a glass lazy susan, my sister and I drummed our chopsticks on the fancy china plates, only to be scolded by our parents. Once dinner finished, my sister and I fell asleep on the car ride home, dreaming of what wonders would await us in the days to come. ◆

Memories of snowy days and childhood in China

Even the most mundane of memories have added to the sense of nostalgia I feel for my childhood in China. I distinctly recall perching by a frost-tinted window at my suburban home during crisp winter days in anticipation for the first fleck of snow to fall; as snow piled up, I would bound outside and meet all my friends, frolicking in the powdery wonderland. Cheeks flushing red, we'd rush back inside to our mothers, who would greet us with cups of steaming hot water.

I couldn't have realized it at the time, but after moving to the U.S. in second grade, I now see those photographs taken during such fleeting moments as permanent doorways to those earlier, simpler waste of time for me; it's perfectly natural to yearn for the past, to think once more of youthful innocence and ignorance.

While there, I lived in a xiaoqu, which is similar to a standard neighborhood with 24 to 30 apartment-home buildings and multiple households living on each floor. Every day, without fail, I would go downstairs to my friend's house, which was right next to mine.

While my parents went to work during the day, I would practically live at their



Sunny and her friends play in the snow.

house, watching old classic Chinese kids' shows on their TV like xi yang yang (happy sheep) or xiong chu muo (bear out) and zhu zhu xia (GG bond).

Thinking back to those shows and memories now immediately brings a smile to my face. I loved the laughter always floating in the air and nonexistent stress in fact, we were only remotely stressed if an episode of our favorite show happened to air off schedule. We would make up completely bizarre stories of our future and huddle over the aroma of our moms' amazing jiu niang, a kind of fermented sweet rice made with rice wine. And when night fell, my parents would come to their house to play a round of poker and pick me up.

Another key memory of my childhood was, of course, kindergarten and elementary school. Now, of course, my memorie are hazy, but I will always recall the first two best friends I've had; we were all in the same homeroom, which was a classroom where students assemble daily with the same teacher before dispersing to other

These were accidental friendships you never know how it happened, just that the three of us were inseparable. Every spring, after annoying our parents and running away from them when they picked us up, we would all go see the cherry blossoms that bloom annually on a street near

Every winter, we would also go hiking up a mountain near my house to play in the snow. Of course, all of our parents would roll their eyes at our mischief, but we loved it.

Now, every summer that I go back to China to visit, we have a reunion, and it's become a tradition to go to arcades to hang out and relive our childhood moments together. Although I cherish the newer memories made in the U.S., I will always attribute my prominent memories of childhood to growing up in China. ◆



Why fishing is my favorite tradition

the swaying and rocking boat, I wait patiently for something (hopefully a fish) to bite when I suddenly feel little taps at the end of the string. With a nudge, I flick the rod up and start frantically reeling. Soon after, I'm yelling for my dad to help me fight against the fish that is half my weight. That day, I found my new favorite type of fish: a one and a half-feet, 15-pound sheep-

We went home that night and I saw my fish coming out of the oven freshly steamed to perfection. At that moment, I knew it would be the best fish I would ever taste despite my inherent biases, I still wholeheartedly consider it the epitome of flavor

Ever since I was in kindergarten, my family and I have gone fishing annually, occasionally even venturing out weekly for several months year-round. You see, my parents and their family friends love fish and apparently by extension,

they love fishing, too. Our typical fishing spots consist of calm lakes, trickling streams, bustling beaches and docks — including the fan-favorite (the fan being elementary

school me) Capitola, a beach in Santa Cruz, where they sold ice cream on the dock. Of course, the fishing was fun too, but who could win against the irresistible lure of ice cream? Unfortunately, I have not been able to go this year, as the heavy storms had wrecked over

Of course, during our outings as an elementary-school kid

The Saratoga Falcon

June 2, 2023

when we fished more often - my needs were always taken care of by my parents, who usually did all of the organizing. All I had to do was tag along and wait to be

In the summer of third grade, my parents extended this hobby of theirs to geoduck-digging; theoretically, digging for geoducks were a level-up from digging sand for sand castles, so the activity gave little-me a sense of accomplishment and a

tasty reward at the end of the day. Geoducks are a large type of clam that consists of two parts: one part looks like a typical, flat-shelled clam and the other, called the neck or siphon, juts out of the edge of the clam. The first time we attempted finding them, however, we came back home after three hours, with only a single

Over the following month, my dad spent his free time scrutinizing several more YouTube videos. We returned prepared. Equipped with waterproof overalls and ice cream scoopers for sturdier digging, we made use of our refined strategy: My dad would shovel off the surface of the sand where we saw the geoducks occasionally spouting water, and the rest of us would to locate

Wrestle the geoduck itself out of the sand.

Lo and behold, our 6-hour outing yielded us over 20 geoducks. After experimenting with various techniques, we started digging enough to fulfill the daily limit (10 geoducks per person), and soon began bringing a few family friends along each of

our geoduck-digging quests. Usually, our outings to either fishing or geoduck-digging supplied us with many times more fish or geoducks than my family could stand to eat, so we often made use of our extra resources by giving them to friends or feeding them to our chickens as

Recently, these family outings have mostly consisted of me and my parents going down to Los Angeles to visit my siblings in college and going fishing on boats nearby. As a result of the frequency of my trips and the types of fish we have found in LA, I have since dubbed it my new favorite fish-

I've learned a lot since my first fishing trip: At the time, my impatient kindergarten self would constantly flick the rod, turning up empty-handed. My dad taught me that flicking the rod too early while the fish hasn't bitten hard enough would scare the fish away. Through this process, fishing has taught me how to be a bit more patient, while also being an activity that shaped my childhood summers.

Although I don't have as much spare time as I did in elementary school—a trend that will likely persist heading into junior year — I still make time to go fishing with my parents and family friends during my breaks or weekends, as it will forever hold a precious spot in my heart.

Ways to spend your free time in the Bay

BY Sarah**Zhou**

Immediately after AP exams ended last year, my friend, Class of `22 alumna Nicole Lu, and I began planning activities for the summer. However, Nicole, having lost her pink Driver's Ed slip from freshman year, and I, not being 16 yet, realized that neither of us could get our licenses or Project — also hits theaters the same day. drive anywhere. This left us with the options: A.) drag along a licensed friend (thanks, Cary!), B.) beg a parent or C.) take an Uber and risk being kidnapped.

So, this brings me to my first point: if you can't drive already, get your license ASAP. With the exception of junior Victoria Hu, by the start of junior year, every single member of my friend group already had their permit or license. Don't be like Hu. A license is something you must pur-

Your parents will (hopefully) not be able to follow you to college to chauffeur you around in their 2006 Honda Minivan. If you don't get your license in high school, it won't be easy to find the time to learn to drive.

transportation, this story will give you a few rec- good after sniffing all the sample candle scents. ommendations for activities to do around the Bay Area this summer that my friends and I enjoyed

Last summer, "Minions: The Rise of Gru" wowed audiences and even prompted a nationwide TikTok trend of dressing up in formal attire fun experience. to see the movie. Obviously, Nicole and I had to jump on the bandwagon and rounded up a few fine dining experience to cap off a monumental of our friends to get our IHOP minion meals and toss bananas at the screen at AMC Saratoga 14.

This summer, we — and all other self-respecting Barbie fans — will be decked out in pink on

wrote a story criticizing every possible aspect of the trailer, but sometimes movies are so bad, they become good). Alternatively, if you're more of a history buff, Oppenheimer — which is about the Manhattan

If staring at a vinyl screen for hours on end isn't your thing, stop by Glow Candle Lounge or Petroglyph in Willow Glen for some hands-on fun. Both stores are owned by the same person, so purchasing a studio pass allows you to both make do your own candle and paint a ceramic piece (similar to in Color Me Mine).

Neither activity requires much concentration, leaving you and your friends plenty of time to gossip with the privacy of being surrounded by people from downtown San Jose — no one will know you, so feel free to drop as many full names and talk as loud as you want.

While both stores can be rather expensive, costing upwards of \$40+ per medium-sized, decorated candle or ceramic piece, you'll definitely Once you actually manage to find your form of leave Glow Candle Lounge smelling REALLY

When you're hungry or ever feeling like you're ready to start your foodie blogger, mukbanger or recommend taking a trip to amusement parks Eataly, Din Tai Fung and Hero Ranch Kitchen in so that you can skip the phase that turns you into Valley Fair and downtown Saratoga can also be a a Disneyland adult

On the other hand, if you're looking to have a night after watching "Barbie", visit one of the multiple Michelin-starred restaurants in the Bay Area such as Chez TJ in Mountain View or the Plumed Horse in downtown Saratoga. After all, if you're go-tive while soaking up too much sun. Stay July 21 for the release of the "Barbie" live-action ing to have a once-in-a-lifetime meal, might as well safe! ◆

are still paying! If you're willing to drive

a bit further to San Francisco, you can play tourist for the day. Hike Twin Peaks or visit iconic sights such as Alcatraz, Coit Tower, Ghirardelli Square and Pier 39.

driver's license

A surprising number of people from the Bay Area have never actually been to SF Bay Area landmarks, and visiting these tourist attractions and others before leaving for college is definitely worthwhile. I would also TikToker era, visiting popular restaurants such as like Great America or the Santa Cruz Boardwalk

Lastly, activities that will keep you outside for a while every day to photosynthesize — such as mini golfing at Golfland, kayaking by Shoreline, horseback riding at Pagemill Pastures or Garrod Farms and getting into hiking or walking in the morning — are great ways to stay ac-

My version of a treehouse: my roof

toddler for three whole months — you've toddler for three whole months — you've got to be creative — and with my sister back from college early, our combined "creativity" had no limits. I mean, we quite literally found ourselves above the ceiling on our roof. In order to escape our cabin fever, we ended up turning our roof into a

It all started with my obsession over music videos — I couldn't sing for my life, but I could dance a bit better, and what better way to pass the time than to choreograph, film and edit a music video? (Saratoga parents and peers, please refrain from answering that rhetorical question.) And while trying to find unique shots from around my house, I realized that the roof, being the most exotic location within the perimeter of my home, was the perfect stage for me to record myself dancing to Billie Eilish's

ie went over and retrieving the birdie. But every so often, the birdie landed a bit further onto the roof, which made it necessary for us to climb onto the roof to find it. As it

had finished recording, my sister had gotten tired of tap dancing incessantly on her square wooden plank in our front yard. So I invited her to join me on the roof, and the minute she got on, both of our eyes lit up; it was the childhood treehouse that we never had, a high place far from our parents' eyes where we could talk, work and decorate to

Nevertheless, the roof wasn't perfect at the beginning: The roof tiles were burning hot from the direct sunlight, we were fully exposed to the obnoxious hair-throwing wind and the tiles weren't the comfiest place to take a nap. So we went up and down the ladder bringing pillows, snacks, books, board games, umbrellas and even a small table until the roof resembled an outdoor pillow fort. But, we did all these "renovations" right above our mother's head — literally — and within an hour, she got completely fed up and yelled: "You're going to make a hole in the roof!" We tried stealth — yet even with our best efforts at tiptoeing around the roof, every step earned an angry "xiao mei" or "xiao jie"

My dad, however, was more concerned about the safety of our heads than his own. While we were fooling around on the roof, he threw two bike helmets up and insisted we wear them, or else: "xia lai ba" (get

Now tasked with dancing as quietly and down in Mandarin). safely as we could, my sister and I, with our helmets on, put on a whole show on every corner of the roof. We pranced around to Adele, Billie Eilish and Halsey without worry that any of our neighbors passing by would take notice of us — that is, until our new neighbor hopped out of his moving van and stared us straight in the eye. He was one year younger than me, and with his first impression of me being that my idea of fun was dancing on rooftops wearing a bike helmet, there's no hope of redemption. Farewell to my chances of being a chill, respectable upperclassman. No matter the shameful first impres-

sions that we made, the parent grievances we received and the beet red sun burns we gained, my sister and I would do it all over again. Those hours spent on our rooftop treehouse remain among my favorite summer memories, so take this as a sign to try it out yourself! (For legal purposes, don't try this at home. Try it ON your home.) •



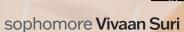
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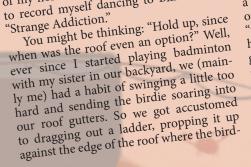
What plans do you have for this summer?

