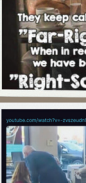


Reporter tests Truth Social: her head's still spinning



Far-Right When in Rome we have a Right-Sc



Remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre in Beijing



Former college football star: athletic director Rick Ellis



THE saratogafalcon

AN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL PUBLICATION

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MARCHING INTO THE 'UNKNOWN'

The band showcased its theme of pushing beyond unfamiliar limits by performing all four show movements at Cupertino's tournament.

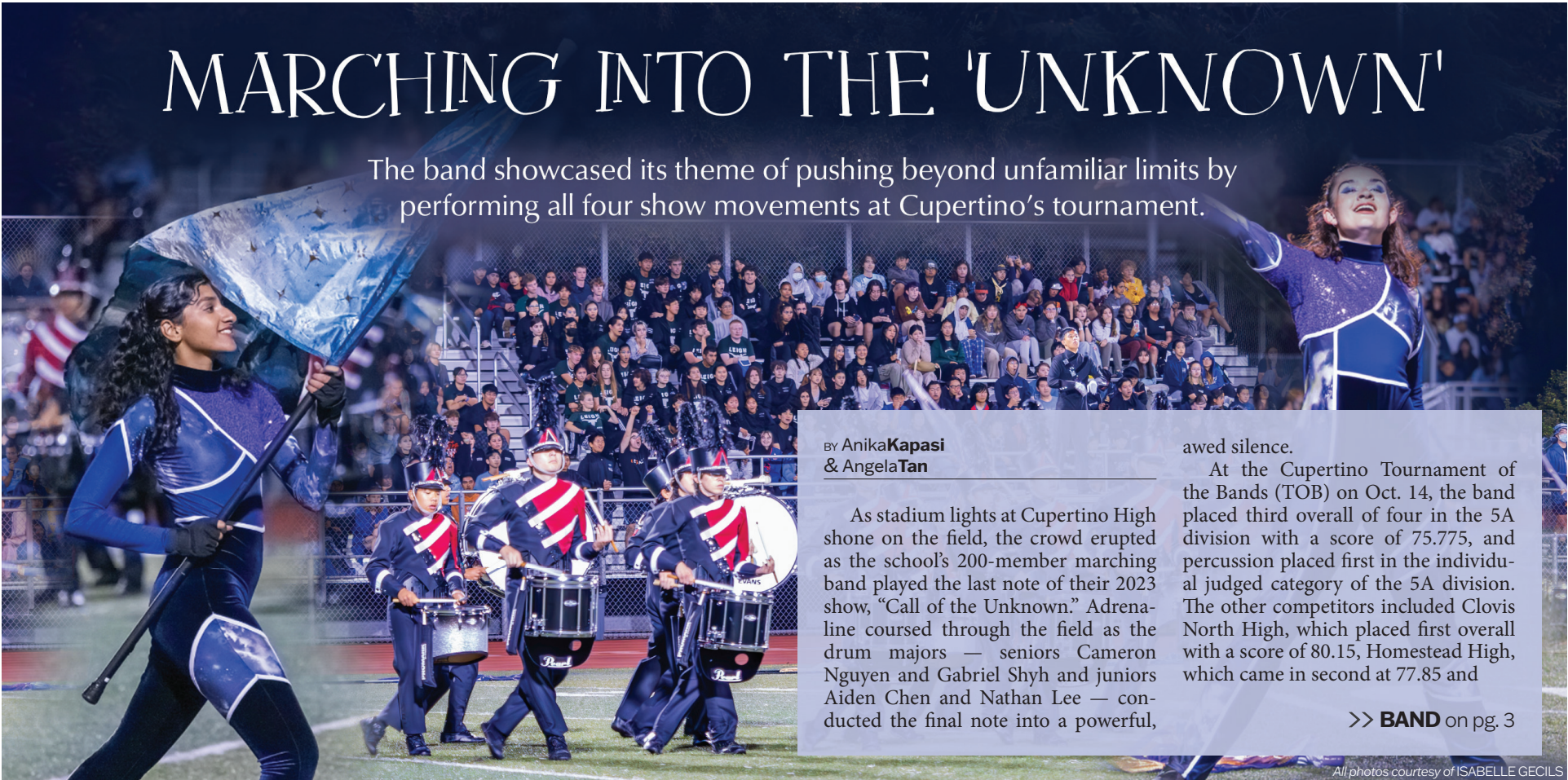
BY AnikaKapasi & AngelaTan

As stadium lights at Cupertino High shone on the field, the crowd erupted as the school's 200-member marching band played the last note of their 2023 show, "Call of the Unknown." Adrenaline coursed through the field as the drum majors — seniors Cameron Nguyen and Gabriel Shyh and juniors Aiden Chen and Nathan Lee — conducted the final note into a powerful, awed silence.

At the Cupertino Tournament of the Bands (TOB) on Oct. 14, the band placed third overall of four in the 5A division with a score of 75.775, and percussion placed first in the individual judged category of the 5A division. The other competitors included Clovis North High, which placed first overall with a score of 80.15, Homestead High, which came in second at 77.85 and

>> **BAND** on pg. 3

All photos courtesy of ISABELLE GECILS



International experiences influence new counselor

BY LynnDai

Nearly halfway through the first semester, students walking into the main office can expect to see a new face with a bright smile and towering figure: Guidance counselor Toni Jones formally joined the school community on Oct. 3, replacing former guidance counselor Monique Young.

Young left the school in late August after 11 years at the school and moved to the Sacramento area.

Hiring Jones helped resolve a challenging situation posed when Young's students did not have a guidance counselor to work with between early September and October. Jones will be responsible for guiding underclassmen with last names beginning with A to F and upperclassmen with last names beginning with A to G.



Jones

Principal Greg Louie, who was Young's guidance partner in the past few years, praised her efforts to help her students as best she could as she left the school.

"Ms. Young is a fantastic school counselor who loves her family and her friends," Louie said. "Working with her was great. She was always dedicated to the well-being of our students and loved our Dance team. Filling Ms. Young's shoes will be a challenging endeavor."

Young helped manage many schedule requests and wrote letters of recommendation for some of her senior students before she officially left on Aug. 31.

The vacancy was posted on education job site EdJoin as a full-time position on Aug. 25, and three candidates were

>> **COUNSELOR** on pg. 4

Students and staff attend Taiwan climate conference

BY AgastyaVitaldevara & DanielWu

Superintendent Bill Sanderson, district board president Katherine Tseng, STEM teachers Audrey Warmuth and Matthew Welander, and seniors Naomi Hsieh, Owen Liang and Eric Norris flew to Taiwan on Oct. 21 to attend the 7-day New Taipei City Multi-Action Green International Carbon Neutral (MAGIC) Youth Forum.

The visit came after a panel of 13 educators and government officials from Taipei City visited Saratoga High's STEM classes on Sept. 20 to observe teaching practices.

Organized by the Taiwan Education Department and New Taipei City government, MAGIC aims to create an international platform for mutual learning and exchange. Because this year's theme is "Carbon Neutral & Net Zero," the event also hoped to help schools implement environmental sustainability practices.

"We want to figure out what our schools and districts can improve upon in teaching methods, but also for implementing carbon neutral practices," Welander said.

The conference hosted over 100 student and teacher participants from countries across three continents, including Australia, France, Singapore and the U.S.

The event was divided into four parts over seven days: technical sustainability project presentations, collaborative work on projects that center on green innovation for future generations, industrial visits and in-school cultural exchange and learning.

Sanderson was scheduled to be a keynote speaker at the conference to talk about LGSUHS as an exemplar of STEM education. He planned to discuss the district's Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) implemented in classes as well as the in-

strumental power of student advocacy in bringing about environmental change. Students attending the conference presented sustainability projects that they worked on for months with Taiwanese school students.

Welander said that while SHS's student project is focused on engineering, other projects spanned a variety of topics. Los Gatos went to the conference in 2019 and did a project that bridged fashion design with engineering to create a jacket that could be heated with solar panels.

Seniors Hsieh, Liang and Norris have been collaborating since April with students from the Jhangshu Creative Technical High School in New Taipei City for their project: a bicycle that records the amount of carbon emissions saved compared to a car ride.

"The motivation for the project stemmed how can we let people see their impact of choosing a more eco-friendly option," Norris said. "It really is just, 'why take a car when a bike is more eco-friendly?'" ♦

>> **bigidea**

Taiwan Exchange Trip

Staff and Students in Attendance:
Superintendent Bill Sanderson, Board of Trustees President Katherine Tseng, Engineering teachers Audrey Warmuth and Matthew Welander and seniors Naomi Hsieh, Owen Liang and Eric Norris.

Itinerary Highlights:
7 days from Oct. 21 to 28; in-school exchanges with host schools such as the Jhangsu Creative Technical High School and Tamsui Vocational High School, biking excursions along the Taiwan coast and industrial visits to learn about sustainable environmental practices at the National Taipei University of Technology.

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newsbriefs

Drama program to hold student-directed plays

The drama program is hosting two student-directed productions: “Suite Surrender,” a play directed by senior Ryan Cagliostro and “Title of Show,” a musical directed by senior Ashly Henry.

The cast members of the drama program are preparing for the shows by rehearsing parts of the 90-minute play for an hour during tutorials and after school on Blue Days. Both shows, “Suite Surrender” and “Title of Show,” will be performed in the Thermond Drama Center on Dec. 7 and Dec. 9, respectively.

“Title of Show” is a musical revolving around four struggling playwrights, Susan, Hunter, Heidi and Jeff, who enter a script into the Broadway competition. The unexpected twist is that the script is about what happens to the writers themselves as they write their script. The four playwrights are played by sophomore Mia Ouchida as Susan, Venkatram as Hunter, junior Niraali Garg as Heidi and sophomore Benny Mercurio as Jeff.

For auditions, students prepared a monologue and selected a one-minute of a song of their choice to sing in front of Henry, who chose the cast.

“Suite Surrender,” a comedic play set in the summer of 1942 in Palm Springs, revolves around two famous actresses — Claudia McFadden, played by senior Margaret Laver, and Athena Sinclair, played by sophomore Nila Venkataratnam — who loathe each other and end up in the same hotel to raise funds for World War II. Chaos occurs as the hotel staff realizes that the two have been put in the same suite.

In a story with harsh feelings of hatred and characters with snobby personalities that differ from modern standards for respect, the cast members have found themselves trying to accurately express their characters.

“It’s just trying to connect with the characters and really get the story portrayed through those characters’ emotions,” Cagliostro said. ♦

— Richard Fan and Jeremy Si

ICAC hosts garba to bring together community

Vibrant fabrics adorned with flower garlands and delicate strings of lights decorated the walls of the gym lobby on Sept. 30, greeting hundreds of colorfully dressed guests as they entered the large gym for a Garba celebration.

This is the second year that the Indian Cultural Awareness Club (ICAC) has hosted Garba — a Gujarati celebration and style of dance. Participants also celebrate through dandiya, a Gujarati folk dance involving wooden sticks that are clacked together in a pattern to the beat of the music. Around 400 students and parents, including some from other schools, danced and ate at the 4-hour event.

Although smaller than last year’s sales, the event raised almost \$10,000, of which \$6,675 went to pay to caterers, the DJ and other small expenses like paper products, wristbands and decorations. Overall, the club raised roughly \$3,200.

“We had a good turnout and it seemed like people had fun,” senior club officer Anu Thakur said. “People enjoyed the food and dancing, and I would consider it a success.”

According to Thakur, the club officers — Thakur along with seniors Avik Belenje, Shyla Bhandari, Raghav Chakravarthi, Kavya Patel and Samik Pattanayak — and their parents began planning for the event during the summer through online Zoom meetings, discussing logistics including dates, decorations and catering.

The ICAC families also spent hours decorating the night before and on the whole day of the event. Loosely based on last year’s decorations, the centerpiece in the gym held a picture of Goddess Amma, a Hindu goddess of weather.

Though the set-up for such decorations and process of holding the 4-hour event was tedious, Thakur said it was an opportunity for the ICAC members to bond and spread their culture to the community.

“Festivals like Garba are pretty universal for all Indians, and I think it’s important to immerse people of different cultures into our culture,” Thakur said. ♦

— Anamika Anand and Kavya Patel

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Courtesy of COSMO COOPER

Death in the Theater | Students dramatically perform in a ComedySportz production held on Sept. 29 in the Thermond Drama Center. ComedySportz is an improv group sponsored by the school's drama club.

Gym upgrades on hold while solar project green lighted

by WilliamCao, EricShi & AgastyaVitaldevara

At its Oct. 17 meeting, the district boards announced the cancellation of major renovations for the school's gyms due to an unforeseen rise in costs, but moved forward with plans to install several solar panel carports in the front parking lot in late 2024. The district conducted a walk-through with interested vendors on Oct. 10 and subsequently filed a Request for Proposal (RFP). The approval of vendors by the Board is pending, with a deadline for vendor submissions set for mid-November.

The gym is often used by P.E. classes and student-athletes, resulting in many advocating for renovating the gyms' lockers and aging Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems. The main complaint is that the 1960-era gyms are either too hot when temperatures are warm outside and too cold in the winter, creating unsafe conditions.

However, despite preliminary estimates suggesting that the renovation costs would be around \$1 million, an updated review found that total costs were likely to surpass \$3.5 million, a sum that is more than the district can afford.

“We spent a lot of time during the summer meeting with the board to find a solution,” math teacher and girls' JV basketball coach Lisa Gintetset-Araki

said. “Now I’m just worried about what [the basketball team] is going to do in the winter.”

However, the board still plans to move forward with plans to install solar panels as an eco-friendly solution to power the school's energy needs. This decision comes after years of advocacy by student groups such as the Green Team and Green Committee.

An energy audit by Sage Energy Consulting found that using solar panels could save the school \$3.4 million over 25 years, with an annual reduction of 105 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

Installation of the eight large solar panel carports in the front parking lot is projected to cost around \$10 million and could begin as early as October 2024. Work on the addition of solar panels and a general overhaul of the school's energy system will split into two main phases: development and deployment.

The development phase will consist of five sub-phases, one of which is requesting a proposal for the overarching energy efficiency upgrade. The first three phases have been completed with the fourth nearing 25% completion.

The deployment phase will include the construction and installation of the solar panels, as well as the implementation of other energy efficiency solutions identified earlier. The current timeline indicates the final closeout of the deployment and installation phase will finish in November of 2024. ♦

Updates made to school technology

by DerekLiang & EricShi

This semester, the district implemented a new certificate-based WiFi system in efforts to boost cybersecurity. In addition to sweeping network changes, Saratoga High's official's website also received a major overhaul.

Julie Grenier, the district's director of technology, led the process for implementing the new WiFi system, which boasts a simplified login process with increased network stability. According to Grenier, the new wifi increases security and uses Single Sign On (SSO) for easier login. A major benefit is that students no longer have to reset their WiFi password at the start of every school year.

The new system simply requires students to download an external “SecureW2 Wrapper” and install a WiFi profile onto their devices. Afterwards, the WiFi will automatically connect.

However, some students, including senior Javed Mohideen, have voiced their grievances.

“The whole onboarding process was pretty extra and overly complicated considering that I’ve really seen no noticeable improvements over the old WiFi,” Mohideen said.



Grenier

Many students have decided to avoid the hassle of setting up their devices for the new network by using alternative WiFi networks or personal hotspots.

Mohideen also shared concerns regarding the privacy benefits, as the setup requires students to download packages on their devices.

However, Grenier said that the new certificate-based wifi system does not permit district members to access or view any files on students' devices, but it does restrict unauthorized outside access to the network.

In addition to the new WiFi system, the school's website was remodeled by a group led by Tanya de la Cruz, the public information officer. The site features a cleaner User Interface and a more intuitive navigation panel.

“Our district websites had not been updated in many years, so it was time for a new look,” Grenier said. “It also gave us the opportunity to update the site navigation and information presented on the website.”

The reaction to the new site has been positive. “It’s a really nicely put together site,” senior Yashom Kapoor said. “In terms of how easy it is to search for information, the website hasn’t changed much, but now that the UI looks a lot better, it’s more enjoyable to navigate the website.” ♦

Seniors honored at One Earth's film contest

by JaneLee

Five Media Arts Program (MAP) seniors — Simarya Ahuja, George Hu, Nicita Raam, Alex Shuey and Caitlin Weber — received honorable mention recognition for their film, “Environmental Justice,” at the One Earth Young Filmmakers Contest Awards held Sept. 17 in Chicago.

One Earth is an international contest for young filmmakers ages 8-25. Applicants have the chance to win up to \$1,000 in scholarships or cash and a \$1,000 matching grant.

All films must be related to ecology and are between 3 to 8 minutes.

The seniors’ 5-minute film was made in their junior year as part of American Issues documentary unit and sheds light on the environmental struggles of Kettleman City, Calif. The city is home to a Class 1 landfill and subsequently faces issues including chemicals in drinking water, air pollution and environmental racism.

Although the seniors didn’t earn any cash prizes, their film was played alongside the top 10 rated films and 11 other honorable mentions to an audience in Chicago that included contest participants.

“Environmental Justice” features clips showing Kettleman City’s landfill along with interviews with the city’s residents, such as



Courtesy of GEORGE HU

Seniors George Hu, Simarya Ahuja, Caitlin Weber and Alexa Shuey pose during SMASH’N.