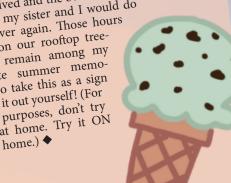
"I'm going to China to visit my grandparents since it's been a few years since I saw them."



"I'm attending an economics camp at Berkeley and traveling to either Italy or Hawaii."







MET Gala Camour

The iconic event brought about many memorable

June 2, 2023



Why you should watch your next movie in the theaters

There's something so comforting about sitting in bed and watching a movie at 2 a.m., knowing that you still have math day. Or, when you're not up at ungodly hours, friends can always come over and watch a movie with you in the comfort and lengthy trip to the theater, hefty ticket prices or the need to look presentable.

However, despite these advantages, watching movies at home lacks the key characteristics that make the traditional movie-going experience so special. In a theater, vou're com pletely immersed in the movie-watching experience: There are no distractions, no parents walking in to check on you and no screaming of a sibling in the background; it's just the big screen, the dialogue, and the food.

Attending a theater provides a truly immersive experience with the big screen, loud music and overpriced popcorn that you just can't get at home.

As the entire theater collectively experiences the movie at the same time, shocking reveals during a mystery movie or a jump scare during a thriller are felt among watchers, and you can hear the reactions of those around you, adding to the shock or fear factor. Such reactions are just as essential to the movie-watching experience as the movie itself; a jump scare set at 20% volume on your TV at home as dishes are being washed in the background just isn't

Sharing buttery popcorn is another staple. Call it placebo, but that overpriced, steaming theater popcorn somehow feels more fulfilling than the microwaved kind at home — it adds to the feeling of watchhomework to complete and a quiz the next ing a movie being a special experience rather than just a way to pass time.

However, one big drawback with the theater experience is the ever-growing convenience of your house — without a price. While a single ticket at AMC costs \$14 to \$18 per person, a month of online streaming can cost from \$4.99 with Ap-

ple TV+ to \$15.49 for Netflix, each of which comes with hundreds of TV shows and movies.

Of course, there can also be minor annoy-√iewers may torget to turn off their phones or talk loudly during the movie. Then there is the overactive AC that is often at full blast, making for a freezing experience

throughout the entirety of the movie. Despite these issues, the large screen and loud dialogue makes the experience special.

As for me, I primarily go to the theaters for long-anticipated movies and ones I certainly don't want spoilers for, such as murder mysteries, in order to keep my wallet from running dry.

While watching at home saves more of your hard-earned money, theaters provide a better, more immersive watching experience and act as a fun social activity with

The next time you find yourself jumping to watch a new movie, consider paying that extra sum for a better experience in

King Charles's coronation needed a comedy slot on SNL

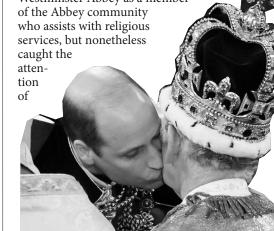
BY William Norwood

On May 6, The United Kingdom crowned its new monarch, King Charles III, and welcomed Queen Consort Diana — sorry, I meant Camilla — as well. The coronation was one of the most organized and thoroughly planned events of the 21st century, with public figures such as Emmanuel Macron, Stella McCartney and Katy Perry flying in from all over the world to witness the ceremony.

The glamor of the event has caused it to be the subject of much reverence from the older generation, but in the eyes of the younger generation, it has instead become the subject of humorous memes and belittlement — evidenced by its reception on social media plattorms like TikTok, where it went viral for the wrong reasons.

The event involved one of the most complex security operations in U.K. history — though security seemed to have missed one thing.

A TikTok clip of a grim reaper at the coronation surfaced, garnering millions of views in a couple of hours. This ominous figure was later identified by Westminster Abbey as a member of the Abbey community who assists with religious services, but nonetheless caught the



To Gen Z viewers, the service also feels like a hilariously outdated affair, remaining in line with the rest of the British monarchy's odd traditions

For example, Prince William, King Charles III's son, had to pledge his loyalty to his father and then kiss him on the

To me, it seems odd to have to look your father in the eye and say, "I, (insert your name here), Prince of Wales, pledge my loyalty to you and faith and truth I will bear unto you, as your liege man of life and limb. So help me God," and then proceed to kiss him on the cheek in front of billions of people.

It seems slightly incestuous, but what can you expect from a family whose motte has historically been "keep it in the fami-

After the crowning of both the king and queen consort, Camilla walked down the aisle while a children's choir sang what many thought sounded like "why not retire, Camilla" or "I want Diana, Camilla."

The choir was apparently singing "Vivat Regina Camilla," though it is my belief that "I want Diana, Camilla" is the clear right answer.

Clearly, people in the younger generation — like myself — are starting to lose more respect for the monarchy and continue to make fun of what it stands for.

The next time a coronation comes around — it might be very soon considering the looming threat of the grim reaper — I urge others to turn on the TV, grab a bucket of popcorn and watch the spectacle that is the British coronation.

I guarantee that although you won't go in with the intent to laugh, you'll be going down a TikTok rabbit hole of jokes as I did by the end. \blacklozenge

Morgan Wallen's new album 'One Thing at a Time' conveys dynamic emotions, pays homage to family

With his new album "One Thing at a Time," American country singer Morgan Wallen has achieved groundbreaking commercial success. His songs have remained at the top of the Billboard charts for 8 weeks since the album's release on March 3. "One Thing at a Time" is his second consecutive U.S. number one album, marking the biggest week of 2023 for album units earned and overall the biggest week for any country album since "Red (Taylor's Version)" by Taylor Swift in November 2021.

Through heartfelt melodies and vivid storytelling, listeners immerse themselves in his personal experiences.

With his songs reaching wider audiences than before, Wallen's music has emotionally resonated with listeners around the world. In an interview with Music Mayhem Magazine, Wallen said he intended for the album to express the emotional highs and lows he's experienced over the past few years of his life, with many songs inspired by "the good, the bad, the love and the heartbreak."

This is seen with the wide emotional range of music produced in the album, from solemn songs about his son like "Dying

Man" to upbeat tracks about his love life like "Everything I Love." These songs display a unique lyrical dissonance; "Dying Man" uses a sorrowful tone as Wallen reflects on how he shifted away from destructive habits after the birth of his son while "Everything I Love" portrays Wallen's heartbreak through an upbeat melody. Opening with the poignant track "Born With A Beer In My Hand," Wallen's distinctive musical motifs and captivating vocal melodies immediately seize the attention of his audience. The song recounts Wallen's youthful recklessness and unwavering dedication to his country roots, despite the hurdles he has encountered along the way. A standout track on the album, "Last Night," resonates deeply with its listeners and is destined to grace summer playlists for years to come. Wallen masterfully reflects on a conversation with his former partner, encapsulating his raw longing in an introspection of their final night together. Through heartfelt melodies and vivid storytelling, Wallen invites listeners to immerse themselves in his personal experiences, fostering a profound connection that lingers long after the song ends.

In addition to capturing his own emotional rollercoaster and personal experiences, Wallen's album also pays homage to family members who have supported him throughout his career and helped him get where he is today.

As such, the album cover itself depicts Wallen standing outside his grandmother's house in Sneedville, Tennessee. Wallen, in the same interview with Music Mayhem

Morgan Wallen's new album cover showcases him standing outside of his grandma's house. shares with her and how he wanted to honor

her with the new album. The album also features other prominent artists in the country music industry, such as HARDY, ERNEST Wallen has also embarked on his 63 day world tour "One Night At A Time" produced by Live Nation Concerts in America and Frontier Touring in Australia and New

"One Thing at a Time," he has faced backlash over the past year due to the circulation of a video from February 2021 where he cess shows no signs of slowing down.

Magazine, talked about the special bond he used a racial slur after a drunken party with friends. Since then, he was removed from radio playlists and awards shows, and has faced criticism from fans and fellow artists. Wallen sincerely apologized for his actions and entered rehab, taking time to reflect and work on himself.

Wallen's resilience and dedication to his music have clearly paid off, as "One Thing at a Time" continues to dominate the charts and his world tour draws in fans from Despite Wallen's impressive success with around the world. Despite the challenges he has faced, Wallen remains a beloved figure in the country music industry, and his suc-

70 years later, 'Peanuts' remains a childhood staple

Over 70 years ago, comic strip artist Charles M. Schultz published the first few panels of his new comic called "Peanuts" in the monochrome newspaper, St. Pioneer Press. Although the final original strip was released in 2000, the beloved comic has continued to be a staple in entertainment, a prime example of how popular media can tackle social issues and continue the legacy of its creator, who died in Feb. 12, 2000.

In the early years of "Peanuts," many characters lacked their distinct features: Charlie Brown's iconic yellow zig-zag shirt was originally a plain white top, Snoopy walked on all fours and Peppermint Patty donned a dress and bow

instead of her staple green shirt and black trousers. But within a few years the characters rapidly gained popularity and became household names. Even a decade after

Schultz's passing, Charlie Brown's iconic "good grief" and Snoopy's alter ego "Cool Joe" were integral, iconic memorandums of my childhood. As the comic rose to prominence as the most popular daily strip in America, it gained new characters, brand deals and even television shows that brought the characters even further into the limelight — and with influence over such a large audience, Schultz made liberal social commentary in the midst of a

period of great political turmoil. In the 1960s, as America worked to desegregate as a whole, "Peanuts" was one of the few representations of a desegregated future in popular media. Following the as-

sassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Schultz was urged to add an African American character into his comic strip by school teacher Harriet Glickman — and so the character "Franklin" was born.

Besides the addition of Franklin, Schultz, consistently included social commentary in his daily strips, the focus of which included gender norms, gun control and even religion. For example, a 1997 strip depicts Snoopy purchasing a gun without a license, emphasizing America's loose regulations on who can purchase firearms while preserving the colorful, comforting plot and picture of "Peanuts," creating innumerable emblematic tropes, quotes and life lessons.

Like other fans, I'll never get bored of the variations of Lucy swiping out the football in front of Charlie Brown's feet just as he is about to take his biggest kick, or Snoopy's adventures bravely battling the infamous Red Baron. I will forever remember Li-

nus's line: "Big sisters are the crab grass in the lawn of life," and Lucy screaming: "You blockhead!" Without these quintessential characters, my childhood would have been nowhere near as vibrant as it was. Schultz also managed to sneak life lessons into each strip — Snoopy's "happy dances" taught me that dancing alone — and enjoying it — can help you appreciate the quieter moments in life. Linus splitting up his blanket so that his friends could experience the same comfort demonstrated how the positive effects of sharing far outweigh the sacrifices.

But never mind the phrases and the heartwarming and hilarious situations Schultz brought to life — "Peanuts" taught me some of the most important life lessons I could ever ask for: Adults aren't always right, don't be afraid to ask your 5-cent psychiatrist for help, but, most importantly, good grief, you don't need to be perfect to

'Liv and Maddie:' A show that shaped our personalities

BY Emma**Fung** & Kathy Wang

"You, you, the other half of me, me, the half I'll always ne-ed, the half that drives me cra-a-a-azy," we chanted, singing along to the theme song of our sixth-grade selves' favorite Disney series, "Liv and Maddie." As we binged the show's four addictive seasons throughout our middle school years, we laughed at cheesy jokes, sobbed at tear-jerking plot twists (they were not that sad) and fell in love with the amiable, charming characters (a.k.a., Joey).

The popular Disney series, which was released in 2013, revolves around identical twins Liv Rooney, a bubbly celebrity actress and singer, and Maddie Rooney, a competitive pro-basketball player, as they try to navigate the ups and downs of high school. Throughout the series, the Rooney twins, along with their family and friends, work through sisterly conflicts, family arguments and relationship issues (ahem, Mosh over Miggy).

After watching the first episode, where Liv returns to her family in Wisconsin after being away for four years to pursue her career as an actress – we were hooked. For the next few months of our sixth-grade summer, our days included nothing but eating, sleeping — and of course, watching and rewatching "Liv and Maddie."

Although "Liv and Maddie" succeeds in entertaining viewers, the show also touches upon more emotional, realistic topics, such as separating from family to embrace the next stages of life. During one of our favorite episodes — part two of the Season 3 finale — Maddie is accepted into her dream college, Southern California State University (SCSU) with a basketball scholarship. In the previous episode,

decided to make a life-changing decision: to give up her lead role in a TV show — which was being moved to L.A. — in order to stay with Maddie in Wisconsin. Maddie, who has always dreamed of attending SCSU, decides to accept the scholarship and move to L.A. for college, leaving Liv in Wisconsin by herself. In our humble opinion, Maddie's impulsive decision was an

absolute outrage! Her for me," as she to accuse her

As hardcore "Liv is better than Maddie" fans, we were furious with Maddie's inconsiderate behavior. After all the unconditional love, support and sacrifices that Liv made for her sister, how could Maddie do this to her? Our eyes were glued to the screen as we watched Liv and Maddie's relationship deteriorate in a matter of minutes.

However, our hopes and dreams were saved as Karen Rooney, the twins' mom, brought out the iconic drawing that they "I never told you to made of themselves when they were little, titled: "Sisters by chance, friends by choice." We wiped our tears and breathed a sigh of relief as the two sisters forgave each other, acknowledging that no matter what forces threatened to separate them, they would alsupporting ways stay together. Liv ended up moving to L.A. with Maddie.

This episode, among many others, filled our monotonous days with excitement. Although the show ended six years ago, we away Liv's still find ourselves setting our work aside dreams as to replay our favorite episodes, reminiscing about the summers of our childhood. •

Special education resource aide Kelly

Allen's fondest memories with a student

she helps on a one-to-one basis are those in

which the student succeeds in her daily en-

deavors. Allen says that seeing her and the

other staff members' efforts pay off in a pos-

itive way is the most fulfilling part of

psychology of how to support an-

other person is very rewarding," Al-

len said. "I got to know her parents

as well and build their trust — so it

feels like an extended family situa-

tion. You're so invested in this one

person and everything that goes into

Allen has been in the department since

2020, working alongside a current network

of 19 aides that span across three programs

grouped under the umbrella term special

education. The aides not only support stu-

dents with disabilities, but also those who

experience difficulties working in main-

The first of the three special education

programs is Community Based Instruc-

tion (CBI), which serves students with in-

creased support needs through specialized

classes, mainstream electives and commu-

nity-based instruction. The school's Special-

ized Academic Instruction (SAI) program

is designed to support mainstream students

in general education classes, while also fol-

lowing their Individual Education Plan. The

third offshoot, the Achieving Student Suc-

cess with Intervention Support and Thera-

py (ASSIST) program, serves students who

trauma, offering therapy to help them make

emotional and academic progress.

stream classrooms.

"For me personally, learning the





STUDENTS GO Projet on IN RESEARCH



Junior's app aims to improve air quality predictions

Stuck as a freshman in the pandemic lockdown, Kyleen Liao, now a junior, looked out the window to the sight of red smoke blanketing the sky from wildfires. The fires obstructed access to clean air and harmed

Seeing a chance to help, Liao was determined to improve the imprecise predictions of air quality available to the public.

Since 2021, Liao has been working on a web application that better predicts air qual-

ity using Graph Neural Networks, a type of machine learning (ML) model that can make predictions based on data represented

courage research advancements in the intersection of environmental science and artificial intelligence to better inform the public on accurate air quality predictions. It is still in the development phase.

meaningful impact to improve people's lives tance in the work I was doing, he as disasters are worsening," Liao said.



A photo collage of junior Kyleen Liao's journey from getting inspiration to taking action.

Science Club. In June 2021, she be-

Through her app, Liao is aiming to en-

gan receiving guidance from Alexander Li, an alumni from the class of 2017 specializing in AI research at Carnegie Mellon University as a doctoral student, to work through project ideas she came up with in quarantine.

"Li always kept me on the right "Air quality prediction really can make a track," she said. "Seeing the imporwanted to make it accessible to users, and he inspired me to create the web

> She added: "I'm so grateful for the Science Club and its program, because without that, I would not have been able to get started on this project two years ago."

As part of creating her app, Liao then reached out to environmental engineering professor Pierre Gentine at Columbia University in the spring of 2022 to learn how to accurately predict air quality. Throughout a summer internship there, Liao received crucial feedback that expanded her research.

As she presented her findings during discussions, she was given constructive criticisms and new perspectives, such as the suggestion to look into the sources of air pollution, prompting her to identify fire vs. ambient sources and their impact on the AQI index, information that's valuable to help the public stay healthy.

"The team encouraged me to utilize machine learning algorithms to address disen-

Liao's journey started with the school's tangling the effects of different sources on

With the project's plentiful potential and the field's complexity, she sees herself continuing its works even as a career path. Working with Columbia allowed her to gain experience of what working in a professional research setting was like.

tially minor in computer science.

Throughout the past two years that Liao has dedicated to the project, numerous obstacles stood in the way. She noted that the most frustrating issue was increasing the prediction accuracy of the PM 2.5 concentration. It took months of research, discussion with Columbia's team and testing techniques to finally arrive at the desired effect.

would be perseverance," Liao said. "Find something that you're passionate about and apply the skills you have to that problem. I always try to keep in mind the end goal

pollutant concentrations," Liao said. This is beneficial to be aware of in order for people to minimize exposure to toxins in air pollution."

The project and internship with Columbia extended into the school year, and she now meets every two or three weeks with the research institution for progress check-ins. Liao's passion for the field has increased with her project work, and she now looks to pursue environmental engineering as a major and poten-

"My biggest takeaway from the project here will always be unexpected issues, but

Stanford can wait: Wang takes gap year to pursue Al

Last summer, senior Mason Wang, already experienced with research and artificial intelligence, reached out to see if he could help two Stanford professors with Noora, a project designed to create a chatbot that assists those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). To his surprise, they agreed to bring him on board

Noora is a chatbot that presents ASD patients with a variety of social scenarios and gives feedback to their various responses to help them better understand how to hold conversations or respond to questions they don't understand.

Despite his previous experience in research, Wang had to learn a lot to work alongside professors Monica Lam, who specializes in natural language

who specializes in psychology "Overall, when working with my professors, I learned a great deal on how to ask questions," Wang said. "For example, I learned what to question when we get experimental results, what questions

to ask when we look at a new prob-

lem and how to read research pa-

pers and question them."

processing, and Lynn Kern Koegel,

To contribute to Noora, Wang had to learn how to prompt a Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (GPT), which is a neural network that already knows how to process and respond to words, but can be fine-tuned by users. By using a GPT, Wang no longer has to create a chatbot from scratch, but can instead modify an existing one to properly respond and connect to ASD patients.

"We're shifting away from this paradigm of gathering data and training a model on it and instead learning how to prompt a GPT,"

So far, the team has held informal tests with a few ASD patients and used their observations to iterate and improve Noora's responses. For example, during initial test-

ing, Wang noticed that patients would occasionally skip through large blocks of text, so he modified Noora to read aloud all of the responses instead of just displaying it on a

To gather data to report in a paper with human subjects, he and his team must get approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Currently, Noora is hoping to hold formal trial runs with a group of patients near the end of summer if approval comes through. Beyond its usage in research and clinical settings like Noora, Wang also believes that GPTs will be the next great innovation in technology evolution.

"GPTs are pretty revolutionary to the point where the majority of people don't even have an idea how revolutionary it is," he said. "I think in 20 years, everyone will

be using generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), even schools."

Wang has been working on Noora for the past year, spending his entire summer after junior year prototyping and testing his initial ideas. Now, since college applications are over, he is spending more time preparing Noora for the testing phase.

Wang

Compared to the theoretical aspects of his other research projects, like his dive into SFTs, Wang feels that the practicality of Noora is more interesting. Inspired by his experiences with Noora, he plans to major in computer science and minor in psychology at Stanford University.

"The theoretical things are very intellectually stimulating and satisfying to understand, but it's the practical building and testing [of the chatbot] that I love," he said.

Apart from Noora, Wang is also working on Hazel, his AI startup focused on helping realtors streamline their work. He founded this company a couple months ago with other incoming students to Stanford, and OVALChat, which would allow GPTs to incorporate Wikipedia into their responses to give more accurate, factual information. He is so invested in the work of the startup that



he will take a gap year next year to further such as Zoom or Google Meet to reduce

"It's the practical building and testing [of the chatbot] that I love."

SENIOR Mason Wang

Wang got his first taste of research during his freshman year working with Class of 2022 alumnus and current Harvard freshman Vignav Ramesh. They collaborated on a project for HackMIT, an event where students compete and show off recent software or hardware projects. Their project, Latent Space, used recurrent autoencoders, a type of neural network that specializes in data optimization, to compress and send audio files across the internet.

Theoretically, this process would allow many widely used video calling platforms

delay between one side speaking and the sound being heard by the other users. Later, the two wrote, but did not publish, a brief to document their findings and results from implementing the neural network.

"Latent Space was born from other researchers' discoveries, as were so many of my other projects," Wang said. "After engaging with so many other people's research, I was inspired to conduct my own."

In his sophomore summer, Wang attended the Research Mentorship Program (RMP) at UCSB, where he worked under a doctoral student. Together, they created two projects and wrote a paper exploring sparse fusion transformers (SFTs). SFTs are an improvement to current transformer neural networks, a type of network better suited for processing text, aimed at reducing computational costs and memory use.

"I initially got into it [AI], because I thought it was cool, and I think that's a good enough reason to just try it out," Wang said. "Now, I'm convinced that AI is the future, and I'm excited to see where it goes." ◆

Aides are divided across the programs based on demand, availability and class to support a large number of students with individual needs. While the ASSIST program has one aide, Trisha Lee, for its 15 students, CBI has about 12 one-to-one and district aides for its 30 students. Likewise, the SAI program has four aides to help its 120 students.

These aides include Steve Matos, Richard Racz, Janeka White, Sahar Binesh, Terry Douglass, Sydney Zepeda, Kasey Felix, Corina Campa, Ayesha Bhatti, Kelly Allen, Tamara Coe, Ken Koop, Cynthia Chen, Grace Conely and Raquel Kirby. However, special education department chair Brian Elliott emphasizes that some aides can switch between programs based on student need.