Jorge Pacheco, an ethnic studies teacher in Menlo Park. In order to emphasize the severity of their environmental problems such as drinking water contamination, the film also included statistics about pollution set against a bright blue background.

The group made an effort to feature various voices from underprivileged residents

in Kettleman City in order to showcase how different affected members of the city have dealt with the polluted environment, Ahuja said.

“The five of us wanted to address environmental racism and how policies such as environmental regulation policies negatively and disproportionately affect low-income

BAND

continued from pg. 1

Cupertino High, which came in fourth with a score of 72.650.

Although bands are also judged and awarded within individual musical and visual categories in their respective divisions, out of the 13 bands total that competed at TOB within the 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A and 5A divisions, the SHS band’s score placed them third overall as well.

Lee credits percussion’s success to a rigorous practice regimen with rehearsals totaling three to four more hours per week than the rest of the band. In addition to regular Thursday night and Saturday rehearsals with the winds, they also have Monday night rehearsals.

“There’s a lot of pent up energy, it’s the first time you see the football stands packed with students cheering.”

JUNIOR Nathan Lee

Compared to most other performing bands in the area, SHS practices about five hours less per week, allowing students the flexibility to participate in other extracurriculars and focus on academics.

“I feel that given the amount of rehearsal that we had, getting the entire show on the field in that amount of time and still being able to compete with all these schools from Fresno and [those with 100+ more members than Saratoga] is impressive in itself,” Lee said.

Lee noted that a major shortcoming in the band’s performance was how members seemed to put all of their energy into the beginning of the show and their endurance wasn’t able to last through all four movements.

“There is a lot of pent-up energy [before performing] because you’re nervous and it’s a competition,” Lee said. “It’s the first time you see the football stands packed with people so I think the band performed pretty well given the amount of pressure.”

It is the first year since pre-COVID times that the band has taken their complete show to TOB. In recent years, they have performed their last movement standstill at TOB, playing the music without incorporating the field parts. Lee notes that this success may have come at the cost of other aspects like getting used to the pressure of performing for an audience and refining visual and musical details.

According to music director Jason Shiuan, the band’s 76 freshmen have played an immense role in influencing how the group performs as an ensemble, and the learning curve for them has been steep. For many members, this is the first year they have been in a marching band, as COVID restrictions prevented them from learning marching basics at Redwood Middle School.

“I think just being in a competition setting the first time is what really gets freshmen to know what marching band is all about,” Lee said. “They have been giving a lot of effort, but now that they know that there are judges who are taking points off for everything we do and we’re being watched all the time, they have to start pushing themselves more.”

“Call of the Unknown,” this year’s theme, has four movements: an opener, a ballad, a percussion feature and a closer. The show was largely inspired by “Hymn of Axiom,” a hymn written by Class of 1996 alumna Vienna Teng, who has achieved popular success as a pianist and singer and songwriter. Although the hymn speaks about surveillance by modern technology and the desire for human connection, Shiuan chose to take a different abstract approach when writing the show’s music.

“We always have a show theme for our students,” Shiuan said. “This year, the idea is to push your limits and boundaries and explore something beyond your comfort level. And then once you do find that comfort, keep going because there’s still more unknown beyond that.”

The concept behind the show originated last April. Each year, Shiuan begins by discussing “big picture ideas” with percussion teacher Sean Clark, later refining the visual and musical details over the summer and throughout the season with educators such as color guard instructor Russell Crow, Visual Caption Head Katherine K. Rasmussen, percussion teacher Chavadiith Tantavirojin



Courtesy of ISABELLE GECILS

Marching band members in formation practice their Cupertino competition routine.

and Clark.

“One of the original ideas we had was simply just 360 or a revolution,” Shiuan said. “Something spinning, actually, was the original concept. But then, as we started to map things out, we felt like it was a little too abstract. We thought that the concept of [exploring] the unknown was more concrete.”

Apart from the reference to the hymn in Movement 1 by French horn soloist junior Ryan Sanders and in Movement 2 by junior mellophone player Anika Kapasi, the show’s music is completely original.

“We’re pushing our limits and exploring beyond our comfort level.”



MUSIC DIRECTOR Jason Shiuan

With a woodwind trio in Movement 2 consisting of seniors clarinet player Jay Lim, flute player Eric Miao and saxophone player Vidur Sanghi, the show is followed by a percussion feature in Movement 3. The show closes out with faint references to the hymn amid a powerful whole-ensemble finale.

communities, communities of color and minorities,” Ahuja said.

During their process of creating the film, the five students first planned their film by conducting research, writing a script, recording a voiceover and making graphics. They then proceeded to film interviews and finalized edits for their film by December.

The MAP students split the workload with Hu, Shuey and Weber in charge of obtaining interviews, Ahuja in writing the script, Shuey and Ahuja in making graphics and Raamkumar in recording the voiceover.

The film won in the American Issues documentary category during the 2023 SMASH’N event, an end-of-the-year celebration of work done in the program.

When Hu brought up the idea of competing in a wide array of film competitions, the team readily agreed without any serious expectations of winning. While the students felt incredibly surprised that their film won an honorable mention award at One Earth, they emphasized that they are glad that their film got greater nationwide exposure from outside the school after being recognized.

“It was really nice to come to terms with the fact that a lot of people got to see it... it’s not like people are looking through documentaries and finding it themselves,” Shuey said. “[One Earth Young Filmmakers Contest] actually showing it is a big deal.” ♦

>> falconfigures

75

woodwind section members

57

brass section members

38

percussion section members

31

color guard members

Green Committee takes on eco-friendly projects

By JaneLee

The school's Green Committee — a roughly 30-member initiative with staff, students and parents — is continuing to work on ambitious projects in hopes of making the school more eco-friendly and has even enjoyed a major success recently.

The district board, at its Oct. 17 meeting, has agreed to move forward on installing solar panel carports in the front parking lot. This was a notable success for the committee, which has often advocated for solar power on campus. The first deployment phase of the project could begin late in 2024.

This year, the committee has planned several new projects: they hope to convince the administration to add more hydration stations to refill water bottles and implement new policies to eliminate single-use plastics in the entire school.

"[Eliminating single-use plastics] is the main goal because once we pass that rule, we don't have to go through the music program or go to the sports program individually and ask them to get rid of single use plastics," senior Kyleen Liao said. "Instead, it'll be just one whole thing that can be in effect across the entire school."

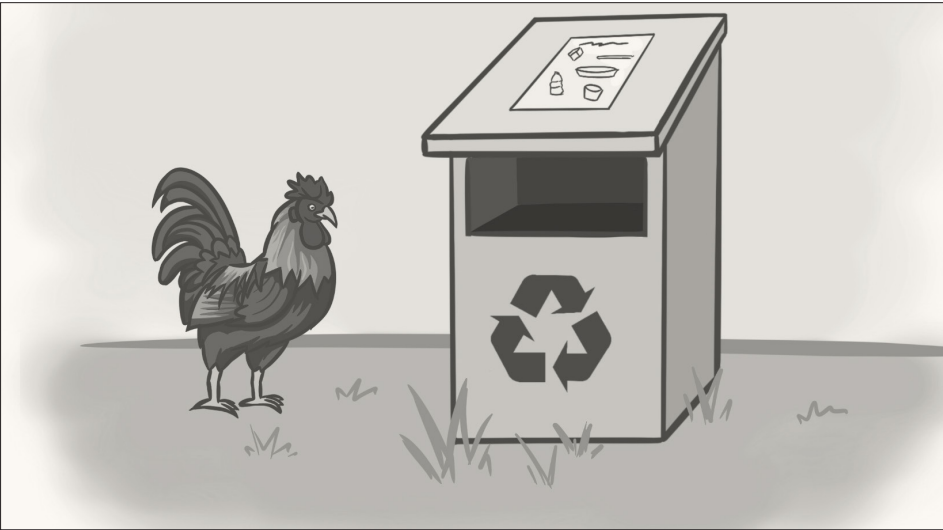
Last year, one of the Green Committee's projects was creating laminated posters to sort the trash, compost and recycling bins. They also influenced other groups to follow more eco-friendly practices — for instance, during the Saratoga Music Boosters' annual Pancake Breakfast event, single-use plastic utensils were replaced with compostable items. In addition, the cafeteria has also shifted to using mainly recyclable or compostable dishes and utensils.

"It's amazing because a year ago, we hardly had anything that was recyclable," assistant principal Matt Torrens said.

However, committee members such as Liao are still concerned about the overall lack of eco-awareness in the community.

"I used to live in Germany. In Europe, the practices about the environment are very different," Liao said. "They're a lot more cognizant about what to use and how to limit waste."

As a result, the committee also plans to work on outreach to students and staff about recycling. Their current outreach projects are an upcoming speaker series, Instagram reels and a blurb in principal Greg Louie's Friday newsletter about how to use the trash bins.



Graphic by AMY MIAO

Many of these projects, however, do not come without challenges.

Because the water fountains sometimes have plumbing systems in concrete, it is expensive to redo all the plumbing, making it difficult to install new hydration stations.

The committee is not fundraising for this project, but rather encouraging the school's

administration to provide the school and its students with this change. Nevertheless, the committee will continue to make the school's campus eco-friendly in other ways.

"We're just really excited for this for this year and we have a lot of great ideas," Liao said. "We have a lot of fun projects coming up and we're excited to get that done." ♦

School sees unexpected influx in freshman enrollment

By EricShi & KevinYang

This year's freshman class is larger than in recent years, shattering trends of decreasing student enrollment since 2016. The enrollment for the Class of 2024 was 294 freshmen and for the Class of 2025 was 285. The Class of 2027 has 305 students — nearly 30 more students than the Class of 2026, which only has 279.

According to guidance counselor Brian Safine, the main reason behind the surprising spike in freshman class size is a larger than usual number of students coming in from overseas and private schools. School registrar Robert Wise theorizes that the main reasons behind past years' decline in enrollment are a stagnant overall city population and the increasing median age in

Saratoga, where the average house costs roughly \$3.6 million according to Zillow and families struggle to afford housing.

Compared to neighboring cities like San Jose, whose population increased from 800,000 to almost 1 million people in the last 30 years, Saratoga, with a population of 28,473, has had roughly the same population, which causes declining enrollment.

Additionally, due to Saratoga's higher than average age, with a median of around 50 compared to the next highest median age of about 40 in Cupertino, there is a higher concentration of older residents. This also means there are fewer younger families with children attending Saratoga public schools.

Safine notes there are many possible factors that influence a school's enrollment numbers, including enrollment from overseas, neighboring districts and students

transferring from Los Gatos High.

"One thing that attracts me to Saratoga is the community," freshman Ethan Tian, who previously attended Stratford Middle School, said. "It's competitive and everyone here is hardworking."

However, there is still a level of variability to future class sizes, and Safine emphasizes that it remains difficult to estimate freshman class size and transfer enrollment rates.

An increase in enrollment can be a double-edged sword, Safine said. While a larger student body does mean increased participation in programs and clubs like band and robotics, it also results in greater demands for increases in staffing and sometimes larger classes.

English 9 MAP teacher Suzanne Herzman has experienced firsthand the effects of the unexpected increase in freshman class

size. While the district made a commitment to keep freshman English class sizes low in 2008, Herzman has seen this policy has been slowly eroding over the years.

After teaching in Singapore last year, Herzman returned to an unprecedented 32 person average class size in her English 9 MAP classes.

Due to this, she has faced challenges such as creating small groups for various group projects. As such, Herzman reiterates her stance that the district should aim to provide smaller student to teacher ratios in classrooms.

"It's really hard to conduct certain class activities with over 30 students, especially for such an interactive class like English," Herzman said. "Overall, I don't know that it's best for freshman students to be at full capacity in those English classes." ♦

"I feel like [my experience] was a really important tale that you can have passion and aptitude for something, but that doesn't mean that's what you need to pursue as a career in terms of satisfaction," Jones said. "I try to encourage students to keep the blinds open, because having tunnel vision can obscure all these fabulous things that could be great for us."

Working as an adviser in three countries

After earning her Master of Educational Psychology, Jones became a university adviser and high school counselor at the nearby Edina High School in Edina, Minnesota. However, she soon discovered that she wasn't learning as much as she could. Hungry for international experiences, she became a university adviser and high school counselor at Escola Americana Do Rio Janeiro in Rio, Brazil.

After working autonomously in Rio for two years, however, Jones longed to work in a team. In 2019, she joined a high school in Hong Kong as part of a team of eight counselors. While she said it was "incredibly difficult" to make decisions with a large team, she learned to be more inclusive while evaluating multiple perspectives.

"I developed more confidence in myself, and I feel like I'm a better team member after years of practicing," Jones said.

While Jones will sometimes make suggestions, she includes students in counseling sessions with parents for important decisions that may have a potentially significant impact on a student's future.

"It's about having this patience as a counselor and meeting a student where they are at that moment, serving their current levels of stress," Jones said. "I try my best to work with what each student presents me." ♦

From high tech to high school hallways: Former engineer joins science faculty as a physics teacher

By BryanZhao

On a typical day, new Physics teacher Tom Casavant delves into the complex curriculum of the AP Physics 1 and 2 class in front of a classroom full of inquisitive students. Occasionally he pauses and then explains the links between the class concepts and the vast knowledge he has accumulated through his years on the frontline of innovation in optics and defense as an engineer at Lockheed Martin, a large defense and aerospace company.

Casavant became interested in teaching in 2005 when he worked with his son on a science fair project. Casavant guided him as his son devised a detector for the mass of weakly interacting massive particles, a candidate theory for dark matter.

After seeing students work on projects in various STEM fields and traveling to international science fairs, he was inspired to help other students achieve their dreams of excelling in STEM subjects. So, he transferred from his previous career as an optical engineer at Lockheed Martin to pursue teaching, obtaining his teaching credentials while working full-time.

At Lockheed Martin, Casavant worked on synthesizing images from satellites through waves, which is based on the bend-

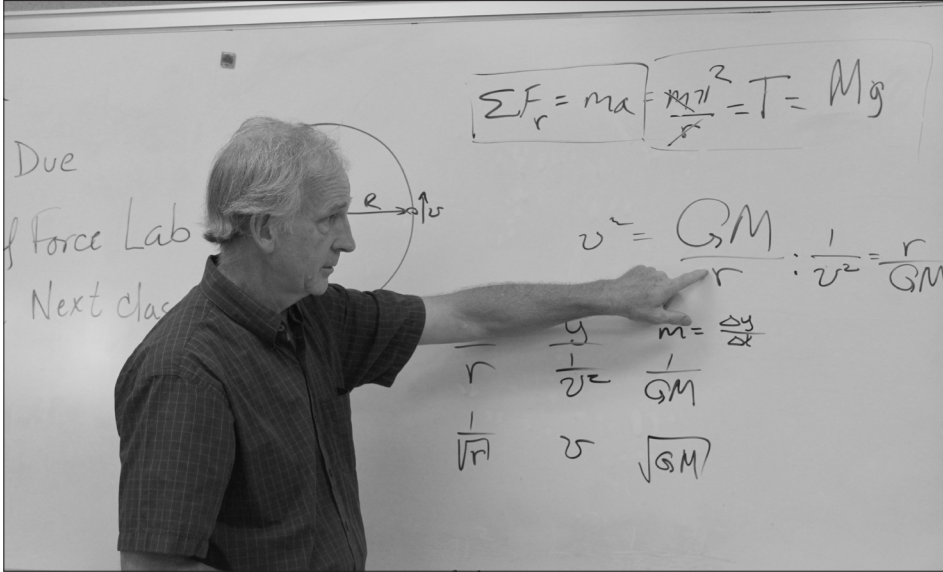


Photo by BRYAN ZHAO

Physics teacher Tom Casavant points to a formula on the whiteboard in the front of his classroom on Sept. 27. The formula details the velocity of an object in a circular orbit.

ing of light and how light reacts with different materials. Images from the satellites would then be used by the military for future planning and defense. By connecting many of the concepts taught in class to real-life applications from his job, he said he

hopes to give students a glimpse into possible future professions that an understanding of physics will allow them.

After leaving the optics and defense industry, Casavant taught at Gunn High School for a year and a half. He said the

atmosphere here is similar, with many students taking rigorous college-level classes.

One difference he notices at Saratoga High, however, is that there are "talented kids wherever you go [on campus]," whereas at other schools there might be only one or two types of these students in a class. He said he is awed at the number of students here who are multi-talented and versatile.

Junior Ashish Goswami, one of Casavant's students, said the class has a lively atmosphere.

"Mr. Casavant's class is highly interactive since each of his questions involves multiple students," he said. "He tells lots of jokes and makes the overall atmosphere light and fun, and his overall physics knowledge is undeniable."

Goswami said he is looking forward to the satellites unit, in which Casavant will help enrich the unit with his previous experience in the industry.

When asked whether he has any regrets about leaving the cutting-edge section of industry in his new teaching career, Casavant smiles as he cheerfully says, "It's impossible to not have regrets, but I'm happy with where I am. The students, colleagues and administration have all been great. I'm very happy and Saratoga High is a pretty special place." ♦

Staff spirit house program sparks unity and excitement

By SashaPrasad & KathyWang

The administration has taken a page out of the wizarding world of Harry Potter and begun a Hogwarts-like spirit house program in an effort to boost staff participation in activities such as sports games and rallies.