The thing about this department is that it's a constant moving target," he said. "However we can best serve students is how we try to define the aide allocation, and those individual student needs can change constantly."

Though some aides work one-on-one with students and others are assigned to support classroom settings and case managers, or home-room teachers, all aides have a common goal — supporting students in their instructional classes.

In many cases, these positions are parttime and always lower paying than teaching and other certificated positions, which require both a college degree and credentialing in subject areas such as math, science,

The lower wages for aides often pose an issue when trying to attract people to the have suffered mental health struggles or job. This hiring difficulty has been exacerbated in recent years due to the pandemic,

"The amount of aide positions that need to be filled fluctuates each day [...] about four to five are needed on days when a few people call in sick," he said. "There have also been aides that have left in the middle of their term, so while the department fills in those positions we could have a shortage of one or two."

Hiring enough special education aides

becomes an increasingly difficult task

Currently, the department is fully staffed, but a few times a year the department suffers shortages that are hard to fill.

Douglass, a CBI general aide, observed the increasing need for special education aides while she was hired as a TPP-Job Coach, where she found jobs for special education students for them to get real-life experience. After working as a substitute aide, she decided to switch jobs permanently. Douglass believes that the main reason for the aide shortage is the demanding nature

"[It causes] burn-out quickly and nothing can prepare you for what can happen, but it's also a rewarding position when all goes right," Douglass said. "Unfortunately. we live in a very expensive area and the pay is not equivalent to the work compared to other jobs."

The difficulty in hiring and retaining aides can result in reshuffling remaining aides to the areas of greatest need, sometimes leaving the highest functioning students without the same level of support for a short period. To help retain good aides, the district is

offering more responsibilities to remaining part-time aides to help them achieve fuller working weeks. For example, a member of staff could work as an aide for six hours a day, but drive students across campus in the morning or afternoon. In doing so, they would earn full-time a salary while still receiving benefits.

Though the school isn't always able to hire all the aides it needs at a given time, those who continue to work in the program put in a tremendous amount of effort to provide individualized and group services. Douglass advocates for its ability to create irreplaceable bonds between them and their students, though the job may come with its share of challenges.

"It is emotionally and physically draining at times, it's not easy or for the weak hearted," Douglass said. "We are here to service the students, instill trust, security, confidence, and help improve their lives all while trying to educate. It is a dance we all have to do, but these kids have a harder task at hand in order to be successful. I do think the students and staff are very lucky to have each other; it's a special group." ◆

falcon**figures**

one-to-one and district CBI aides for its 30 students

aides to help SAI's 120 students

ASSIST aide for its 15 students

> programs grouped under the term special education

Historic atrium honors legacy of impactful parent

ву Meher**Bhatnagar**

Though subtle, elements of the school's history can be seen throughout the campus, from buildings to various plaques.

One of these pieces of history is located at the center of its main office: a Japanese-inspired glass atrium that contains greenery and other traditional features such as fountains, vines, flowers and a miniature Japanese garden bridge at the center.

This atrium was built to honor Dr. Gordon Iwanaga, parent of alumnus Ryan Iwanaga, Class of 1984. Credited with organizing the first Graduation Night and noted as a very active member of the Sports Boosters club, Dr. Iwanga was among the most impactful parents at Saratoga.

"After my father died, the community of Saratoga was amazing. They rallied around my family and really looked after me and my mom," Ryan said. "I think the support was a result of how much he had contributed to and believed in our school." The atrium was built in 1990 as a way

> to represent Dr. Iwanaga's passion for gardening and nature within the school. Dr. Iwanaga's presence in the Saratoga community

not only resulted in the construction of the atrium dedicated to his legacy but also a scholarship fund for graduating seniors established in his honor, which ran until 2015. The scholarship called for a well-rounded

student who not only showed great academic achievements, but overall contributions to the community through volunteering, school activities and sports. Ryan said that his father truly valued his

family as well as the Saratoga community, driving him to become more involved in the school's activities. Dr. Iwanaga's legacy runs through the community, and according to Ryan, it still lives within the walls of "I think the atrium is a good remind-

er for me of my father's spirit. He was very devoted to the town of Saratoga and to the high school itself," Ryan said. As a Japanese-American family in California, the Iwanaga ancestry remained close

to previous generations as a result of experiencing the internment camps in the 1940s. Ryan devotes his father's passion for his community to their upbringing in tightly-knit family structures.

Following Dr. Iwanaga's death, the community of Saratoga was involved in making his family feel at peace with the loss. Beyond the establishment of the scholarship, the school's maintenance crew has been taking care of the garden and over the past year, Principal Secretary Allison Montgomery has taken up that job as her own.

This stems from her passion for all things nature, as her desk consists of various spo- are currently discussing potential upgrades beautiful to look at radically placed plants to keep greenery

Washington (who



The atrium that lies within the office allows afternoon sunlight to filter through the roof.

"I really love nature and I spend most to get a chair or a small cafe set out there, of my time looking through the glass surrounding the atrium," Montgomery said. "When I noticed that it needed a little care, I er," Montgomery decided to take it upon myself to get it fixed

Montgomery has worked alongside the custodians to water flowers, repaint the be nice. I am ardeck and keep everything within the atrium tistic by nature and

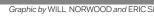
to add more ambiance to the garden.

"I think recently we have been wanting everyone." ◆

where we can take a little break in the middle of the day when the weather gets warm-

trellis would also Office workers, including Montgomery, environment that's will be beneficial to





a skirt at two public, off-campus

college programs. Someone at one

of the meetings reported her to

Menlo, and she was called into a

meeting, only to be warned against

skirts on campus" in a later email

When she raised the idea of finally

coming out publicly and recount-

ing her transgender story in a na-

tional news platform such as the

New York Times, the supervisors

ing her job and prioritizing her

parents' declining health over the

issue, Ward complied with her su-

was three of the most powerful

supervisors at Menlo, against a

Nevertheless, over that sum-

With the end of liberating sum-

mer and the diversity meeting

on the first day of the 2015-2016

school year, Ward felt empowered

meeting. She was met with rau-

ered to address the issue of com-

ing out in her personal blog, Ward

was shocked to receive a request

from the supervisor to reduce the

lengthy description of her experi-

ence down to one disappointing

paragraph. Furthermore, in her

draft, Ward had copied five other

administrators whom she felt sup-

ported by. But in their response,

ner three supervisors cut those

five administrators out, isolating

end, only one of the five replied to

her separately — the Director of

2007

her from her chosen allies. In the

While she initially felt empow-

transgender person," she said.

was totally fine with it."

"At the end of the meeting, it

Each time, out of fear of los-

shut her down immediately.

pervisors' wishes.

negative impacts of her wearing

June 2, 2023

Facing the Capitol

building of conser-

vative Texas, Ward

takes her first testosterone blockers

at a college coun-

seling conference

on Sept. 26, 2022,

starting her journey

towards physically

transitioning. Al-

BECOIIIG HER IOURNEY

IN HER JOURNEY.

ву Saachi**Jain** & Beverly**Xu**

Growing up in the early '80s, a young Brad Ward lived in a world where being transgender or gender-divergent were concepts unknown to the majority of society. Almost 50 years later, after finding a career in college admissions, moving to California from Pennsylvania, battling supervisors who she perceived as trying to muffle her voice when she came out as a transgender woman and finally joining the SHS community as the school's college and career counselor earlier this school year, Ward is on her way to living the life she

She is solidifying her gender identity as a transgender woman through gender-affirming care while working at SHS, where she said she feels financially and emotionally supported enough to undergo the physical aspects of gender transition. SHS was also the best place for her to publicize her transition and serve as a role model to gender nonconforming students, Ward said. (While she identifies as female, she has so far retained the name Brad.)

"I was the only transgender college counselor in this whole country until a month ago, as far as I know, and I need the national visibility that a district like Saratoga can provide for people like me,"

She hopes to serve as a reminder that all transgender people, just like everyone else, can flourish in any corporate or educational community.

Discovery of identity in a religious, conservative childhood

Born to conservative parents in Ohio and growing up in Marin County, California, Ward attended Mass weekly and was enrolled in Catholic schools throughout her childhood, a time in her life when she began to feel "different."

"I need the national visibility Saratoga can provide for [trans] people like me."

COUNSELOR Brad Ward

During her time in private high school, she had to wear gendered uniforms and grappled with her confusion by hanging out with girls and joining cross country and track, the only co-ed sports offered, because she did not feel like she fit in with the boys at her school.

"I should be wearing skirts, not pants," said Ward, describing her thinking as a teen. "Why do I want to hang out with the girls more than the boys, wear skirts and stereotypical [female] things

transgender people as "transsexual" or "crossdressers," which were derogatory, pathologically connotated terms, she said. The AIDS epidemic of the '80 and '90s fueled false associations between HIV and homosexuality,

science beyond the binary genders

assigned at birth, society labeled

making it even more challenging for Ward to understand her iden-"I basically figured that I must

be gay, because back then, if you were like an effeminate boy or an effeminate man [a male who displays female characteristics], people just assumed you were gay," Ward said. "But why then why was I attracted to women? It just didn't make sense." While she attended college at

Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, Ward found no official transgender community or mentors to confide in. However, attending a non-religious school allowed her to detach from the misogyny she observed in the many male religious figures of her youth.

Finding transgender role models

Everything changed after she was offered a job in college admissions at Bucknell in 2000 at her 10year reunion. A few years later, a colleague introduced Ward to the book "She's Not There" by Jennifer Finney Boylan. In the book, Boylan, a professor at Colby College in rural Maine, detailed her experience coming out and undergoing gender-affirming surgery and care (medical procedures that allow transgender people to physically transition their body to align with their gender identity).

"I read it all in one afternoon; it was the first time that I felt like I wasn't alone," she said.

Ward started trying on female clothing — just like Boylan, she mer, Ward began experimenting experimented with wearing skirts with clothing again in her free and female-gendered clothing on time without the additional push-Bucknell's campus, college fairs, back from the school. One of her high school visits and more. favorite pastimes was hiking in skirts, saying, "The whole world

Facing obstacles and coming out

By 2007, Ward was working at Menlo, a private high school in Atherton; she began experimenting with more easily reversible changes such as growing her hair to come out as transgender to out and experimenting with cloth- the nearly 90 faculty at that same

However, two years later, two cous applause from colleagues. of her direct supervisors began expressing concerns for her "feminine" appearance. She said two of her direct supervisors asked her to cut her hair.

"I had only been at that school for two years, and as a trans person who was still closeted, there were very few of us out there," Ward said. "There wasn't really anything I could do but cut my hair and let

Several months later, before her hair had even grown to reach its previous length, the same supervisor asked her to cut it once more. Six years later, one of the previous Diversity.



By cutting her off from allies supervisors and two additional ones continuously reprimanded and restricting her gender-identity her choices of self-expression. Folexpression, Ward thought Menlo's lowing a string of 10 suicides by administrators' actions during her trans teenagers across the counemployment there were a violation try — one of whom was Ward's of federal law against sexual habrother's former neighbor —Ward rassment, sexism, discrimination, became determined to combat the anti-trans and an abuse of power. transgender stigma by wearing

She was fed up with trying to compromise on her own identity and her self-expression.

But instead of taking legal action, she published her coming-out piece to her own personal blog. She was fed up with trying to compromise on her own identity and losing control over her self-ex-

She was eventually let go from Menlo in 2017 because of her being "unable to effectively work with students and colleagues." Shortly after, she began interviewing for new positions with the pronouns "she/her/hers," wearing skirts and clearly displaying her gender identity.

anti-trans

healthcare bills Post-Roe

AR SB199

Makes performing gender-affirming care for minors in Arizona illegal

TX SB14

Prohibits performing or funding gender-affirming care for minors in Texas; barres those currently undergoing care for

and 74 other bills have been passed in U.Ś. states...