The program was launched on Sept. 13 by activities director and assistant principal Kristen Cunningham, who first learned about the concept of spirit houses after attending a conference. Staff members have been put into teams that compete for points by attending student-related school events to support students.

"I feel that as the activities director, one of my goals and aspirations in that role is to create a sense of belonging and community

for students so that when they look back on their experience, they remember it fondly and want to come back," Cunningham said.

“One of my goals and aspirations in that role is to create a sense of belonging and community for students.”

AP Kristen Cunningham

Cunningham collaborated with guidance counselor Brian Safine to create a system in which staff members are randomly dispersed between four groups, represented by the col-

ors red, blue, gray, and white. Participation in the program is not mandatory for staff members, though highly encouraged and many are having fun with it.

Staff primarily earn points by attending sports games, dances and rallies. Points can also be earned by participating in quad-day events. The school decided to honor coaches and class advisers on campus by giving them 50 points to begin with. At the end of the semester, the team with the most points will receive a budget to spend \$500 on a prize of their choice.

Currently, there are 342 instances of staff members actively participating in the Staff Spirit House program. (Staff members self-report the points they earn.) Cunningham and Safine are both members of the red team — named the "Red Renegades" —

which is currently in the lead.

Cunningham has already extensively participated in Homecoming activities by collaborating with the spirit commission to pick themes, designing T-shirts and participating in the quad day dance. Wellness center lead therapist Shobha Vaidyanathan, another member of the "Red Renegades" team, has dedicated her time to creating a weekly pie chart that tracks the points of each team.

"Our students spend a lot of time on activities like music, drama, sports, robotics, their club activities, and I think it helps validate a student's efforts by seeing other community members including their teachers, at their events," Safine said. "The Staff Spirit House Program benefits community building, supporting students and builds camaraderie amongst the staff." ♦

COUNSELOR

continued from pg. 1

interviewed on Sept. 8, Louie said. After reference checks were conducted that week-end, the position was offered to Jones on Sept. 11, and she officially joined the counseling team on Oct. 3.

Between Young's departure and Jones' arrival, each of the three remaining counselors — Eileen Allen, Brian Safine and Frances Saiki — took additional responsibility to support her students with schedule requests and college application concerns. Jones will be caring for her students' scheduling issues, seniors' college application materials and other academic and behavioral support.

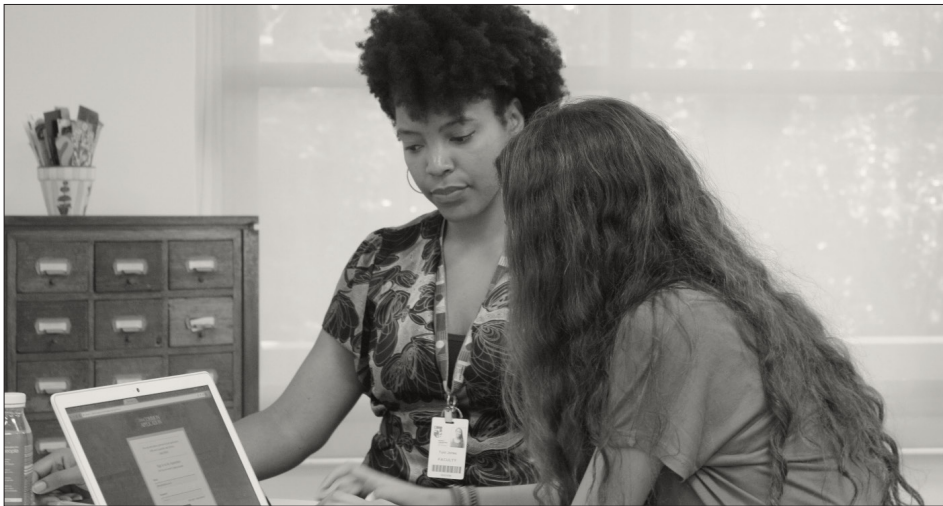
"I'm learning a lot each day, but it's primarily a matter of learning Saratoga High systems," Jones said. "The general senior support practice has proven very familiar."

Over the past 16 years, Jones has worked as a university adviser at five schools in three different continents. She said her decision to join each school was largely motivated by the personal goals she hoped to achieve at each institution.

“I’m learning a lot each day, but it’s primarily a matter of learning Saratoga High systems.”

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR Toni Jones

"A goal of mine is to pull some of the fabulous professional practices [working with a team of eight counselors] that I gathered in Hong Kong and to use them here because



Courtesy of TONI JONES

Guidance counselor Toni Jones works with a student at Escola Americana Do Rio Janeiro.

they worked so well, while also relinquishing anything that doesn't align with this environment," Jones said.

Discovering her passion for counseling

During her undergraduate years at Emory University, Jones earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, concentrating in African-American Literature, and a minor in Portuguese/Brazilian studies. Her academic interests were heavily motivated by her high school experiences, where she discovered she had an aptitude for language in writing. Her interest in Portuguese/Brazilian studies sprung from Spanish classes in high school. Jones recalls seeing a large map of South America in her classroom, with a "massive country grayed-out" and unacknowledged by the curriculum. Jones's curiosity would draw her to study abroad in Rio for six weeks during her undergraduate years.

The inspiration she gained from talks with prominent scholars, including poet Rita Dove and professor Lawrence Jackson — whom she worked with closely for a Chester Himes biography project — inspired her to pursue a Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Minnesota under a scholarship grant. Her decision unexpectedly led her to discover a career in counseling.

"Because I had so little of what I needed to feel seen as a high-achieving young Black student and so little African-American literature and history, I was really inspired to pursue doctoral studies," Jones said.

Additionally motivated by her experiences with high school students working as an admission adviser at Emory as an undergraduate, Jones transferred out of her American Studies program and into a master's degree program at the University of Minnesota for counseling psychology.

7 SHS female mathletes travel to MIT for elite contest

By JessicaLi & AmyMiao

Of the 250 girls from across the country invited to the annual Math Prize for Girls (MP4G), seven were from SHS and three of them finished in the top 20.

The contest, held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on Oct. 8, turned out to be a success for senior Victoria Hu, who finished in 15th place — with her overall score tied for 7th. She was awarded \$1,000 for her ranking.

"Since it's my last year being able to compete in this competition, I felt like it was a really good way to wrap up my contest journey," Hu said. "I felt a bit of pressure to perform well, so I'm glad that I ended on a high note."

Along with Hu, freshman Vivian Zhong and junior Ishani Agarwal also made the top 20 leaderboard, with both tying for 19th.

The school's representation at the international contest spanned all grade levels — Zhong, sophomore Ella Li, junior Agarwal and seniors Lynn Dai, Hu, Medha Ravi and Nidhi Vadlamudi all attended.

To qualify for MP4G, students had to first apply using scores from last year's American Mathematics Competitions (AMC 10/12) contests. This year, the cut-off scores were

109.5, 111, 102 and 97.5 for AMC 10A, 10B, 12A and 12B respectively, meaning that roughly the top 250 female applicants were accepted.

The contest remains a popular option for girls because of its lucrative cash prizes worth up to \$50,000 and the opportunity it provides for like-minded girls to meet. The contest serves to inspire girls to follow careers in math.

The 2-day event featured a diverse selection of activities, including Harry Potter-themed math talks during the afternoon on Oct. 7. Later that evening, there was also a game night with catered dining, icebreaker activities, paper crafts and board game tables.

The following day, contestants took the 2.5-hour, 20-question test consisting of problems from four categories — number theory, geometry, combinatorics and algebra.

Zhong said she entered the testing center confidently, feeling both well prepared and with high ambitions.

"A while back, I realized there wasn't really any point to worrying about and getting nervous about the test because it's pretty counterproductive, and I held on to that mindset during the test itself," she said. "In the end, my placement was super shocking to me because I didn't think I'd rank that high, but it felt really cool and exciting."



Courtesy of VIVIAN ZHONG

Freshman Vivian Zhong (far right) and junior Ishani Agarwal (third from left) are awarded metals for tying 19th place at the Math Prize for Girls awards ceremony on Oct. 8.

Zhong prepared for MP4G by completing mock exams with friends and attending competitive math training programs such as G2 to introduce herself to advanced Olympiad topics.

However, experiencing high-level competition was only the beginning of what imprints Zhong took away from MP4G. In addition to an immersive math experience, she got the opportunity to meet and form

friendships with mathletes she has admired for years.

"I've always wanted to meet my role models like Hannah Fox, who was the only USA-JMO gold receiver to achieve a perfect score on the test last year," Zhong said. "I'm glad I had the opportunity to be friends with her personally and be surrounded by a group of like-minded girls in an environment where I'm not judged and feel like I belong." ♦

Elderly find community at the Saratoga Senior Center

by AmyLuo
& KathyWang

On a visit to the Saratoga Area Senior Center Council (SASCC), you may stumble upon a crowd of elderly people in their 70s and 80s waltzing to vibrant Chinese music. The karaoke verses flow on a TV screen and content smiles spread across their faces. Other seniors sit at nearby tables, singing and nodding along to the lively music.

The karaoke class is just one of the various activities offered at the SASCC, which was established in 1979. The SASCC is a branch of the nonprofit Successful Aging Solutions & Community Consulting, formerly known as the Saratoga Area Senior Coordinating Council. Its mission is to provide access to physical and social activities along with resource services that improve the overall quality of life for seniors living in Saratoga.

The other three branches include the Adult Care Center, which aids less independent seniors with mental or physical health disorders, the Outlook, a local publication-and the Ryde, a transportation program for seniors.

The SASCC is not a residential facility, but rather a recreational center for people over 55. On Tuesdays through Thursdays, members can stop by between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. for a variety activities, including Tai Chi, quilting, ukulele, ping pong, memoir writing and yoga. Each class is either free or offered at low prices of around \$5.

“We try to have a balance on physical ac-



Photo by KATHY WANG

Seniors sit among groups listening to one performance during their weekly karaoke activity.

tivity of classes and classes where you can learn things so there are a range of activities,” program specialist Samuel Leale said. “Over time, we develop new activities — like at the end of this month, we’ll have Zumba classes going on.”

Leale, who has a master’s degree in gerontology, has worked at SASCC for six months. He said he finds fulfillment in improving the lives of older adults, especially since he is able to interact and establish close friendships with them.

“I work here to meet people, learn their stories and think of ways to make life better for them, to make it a place they want to come to,” Leale said. “Many older adults are

alone or don’t have great support systems, or in general are kind of forgotten.”

Similarly, operations manager Raj Kaur, who has been working at SASCC for seven years, likes that “not one day is the same.” Kaur has observed that people tend to stigmatize senior centers and think that they are “a boring, dull place for old people.”

“I mean, these [seniors] can make you sweat in ping pong,” Kaur said. “It’s more fun being here than people realize. There probably aren’t many places where people can really say ‘my job’s different every day.’ Working here is almost like a challenge because I’m like ‘what am I going to deal with today?’ in a good way.”

Ping pong is one of the most well-attended activities at the SASCC, with up to 50 participants. Every Monday, Tuesday and Friday, volunteers will set up five to six tennis tables for the seniors. They often play for up to four hours.

Another popular activity among the seniors is karaoke, which takes place every Wednesday. Seniors must sign up on a whiteboard and are allowed to perform up to two songs each turn.

“For something like karaoke, it doesn’t matter whether it’s young or elderly people,” senior member Belleza Chou said. “As long as you like the music, it’s really great.”

Chou has been a member of the SASCC since 2016. After retirement, she sought something meaningful to dedicate her time towards. After one of her friends donated to the SASCC to open up ping pong as an official event, Chou began playing ping pong at the SASCC — which later spurred her to start volunteering there.

“We love the friendly staff,” Chou said. “It’s a social exercising opportunity, and everybody enjoys it. I would say this is a great place.”

While the SASCC has since developed and increased the variety of activities offered, its core mission of bringing the senior community together remains the same.

“In this place, it’s people’s lives that you’re experiencing every day, and some people come in and are having a great day and some people are not, but they’re still here,” Leale said. “You still get to live that with them a little bit.” ♦

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

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MVHS censorship incident underscores need for independent student journalism

Recently, Hanna Olson, a senior who is the editor-in-chief of Mountain View High School’s Oracle student newspaper, and its former adviser, Carla Gomez, have threatened to sue MVHS’s administration over alleged censorship of the publication and the removal of Gomez from her position.

According to a letter written by their lawyer, Jean-Paul Jassy, the administration pressured writers last spring to significantly alter an article documenting sexual assault among students, published May 8, with principal Kip Glazer allegedly telling the newspaper’s staff members that the article would reflect poorly on the school and there could be “catastrophic consequences” for the publication.

Student journalists serve a crucial role within communities.

Controversial topics like sexual misconduct, LGBTQ+ rights, child pornography and even vaccinations have all been subject to censorship by administrators in high schools across the nation.

This marks a dangerous trend: A student press is rendered defunct if it is subject to the whims of those we are meant to hold accountable.

Student journalists are held to the same ethical codes and legal guidelines as professional journalists, but across the nation, student journalists do not always share the same protections as their professional counterparts.

Over 60% of publications at 4-year public institutions have faced some form of censorship, which can range from defunding the publication to outright silencing journalists, as Glazer has

been accused of doing.

The First Amendment right to freedom of journalistic expression is subverted by administrators taking advantage of the 1988 Supreme Court’s *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* decision. The verdict, siding with the principal, stated, “Educators did not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the content of student speech so long as their actions were ‘reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.’”

The Hazelwood decision does not apply to California public schools.

Instead, student publications here are governed by the state’s educational code. Perhaps not knowing or not caring about the greater protections enjoyed by student journalists in California and a handful of other states, the principal allegedly sought to water down a story about sexual assault to maintain the school’s image.

Then the administration allegedly took it one step further by getting rid of the Introduction to Journalism class this year.

While the school may have been within their legal rights to remove this class under the excuse of low enrollment, it was a bad-faith decision that will severely impede the publication in the coming years as the pipeline of students in the program dries up.

Even when schools provide minimal funding for journalism programs, administrators can still interfere with the publication.

Student journalists should function as independent journalists under the direction of an adult adviser, but are often treated by administrators as an extension of the school’s public relations department — essentially, they’re told they can’t make the school look bad even if what



LEYNA CHAN

they write is the truth.

As journalists, students must learn to seek the truth and publish stories without fear or favor, pointing out the bad along with the good.

Glazer’s alleged suppression of The Oracle on multiple fronts speaks volumes to the prevalence of censorship in student journalism, even in liberal states like California.

Though eliminating the class may be within the school’s rights, pressuring writers to change the article and reassigning the adviser just to protect the school’s image undermines the ethos of good journalism and teaches the wrong lessons.

Student journalists serve a crucial role within communities and are the cornerstone of a free press.

Every school deserves to have real student journalism, and every student publication deserves

an environment where they aren’t punished for or threatened for doing their essential work of tackling tough, sometimes uncomfortable issues.

If the First Amendment’s protection of journalistic expression can discriminate between a classroom and a newsroom, it has failed to protect journalists everywhere.

“Just the premise of wanting to have so much influence over the publication of this article was, to me, a violation of the rights of the publication,” Olson recently told the Mountain View Voice.

The removal of Gomez and the Introduction to Journalism class was unacceptable.

The MVHS administration needs to bring back Gomez as The Oracle’s adviser and make a good-faith effort going forward to support independent student journalism. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 33-2 in favor of this article.

CA EV mandate does more harm than good

by RichardFan
& AlecGuan

In an attempt to combat the planet’s continuously rising carbon emissions, Gov. Gavin Newsom recently issued an executive order mandating the purchase of new gasoline-powered vehicles be halted by 2035. Although at first glance this order may seem beneficial in the fight against climate change, there are several issues — both financial and, ironically, environmental — rooted within the idealistic and unrealistic nature of Newsom’s new mandate.

One of the major issues with the mandate is the financial aspect of making expensive electric vehicles the sole option for residents.

According to an article in the Observer, the average cost of buying a gas vehicle is around \$44,000, while the average cost of an electric vehicle is around \$67,000.

And although some may argue that going electric will save consumers’ money in the long run because they’re not filling up their gas tank, other costs undermine this hopeful equation.

According to calculations that factor in a car’s original cost, the average annual cost to maintain a gas vehicle is \$8,691, while the cost of maintaining an electric vehicle is about \$10,360.

Newsom’s new mandate will not only place financial burden on the consumers, but it will also prove crippling for the car companies.

First of all, the automaking industry makes up 3% of the global economy, and we’ve seen in the past that slowdowns in the auto industry also lead to problems in the global economy and supply chain.

For example, the automobile part shortage two years ago cost many people their jobs and \$210 billion in economic losses.

Slowdowns within the automaking industry will also lead to problems in the global supply chain.

Second, facing such a strict mandate, car makers might revolt and could just stop selling the necessary volume of vehicles here.

On the environmental side, EVs also have their downsides, namely, the overmining of rare earth metals like lithium in countries such as Venezuela and Brazil. Mining a ton of lithium takes approximately 2.2 million liters of water and has a dangerous risk of polluting local water sources, according to the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustain-

ability. Extracting these materials is extremely energy-intensive and massively degrades the land that the mining takes place on.

Although the mining of these minerals may not be as harmful to the whole environment as gas-powered cars, the initial environmental footprint of electric vehicles is worse at the beginning of the vehicle’s lifespan.