Information from translegislation.com

Finding the right community When Ward arrived at SHS last August, she said she found the sense of community that she needed to confidently begin her permanent physical transition. Last spring, she reached out to health

though the medications have already cost her upwards of \$900, the physical changes she has seen have made it all worth it for her. professionals to

start her treatment and found clinicians specializing in gender-affirming care who helped her feel comfortable and accepted.

On Sept. 26, 2022, Ward deliberately took her first gender-affirming healthcare supplements at a college conference in one of the most anti-transgender states in the nation — Texas, which has introduced more than 10% of all state-level legislation in the U.S. restricting transgender expression, access to gender-affirming care and more. There, she took her first testosterone blocker (a pill that blocks the male hormone, testosterone) and estrogen patch (a patch that sends the female hormone estradiol into the bloodstream to produce feminine

"I thought starting my process [in a state] where things were so wrong was symbolic and something I needed to do," she said.

Since then, she has continued taking testosterone blocker pills twice a day and replacing her estrogen patches twice a week and is waiting for it to finish in September so she can assess when she can pursue gender-confirmation

"All the years that I would look at myself in the mirror and be like: 'No, it's not really you.' I mean, they call it gender-affirming care for a reason," she said. "I'm not sure when it disappeared, but that overwhelming doubt about who I am is gone now."

Even though she is happy with her progress so far, had she been given the opportunity to use pubertal suppressants as an adolescent, Ward believes that she would have undoubtedly done so. Ward believes that transgender minors should have the choice to pursue gender-affirming care, regardless of their age.

From her beginnings in a strictly Catholic environment, to finding and fighting for an accepting community in the workplace, Ward has stayed true to her identity. She hopes to be the model of transgender success that she sorely missed during her own childhood and to students at SHS who identify as transgender, nonbinary, gender-divergent, etc., Ward has three words: "Hang in there." ◆

The Saratoga Falcon

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL WHO'S THE thinnest OF THEM ALL?

Peer pressure and culture prove to be problematic for students' mental health and body image

BY William Norwood

Editor's note: This story contains mentions of body dysmorphia, eating disorders and suicide. It also uses anonymous sources to discuss sensitive topics.

In February, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention released a report showing that 3 in 5 adolescent females reported persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness. More worrisome was the report's finding that 1 in 3 teen girls has seriously considered committing suicide.

Girls interviewed by The Falcon cite academic stress and body dysmorphia as the main reasons for these findings, with one saying: "I would be surprised if a girl at SHS hadn't faced body image issues at some point during high school." Each year, barring 2020-21, rates of suicide and depression have continued to rise in the U.S. among men, women and adolescents.

In addition, body dysmorphia — a disorder that involves an obsession with perceived flaws about appearance — are at alarming rates in both men and women. According to a study conducted by Brigham Young University, an estimated 23% to 32% of college-age women have suffered or are suffering from some kind of eating disorder or body dysmorphia issues.

Senior mitigates body dysmorphia

Rachel largely attributes her experiences facing body issues and academic anxiety to the school's hyper competitive environment.

"I was an eighth grader. No eighth grader should be worrying about losing weight."

JUNIOR Christine

"People — myself included — are constantly talking about how Saratoga is stressful and promotes unhealthy academic standards," she said. "However, we don't do anything substantial to alleviate that stress or pain that weighs on students' mental health. That's what ultimately causes kids to crumble: The consistent pressure to achieve higher standards.'

Quarantine hit just as she started high school, and like much of the teen population, she found herself constantly online, which further exacerbated the stress she was already feeling. A UC San Francisco study found

that 12-13-year-olds doubled non-school-related screen time during the pandemic.

Simultaneously, social media experienced a boom in promoting "healthy eating" by fitness influencers. However, according to studies by Health-

line, this promotion of so-called healthy eating proved more toxic than healthy. Influencers promote ways to

0

quickly lose weight or get abs

quickly, often through restric-

tive diets. This leads to a toxic diet culture that idolizes unrealistic body goals. As Rachel continued to compare herself to others, symptoms of body dysmorphia, present since childhood, had worsened

during the isolation of

quarantine. "Since I was in elelementary, middle and high school." >> falcon**figures**

ementary school — which is crazy to think

about — the biggest issue I had, body-wise,

was my legs, my thighs," Rachel said. "It pre-

vented me from wearing shorts throughout

suicide counselling are

percent of women

mental disorder

percent of women have

experience a common

self harmed

Despite the fact that her body dysmorphia stemmed from trying to look the "best way" and get the "ideal body," Rachel believes that her time playing soccer helped her overcome her insecurities. "I had to wear shorts during games, so I

just had to suck it up and get it over with," Rachel said. "To a certain extent, soccer pushed me to get over [my body dysmorphia], because my thighs aren't something I wanted to think about during the game. If I was playing, I wasn't going to think about my thighs — I'd be thinking about the ball."

Rachel feels that the way she has managed through her mental health struggles was her desire to get better. While she continues to struggle to maintain and navigate her mental health, she has consistently worked to better her mental health.

Body dysmorphia fueled by isolation

Starting elementary school in Asia, Christine always felt like an outsider in her school's environment.

Even before moving to Saratoga, she was bullied by other kids.

"They isolated me because I was pretty nerdy, and they would call me ugly to my face," said Christine. "My best friend at the time would fluctuate between joining them just to and siding with me. [The bullying ruined my confidence and faith in my friendships to this day."

As a result, she was increasingly lonely, causing her social skills to decline and leading her to develop social anxiety.

"I started developing social and general anxiety in elementary school. I would have these fears of my parents dying. I had a lot of panic attacks," Christine said. "I didn't really have many friends or anyone to eat lunch with. When I started taking lunch to school, I'd be so embarrassed of this that I'd throw away my food."

Even so, Christine said she had never felt a major decline in her emotions and mental health until she moved to the U.S in 7th

How many Falcons

mental health: 77%

body dysmorphia: 52%

The Falcon polled 71 and 69 people

on Instagram, respectively, for

both topics.

have ever struggled with...

Service

At that time, Christine also started to experience recurring ideas of body dysmorphia and how she, and other girls, were expected to present themselves.

"On top of needing to prove yourself and excel in what you do, you also have other pressures of people telling you how you're supposed to look and how you're supposed to behave," she said.

She recalled one particularly traumatizing experience — of a boy rating the looks of girls in a P.E. class — that occurred at Redwood Middle School in 7th grade. The boy had pointed to a conventionally attractive girl and rated her a 9, otherwise a 10 except for her wearing makeup, and then pointed to Christine and told her she was only a 3.

This experience made Christine acutely aware of how others judge her based on her appearance. Around half a year after this incident, the pandemic quarantine started, and Christine's mental health hit rock bot-

Along with dropping grades and struggles with general and social anxiety, she also suffered from severe body dysmorphia and would often throw away her food, which eventually transformed into a vicious cycle of restriction and weight loss. She was diagnosed with both eating disorders and body dysmorphia in that same year.

"I would spend hours scrolling on Tik-Tok looking for the best ab workouts to lose weight," she said. "That time spent scrolling would just end up making me feel horrible. I was an eighth grader. No eighth grader should be worrying about losing weight."

More recently, Christine started going to the gym consistently, a habit that has given her more confidence. However, while working out at the gym, she still feels that her body type does not fall into the ideal "gym girl" look.

"There's a certain body type that's desired. Big butt, big legs, abs and a small waist," Christine said. "I just feel like, as a woman at the gym, people are judging me."

Christine also feels the bodybuilding and gym culture is inherently toxic with a common practice of "bulking" and "cutting" through meticulously measuring calories and macros in your diet.

"As someone with a diagnosed ED I'm always going to be an anorexic so I've been conscious to stay away from the conventional notions of dietary control because it is easy to slip back into restricting," Christine said. "It really turns into a different kind of eating disorder where restricting calories turns into counting macros with this same level of unhealthy obsession."

Her mental health has improved now, thanks to therapy and eating programs to better improve her relationship with food. Although she feels happier, she faults society and growing expectations of parents and other teens, as well as isolation, as the main causes of her mental health issues. "It's not enough to just exist. You always

have to be doing something more," Christine said. "There's so much going on; there's climate change, wars, discrimination, health crises, global recessions and a pandemic. And I'm expected to fight, but when I

do, I'm told that I am only a child and should not worry about these things. What do you want from us?" ◆

To anyone at SHS

who is in a mental health crisis, please contact the suicide and crisis lifeline. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national local crisis center, which provides confidential support for people in an emotional crisis, or in a suicidal situation.



The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network

of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. They are committed to improving crisis services and advancing suicide prevention by empowering individuals, advancing professional best practices, and building awareness.



The National Eating Disorder Association is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders. NEDA supports individuals and families affected by eating disorders, and serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures and access to quality care. Contact the NEDA Helpline for support and treatment options for someone who is struggling with an eating disorder.



The Office on Women's Health is on a mission to provide national leadership and coordination to improve the health of women and girls through policy, education, and innovative programs. Their vision is to allow all women and girls to achieve the best possible mental health. Some of their goals include informative and influential policies, supporting innovative programs and educating the public.

read the full story

2006

2015

2015

2017

2022

All graphics by AMY LUO and BEVERLY XU

All graphics by SUNNY CAO and KATHY WANG



The Falcon's 2023 **Sports Power Rankings**

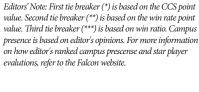
CONTRIBUTIONS BY ANIKA KAPASI, VICTORIA LIN, AIDEN YE AND ANDY ZHU

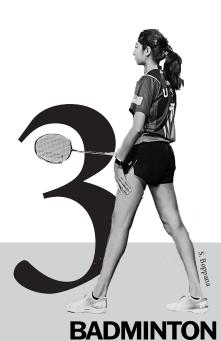


League Record: ((wins + ties)/total games) x (value of respective leagues); Win = 1 pt, League Placement: 1st - 3 pts, 2nd - 2 pts, 3rd - 1 pt, 4th and below - 0 pts CCS: 4 pts - CIF States, 3 pts - Finals, 2 pts - Second Round/Semifinals/Trials, 1 pt









Sport	League Record (win-tie-loss)	Win Rate (1-10 Pen- insula-Lake, 1-15 El Camino, 1-20 De Anza)	League Title (0 - 3)	CCS (1-4)	Campus Presence (1-5)	Star Player	Total
1. Boys' Volleyball	El Camino 10-5	10	2	2	5	K. Duvvuri (11)	19
2. Baseball	El Camino 10-5	10	2	1	5	L. Dennis (12)	18
3. Badminton	De Anza 5-7	10	0	4	3	E. Oaklander (12)	17*
4. Girls' Track	El Camino 4-2	10	1	3	3	M. Tippets (12)	17*
5. Boys' Tennis	De Anza 7-5	11	1	2	3	S. Ogata (9)	17**
6. Boys' Basketball	El Camino 6-6	10	0	2	5	N. Tjaden (12)	17
7. Softball	El Camino 9-3	11	1	1	2	L. Guzman (12)	15
8. Girls' Swimming	De Anza 2-4	6	0	4	4	K. Zhang (9)	14*
9. Girls' Tennis	El Camino 9-3	11	1	0	2	S. Manea (11)	14
10. Girls' Soccer	De Anza 4-2-6	8	0	0	4	G. Golko (12)	12
11. Girl's Volleyball	El Camino 5-7	6	0	0	3	J. Song (12)	9
12. Boys' Golf	De Anza 3-1-8	6	0	1	1	H. Shu (12)	8**
13. Boys' Cross Country	De Anza 5th	4	0	1	3	W. Khan (12)	8**
14. Boys' Swimming	De Anza 1-5	3	0	1	4	T. Yim (9)	8*
15. Boys' Water Polo	El Camino 5-9	5	0	0	3	K. Nikfar (12)	8***
16. Boys' Soccer	El Camino 2-4-6	5	0	0	3	G. Wheeler (12)	8
17. Girls' Cross Country	De Anza 6th	3	0	1	3	E. Stoiber (12)	7*
18. Girls' Golf	De Anza 3-7	6	0	0	1	S. Lim (10)	7**
19. Girls' Water Polo	El Camino 5-9	5	0	0	2	R. Kline (12)	7**
20. Football	Peninsula-Lake 1-6	2	0	0	5	S. Hulme (12)	7
21. Boys' Track	El Camino 1-5	2	0	1	3	Y. Singh (12)	6*
22. Girls' Basketball	De Anza 2-10	3	0	0	3	T. Ghai (12)	6
23. Field Hockey	De Anza 2-2-10	4	0	0	1	G. Adams (12)	5
24. Girls' Wrestling	De Anza 10th	1	0	0	1	R. Bossow (10)	2
25. Boys' Wrestling	El Camino 0-7	0	0	0	1	S. Bhan (12)	1

The Falcon's top seniors

BY VictoriaLin, TaraNatarajan

Best male athlete: Lucas Dennis

A pitcher and shortstop for both the varsity baseball team and Zoots Baseball Club — the No. 1 club baseball team in Northern California senior Lucas Dennis has made first team in Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) all-league two years in a row, and finished

third California. he threw as well as pitched 25 innings, had eight

batters and only gave up one run. Outside of his impressive performance with the school team, Dennis placed third at the 2022 USA Baseball National Championship in Phoenix, Arizona, last June with Zoots Baseball. Dennis cites his confidence on the mound as one of his biggest strengths

He will be attending Pomona College in the fall and playing Division III baseball for the Pomona-Pitzer

"I'm excited to be heading to a place with a lot of like-minded and equally committed players," Dennis

Best female athlete: Zeynep Tokuz Placing No. 3 for the medley relay

team for CIF States, senior Zeynep Tokuz has been swimming competitively since at age 10.

She attended multiple Futures competitions, an intermediate step for a Junior Nationals meet, and also got invited to Next College Student Athlete (NCSA) 2019, which is at a similar level of Junior Nationals.

She recently reached the finals at Futures for 200-yard breaststroke and the 400 yard IM, and placed No. 16 for the 200-yard breaststroke.

Recently, she attended the Mission Viejo San Fran Crippen Memorial Swim Meet, where she placed No. 9 for the 200-yard breaststroke. She also attended two Far Western meets on April 7 and placed No. 6 for the 200yard breaststroke.

Currently, she is ranked No. 50 in the state and she has committed to NYU for Division III swimming.

"I'm excited to be attending NYU for swimming. Maybe I can go to the Olympics, but we'll see," Tokuz said.

Runner up: Jalyn Harrigan

As both a star soccer player and track and field hurdler, senior Jalyn Harrigan proved to be a valuable veteran member on both teams this year.

Last year, Harrigan qualified for the Stanford Invitational for track and field and made CCS. Additionally, she also set a school record in the 300m hurdles of

45.53 seconds. This year, at the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL), she placed first in 100-meter hurdles, 300-meter hurdles, and was part of the first place finishes in the 4x1 and 4x4 relays.

At CCS Finals, she also placed No. 6 in the 100m hurdles, and No. 8 in the 300m hurdles. ◆

Dribbling across the field, weaving through six defenders, junior forward Yul Hong jumped up, heading the ball toward the goal, and watched the net ripple in the frigid San Francisco air. The crowd exploded as the U17 De Anza Force Major League Soccer (MLS) Next team took a 1-0 lead against San Francisco Glens SC in early May. With the team's stellar defense and Hong's goal, the game ended with a 2-0 win for the powerful Force team.

The game was electrifying and memorable, not just for the crowd, but for Hong as well. After the game, he received a phone call from the Division I Navy Midshipmen Men's Soccer coach, Tim O'Donohue, extending an offer to play soccer for the team starting in fall 2024.

Hong had been in contact with O'Donohue for six months prior to the game after the head coach watched him play in the December Palm Springs college showcase. They stayed in touch through text and phone calls and the coach came out to other MLS Next games to watch Hong play.

Hong was not just being pursued by the Naval Academy, however. Playing in the MLS Next league, the highest level of competition in the country, Hong was part of both the U17 and U19 MLS Next teams. In mid-May, he helped the U19 team win all three of their games in a playoff qualifying tournament in Washington, D.C., eventually landing them the second seed in their upcoming playoffs. Because Hong plays in the MLS Next League, he is not permitted to play for the school so he is constantly training with the same team and coaches.

Hong, who started playing recreational



Junior forward verbally commits to play for

United States Naval Academy Division I soccer

Junior Yul Hong dribbles at the U17 MLS Next soccer showcase in December at Palm Springs.

soccer at age 6 and joined De Anza Force in fifth grade, said that, because of the exceptional coaching staff and facilities, the club provided numerous opportunities for him to be recognized by college coaches.

"De Anza has a good reputation and a great team," Hong said. "We often get scouts showing up to our games and college show-

After traveling to Maryland for an official visit to the Academy in April, Hong eventu-

ally decided that the school's program was a strong candidate on the list of potential colleges he wished to attend.

"I was talking to a few other schools like Princeton, but I didn't feel that I wouldn't get the same opportunities [the Naval Academy could give me]," Hong said. "[The Naval Academy] has great facilities and I like the people on the team."

After taking about a week to discuss his options with his coaches and parents, he an-

nounced his verbal commitment via Instagram on May 17.

Hong noted that the Naval Academy is different from most universities because students do not have to pay tuition in order

Instead, students must enlist in the Navy for five years after graduation.

Additionally, the Naval Academy has stricter rules and customs that students are forced to abide by.

For example, students are forced to all eat together at the same time every day, parties are not allowed and they have daily training sessions with their company.

"I was talking to [Princeton] but I felt that I wouldn't get the opportunities [the Naval Academy could give me]."

JUNIOR Yul Hong

Hong said that he is considering pursuing a career as a naval pilot, and the Academy provides a good training ground for that

The Naval Academy also allows all freshmen to come in undecided, which is an aspect Hong appreciated as it would give him the opportunity to try a wide variety of classes and fresh start before he settles on a

"I'm happy I made my decision to go to the Naval Academy," Hong said. "I know they can do great things for my soccer career and my real career." ◆

Swim attends CIF for the first time in four years

BY MitchellChen & Victoria**Lin**

The swim team cheered for their girls' relay team during the CIF State championships at Clovis West High School, which took place May 11-13.

The girls' 200-yard medley relay team - consisting of senior Zeynep Tokuz, junior Meher Bhatnagar and freshmen Kelsey Zhang and Emma Geng qualified for CIF States — and placed third.

In addition, Zhang also qualified for the 100-yard butterfly, where she placed first (see story on page 1).

"It was a great feeling," Tokuz said. "I'm glad we were able to qualify for States, especially since Saratoga hasn't been able to

CCS was held at Hollister High School on May 5-6.

"Even though we didn't make it to states, it was a really amazing and fun experience to go to CCS with my team."

JUNIOR Jarrett Singh

The girls' participated in all relays. Individually, Tokuz participated in the 200-yard

individual medley (IM) and the 100-yard breaststroke. Zhang swam the 100-yard butterfly and the 200-yard IM.

senior Channie Hong, senior Mark Liu, junior Jarrett Singh, sophomore Yusuf Tokuz and freshmen Taewon Yim and Kunal Bhatnagar - also competed in CCS.

The boys' relay team qualified for the 200-yard medley, 200-yard free relay and the 400-yard free relay. Liu also swam at CCS for his individual events, the 50-yard freestyle and the 100-yard freestyle. Unfortunately, none of the boys made it to CIF States.

"Even though we didn't make it to states,

it was a really amazing and fun experience to go to CCS with my team," Singh said. "Competing in such a large competition, The boys' swim team — consisting of I get to see my friends who swim in other

Despite the boys' team not mak-

ing it to CIF States, the swim team had a significantly better season than last year, with the girls' ending with a 2-4 record and the boys' a 1-5 record in the De Anza league.

Last year, both teams placed last. This year, with the addition of talented new freshmen, the swim team

was more competitive. "I've always liked the swim team,"

Tokuz said. "Everyone put in effort this season and we all had a great bond." ◆

KELSEY ZHANG

continued from pg. 1

Because of the closeness Zhang feels with PASA, she feels more comfortable swimming with her peers and always feels like she has a strong support system behind

"In practice, we help each other, and if it's a hard set, we can say 'Oh, you can do it!," she said. "I feel like we can also learn more from each other."

Zhang recounts a meet when she had felt extremely discouraged after being disqualified from a relatively large meet she was hoping

She said her teammates helped bring her spirit up immediately.

"All my teammates came over and gave me hugs and told me it's

okay and stuff, and then they comforted me and brought me snacks and food," Zhang said.

In addition to growing with the family in her club team, Zhang has also recently found that she has grown in regards to her personal

When Zhang was younger, she remembers that her father would take care of most of the logistics, such as when and what skills she

Now, however, it's up to her to take initiative when training and take care of her developing skills

For example, if Zhang ever feels like she needs more practice in a certain area — for example to train her arms, legs or core — she might decide to go to the gym to train on her own instead of her dad taking her.

As Zhang focuses her swim-

ming in high school, she aspires to continue swimming in college and possibly further.

While she is still unsure of which college to attend or commit to, as college sports rankings are liable to change, she plans to attend one with a strong swim team.

"I want to keep swimming in college and even go to the Olympics."

FRESHMAN Kelsey Zhang

"I want to get into college for swimming, and I hope I will still be able to pursue my dream of going to the Olympics after college," Zhang said. ◆



Singh

The girls' 400-yard medley relay team poses for a photo at CIF States with junior Meher Bhatnagar on the left, senior Zeynep Tokuz at the bottom, freshman Kelsey Zhang on top and freshman Emma Geng on the right.

All photos by WILLIAM NORWOOD, , LORITIMMONS, SANNIDHI BOPPANA, LUCAS DENNIS and MALCOM SLANEY

BOYS' TENNIS

Midseason changes allow for CCS qualification

& Ariel**Zhou**

From unexpected injuries to rained-out practices, the boys' tennis team faced no shortage of challenges this season, overcoming them and ending the season in a CCS semifinal loss to No. 1 seeded Menlo Park.

By the season's midpoint, the team stood at a 3-3 record as they struggled to find their groove. However, as the player injuries healed and the courts dried, the team gradually made a comeback and concluded their season with a 7-5 league record.

The Falcons began their CCS journey with a 6-1 win against Mountain View on May 8. They then advanced into the quarterfinals where they eked out a 4-3 win against Bellarmine on May 10. Ultimately, the team ended CCS in the semifinals where they fell 7-0 to Menlo Park on May 11.

No. 3 singles player junior Johan Amirineni attributed the team's early season struggles to having an underclassmen-heavy team. This involves greater cooperation compared to outside tournaments as players are often paired into doubles rather than the familiar singles. Still, the Falcons were talented and learned with each match.