There are even some batteries that have a shorter lifespan than the time it takes to pay back the carbon footprint, which completely defeats the purpose of electric vehicles.

Scientists warn that we are reaching the point when climate change becomes irreversible, and this massive undertaking to convert the auto industry to electric might just be what completely tips the scale.

So far, most Californians have yet to consider the real-world implications of Newsom’s mandate. Taking smaller positive steps one at a time is much better than imposing such a drastic restriction on Californians. ♦

Debate teams mark a strong start to the season

by EmmaFung
& AnthonyLuo

As sophomores Jet Tsang and Bryan Zhao nervously headed into their first round at the Nano Nagle Invitational at Presentation High in San Jose on Oct. 6, they took a deep breath, clearing their minds. After smoothing his suit and finalizing his opening statement, Zhao stood up and gave his constructive speech arguing why an increased U.S. military presence in the Arctic would be detrimental to national interests.

Alongside sophomore Anthony Luo and junior Skyler Mao, who made it to finals and placed second overall at the Nano Nagle, the four competitors also attended the Yale Invitational the week before on Sept. 29, where Tsang and Zhao placed 21st seed, while Luo and Mao placed second.

Competing in tournaments like the Nano Nagle — one of the most competitive tournaments in the Bay Area — and the Yale Invitational was a culmination of an entire summer’s worth of research and preparation. For Tsang and Zhao, this meant attending summer camps with Nova Debate, where they hammered in both their fundamental and advanced debate skills.

“After finding out we lost, I definitely felt sad and angry that we had let that happen to us.”

SOPHOMORE Bryan Zhao

Public forum debates consist of back-and-forth speeches between two teams on opposite sides of a topic “ripped from the headlines,” which is selected based on a nationwide vote polling of students and coaches a month before tournaments begin during that cycle. For September and October of this year, the topic selected was “Resolved: The United States Federal Government should substantially increase its military presence in the Arctic.”

“I personally didn’t really like [the topic] since there’s a lot of ambiguity about the exact definitions,” Zhao said. “That led to a lot of debate around whether scenarios would actually happen or what defines a substan-



Photo by ANTHONY LUO

Sophomore Anthony Luo and junior Skyler Mao pose with their second-place trophies outside of Presentation High School after competing in the Nano Nagle Invitational on Oct. 8.

tial increase in military presence.”

Tsang enjoyed debating modern-day geopolitics, especially those concerning the U.S., Russia and China. Both partners had to prepare evidence, arguments and responses on both sides of the topic to set themselves up for success at the tournaments.

Preparations accelerated once practices started in September, and on Sept. 29, Tsang and Zhao competed in the online Yale Invitational tournament alongside two other public forum teams from the school.

Their performance reflected their efforts well, as they won five of six preliminary rounds and placed 21st of 289 teams. During their second elimination round, however, the team focused their efforts on one argument but missed one of their opponents’ response to it, a mistake that caused a loss and knocked them out the bracket.

“After finding out we lost, I definitely felt sad and angry that we had let that happen to us,” Zhao said. “But I also felt a spark inside that motivated me to want to improve and win in the future.”

The overall team performance was strong, with Luo and Mao going undefeated in preliminary rounds and ultimately placing second seed.

According to Zhao, a large factor in their loss was because online tournaments often prevent clear speech and enunciated voices. Zhao recalls that during the invitational, his voice was muffled due to WiFi issues, mak-

ing his speech less coherent to the judges.

Though the team was slightly disappointed by the results, they still found the experience to be enjoyable and had high morale going into the Nano Nagle Invitational.

“During in-person tournaments, you’re able to get to know your opponents better and express yourself more to the judges using body movements and such,” Zhao said.

At Nano Nagle, the team as a whole performed well. Luo and Mao went 4-2 in preliminary rounds, advancing through the bracket and ending up losing the finals round. They placed second overall, qualifying for the prestigious Tournament of Champions in April.

Tsang and Zhao went 3-3, preventing them from qualifying for the elimination rounds.

For Tsang and Zhao, although the in-person tournament provided more interactive and clear-cut debates, other problems arose from standing in front of real people. Since they had only been partners for a few months, coordination within each round proved to be a challenge. They look forward to honing their communication skills for future tournaments such as the John Lewis SVUDL Invitational on Nov. 17.

“I think that we need to work more on the substance of the argument itself, but also refine our speaking skills to ensure that the judges see that we are passionate and knowledgeable about our topic,” Zhao said. ♦

Summer precollege programs not meaningful enough to justify the steep price of attendance

BY BeverlyXu

Imagine spending your summer as a student at Brown University — sitting in the classes, roaming the streets of quaint Providence, Rhode Island, and interacting with Ivy League professors — all while you are still in high school.

This is the main selling point of one of Brown's pre-college programs — Summer@Brown — and other similar pre-college programs that many students choose to spend their summers at. In short, pre-college programs allow students to take college classes, occasionally earn college credits and meet “like-minded peers.”

What always fails to find its place on pre-college homepages is the exorbitant price.

Summer@Brown, Brown's 4-week, on-campus program burdens attendees with an \$8,011 program fee, and University of Pennsylvania's 5-week, on-campus program costs a shocking \$20,962.

That's more than the cost of one year at a UC. These costs raise the question: Is a pre-college program really worth the cost?

Pre-college opportunities allow students to take college classes, earn credit and meet “like-minded peers.”

The short answer is no. The long answer is: It depends.

It depends on what you want to get out of the program — if you are just looking to get one to three units of college credit (which comes at a pricey premium), to make a diverse range of friends (albeit income-restrictive), to escape from Saratoga for the summer, and — most importantly — if your parents do not mind the price tag, go for it.

However, for students looking to increase their chances of getting into the school where the camp is hosted, find internships with the professors that teach their classes or take irreplicably enlightening college courses, attending pre-college programs is not some kind of magic bullet.

There are much better and more cost-effective options.

According to admissions officers interviewed by the Washington Post, prestigious universities typically offer these pre-college programs to make money from their otherwise empty dorms and lecture halls during the summer, a time when most undergraduates are off-campus.

By feeding false hope of undergraduate admission and using buzzwords like Stanford's “intellectually passionate pre-college students” and Brown's “challenging academics,” programs sell the image of being rigorous and selective, when in reality, there isn't much prestige behind them.

Again, take Brown, for example. With my questionable “essays” written in a day, I was accepted to Summer@Brown. Although I am admittedly only one example, most SHS students with a GPA above 3.5 are more likely to get in than not.

As Christine Kim, a former assistant director of admissions at Yale said in an interview with CBS News about pre-college programs: “While acceptance isn't guaranteed, a high school record of at least straight Bs should suffice.”

Many equivalent courses, minus the creative titles, can be found at community colleges or the UC Scout program, without the substantial charge.

For example, an alternative to University of Pennsylvania Pre-College's fancy-sounding “The Social Contract” course is West Valley College's Social and Political Philosophy course.

Other low-to-no-cost college programs like the Princeton Summer Journalism Program are just as, if not more, difficult, despite



Graphic by AMELIA CHANG

being significantly more selective.

Generally, camps specializing in one course — like UC Santa Cruz's Science Internship Program — are truly rigorous.

Nevertheless, although such programs do not significantly help college applications, there are still many benefits from attending. Junior Ivy Tian, who attended the 2023 Summer@Brown program on-campus for two weeks, pointed out that meeting new people and gaining personal independence away from home made the experience memorable.

“We had people from all over the world: from London, Korea and Japan,” Tian said. “It was really diverse, and since we only had three hours of class time each day, we spent a lot of time talking and learning about each other.”

The program also planned excursions for students through Boston, although Tian remembers the signups filling up so quickly that she could only attend one lackluster field trip to an aquarium.

Instead, she found that the freedom to

plan her own short-distance trips, such as to a nearby beach, was much more enjoyable. Despite curfews and resident assistants barring students from the advertised “true college experience,” Tian said trips with friends were the main highlights of her two weeks at Brown.

In the end, Tian believes that although she enjoyed the program, it was not worth the money.

“I feel like I would have enjoyed it more if it had been a lot more academically intense,” she said. “This summer, I would probably prefer to attend something that isn't just a pay-to-play program.”

The important thing to remember is that attending a pre-college program does not guarantee admission to its host college — or other prestigious universities.

You are better off finding unique ways to pursue your interests that do not burn a hole in your parents' wallets, whether it be through taking community college classes, finding an internship or working a part-time job at a restaurant or summer camp. ♦

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Vivek Ramaswamy hides extremist ideology with charisma

BY AgastyaVitaldevara

Now, to answer the question on everyone's mind: What's a skinny guy with a funny last name doing at the center of your debate stage?” With glaring white teeth and a cheekbone splitting smile, Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy introduced himself during the first candidate debate on Aug. 13. Relying on his unbridled charisma, he then launched into an impassioned recital of his “10 Truths,” a list that includes statements such as “God is real,” “there are two genders” and “reverse racism is racism.”

Throughout the debate, rows of white voters greeted Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old Indian American candidate, with thunderous applause. However, in a salient demonstration of his unoriginality, the sentence he used to cement his dramatic rise in GOP politics was first spoken 19 years earlier by a budding Barack Obama.

Like fellow Harvard alum Obama, Ramaswamy's talent as an orator has largely fueled his rising popularity. Unlike Obama, however, Ramaswamy's viewpoints — including support for immigration restrictions, denial of climate change and a militaristic foreign policy — are dangerously extremist, pandering to his fanatical, Trump-loving Make America Great Again fanbase.

Like his fellow Harvard alum Obama, Ramaswamy's talent as an orator has largely fueled his rising popularity.

After founding a multibillion dollar pharmaceutical company, Roivant, Ramaswamy entered the turbulent world of politics with the release of his first book, “WOKE INC.,” a scathing attack on progressive ideas. His name was the #1 Google Search for 24 hours following the first Republican presidential debate as his name recognition skyrocketed,

leaving him polling third in the primary.

Ramaswamy's growing traction, especially in elite pockets with a high concentration of Indian Americans like Saratoga, can be explained by his eloquence in contrast to other Republicans. Unlike Trump or Georgia representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, Ramaswamy can come off as reasonable and clear headed.

While the GOP's success in the last 7 years has drawn upon creating blunt personas with outrageous viewpoints that their voter base can relate to, Ramaswamy is a revitalization of the old, well-educated archetype of candidates. Yet, under this rebuilt facade of education lie the same extremist ideas espoused by other top Republican candidates — making Ramaswamy all the more dangerous.

The ugly aspects of Ramaswamy's policy ideas are easy to ignore in comparison to his counterparts. Many Saratogans, though attracted by elitist economic policies like significant tax cuts — or in Ramaswamy's case, a complete abolishment of the IRS — would find it unconscionable to cast a vote for unashamed racists like Trump. Behind Ramaswamy's Ivy League words and polished demeanor, the same indiscretions are easier to ignore.

One of Ramaswamy's most ambitious campaign promises is a complete dismantling of the Great Society programs started by Lyndon B. Johnson. The Great Society now includes foundational programs like Medicare and Medicaid. Though proposals like these may be attractive to the wealthy, Ramaswamy's suggestions have significant potential to destabilize systems that support countless lower-class and middle-class families nationwide.

Along with supporting policies that cater to the top 1 percent, Ramaswamy's unabashed embrace of his Hinduism is a source of pride for many Indian Americans, despite his xenophobic foreign policy. Though Ramaswamy is himself a birthright citizen, he advocates for ending birthright citizenship and restricting visas, both of which would hurt Indian immigration.

For some, the idea of an Indian American candidate is exciting enough to garner support regardless of his politics.



Courtesy of NPR

Vivek Ramaswamy celebrates after the first Republican candidates' debate in August.

“Many of my family friends support Ramaswamy despite his abhorrent policy because he's an outspoken Indian,” junior Akshat Bora told me.

Bora's observations are echoed throughout Saratoga and the Bay Area. Ramaswamy has even received praise in India, with prominent newspapers like The Times of India and The Hindu running stories expressing policy-blind support.

To support Ramaswamy due to his heritage or Reagan-esque economic policies requires an inability to acknowledge the dangers he poses.

With regards to foreign policy, Ramaswamy is a dangerous loose cannon as well. He advocates for militarizing the southern border and using drones on civilian populations in order to quell the flow of refugees. Ramaswamy has even suggested sending troops into Mexico, which would disrupt a 106-year peace.

The list of disturbing pledges goes on: Domestically, Ramaswamy claims that members of the LGBTQ+ community are mentally ill and vows to pass restrictive laws. He also pledges to abolish all “woke” climate policy and “Drill, Frack, and Burn” indiscriminately.

Ramaswamy also swears to dismantle the Department of Education, enforce civics test for voting and increase the voting age to 25. Civics and literacy tests have not been used in the U.S. to prohibit voting since 1965, before which they were used to suppress minority voting power. In both his assault on education and on voting rights, Ramaswamy expresses disdain for the next generation and brazenly and unapologetically attempts to cripple Democrats.

In addition to his shaky policy ideas, Ramaswamy supports fringe conspiracy theories, including the involvement of the government in events like the 9/11 attacks and January 6th. Ramaswamy has gone so far as to assert that he, in the place of Mike Pence on Jan. 6, would not have certified the results of the 2020 election (even though Pence had no such power in the first place).

From every perspective, Ramaswamy is undeniably a far right extremist, paralleling and even exceeding opponents that most Saratogan voters have fiercely disavowed.

Beyond the promise of tax cuts, beyond Ramaswamy's Indian heritage, beyond the veneer of flashy slogans, voters must remember that Ramaswamy is, at core, a fanatical who should be soundly rejected. ♦

The new digital SAT is a step toward accessibility

BY AmyMiao & BeverlyXu

The SAT plans to go digital next spring for U.S. students after finding success piloting the digital version in the U.S. and internationally in 2021.

CollegeBoard argues that the transition to digital will make the SAT less stressful for students as it is similar to their day-to-day computer work.

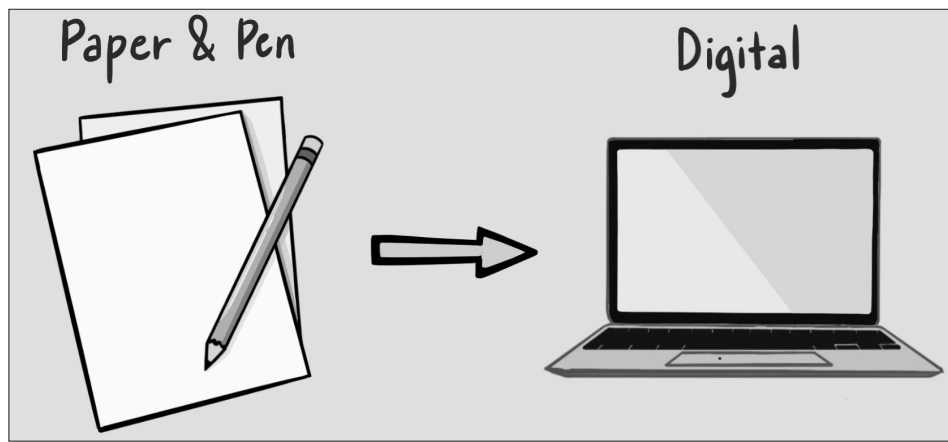
Nevertheless, many students are skeptical of the new format: They fear technical difficulties, accidentally clicking on wrong answers and other problems caused by the overall unfamiliarity with the digital version.

But apart from these concerns, the benefits of a digital SAT ultimately outweigh the drawbacks, as the digital version provides useful new features, online accessibility for students (especially international test-takers), faster score releases and other long-term advantages.

One of the digital SAT's new additions is an online timer. During the test, an on-screen countdown clock can help students with time management; however, test-takers also have the option of hiding the clock if it induces stress.

In comparison to the traditional paper-and-pen SAT where clocks are not required of testing centers and students are generally only provided with 5-minute warnings before tests end, this change allows students to pace themselves appropriately.

There are also tools that allow students to flag questions to come back to later, which can make checking work much faster and easier in comparison to flipping through a booklet, trying to locate a question.



Graphic by AMY MIAO

Furthermore, the new format retains the paper SAT's ability to annotate text, while eliminating one critical flaw: usage of an unsustainable volume of paper.

In 2022, around 1.7 million students took the SAT, using more than 100 million sheets of paper, equivalent to approximately 10,000 standard pine trees, 6,500 tons of carbon and 850 million liters of water. This change dramatically reduces CollegeBoard's carbon footprint.

In terms of test length and content, the exam has even been remodeled to be more student-friendly.

Unlike the paper version, which requires over 3 hours of concentration, the new digital SAT is just 2 hours and 14 minutes, made up of a 64-minute long English-based Reading and Writing (EBRW) section and a 70-minute-long Math section.

The sections are each divided into two equal length modules with a 10-minute break in between the sections.

Specifically for the EBRW section, which

combines the old reading and writing sections into one, the digital SAT will shorten passages for both, which can be beneficial for students who have trouble comprehending multiple-page passages.

Each passage only has one related question, making it more straightforward as students only need to look for one answer while reading.

A digital test also allows students to receive their scores in days instead of weeks. This allows students to quickly plan their next steps — if they want to retake the test or submit their scores to colleges earlier.