"We're all really close to each other, which is a good thing for team spirit, but we horsed around a little too much so we lacked that crucial locked-in practice time at the start of the season," Amirineni said. Nonetheless, the underclassmen proved their ability as freshman Somei Ogata and Nikhil Srivastava currently play as the No. 1

and No. 2 singles players on the team. Additionally, key team members were afflicted by injuries, including team captain Julian Berkowitz-Sklar, who suffered elbow tendinitis, and junior Shrey Jain, who was forced to opt out due to a heel fracture.

At the time of injury, Berkowitz-Sklar played as No. 3 doubles and Jain played as No. 1 doubles. Their injuries forced a shift in the doubles pairing, and sophomore Teddy O' Yang substituted in for Berkowitz-Sklar while freshman Andre Popas substituted in for Jain. The players were forced to adjust their play styles in order to accommodate their new teammates.

In order to facilitate an easier transition for the new doubles, head coach Florin Marica ran circuit practice sessions where every few rounds players would be placed with new doubles partners in order to familiarize them in playing with different play styles.

Following the return of Berkowitz-Sklar and Jain at the end of March, the team swapped to their normal doubles pairings which led to a string of victories.

"I was worried that I wouldn't be able to enjoy my final high school season so it truly is a blessing that I've recovered to a point where I can play," Berkowitz-Sklar said.



Freshman Somei Ogata prepares a backhand hit in a match against Bellarmine on May 10.

Amirineni mentioned that the team has been able to bond through strife, as the challenges from missing key players to facing multiple losses early season meant that players had to be understanding of one another and persevere together.

We definitely grew to understand that tennis is not just about winning your own match but also cheering on and looking out for your teammates," Amirineni said.

Captain Berkowitz-Sklar mentioned that

he feels confident in the team to succeed in future seasons as the underclassmen have trained rigorously and learned to cope with unexpected challenges. He hopes that they will continue to overcome adversity.

"I'm definitely proud of the work that the team, and especially the underclassmen have put in this season. High school tennis was quite the ride and I'm grateful for every moment I've shared with the team," Berkowitz-Sklar said. ◆

BASEBALL

Strong season ends short after a 6-1 loss in CCS quarterfinals

BY MitchellChen

After finishing second in the El Camino league with a 10-5 record, the baseball team qualified for CCS for the second year in a row, but their season ended sooner than they wanted after a 6-1 defeat in the quarterfinals to Capuchino on May 20.

The Falcons had a rough start to the game with the scoreboard reading 4-1 to Capuchino after the first inning.

"We just couldn't hit anything and we were all a bit shaken up after the first inning, lost 3-2 against Evergreen Valley on April

especially after one of their players hit a grand slam," junior catcher Nathan Lee said.

Star pitcher sophomore Aiden Chen had bumpy game. Throughout the game, the Falcons tightened up their defense, with Capuchino only scoring two more runs. The key to this was junior first baseman Abhinav Kiran, who had eight put-outs.

The Falcons lost 8-0 and 6-3 against Fremont on May 11 and May 9 respectively; won 4-3, 9-0 and 4-0 against Lynbrook on May 4, May 2 and April 7 respectively;

"Now we have a better understanding of what our team is capable of."

SOPHOMORE Aiden Chen

29; won 15-1, 15-2 and 10-5 against Monta Vista on April 27, April 25 and March 23 respectively; and started the season going 3-3. Chen felt that the Falcons' offense and starting lineup didn't quite perform to what they

Despite not advancing to CCS semifinals, the Falcons are proud of what they accomplished this season and hope to continue to find success next year as well.

"Overall we had a decent season, but now we have a better understanding of what our team is capable of after back to back CCS appearances," Chen said. "We need more individual commitment to create a championship environment and a championship

BOYS' VOLLEYBALL

3-0 loss to Harker in CCS quarters ends the Falcons' season

ву Derek**Liang**, Andrew**Lin**

After a huge turnaround performance compared to last year's winless season, the boys' volleyball team finished 8th in CCS Division II, following a 3-0 loss to Harker in the quarterfinals on May 9. During the match, Harker kept the Falcons at 25-17 and 25-16 in the first two sets. In the third set, the team clung onto a last chance to force a fourth game, but came up short with a final score of 25-22.

Harker targeted the Falcons' weaknesses, notably their defense near the edges of the net, after coming to watch their first CCS game against Mills on May 8, where the team won 3-0.

Harker's middle blocker also targeted the deep corners because of how far up the Falcons' sides were pinched.

These hits, combined with a fast play style from Harker, allowed them to catch the Falcons off guard.

The team finished second in the El Camino division with a record of 10-5, behind only Los Altos with a record of 14-1. This vear marked the first time in four years that the Falcons made CCS.

"We came out with a fire this year. We didn't want to repeat what we did last year [going 0-14], so we were all determined to train really hard, even before the season started," said junior co-captain Samuel Kau.

Three out of five of the Falcons' losses



Junior Samuel Kau leaps up, preparing to hit a top jump serve against Los Altos on April 27.

were to Los Altos, with whom they competed tightly but were never able to beat. Junior co-captain Kali Duvvuri, who won the 16u national championship last year with his club, partially attributes the team's losses to Los Altos to their dependence on momen-

During some games, both teams managed to get into positions where they scored many points in a row. This put the Falcons at a disadvantage when the opposing team gained significant momentum, like with Los Altos' last-minute 6-point streak that cost the Falcons the game during their final

match on April 21. "We've had a season-long problem of getting into ruts and letting our mistakes pile up," Duvvuri said.

Coach Lori Gragnola said next season, the team can break out of ruts and prevent games from being as close as they sometimes are by "coming together as a team on the court, just to make sure that everybody knows that it's OK if you made a mistake."

Despite occasional challenges, the team's chemistry was strong throughout the entire

Freshman outside hitter Jeremy Si, who boosted the team's offense with his strong serves, said Kau was a powerful motivational force during practices and games.

"He [Kau] does a really good job of rais-

ing morale," Si said. "During games and timeouts, he keeps the energy up for the team."

Looking at the season as a whole, players said their teamwork improved dramatically, and although the season didn't end exactly the way they wanted, they more than met their goals.

Many of the underclassmen on the varsity team showed promise of becoming the team's new leaders next year, with Kau noting that freshman outside hitter Brennan Pak will be key to filling the large shoes left behind by senior opposite hitter Seth Hulme.

"Next year, I think [Si's] gonna step up," Duvvuri said. "This year, he was primarily a serving specialist. Next year, he's gonna have

In addition to Si and Pak, other players anticipated to become key to next year's success include junior outside hitter Eric Norris, Kau and junior middle blockers Edmond Hsu and Scotty Rich.

Early in the season, Norris said that optimism and team energy was going to be a big factor for the team. Upon the end of the season, he thinks that both the team energy and crowd energy delivered in the games was phenomenal.

"I think that the optimism we had going into the season paid off, we've really been able to deliver and make it further than in multiple past years," Norris said. "The sense of optimism we clung onto reflects our sea**GIRLS' SOFTBALL**

Freshmen key to season improvement

ву DivyaVadlakonda & Beverly**Xu**

When star sophomore pitcher Saira Ramakrishnan threw the first pitch of the team's first CCS game away at Santa Teresa on May 20, the Falcons were playing with house money: They had already achieved more than they expected to start the year.

"[We were thinking that] whatever happens will happen, we're just gonna have to play our best and play hard," Ramakrishnan

Although the team lost 9-1, they flour-ished in the El Camino League, experiencing a series of wins that placed them third with a 9-3 record.

Recently in their league, the Falcons won 13-0 against Monta Vista on May 11, won 13-1 and 17-4 against Lynbrook on May 8 and April 24 respectively, won 8-2 against Santa Clara on May 5, lost 4-2 against Fremont on April 28, and won 12-1 against Palo Alto on April 26.

According to junior right fielder Claire Weidner, their expectations were set low at the start of the season since they had become used to losing and had several new players The Falcons, coached by history teacher Mike Davey, seemed to change their mindset after the team flipped the score in their first preseason home game against

Leigh, taking the lead to win 7-6 on March the team's attitude through their rapid im-7. They realized they could succeed, creating a tremendous positive impact on future per-

In Weidner's eyes, softball games are one-third skill and two-thirds game mentality. From the prolonged, anxiety-inducing breaks on the bench to the feeling that each failed pitch or swing is an individual fault, Weidner believes that an optimistic mindset is crucial in winning games.

"[We were thinking that] whatever happens will hapepn, we're just gonna play our best and play hard."

SOPHOMORE Saira Ramakrishnan

"In games where we're down by a lot we tend to get down on ourselves really easily," Ramakrishnan said. "But honestly, it really just takes one person to say something [positive] or help you out to [uplift our game]."

Ramakrishnan also mentioned how all four freshman players — Soumya Katkere, Vivan Lei, Katelynn Vasquez and Sandy Vavrousek — have greatly helped boost

provement during the season, which shone during team practices and games. With only Vavrousek and Vasquez having prior experience playing softball in elementary school, Davey started out the season by implementing extra practices to teach the four players the basics of throwing, hitting, fielding and base running.

The practices proved to be effective, as each player improved considerably throughout the season. Freshman right and left fielder Soumya Katkere said that the criticism she received from the coaches on her swing, as well as the continuous drills to refine her catching and throwing, greatly

Due to the freshmen's contributions in outfielding, pinch running and occasional hitting, combined with stronger leadership and guidance from both junior co-captain and second base Vivienne Brooks and senior co-captain and first base Lily Guzman, the players have had a much better season

Looking ahead to the 2023-24 season, star players such as Ramakrishnan and current shortstop Sydney Riera will help the over the course of the season." ◆

aided in improving her skills.

than they originally anticipated.

even with losing key senior players — Guzman and first baseman Irene Frazier — Davey believes that the increased participation from newcomers this year and remaining



Junior Caitlin Weber steps up to bat at the league game against Monta Vista on May 20.

Falcons overcome any challenges next year

'We have a lot of inexperienced people who've gotten much better," Davey said. "I'm really proud of how they contributed

TRACK AND FIELD

Two seniors race at CCS but do not make States

Sophomore distance runner Pranav Rajan trailed just ahead of the other runners in the 1600-meter race at the final dual meet against Cupertino on April 18. With the finish line in sight and two run-

ners closely behind him, he charged down the final 100 meters, finishing first with a time of 4 minutes and 45.01 seconds. Even with Rajan's impressive race,

the boys' varsity team lost 70-55; however, the varsity girls won 78-43. Overall, the boys' team ended with a 1-5 record over the course of six dual meets, placing fifth in the El Camino league, while the girls' team ended with a 4-2 record, finishing third.

Head and distance coach Ian Tippetts, head and jumps coach Archie Ljepava,

sprints coach Rick Ellis, throws coach Stephen Matos, and hurdlers coach Kole Tippetts helped guide the athletes throughout

Although this season's results were subpar for the team as a whole, 10 athletes were able to do well enough in the El Camino League Trials and Finals to qualify for the SCVAL Finals on May 6. Five of those 10 moved on to compete in CCS Trials the follow-

ing week on May 13. Senior Jalyn Harrigan qualified for the 4x100 relay, 100-meter hurdles and 300-meter hurdles, while senior Mika Tipetts qualified for the shot put and discus. Senior Isha Goswami qualified for the 400-meter run and the 4x100. Sophomores Natalie Zaragoza and

Clara Zhao also qualified for the 4x100. During trials, Harrigan placed sixth in

seconds and eighth in the 300-meter hurdles with a time of 46.67 seconds. Tippetts placed ninth in the shot put with a distance of 33 feet and 8.5 inches and ninth in the discus with a distance of 107 feet and 8 inches. With their marks, both seniors advanced to CCS finals.