Of course, the switch to a digital SAT isn't all positive. It's much easier to misclick the wrong answer choices and skip questions by accident compared to paper tests.

Spending a few seconds on bubbling each answer helps students ensure that they don't fill in the wrong circle and any blank questions are easily spotted on the scantron sheet.

Additionally, technical difficulties are

inevitable with so many students testing at once on the same WiFi.

Properly setting up computers might lead to further waiting time, in addition to the near-hour that students already expect in delays.

Although CollegeBoard claims that students who suffer from technical difficulties will have their work saved and receive extra time, experiencing the nightmare of losing connection during a test can potentially break students' mental focus and make them feel nervous, thus hindering their performance.

Most importantly, the preparation material for the digital SAT is limited as there are only four official practice tests, while the paper SAT has eight official tests and many more provided by SAT tutoring companies.

On average, SAT experts recommend students to take 3-5 practice SATs prior to their actual exam. In the face of an unfamiliar format, the limited online practice tests will put students at a disadvantage for success in the first few years after the restructuring.

SAT tutoring centers such as Kaplan and Revolution Prep have already rolled out online practice tests. On the whole, tutoring centers are limited in both the tests they can provide and the similarity of their test simulations to the actual SAT.

It reflects CollegeBoard's efforts to make a more relevant and accessible test for all, placing less emphasis on comprehension of extended passages and primary sources, in turn making the test easier and less stressful.

Although the digital SAT is bound to have unprecedented challenges, the potential benefits make it a choice worth supporting. ♦

You aren't 'too cool' for rallies

BY ShirinaCao & AnikaKapasi

It's a rally day. Decked out in class colors and paint, students swarm into the gym during tutorial, trying to squeeze next to their friends in the cramped bleachers.

The energy is electric as students get ready to cheer on their class in rowdy rally games.

Although some students choose not to attend rallies as they are not mandatory, we personally look forward to the few rallies we get every year.

They are usually held during tutorials, which make them the perfect brain break in the middle of a hectic school day.

Rallies usually include fun games in which students from different grade levels and teachers compete against each other.

There are also performances from the school's dance team, cheer team, jazz band and organizations like Singing for Smiles sprinkled in between.

You can watch and cheer on your friends' performances, or watch them win in games against other grades.

Attending rallies also presents the opportunity to get back at teachers, especially during student versus staff dodgeball.

Since the school has such a hyper-focused academic culture, screaming and cheering with classmates during class competitions and student versus teachers games is a healthy way of relieving stress and raising class spirit.

Going to the rallies will result in more overall student engagement, allowing everyone to develop deeper connections with each other.

Some may say that they need their tutorials to finish work but let's be honest

— you had enough time to complete your homework and ask your teacher questions long before you were “too busy” to attend the rally. Poor time management is not a good excuse to avoid participating in school activities.

Additionally, there are less than five rallies held over the course of one school year, with two being night rallies — so missing even one rally means losing out on a relatively rare opportunity to cheer your class on as they face their adversaries.



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

Because night rallies are often held before long breaks, attending one is also a convenient way to have fun with your friends before you are separated during break.

You don't want to look back after graduation to realize all you did was study during high school.

Rallies don't take up too much time, and they're definitely worth attending: you can build community with your class by cheering on your peers in games, making them a great opportunity for you to let loose during a stressful week. ♦

Stop shepherding us to rallies

BY AlecGuan & JeremySi

It's wishful thinking to believe all students enjoy rallies and want to attend them.

These students, feeling defeated, are sometimes corralled by staff into the large gym like sheep. They sit on the cramped bleachers, squeezing each other to the point of suffocation, while the ceaseless and deafening screaming feels like it's going to shatter their eardrums.

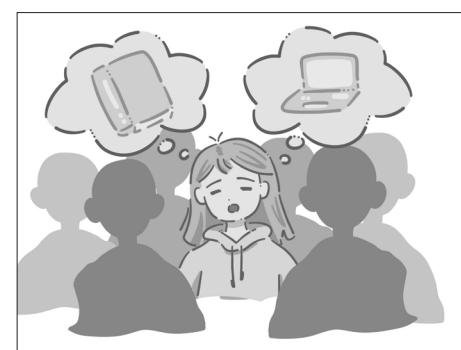
Admittedly, rallies happen only a few times a year, but the problem is that their timing can be awful. Have you ever had an upcoming test right after tutorial or an urgent matter to discuss with a teacher only to find out that there was an upcoming rally waiting to poach your entire tutorial period? Unfortunately, we have — more than a few times.

On rally days, many students walk to their usual spots for tutorial hoping to meet with their friends and do homework, only to find their favorite classrooms locked and their beloved teachers nowhere to be found. While the school doesn't have an explicit policy mandating rally attendance, teachers practically push us out of their rooms and into the large gym during rally days.

Tutorials are incredibly useful and should not be pushed aside by rallies. They are supposed to be a time for students to catch up on homework and seek help from teachers; the school makes this very clear during the beginning of the year.

We, as students, are not supposed to engage in frivolous activities during this short work period in order for the school to meet the state-mandated instructional minutes requirement. So where do frivolous activities like rallies fit in?

Rallies are full of “fun” games and activities that students and staff compete in while their peers and colleagues watch and cheer them on — does this count as being any more academically or socially emotionally relevant than studying? Rallies are intended to improve school spirit, but when was the last time a rally actually achieved this goal?



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

It seems that after every single rally, many people come out of the gym shaking their heads in regret and muttering complaints to their friends about the precious time they lost.

Although it may be entertaining to see your friends miserably fail in various rally games, this short-lived satisfaction doesn't yield any of the long-lasting positive results that productive tutorial sessions do.

Of course, rallies can be a fun place to take a break for those who want to relax, but practically forcing us to go to them simply does not make sense. On rally days, the school should at least open some classrooms for students to preserve their personal space bubbles and their eardrums. ♦

AI tools democratize college admissions — if used properly

By SarahZhou

When ChatGPT was released in November of last year, it quickly became popular among teenagers and adults; however, it caused controversy in academia — a new accessible approach to “cheating” had apparently been placed in the hands of many students.

College counselors and admissions officers remain firm in their stance that AI is unacceptable, some even going so far as to ban applicants from using such bots during the application process.

By any measure, it’s unwise to use AI to write your application essays, especially if certain colleges have specifically released policies against such software.

Many admissions offices have probably spent the entire summer testing and analyzing ways to detect and adapt to possible AI usage by applicants, and “cheating” being your first impression is a surefire way to earn a rejection.

However, while I agree that students should avoid using ChatGPT to write their essays, if used well, AI tools can be just as valuable as the services offered by most expensive private college counselors for socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Private college counselors cost upwards of \$40,000. They usually all do the same things: help make your college list, edit your essays and answer questions.

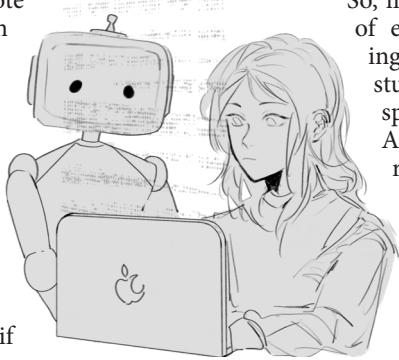
Though ChatGPT 3.5 boasts an astonishingly low overall response accuracy rate of 12.2%, it can do pretty much all of what a college counselor does.

As for essays, I beg of you to only use ChatGPT for topic brainstorming with specific prompts. If you work with a draft that ChatGPT wrote the first version of, it will come across to readers as exactly what it is — a ChatGPT creation.

The same thing, however, goes for private college counselors — if they write your essay for you, more likely than not, it will sound the same as the dozens of essays they are probably writing for their other clients.

Instead, think of ChatGPT as a free version of Grammarly Premium. Students can use it to make structural revisions, refine word choice and correct their grammar.

This approach is already being adopted by schools such as Georgia Tech, which released a statement from an official saying that if you use “AI-based assistance while working on your writing submissions for Georgia Tech, I encourage you to take the same approach you would when collaborating with people. Use it to



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

brainstorm, edit and refine your ideas.”

Moreover, many schools such as most Ivy Leagues and the UCs are now test-blind or optional, a change is driven by a commitment to fairness and bridging the equity gap in college admissions.

So, in the same spirit of equity, authorizing and enabling students to responsibly utilize AI tools is the right move — it acts as a resource for all, being particularly beneficial for underprivileged students who cannot afford to drop thousands on a private counselor, especially when AI can do just about anything that a counselor can.

In the long run, AI is constantly evolving and updating; and, despite their numerous faults, AI platforms such as ChatGPT can give valuable second opinions on essays. AI will only continue to become more sophisticated and hopefully reliable, as demonstrated by ChatGPT 4’s enhancements compared to version 3.5. Society’s increasing dependence on AI is inevitable, so the admissions process may as well embrace this and make the shift toward a more equitable approach. ♦

The era of re-electing the same ancient politicians needs to end

By AnthonyLuo

On Aug. 30, 81-year-old Sen. Mitch McConnell froze for about 30 seconds during a press conference in the Capitol. Unsurprisingly, this has happened before. The late Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who passed away while in office on Sep. 29 at the age of 90, made headlines earlier this year for giving up her power of attorney to her daughter and not seeming to be fully functioning in her job.

Incidents like these mark a frightening trend that doesn’t seem to be going away as aging politicians continue to cling to power.

This year, the average age in the Senate is the oldest it’s been since the signing of the Constitution. The two frontrunners for the 2024 presidential election — Donald Trump and President Joe Biden — are 77 and 80, respectively.

This year, the average age in the Senate is the oldest it's been since the signing of the Constitution.

If there’s one issue everyone must agree on right now, it is that electing politicians from our grandparents’ generation is detrimental to our democracy and the functioning of our government as a whole. This gerontocracy locks out new voices from being heard in politics, while often maintaining less urgency over the most pressing issues that younger people will live with. Both sides have taken note of the issue, yet we still seem to be perpetually re-electing the same politicians, with no end in sight.

Look no further than the 2024 Republican primary — despite all the combined campaigning efforts of 9 other nominees, Trump, the oldest candidate, has more than 58% of the voter base supporting him as of Oct. 13.

How did we end up in this situation in the first place? On the most fundamental level, it comes down to one issue: the entrenchment of career politicians.

In 2022, every single incumbent in the Senate won their re-election. Over the past 60 years, no less than 85% of all representatives get re-elected every election cycle, with the number often exceeding 95%.

The popularity of these candidates speaks to the ways in which the political system plays out these days. Hard-drawn party lines claim all in their path and tend to ostracize anyone who dares to break with those lines, and because each side holds their own set of beliefs, voters end up choosing based on whoever has been in office the longest instead of who can bring change.

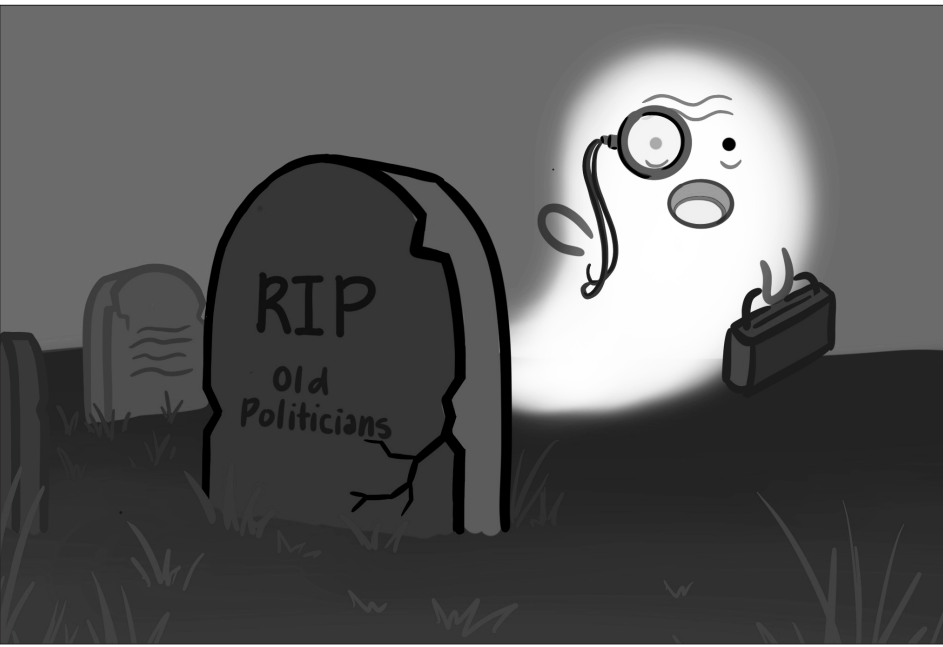
This cycle crumbles the government’s system of checks and balances. Gridlock, which was originally intended as a tool to filter out extreme bills from reaching the desk of the president, has now taken on the exact opposite role.

Older senators can stop historical climate change bills or erect a blockade against military promotions, however devastating those actions may be. Many of these politicians, who have shown an obvious lack of urgency, can’t possibly see the results of their actions, leaving our generation to suffer the consequences.

Their political power also prevents the small group of younger voices from advancing any legislation made for the people. Take Rep. Matt Gaetz and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, two polar opposites in terms of political leanings, who introduced a bill in May to end stock trading by members of Congress.

Younger blood like them are clearly pointing out the entitlement and selfishness that has started to seep through the older ranks of Congress. Unfortunately, Ocasio-Cortez and Gaetz’s bill was quickly forgotten and overshadowed, despite the clear bipartisan support of the issue.

The faces of our government aren’t the



Graphic by AMY MIAO

only ones perpetuating this pattern. From policy advisors, department officials and cabinet members to unreasonably wealthy lobby and campaign groups, it becomes more and more clear that the mere opportunity for young voices to enact change doesn’t even exist.

The campaign trails of these lawmakers reek of similar problems. While almost all of our congressional representatives are exceedingly old, most of them also possess substantial wealth, with the richest having net worths exceeding a hundred million. That means they can easily outspend up and coming politicians with relentless campaigning.

We are left with a complex problem that seems impossible to combat. Ever since a 1995 Supreme Court ruling found that maximum age or term limits for Congress were unconstitutional, we have only one option — to wait this round of politicians out as they slowly release the grip on their seats through death and retirement.

Some recent events have shown a glimmer of hope, such as when Sen. Mitt Romney stepped down earlier in September, calling on both Trump and Biden to do the same. We can already see younger members slowly fill in these spots. Rep. Maxwell Frost, 26 has taken center stage as some the youngest to join the House of Representatives, being its first Gen-Z member.

Still, politicians like McConnell have shown no sign of ending their careers, and even then events like the passing of Feinstein only prove how unpredictable this solution can be. With the help of unrelenting lobbyists and a broken-beyond-repair political system, these institutions remain our country’s most prestigious nursing home, with no end in sight to their ever-aging populations.

Meanwhile, the planet is still warming, mass shootings terrorize citizens across the country and more than a few in Congress continue to stuff their own pockets with rampant insider trading. ♦

Erratic library hours displease students

By AngelaTan

Last year, my 3rd period English teacher instructed me to print out and submit my Fall Writing Assessment before the end of lunch or else I would get a 0. I frantically ran across campus, only to find the library doors shut with words reading “CLOSED.”

My mind swarmed with stress as I stumbled around campus looking for a classroom with a printer and I held back spiteful tears when none of my teachers could generate one for me.

Unfortunately, inconsistent library hours mean that I am constantly play a game of roulette trying to predict when I can use its resources.

Although there is a massive collection of information available for student use on the library’s website, I find that the physical space of the library is most helpful for students. When the library is open, students can collaborate on projects, study class material or play video games.

This year’s hours deter students from taking advantage of library resources it has to offer.

The main cause behind this is a staffing shortage. Currently, assistant principal Matt Torrens is often the one overseeing the library because main librarian technician Lee Tapley has been away for health reasons since last spring.

Along with textbook technician Cynthia Cheng, Torrens



Graphic by ANGELA TAN

Studygram — pointless hoax or practical help?

By JaneLee

Oh, to be a popular studygrammar and have the perfectly aesthetic feed and academic preparation most of us can only dream about.

Take me on a recent night as just one example. At 9:30 p.m., after arriving home from a 3-hour marching band rehearsal, I dreaded looking at my daunting to-do list. I still had to study for a chemistry quiz, pore over formulas for a math test and toil through the assigned AP European History reading.

Enough with the negatives. Although study influencers definitely set unrealistic standards, the advice they provide can still be useful for students seeking new, efficient ways to study.

One method they suggest is studying somewhere other than a cluttered desk. This helps students to stay organized, instead of spreading notes all over a cluttered desk and eventually losing track of all kinds of papers. Recently, whenever I have a couple of hours free, I’ve begun to enjoy going out to study in different locations.

My top three spots are the Sara-



Study influencers have been a valuable part of my life since I started seriously studying.

Most students have been there — fighting the urge to sleep while — trying to finish piles of homework late at night before 8 a.m..

It doesn’t help that social media

toga Library, the Argonaut Center Starbucks and the Park Saratoga Peet’s Coffee. While the Saratoga Library is quiet, spacious and usually at low capacity, Starbucks and Peet’s main attractions are the drinks and the ambience. Plus, it can be fun to have a study date with a friend while sipping on a pumpkin spice latte.

Even though studying with a friend can be motivating, it will, at times, degenerate into gossip sessions that last more than our so-called 5-minute breaks.

Depending on the amount of self-control a study group has, the session can be either very productive or result in chaos with absolutely nothing checked off the to-do list.

If you’re like me, even studying alone leads to an unproportionate amount of breaks, whether I’m scrolling through Pinterest or watching YouTube as hours fly by. Ironically, my Pinterest feed

introduced me to the solution: the Pomodoro technique — the concept of studying for short periods of time followed by a break — has been trending for years and was even covered in one of the schools’ MOSAIC lessons. The recommended ratio of 25 minutes of studying to 5 minutes of break time created a guideline for the amount and length of breaks I took, helping me avoid going down YouTube rabbit holes.

Studygram has also popularized the time-consuming concept of rewriting your notes, whether it be on expensive Japanese stationery or an iPad.

In my experience, unfortunately, rewriting my biology notes word-for-word last year turned out to be a waste of time. Additionally, the frustration from high-



lighting terms crookedly led me to throw away pages of mistakes — it’s safe to say that artsy note-taking doesn’t really help me or my carbon footprint.

Nonetheless, study influencers, along with tips on Pinterest, have been a valuable part of my life. Seeing other people’s strong work ethic has motivated me to study harder and resulted in better grades.

While studygram has sometimes taken me down wrong paths, the benefits of discovering new study methods has improved my academic life in the long run by helping me explore better study environments and realize what works for me in terms of study efficiency.

I’ve also concluded that when it comes to academics, I’d rather not have to rewrite all of my notes every day for the sake of aesthetics. But if you do, more power to you. ♦

Self-care 101: a how-to

By AnikaKapasi

Picture this: It’s Friday night and it has been one of the most tiring and mentally draining weeks of your life. You have managed to survive three AP class tests, an in-class essay and, of course, you can’t forget completing what should be an illegal amount of APUSH notes.

As you face high academic pressure, all while balancing extracurriculars and friendships, life becomes stressful in a very short amount of time. For me, junior year has been more taxing than I could ever have imagined. Fortunately, I have found that self-care nights have never failed to make life feel just a little less hectic.

My self-care nights mostly consist of blasting pop music in my room and putting on a sheet mask (that I look undeniably goofy in) while attempting and failing at different nail-art designs I find on Pinterest.

My face mask recommendations are those that exfoliate and hydrate the skin, especially the inexpensive Que Bella ones from Target with aesthetically pleasing pastel packaging.

At the end, I always follow up with a lengthy skin and hair care routine, which gives me a lasting confidence boost and leaves me feeling naturally pretty.

Some days, I have found that self-care takes the alternative form of coming home from school, taking an “everything shower” — washing myself head to toe, deep conditioning, shaving and exfoliating with body scrubs — and laying under the comfort of my warm blankets with my favorite movies and TV shows as a way to shut out the world.

Eating junk food, chips and candies is also a must to feel better. For me, scarfing down Milky Ways, Reese’s Pieces and Garden of Eatin’ Sun Chips while binging Gilmore Girls has always done the trick.

Regardless, my self-care nights cannot be complete without sipping freezing cold water through a straw. There’s something uniquely rejuvenating about getting an extra cold dose of hydration — and the aesthetic of the water cup and calming properties makes it an absolutely refreshing necessity to get the full self-care experience!

Over time, though, I’ve realized that



while designated “self-care” nights do help me get mentally and emotionally back on track, there are also other stress-reducing activities that I consider to be equally important.

Working out has always been one of my favorite ways to reset and increase productivity. Whether it’s weight lifting at the gym or participating in a yoga class, finding ways to stay healthy is necessary to physically care for myself.

Sometimes, I run 3 to 5 miles around my neighborhood or at the Congress Spring’s soccer fields — I know that distance sounds horrible — but I’ve found that when I get into a rhythm, it is actually a surprisingly tranquil and euphoric experience. The endorphins released trigger a positive feeling, or a “runner’s high,” and I find it to be a great way to relieve tension.

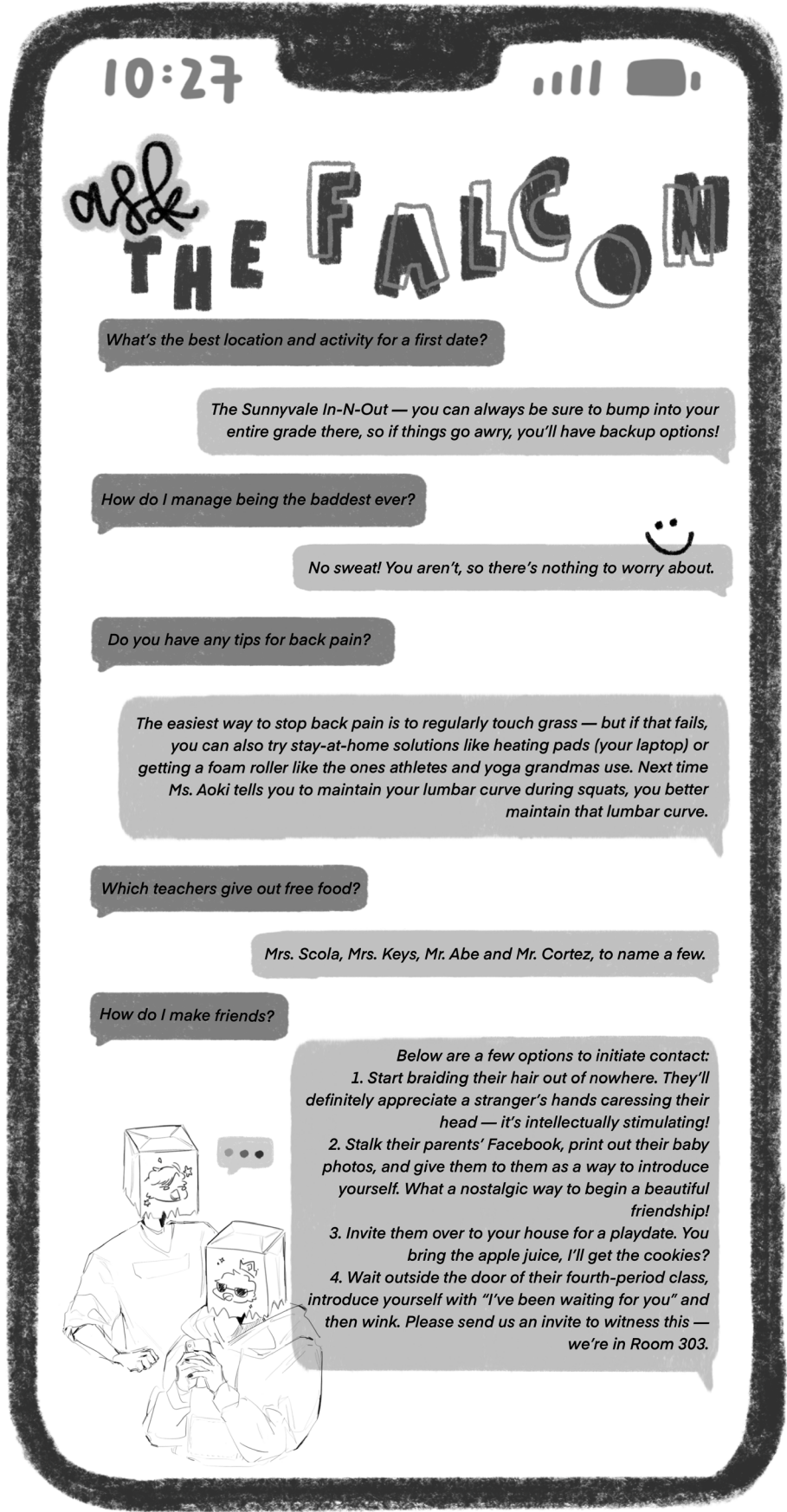
For a while, my definition of self-care meant finding ways to alleviate stress on my own. However, as I started to figure out which people I click best with over the past few years, self-care has started to also mean just hanging out with my friends.

Spontaneously going out to McDonalds after football games, grabbing boba after school or going hot tubbing at night with them always leaves me with a smile on my face and these outings have honestly become some of my favorite memories.

The reason that the social aspect of self-care is so imperative to health is that you start to realize how difficult it is to deal with stress and your struggles alone. It’s fulfilling to be able to lean on others and support them in return.



While different methods work for different people, these are some of the most reliable ways I have found to take care of myself, boost my self-esteem and make life feel just a little less chaotic! ♦



The itsy bitsy spider torments me

Natalie ChuAAAA

Natalie Chua

If someone asked me to describe a spider, I would not be able to explain it in full detail. That's because I've trauma-blocked any memories having to do with them.

Since I vehemently refuse to look at any spiders, think about them or even exist in their vicinity, every time I see one, my reaction is to flee and make my parents deal with it instead. My strategy was challenged once, however, when my dad did not want to kill the gigantic spider on my bathroom floor because he was too tired.

Forced to weigh my grim options, I reluctantly attempted to take matters into my own hands.

I approached the ugly eight-legged behemoth slowly, praying that it wouldn't suddenly jump in my direction. Lifting my house slippers, I flung them viciously at my target as soon as I was close enough.

Though my slippers had been compromised, I believed I had succeeded since the spider was

not moving.

Thinking I would leave the carcass for my dad to pick up in the morning, I left the danger zone to brush my teeth. However, when I went to check on it again several minutes later, it was gone! After such a horrific realization, I refused to use the restroom for a week, fearing that the spider might show up and hunt me down.

My arachnophobia is so prevalent that I refuse to even glance at pictures of spiders. When TikTok, my fingers have never moved faster to swipe to the next video or refresh the page.

Maybe their creepiness comes from their disturbing crawling movement. Their thick and hairy legs move like those hideous crawling demons from horror movies. Maybe it's the way that their dark, rounded bodies mar my pristine white walls. Perhaps it's the zoomed-up pictures of their numerous unfriendly eyes, glaring at me hyper-realistically from covers of National Geographic magazines.

I just can't pin it down... maybe it's all of the above.

It's not only me who experiences this fear — seven of my friends have also faced traumatic encounters with spiders. In fact, six percent of the population worldwide would not dare come

close to these devilish creatures — whoever said they're too small to be scary is completely wrong.

When I confided in one of my friends about my arachnophobia, hoping to be understood, she instead thought it would be hilarious to use my phone to take pictures of spiders that she searched up.

After she told me about her evil prank, hoping to get a kick out of me, I immediately contacted my other friend and drove 10 minutes to her house so she could delete the pictures from both my camera roll and trash album.

Unfortunately, I will never be able to fully confront my fear. Though I have tried to face it by examining spiders close up, I always end up running away, begging my parents to kill them for me or blindly flinging my slippers at them.

Moving to Australia will never be on the table for me, since spiders over there have bodies as big as a human face and legs as long as two ICE sparkling water containers.

To ensure the preservation of my sanity, I've decided my future boyfriend is required to be able to snipe any spiders on sight. ♦

Butterflies and moths: Two sides of the same horrid coin

Me-hell NO

Meher Bhatnagar

We have all heard of irrational fears before — the fear of dark spaces, the ocean's depths and even of sleeping alone at night. But just how irrational can a fear be?

Let me introduce you to my biggest enemy, my arch nemesis, something that freaks me out so much I flee from the mere sight of it: butterflies.

You may be wondering why I am labeling butterflies, insects known to be vibrantly beautiful and majestic, with such a derogatory term. My answer

is plain and simple: Butterflies are simply disgusting wannabe moths.

Think about it — anywhere there is a bright light, a nasty gray moth hovers around the cobweb-covered glow for hours on end. In my eyes, a butterfly is just a moth with color that likes to be around people rather than light. Like seriously, don't moths have something better to do with their life than just fly around one spot day in day out?

I find their fluttering more annoying than graceful. Under their vibrant hues lie the same traits of the gray, cobweb-loving moth. Once you see it, it's impossible to unsee: 4 fluttery wings, small grapping legs and a tiny frame. Disgusting.

I recall several instances when I have been out with my friends or family, minding my own business and one of these demonic creatures decided

to land on my arm. One time, walking through a strawberry field off the coast of Davenport, an object fluttered in my peripheral vision as I crouched down in search of the ripest berries. I told myself I was seeing things and continued working until I felt the faintest pressure on my arm.

I could barely register the pale white wings flashing up at me. Within a few moments, I was letting out the loudest and most obnoxious screech, bolting around in circles trying to get rid of the repulsive insect.

In reality, butterflies are the masters of camouflage. They seem to serve no useful purpose and don't deserve the hype that they get for being graceful and beautiful insects. Bees already take the spot for the number 1 pollinator; butterflies are simply a useless extra. ♦

Teenagers who radiate middle school energy

Angela, not Devil-a

Angela Tan

I will forever be grateful for attending Saratoga High, as I no longer have to worry about bumping into a particularly terrifying breed of teenagers. To be clear, I'm not talking about that one superhuman who does speech and debate, orchestra and five sports, while also somehow maintaining a 4.0 GPA and a functional social life. Before coming here, I experienced my worst days during middle school in Los Gatos.

The students there would do ridiculous things like jump in the trash bins during passing period, or intentionally shoot an arrow over the fence during PE, leaving the teachers no choice but to cancel the entire archery unit.

Eating lunch came with the risk of being rained on by an exploding Izze, so my friends and I confined ourselves to a little corner in the back of the English wing. My impression of teenagers was that they were loud, confrontational and very tall, all of which I was not. Additionally, my group of friends were all quiet book club fanatics, so it didn't help my sense of inferiority when it came to being a "cool teenager."

Everyone else seemed so mature with their stylish Birkenstocks and inventory of cuss words; standing next to them, I felt childish with my Cat & Jack T-shirts and timid voice.

One of the most traumatizing moments happened as I was biking home in 6th grade. I had left immediately when the bell rang, so I quickly fused with the dense crowd of students. As I crossed the intersection of Los Gatos Boulevard and Shannon Road, I could sense the sea of curly blond heads and baseball caps swarming around me.

My gaze became fearfully motion-

less as they sauntered past, loudly complaining about the lunch meat and recklessly shoving each other off the pavement until a car horn blared at them. I was attempting to navigate past the bustling crowd when I heard a holler, and a swarm of boys' mischievous eyes honed in on me.

"Hey, are you going to run us down?" the tallest boy said, towering a foot over my cowering figure.

A group of lanky 8th-grade boys formed a wall in front of me, preventing me from moving forward. Confused, I tried to maneuver through them. The boys threw their hands up and hooted, "Whoa, whoa, calm down, are you trying to kill us?"

With forged confidence and what I hoped was an intimidating glare, I told them to please let me through. In response, the insolent boys laughed harder, and at this point, I wanted to burst into tears and squash them into roadkill.

Somewhere in my chest, I felt my dignity die as I was reduced to a help-

less wooden doll, burning with humiliation. I stared at their blond mops, mockeries of hair that flopped unapologetically on their heads as they snickered in front of me.

I sucked in a sharp breath, anchored my feet onto my bike pedals, and accelerated, making direct contact with one of their shoes. My victim yelped and the rest of them quickly scattered, not unlike a startled flock of geese, giving me the opportunity to finally speed off.

Since then, my definition of maturity has evolved. I no longer admire reckless teenagers who harass others for fun. As a junior in high school, I am still terrified of that breed of teenagers who can't be told what to do.

It's become a habit to turn away whenever I see a mob of freshmen boys throw beverages on each other or leave their trash flippantly strewn on the floor. These immature underclassmen might not seem scary to others, but their middle-school energy makes me shudder. ♦

Dancer and storyteller: Senior prepares for Arangetram, first Indian solo dance

BY VictoriaHu

Dressed in a resplendent red and gold pleated pant costume, senior Ameya Saund watches herself dance in the mirror at home as she practices crisp arm and leg movements known as adavus — which are basic foundational movements in the style of Bharatanatyam, one of the nine forms of classical Indian dance.

She spends at least three hours daily running through her Bharatanatyam dances and fine-tuning her movements. Saund is preparing for her arangetram — directly translating to “ascending the stage,” an arangetram is the on-stage debut performance of a former Indian classical dance student.

“My arangetram is the culmination of everything I’ve learned.”

SENIOR Ameya Saund

Her 2-hour solo, scheduled to take place in early March in a location that is still being determined, will showcase the skills she has learned over the course of her nine years of dancing.

“My arangetram is the culmination of everything I’ve learned,” she said. “It’s a really important dance graduation performance, and it takes a lot of time and effort to actually pull it off.”

Arangetrams are usually colorful, energetic celebrations, with expenses for live musicians, food, custom-made costumes and jewelry often adding up to thousands of

dollars. Saund thinks at least 200 people, including family, friends and relatives from both the U.S. and India, will attend.

“I’m a bit stressed, but it’s normal,” she said. “I know that all I need to do is practice and I’ll be ready.”

Arangetrams demand nearly a decade of instruction before a teacher decides a student is ready for a public debut.