Facing stiff competition, neither athlete was able to move forward and compete in the CIF State Championships.

At finals, Harrigan placed sixth in the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 15.51 seconds — coincidentally the same exact time as in prelims — and the 300-meter hurdles with a time of 46.57 seconds. Meanwhile, Tippetts placed seventh in the discus with a distance of 109 feet and ninth in shot put with a distance of 33 feet and 9 inches.

Despite being extraordinary athletes, they still feel that they have room for im-

the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 15.51 provement, especially for Tippets, who plans to continue participating in track and field at De Anza College. "For throwing, I think my technique

is good, but the power behind my throws needs work. I feel like I have an insufficient amount of strength [when I throw]," Tippetts said.

Unlike Tippetts, Harrigan will not do competitive college track. Regardless of future plans, both athletes' main goal for the season was to have fun with track and field before leaving for college. Harrigan felt that by possessing the passion to aim higher every time she competed, the hard work she put in during practices paid off.

"I gained confidence from track," Har rigan said. "Everyone feels empowered after they finish their race, especially if it's a longer distance. Everyone feels good about

BADMINTON

& SaachiJain

The crack of a racket echoed through the air as the badminton team faced off against other regional schools at the CCS tournament on May 13.

While the team didn't emerge as champions, the doubles team of sisters junior Sannidhi Boppana and sophomore Samanvi Boppana had a strong postseason run. The pair placed second in girls' dou-

bles at CCS, qualifying them to the NorCal

championship on May 20. At NorCal, Sa-

manyi and Sannidhi placed third. "I'm really happy with how me and my sister ranked," Samanvi said. "We really wanted to work on rotations since we don't play together outside of school. It was a

close fight but we performed really well and I'm proud of our score." The team ended with a record of 5-7 in the highly competitive De Anza League. Prior to attending CCS, they lost three out of four matches — losing 14-14 in a tiebreaker against Wilcox on April 24, 26-4 against Lynbrook on April 26 and 23-7

against Milpitas on April 27 — but pulled

a 22-8 win against Monta Vista on May 2 As Sannidhi reflects on the season, she attributes the majority of the team's losses to a lack of reliability among players.

"Many of the team members have been inconsistent, both in performance and attendance," she said. "It made it difficult to pinpoint who will play which matches."

At the end of the season, head coach Thomas Ching chose the top two players from each category - girls' and boys' singles and doubles, as well as mixed — to attend league finals. This year, seniors Jason Liu, Tony Guo, Evan Oaklander and Sannidhi and Samanvi attended leagues, and all advanced to CCS after placing in the top four in their events. The first round was on May 5 and the second round was on May 6. with CCS following a week later on May 13.

With Guo, Liu and Oaklander graduating, the team is looking for strong players like junior Avik Belenje and freshman Ishir Gupta to carry the torch next year.

Throughout the season, we had a lot of close individual games that led to a collective team win, and I'm really proud of how hard everyone fought this season," Guo **BOYS' GOLF**

Girls' doubles make States | Team sends two to CCS

After placing top three in the De Anza League for the past four years, the boys' golf team had a subpar 2023 season, dropping to sixth place out of seven teams. The Falcons finished with a 3-8-1 league record and failed to qualify for CCS.

The team maintained almost the same roster as last year — when they ended the season with a 5-6-1 record and qualified for CCS as a

"On paper, we were supposed to be better with one more year of practice, but that didn't happen," senior No. 4 player Howard Shu said. "There weren't any major setbacks; most of us couldn't find the same level of consistency that we had last year."

Only two individuals, sophomore No. 2 player Oliver Pott and Shu, qualified for CCS on May 3 after shooting 77 and 75 respectively on the Santa Teresa Golf Course. During CCS on May 9 at Laguna Seca Golf Ranch, both Pott and Shu shot 78, just three shots shy of qualifying for finals.

With half of the top six players gradu ating this year — seniors Shu, No. 3 player Sunny Aswani and No. 5 player Cameron Sy — the Falcons will heavily rely on currently benched underclassmen to step up when they qualify for the starting lineup next season.

Pott and Shu both attributed the lack of success this season to inadequate prac-

tice during the off-season and emphasized the importance of players working on swings before next year's season.

Additionally, members of the team faced a difficult mental game, as players often felt under pressure to perform. According to Shu, strong scores from five to six players are needed to win a match, but

"Much of the team, including myself, was not really prepared for the season this year," Shu said. "If the team is able to start off strong it makes it much easier to carry momentum and confidence through the season, which I think is how we did well last year." ◆

typically only three to four players played well.

snapshots: A look back at senior year







Photo by ATREY DESA

SENIORS 25



Seniors Kiana Compeau, Dylan Sinton, Nadine Cobourn and Anand Agrawal dance in celeration of their final year of high school while wearing senior jerseys in the 2022-2023 Homecoming dance in September.

Seniors cheering in student section during Homecoming football game.

Seniors Kiana Compeau, Shaan Sridhar, Isha Jagadish, Maithili Kulkarni dance wearing traditional Indian clothing during the partner dance of the 2023 annual Bombay in the Bay performance held in February.

Seniors strategizing with their coach, varsity team member Max Timmons, in a huddle during seniors vs. sophomores Powderpuff game.

Seniors celebrating the end of high school during the final school rally.

Dear Seniors, you taught us well; we're going to miss you!



With seniors graduating in the next few days, it will once again be that time of the year when juniors and underclassmen have to say their final goodbyes. Although graduation should be a happy time for us to celebrate the seniors on finishing four grueling years of high school, it will still be sad to see them go.

My senior friends have been my greatest advisors — it's crazy to realize that next year I'll be like them, taking all the younger underclassmen under my wing and tutoring them on the ins and outs of high school.

When choosing classes for next year, seniors are always the best people to ask. For example, as I struggled between choosing

AP Lit or AP Lang for my English class next year, the seniors described the workload I would face and the hours of work ahead of

Thanks to their advice, I chose AP Lang because I realized I might not get the chance to study philosophy in the future: According to my senior friends, engaging in deep discussion during Socratic seminars taught them the importance of being decisive, a skill that can be applied to everyday life.

When I struggled with learning U-substitution in Calculus, I was able to count on my senior friends to clarify the concept, taking me through example problems during tutorial and testing me on conceptual questions. Even when I was hard stuck in the silver level in League of Legends, I could always call my senior friends for help to win games and climb rankings.

They never fail to give life-changing advice in personal situations, too.

For example, there used to be someone that I liked, but I was not confident enough to do anything about it. Thankfully, my fel-

low seniors pushed me out of my comfort zone and offered me steps on how to proceed with asking her to prom. If it wasn't for their constant meddling, you would have found me slow dancing with my own shadow at prom.

Beyond their valuable advice, my senior friends have also become some of my closest friends.

During the first semester, it was hilarious to see the seniors rant about their failed situationships while simultaneously scrambling to finish their college applications.

I can even say that senior friends have inspired lifestyle changes for me: One of them was able to get me into working out. They even went so far as to help me sneak into a gym without a membership and take me golfing at the country club as a guest, pushing me to explore new experiences that I wouldn't have otherwise wanted to try.

The sad reality is that graduation will probably be the last time that I talk to many of the seniors, as I cheer them on and snap photos as they walk down the football field



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

for the last time. They will move on, making new friends and living new experiences.

I have known most of these seniors for years and sadly, our time together has passed in a blink of an eye. I wish all the seniors happiness in their new lives. Congratulations to class of 2023, we're going to miss you. ◆

The Junioritis virus is plaguing the Class of '24



We don't know whether it's because of school or the warm weather, but every day more and more juniors (including us) struggle to climb out of bed to go to school on time.

We cram whatever is left on our desks from last night into our bags, eyes half closed, perhaps vibing to Katy Perry or Taylor Swift. We drive to school sleepily with our newly obtained licenses, trying not to crash into the slow-moving Saratoga parents. As we slowly ease into the parking lot, we see seniors seem to have caught the same condition: They too sluggishly stumble through the quad on the way to class.

At 8:30 a.m. or later, we finally make it to our first-period or second-period classes and soon find ourselves battling to stay awake (and hoping that this tardy doesn't result in yet another Treasure Toga after-school work punishment.

AP testing season is finally over (thank god!), our finals are finished, and we know which teachers we need to ask for letters of recommendation.

For all intents and purposes the school

year is over and we are now not-so-patiently waiting for the first day of summer vacation.

AP classes are usually the toughest courses and take the most time out of our schedules, so it would be logical to assume that we don't have much to do now that exams are over and would be able to sleep at 9 p.m. every night. Sadly, we still see ourselves sleeping at 2 a.m., watching trashy shows on Netflix, not doing the 15 minutes of homework assigned until morning and requesting our parents to please call us out sick.

Now, the most difficult part of school is motivating ourselves to complete the end-of-the-year assignments that non-AP courses have. Most of us juniors are barely able to find the brain cells to function, let alone do homework — if our English teachers assign 30 pages of sleep-inducing reading to complete by next class, we'd be lucky to finish the second page.

All that aside, we haven't even talked about the hell that was AP testing.

Graphic by ANNIE LIU

Many of us had to wake up at 6:30 a.m. (goodbye, two hours of sleep) to get ready for an APUSH exam, get to the school by 7:30 a.m., realize that none of the administrators were there, and stand in the cold until the doors finally opened at 8:30 a.m. And let's not forget about the tests themselves, either. We're supposed to remember so much irrelevant information from the very beginning of the year that we forgot the minute we stepped out of class. Oops.

The worst part is the beautiful, tempting weather that shines in through our windows as we sit down to read "The Things they Carried," which, we may add, is probably the most confusing and stress-inducing book of the year (take that, "Beloved!"). The scorching heat makes us just want to jump into a lake and swim for hours on end, only coming home when the sun sets. It should be a crime to keep us locked up in our rooms finishing the homework we were assigned, and it doesn't help that the school's cinder block buildings make it feel like a prison.

Thankfully, summer break is just around the corner, which means doubling down on doing internships, volunteering, and taking outside classes (not to mention starting our college applications). Many of us have a very busy schedule this summer, but let's make sure we get

busy schedule this summer, but let's make sure we get some much needed rest to help us push through our senior year, even if that rest started in mid-May.

topten

WORST PAINS

- **10 Papercut pain.** When you use hand sanitizer, you especially feel the sting of cuts you didn't even know existed.
- **9** Back pain. You're simply gaining a valuable perspective on how old people feel.
- **8 Head pain.** Teenages shouldn't have migranes, but taking 7 APs while doing six extracurricular activities can have that effect.
- AP testing pain. It's that time of year again when you get to spend 3 hours tirelessly writing for your AP US History exam only to realize that Abraham Lincoln was in fact, not from the 1900s.
- 6 Test grade pain. There's nothing like that feeling of impending dread when you collect your test after your teacher writes that the test average is 48%.
- **Toe-stubbing pain.** Almost as bad as stepping on a Lego in your bare feet.
- **4 Deadline pain.** Everyone knows the best time to start big projects is the night before.
- **3 Covid pain.** There are few experiences less rewarding than lying in bed all day and doing nothing.
- 2 Knee pain. My knees sound like I have a painful argument everytime I take the lightest step.
- **1** Rejection pain. When the recipient of a promposal says no after you spend two months gathering up your courage to ask.
- >> Victoria Lin and Aiden Ye