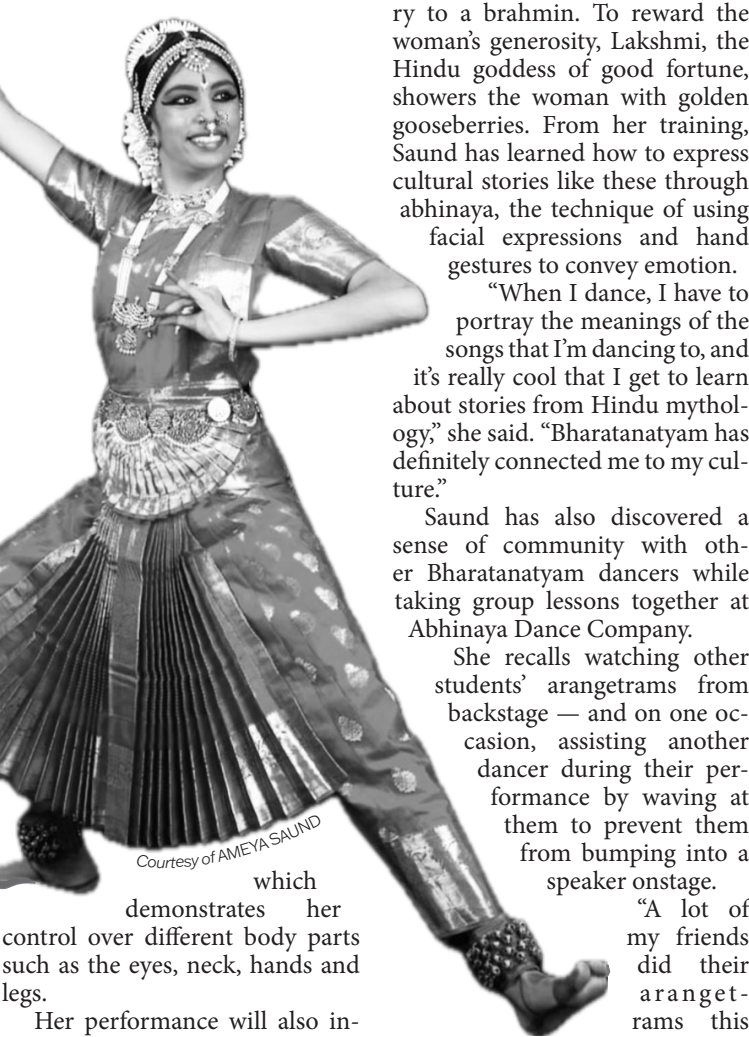
Saund has been training since third grade under the tutelage of Mythili Kumar, an award-winning dancer and the founder of Abhinaya Dance Company in San Jose. In her preparation so far, one of Saund’s greatest challenges is to build the stamina required to dance continuously for long periods of time.

“I have seen many arangetrams where girls mess up their steps at the end because they’re out of energy,” she said. “So my goal is just to keep up my stamina throughout my performance.”

Saund’s arangetram will feature seven dances — each from a different stage of her Bharatanatyam education — spliced together roughly in the order that she learned them. Simpler dances will be generally featured at the beginning while more complex ones will be at the end. There will also be an intermission for Saund to change her costume. She will begin her arangetram with a pushpanjali, which translates to “floral salutation,” during which she will offer flowers to Lord Nataraja, the Hindu god of dance.

Next, she will showcase pashu-nam patim, a 6-minute dance describing the characteristics of Lord Nataraja.

This is followed by an alarippu, a compilation of basic steps



Courtesy of AMEYA SAUND

which demonstrates her control over different body parts such as the eyes, neck, hands and legs.

Her performance will also include a jathiswaram, a set of steps executed to repeated musical notes set against a nine beat rhythm. The longest and most intricate dance in Saund’s repertoire is her

varnam: a 38-minute piece called Simhavahini, which translates to “the goddess who rides a lion.”

This dance depicts many stories from Hindu folklore, one of which is the tale of how a poor woman offers her last gooseberry to a brahmin. To reward the woman’s generosity, Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of good fortune, showers the woman with golden gooseberries. From her training, Saund has learned how to express cultural stories like these through abhinaya, the technique of using facial expressions and hand gestures to convey emotion.

“When I dance, I have to portray the meanings of the songs that I’m dancing to, and it’s really cool that I get to learn about stories from Hindu mythology,” she said. “Bharatanatyam has definitely connected me to my culture.”

Saund has also discovered a sense of community with other Bharatanatyam dancers while taking group lessons together at Abhinaya Dance Company. She recalls watching other students’ arangetrams from backstage — and on one occasion, assisting another dancer during their performance by waving at them to prevent them from bumping into a speaker onstage.

“A lot of my friends did their arangetrams this year, and if we were doing a similar dance, I would go watch them,” Saund said. “I feel really proud of them. Seeing someone do a good arangetram inspires

me to want to dance more — it’s a really interesting and fun art form to watch.”

Although Saund’s arangetram will mark her “graduation” from classical Indian dance, she intends to continue staying involved with the community by teaching younger dancers.

In addition, she plans to participate in other dance shows such as Bombay in the Bay in February. Though she has a lioexperience with many different genres of dance, Saund ultimately credits Bharatanatyam and Abhinaya Dance Company for providing her with the foundational skills to become a good dancer.

“I want to give back to the community that’s given me so much,” she said. “So I want to teach a lot of other kids and anybody who’s interested in dancing, because I really love to dance and I just want to spread that.” ♦

>> falconfigures

9 years of training

200 friends and family

2 hour long performance

10,000 dollars for creating a successful arangetram

Senior finds creative expression through Korean dance

BY KathyWang

HANNAH SHAW TOOK WEEKLY LESSONS FOR THE PAST DECADE

The red, green and blue colored cloth of senior Hannah Shaw’s hanbok, a traditional Korean dress, cascaded into a flower-like shape as she spun to the rhythmic music at the 30th anniversary celebration of the Sejong Korean School in the early fall season of 2022.

With a bright smile, she gracefully lifted her arms to bang on a Jangu, a Korean traditional drum, that hung around her neck.

For the past 10 years, Shaw has been taking weekly lessons for Korean folk dance — though she has paused taking weekly classes during senior year due to her busy schedule.

Her interest was sparked in second grade when she began attending the Silicon Valley Korean School (SVKS), which offered a variety of traditional Korean art electives such as Danso, Korean flute, traditional calligraphy and cultural folk dancing.

Much of Shaw’s decision to choose Korean folk dancing stemmed from her parents’ encouragement. Shaw’s Korean mom

urged her to take a more physically active elective that connected with her heritage and gave her the freedom to express her creativity. Both her parents agreed that dance would do just that.

“It lets me be more in touch with my Korean side and explore this other side that no one really talks about as much,” Shaw said. “The dancing itself is so beautiful, graceful and elegant and I ended up loving it.”

“Korean dancing helped me keep in tune with my Korean side.”

SENIOR Hannah Shaw

The history of Korean traditional dancing dates back 5,000 years. It was used in religious shamanistic rituals to guide spirits into heaven.

Later, when kingdoms developed, Korean dance was highly regarded by the royal court.

Many of these dances became popular over 1,000 years ago. Shaw has practiced six different Korean folk dances: Buchaechum (fan dance), Hawgamun (floral coronet dance), Jangu (drum dance), Geommu (sword dance), Kkochtaryeong (traditional flow-

er ballad) and Ganggangsullae (harvest dance). During her classes, Shaw alternated between each dance, but would sometimes focus on one if there was a performance coming up, which occurs around twice a month. She particularly enjoys Buchaechum, which is typically performed by groups of females and incorporates the usage of floral patterned fans to portray a blooming flower or towering mountain. The dancers wear hanboks which cover their feet — their dresses contribute to the “flowiness” of the dance.

“You can also do the dance solo-wise, but it’s much more beautiful as a group because all of the handbooks and fans portray the elegance of a flower or nature,” she said.

During her elementary school years, Shaw spent a total of 1 to 1.5 hours every Saturday practicing dance at the SVKS.

Directly after her SVKS class, she also took an extra 3 to 5-hour dance class taught by the same teacher at Ilhyun Kim Dance Studio.

Despite leaving SVKS, she decided to volunteer there with her dance instructor to teach Korean folk dancing to elementary school students, which she continued un-



Courtesy of HANNAH SHAW

Smiling brightly, senior Hannah Shaw performs a dance in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Sejong Korean School where she learns.

til the pandemic.

“I really wanted to keep doing it because I fell in love with it,” Shaw said. “Even if I dropped out of [Korean dance] school and still have [another dance] class later in the day, I still wanted to spend time with the kids. They can be frustrating sometimes, but they’re still fun to work with and I can take a load off the teacher with [around] 20 kids.”

Due to her increasing school workload, Shaw also had to pause her dance lessons at Ilhyun Kim Dance Studio for her senior year.

However, she still has her dance equipment and uses it to practice from time to time to “keep the dancing in her.” ♦

As a member of the school’s color guard team, Shaw noted that her background in Korean dance has helped her, since she has been trained to move gracefully, use detailed facial expressions and keep a stable balance.

After her first semester of senior year, once her workload of rigorous classes combined with college apps lightens, Shaw plans to spend more time on Korean folk dancing and other activities she’s passionate about. She hopes to continue Korean dance beyond high school.

“Korean dancing helped me keep in tune with my Korean side and made me the performer I am today,” Shaw said. ♦

I spent a week on Truth Social — and my head’s still spinning from everything I read

After Twitter, now known as X, unmag-nanimously (very very big word meaning ungraciously) banned former president Donald Trump from the platform, Trump took matters into his own hands. He created his own platform that provides a community for country-defending militia members who exercised their First and Second Amendment rights on January 6th (January 6th? What’s that?), as well as “right”-wing supporters and other anti-Antifa people.

And what is its winning name? Truth Social.

Now I hope that you can already tell that I’m kidding — unlike die-hard Trump fanatics, I do not believe that January 6 was an insurrection by Antifa members, that Trump won the 2020 presidential election or that Democrats are a part of a secret society of pedophile blood-suckers — so instead, I decided to dive into a world of people who do: the world of Truth Social.

I looked forward to raging conspiracy theorists, signups for “gun get-togethers” and Fox-ified explanations of current news. So to preview what I was getting myself into before committing to clicking the signup button, I did some background research and learned two key points about the app.

First of all, Truth Social, despite its branding as a nonpartisan platform, largely caters to pro-Trump and Republican users: Pew Research Center reports that nearly half of top accounts by following on Truth Social openly identify as pro-Trump or right-leaning.

Even more staggeringly, Pew revealed that two-thirds of users of the alternative social media sites in the study, including

Truth Social, are Republican.

After being barred from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store for inciting violence, the company was forced to place some basic censors.

After finishing the background research, the first order of business was to determine my username. After crowdsourcing names from my friends, I took inspiration from the “stop” suggested as a joke and expanded it to “stopthesteal_2023.” First step to blending in as a Trump fangirl — check.

Logging into the app, I was given a list of high profile Truth Social users. On the top of that list, of course, was the creator: @realDonaldTrump. Scrolling down, I encountered other defining faces of the Republican party: MyPillow founder Mike Lindell, Sean Hannity, Donald Trump Jr. and — drumroll please — @catturd2, the Twitter right-wing political heckler.

The app is intended to mimic Twitter & Facebook (which both banned Trump in 2021), but without censorship.

Unsurprisingly, there were also a number of conspiracist and pro-Trump politicians like representative Marjorie Taylor Greene and House speaker Kevin McCarthy, who still insists that he cannot pronounce QAnon, which is apparently supposed to prove his dissociation from the conservative

conspiracy theory.

However, I was surprised to not see most Republicans representatives and senators or quotes from news agencies like Fox News. Instead, posters cited right-wing news sites like Newsmax and forums like Quora to support their claims, giving me the impression that maybe, just maybe, what these users claim on Truth Social is a bit far from the truth ...

Of course, the platform was overflowing with claims of voter fraud, rioting (and buying the needed guns and ammunition from Costco?). But by far the most popular topic was how president Joe Biden — or more commonly called “Creepy Joe” within the app — loves sniffing children.

Every other post led me to a YouTube compilation of Biden’s head suspiciously surfacing behind the figures of various children, such damning evidence of the president’s disgusting hobby that a few users even claimed he preferred children over ice cream.

These baseless claims, of course, met no opposition on the platform, nor was there a mention of Trump’s four indictments and more than 90 felony charges he faces in state and federal courts.

Overall, the platform fell short of my expectations of an established Republican official hotspot, with few notable Republicans other than Trump’s own family members. It felt more like just another conspiracy forum stringing buzzwords together — claiming that Biden is a vampire, Hillary emailed Hunter Biden’s laptop and Trump won the last election.

But on a more serious note, the messages and posts that the half a million Truth So-



Photo by BEVERLY XU

After spending one week on the platform, here are some ridiculously ironic Truth Social memes that will make you cringe.

cial users share paint a stark picture of what another Trump presidency might look like, as he remains in the 2024 presidential race and might be the Republican nominee.

Unsettlingly, the Trump supporters on the platform show a blatant disregard for evidence that contradicts their view points. The Truth Social community shows the irreparable divide in communication between Trump supporters and the rest of U.S. voters. ♦

Movie 'Avatar' shows cinema can enhance viewing when done right

BY ParavManney

A couple of months ago, I saw the 3-D version of “Avatar 2: The Way of Water” at AMC Saratoga 14. It was a breath-taking movie-viewing experience.

When the blue-skinned characters dived into the ocean, I was surprised by how real the marine scenery seemed. Schools of fish scattered and each one darted from odd angles in my periphery. A ray-like creature glided through the water in a wide-sweeping arc, the underside of its alien form approaching and receding away from the audience, stretching out the screen and merging back into it to produce a heightened sense of depth perception, making one feel as if they were truly there.

Such is the effect of 3-D on a movie with tremendously meticulous detail in its computer-generated imagery.

In general, the “Avatar” movies never interested me with their lackluster science fiction plots. They excelled in their ability to dazzle the eyes with dynamic and rich environments, brimming with realistically rendered alien life made all the more authentic by their three-dimensionality (when viewed with the appropriate glasses, of course). Seeing a creature’s contours, soft color-shades or gritty textures is one thing, but actually perceiving its roundness and extension into your world, as though it were suspended over the seating-rows in front of you, is something entirely unique to 3-D cinema.

The director of the “Avatar” movies, James Cameron, has stated that his intention was to push the limits of 3-D technology to effectively immerse his audience in a fictitious, alien world. He succeeded

brilliantly.

The original “Avatar” and its sequel, unlike many other movies, are exemplar “natively authored 3-D” films, meaning they were shot with stereoscopic 3-D cameras. This approach captures depth and dimensionality in a way that post-converted 3-D films (where 2-D films are converted to 3-D in post-production) often cannot replicate.

The scenes of vast, glimmering oceans in Cameron’s latest installment team with layers of vibrant aquatic life and tall spikes of coral analogues projecting from the sandy floor which, in the theater, seemed only centimeters away from my eyes.

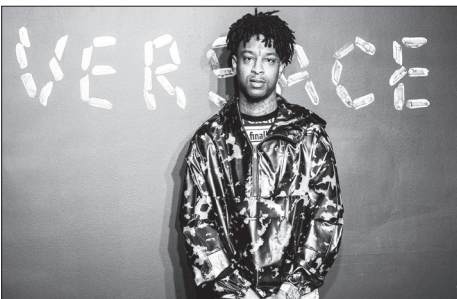
This is the embodiment of 3-D done right and it’s easy to see why: Every aspect of the experience was curated for that

kind of viewing, from the minute precision of the graphics to the camera used to shoot the film. I’ve never really seen many movies that got 3-D right, however, since in most cases it’s pretty unnecessary.

Movies like “Oppenheimer,” “The Light-house” and “Star Wars: A New Hope” (all movies with resplendent visuals) wouldn’t fare well under the 3-D treatment, and would instead just appear like gaudy renditions of their original versions: Objects arbitrarily leaping from the screen would add nothing to the experience.

Since such movies were not made with 3-D at the forefront of the director’s vision, such as with “Avatar,” the additional dimension would, to me, not really heighten the imagery and instead just detract from the original two-dimensional experience intended.

So, context is important. But when done right, “Avatar 2: The Way of Water” proves 3-D movies can be magical. ♦



Courtesy of GETTYIMAGES

21 Savage at Versace fall 2019 fashion show.

Despite its success through the years, MSET Robotics team strives to upgrade its training

By Alec Guan
& Beverly Xu

Every year, the school's FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) team — MSET Fish — is flooded with many more applications than it has open positions.

Its popularity might be attributed to the fact that the team has qualified for the FIRST World Championships seven times and won over 20 awards in its 22-year history. But despite its success, many participants still believe that the team still has a ways to go in improving its organization and integration of newer members.

According to MSET staff adviser and biology teacher Jennifer Lee, the problem lies in the inherent characteristics of a typical FRC team: the large size, time dedication and the demanding 6-week season that runs from early January to April. This year, the team has nearly 50 members, all working on a single competition robot.

Due to the large team size, however, uneven task distribution is a frequent problem.

"When you have a big team, certain people who are more experienced or aggressive will be doing more work," Lee said. "I don't think that a big team means that you can't distribute tasks; I think it means [you have to] take the time to make sure that people are equipped with the skills and opportunities to get involved."

Another challenge is that the team only has five technical mentors, most with full-time jobs as Silicon Valley engineers. This means participants must do a lot of work independently — which takes longer than if a mentor were present to guide students.

During the offseason, which spans from April to December, the team requires members to attend sessions for six hours a week. However, when the build season begins in early January, the required time commitment triples to nearly 15 to 20 hours a week for members who make more technical con-

tributions to the robot.

Every member is also required to volunteer for an outreach initiative for at least two hours during the offseason, such as mentoring local elementary schoolers in their First Lego League robotics competitions. Other than outreach initiatives, which primarily run during the offseason, the team is split into four technical subsystems: software, hardware, electronics and manufacturing. The software and hardware subsystems are then divided into different subteams, each responsible for a different mechanism on the robot, such as drive-train or intake.

Since these teams are already fairly small, and most of the mentors' attention is focused on the sub-team leads, the team has had trouble delegating tasks to new members with less experience than veterans, according to senior team lead Cameron Nguyen. This then hurts team efficiency during competition season, because most experienced members end up having to spend their time mentoring new members rather than developing their actual robot during the time that it needs the most attention.

This season, the student leads and adult mentors are aiming to boost new member participation by building mentoring structures, encouraging team bonding and continuing to respond to constructive criticisms. One of the most common points of feedback that Lee got in her well-received one-on-one "office hours" was a desire for more non-technical activities during meetings.

Unlike previous years, the team holds occasional team-building activities during mandatory meetings that help members build relationships and encourage open communication without needing to spend hundreds of hours in the room together.

"I think team bonding [outside of working on robotics tasks] is important because



Photo by BEVERLY XU

Junior Richard Chung, the FRC team's safety lead for the 2024 season, introduces plans to train nearly 50 members on basic machining for the semester on October 1st.

when you're bonding over a task, the relationship only forms because of the task at hand," Lee said. "But if I know that you have my back, that can go a long way to relieving the tension when working on a task gets hard."

In the software team, senior lead Govind Buttar is also training new members at a much slower pace in comparison to the previous year, so that they have a chance to learn the material in greater detail.

Although Buttar admits the slow pace may be a bit boring for some, he believes that if veteran members can remain patient and answer any questions that new members have, the team can successfully pass on knowledge that would have otherwise been lost after the current senior class graduates.

To make larger changes in leadership principles, Nguyen is working with other student leads and adult mentors. In order to ensure that student leads are capable of better organization and communication, Nguyen and the mentors plan to hold regu-

lar leadership workshops to teach said skills, so that student leads always keep members up-to-date on subsystem progress and gradually teach the required skills.

"We want to eventually make the seminars a place to workshop ideas, and talk about recent and relevant topics that we can put into practice on the team," Nguyen said.

For example, the team has already implemented a system that links new members and veterans together in "schools of fish" — support pods that are not restricted to their usual subsystems. These "schools of fish" sit together every Sunday mandatory meeting and form groups for each team bonding activity.

So far, the team has elevator-pitched outreach initiative ideas, played capture-the-pool-noodle and folded paper planes and forts to attack and defend.

"This year, we're going to push everyone to be involved and engaged with the team, and we're shooting for exponential growth as time goes on," Nguyen said. ♦

Drum Majors: Keeping the band in rhythm

By JaneLee
& AnthonyLuo

As the 6-9 p.m. marching band rehearsal ended on Aug. 17, drum majors Gabriel Shyh and Cameron Nguyen, both seniors, along with drum majors Aiden Chen and Nathan Lee, both juniors, stood by band director Jason Shiuan as he gave out final announcements and reminders to the rest of the band.

Only a few months prior, the four had received the news that they would be the drum majors for the 2023 season, the highest student leadership position in the marching band.

As drum majors, they conduct rehearsals and lead the band throughout the season, often arriving early to practices, staying late and dedicating a huge portion of their time to the program.

"I was really excited because it's a huge position," Nguyen said. "It's very honorable to even be considered."

The extensive, months-long application process for choosing this year's drum majors began in April, with a pool of fifteen applicants applying.

The biggest step was creating a service project dedicated to improving the marching band or another program on campus — for Lee, it was compiling the most effective warm-ups and fundamental exercises for brass players into a book. Besides that, written responses to questions, a conducting audition and interviews with the music staff all contributed to the final decisions.

When he found out he had been picked, Lee said, "It took a long time for it to sink in because before, I didn't have any leadership position, so it was quite a leap transitioning from being a regular member of the trum-

pet section to running the marching band every day."

On typical days, drum majors conduct the band from podiums and ensure that rehearsals run smoothly, whether it be by raising energy levels during warm-ups or making sure that band members are staying on task during practice.

Working alongside the drum majors, staff members also sit in the bleachers or work with students on the field as they clean their field show, providing feedback and instructions.

"The idea is that you don't really want any mistakes to be noticed," Chen said. "You're really just there to assist the directors, but it's also about having a strong voice and being there if anyone needs you."

Making the job especially challenging is that there are 200 members in the band and Color Guard this year, many of them inexperienced freshmen.

But besides keeping members on task, drum majors must also worry about conducting in such a way that they consistently stay on tempo without relying on a metronome. Otherwise, the band would quickly fall apart as it would be impossible to coordinate with each other while facing different directions all across the field.

Although conducting is their main official responsibility, being the face of the music program comes with other duties as well.

The most important one, Nguyen said, is

that each drum major must serve as a role model for other band members.

Nguyen describes this facet of his role as being a "liaison for the students." As actual students who know more about the school environment and are more directly involved with peers, the drum majors can guide other newer members in ways that the music directors might have trouble doing — such as by having conversations with them during water breaks to talk about the show or their lives to help develop a mutual understanding of each other's goals.

For Shyh, that peer-to-peer connection can make all the difference in how a member feels about their marching band experience.

Still, Shyh says leading such a large group is rarely easy.

"Sometimes it's hard to motivate a group that's 200-plus people through the thick and thin of the season, especially with Saratoga's difficult classes and academics," Shyh said.

In particular, as competition season goes into full swing and members have long, exhausting rehearsals in the heat of the day, usually on Saturdays from 9 a.m.

to the late afternoon, the focus of the group can easily collapse.

These situations require the drum majors to project their determination toward the rest of the group by continuing to conduct and energize the group. Shyh said he and the other drum majors often have to step in and provide that extra motivation to push the

band forward.

In the end, the drum major experience boils down to the character of the individuals who hold the position, not just their ability to execute, Lee said. That means each candidate must display discipline, passion and decisiveness in order to earn the trust of those around them.

"A big part of the job is being able to gain the respect of everyone, because respect is not something that comes with the title [of drum major]," Lee said. "Having confidence and believing that the band members will do what you say and that the decisions you make are right is really the most important."

While all of these challenges make the position a tough one, the drum majors said that seeing the band succeed is equally rewarding for everyone involved. So far, their experience has shown them what a group this big and with so much potential is capable of, having already showcased multiple impressive performances of their 2023 show, "Call of the Unknown" at football games and showcases, as well as the Cupertino Tournament of Bands on Oct. 14, where they placed third overall in their division and won Best Percussion.

They will be performing again in competition on Oct. 28 at the Foothill Band Review and on Nov. 4-5 at the Folsom Fall Festival. However, Shyh emphasizes that winning isn't the end goal for marching band.

"Our main goal for this season is that we're trying to step out of our comfort zone and not necessarily doing everything that's super comfortable," Shyh said. "Winning a couple competitions is a byproduct of those efforts, but the true goal is to improve ourselves and our entire group as a whole, not compare ourselves to other bands." ♦

>> falconfigures

22 years in operation

50 members all working on a single robot

15 hours a week in a season for members with technical contributions

7 FIRST World Championships qualifications

A simple guide for success in Chemistry Honors

Within the first few months of sophomore year, I could tell that Chemistry Honors was a notable step up in course difficulty compared to the more introductory freshman-year courses. As a result, it's often known as a Saratoga High student's first "B."

A primarily sophomore-year class, Chemistry Honors is recommended for students who earned a B+ or above in Algebra 1 and Biology. While regular college prep Chemistry class is challenging in itself, the honors curriculum is faster paced and digs deeper into the topics.

Chemistry is more application-based than freshman year Biology, meaning that mastery of the topics call for the ability to apply the knowledge in an expanded context. From what I experienced, that is one of the main reasons why many Chemistry Honors students tend to struggle. Truly understanding concepts is crucial to success.

But don't fret. While Chemistry Honors is a big mountain to climb, there are some tried and true ways to reach its summit.

Starting in the early units, make sure you're on track even if the content seems simple enough to rely on memorization. However, you'll eventually need the ability to synthesize multiple concepts with a collective understanding when the difficulty increases. Though occasionally, teachers will specifically tell you to memorize certain basics, such as chemical compound names.

Chemistry Honors is also cumulative, meaning that second semester topics such as acids and bases will require a proper understanding of the first semester's concepts, such as atomic structure and periodic trends. This is reflected on both finals, with the second one including content from the first semester.

If something is unclear, it's imperative that you master it before it's too late. The first and easiest option is to ask a teacher or classmate. For the first semester, Chemistry Honors teacher Kathy Nakamatsu said she opens discussions on Canvas that allow students to anonymously seek and receive help from both their classmates and Nakamatsu. If you still find yourself confused, there are many freely accessible resources online that many students have found helpful.

Khan Academy, a nonprofit in education, is one of the best resources. Since it offers a Chemistry library structured like a course in itself, with videos, articles, practice problems, quizzes and a unit test for each unit, Khan Academy is a great tool for aiding understanding and breaking down complex questions.

In addition, The Organic Chemistry Tutor, a YouTube channel, offers in-depth lectures on all the topics from the class. For complex concepts such as stoichiometry, the account offers concise tutorials by walking through examples that guide students to a

deeper understanding of the topic. The brief but detailed nature of these videos makes them a must-watch.

Crash Course is another great resource. You may know them from your history classes, but its videos also extend to social science, physical science, life science, math, media studies and business. The coverage that Crash Course chemistry provides is fast-paced, so I'd recommend it for either previewing a topic or studying for finals.

"Information online can also be unreliable, so steer away from sources like Wikipedia and Reddit."

TEACHER Kathy Nakamatsu

For visual learners, your help is just a Google search away. It may be helpful to look at what a certain molecule actually looks like in 3D instead of solely memorizing its properties.

Surfguppy is a digital notebook-like source with mini lessons that include videos explaining topics like periodic table trends, with helpful diagrams and cartoons that help students visualize how atoms and molecules interact for the phenomenon to

To say the least, commuting to school for the past three years has always been convenient for me.

While almost everyone else battles traffic on Heriman Avenue, I lie in bed, sound asleep until my alarm goes off at 8:10 on Blue Days so that I can make it to second period on time.

On Red Days, it's even better: I get the opportunity to sleep in until 10:20 a.m. due to my unscheduled first period, and take my time enjoying delicious scrambled eggs on a bacon-filled bagel. Only after I finish my relaxing breakfast do I have to worry about walking to school or



William Cao

cramming for tests (unfortunate for you unlucky individuals with a first period).

This extra sleep and relaxation before school contributes to me being more productive during the morning, having a set schedule on occasionally working out and studying before school.

Even then, the walk to school takes at most seven minutes. On some occasions, I might wake up at 10 a.m. and opt for a trek to the 30-minute tutorial.

Interestingly enough, I've also been experimenting with how late I can leave and arrive on time for school to the chagrin of my morning teachers.

On Red Days, my limit came in at

10:35, while on Blue Days I pushed it to 8:28 with a bit of running.

Furthermore, living this close to school has its perks when it comes to school-wide events. Since it only takes a few minutes to walk to school, I get to easily enjoy watching some of my favorite events like showing support to the home football games, attending the girls' and boys' volleyball matches and catching up with the tennis and swimming teams.

Also, if I ever forget something at home, whether it's a textbook or my MacBook, I can quickly return and retrieve it without any significant delay. After all, there's very little traffic during school hours.

And let us not forget the annual graduation

ceremonies. From my location, I can hear the honks of all the air horns and joyful cheers from the gathering of parents and friends to commemorate the accomplishments of the seniors — it allows me to feel the celebratory atmosphere and share in the excitement of the event which fills me with excitement and walk over to the event.

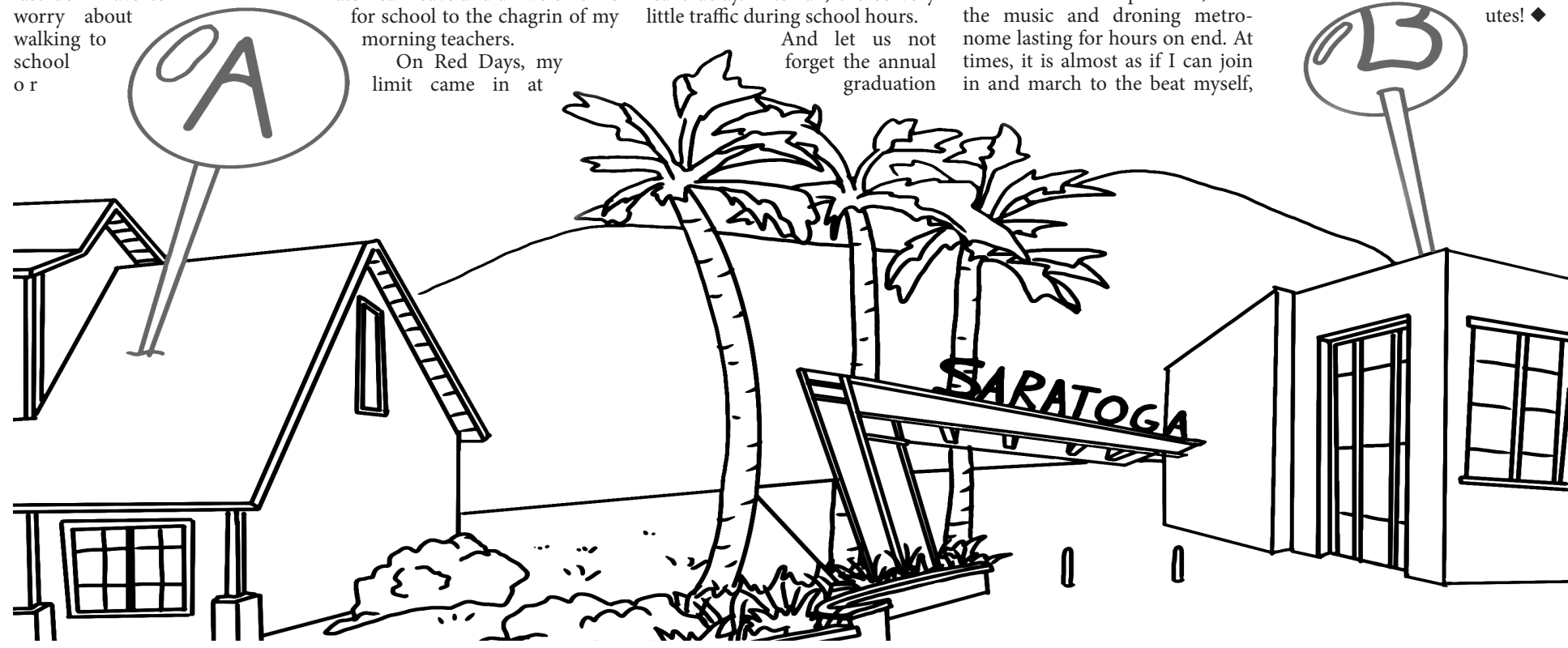
But, of course, living this close to school certainly has some drawbacks, and the extent of these disadvantages often depends on how far into the school year we are.

The marching band rehearsals can be rather cacophonous, with the music and droning metronome lasting for hours on end. At times, it is almost as if I can join in and march to the beat myself,

which is suboptimal when I have unfinished assignments that are due.

During home football games, the announcer's voice (English teacher Erick Rector, in most cases), and the spirited crowd's cheers echo through my open window, creating a sometimes annoying, sometimes relaxing ambience, depending on my mood and what I am currently doing.

Now, as the clock strikes 8:15, it is time for me to roll out of bed and prepare for another day of school. If you will excuse me, I need to get ready. See you on campus in a few minutes! ♦



All graphics by ERIC SHI

THE TIANANMEN SQUARE MASSACRE: THE DAY THE SKY FELL

IN WANG'S WORDS

IN JI'S WORDS

By AnthonyLuo

Editor's Note: Wang is a pseudonym for a Saratoga parent in this story. The parent didn't feel comfortable sharing his name.

On June 3, 1989, one day before the infamous Tiananmen Square massacre that sparked years of outrage and uprisings worldwide, Saratoga parent Wang remembers standing in front of Xinhua Gate (新华门) in Beijing. He and other student protesters formed a human blockade to separate an angry mob of demonstrators demanding dialogue with the government from a group of soldiers. The soldiers were guarding the Zhongnanhai (中南海) — a government compound that housed the highest elites of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) — including previous party head Mao Zedong and the leader at the time, Deng Xiaoping.

"Because of the demonstrations, there was no order at all," Wang said. "We formed a line to prevent random people from attacking the soldiers or escalating the situation."

A day prior, the People's Armed Police (PAP) — the government's official police force — fired tear gas on hundreds of demonstrators at the same gate, a first act of violence against the protesters.

In the early hours of June 4, after Wang retreated back to the middle of Tiananmen Square, that same street was awash with the blood of innocents and soldiers alike after officials ordered a major — and violent — crackdown.

At the center of the crowd, Wang narrowly escaped Tiananmen Square with his life intact, just a few hundred feet away from the tanks and guns firing at fellow student protesters.

"That's really an experience you'll never forget — when you see a soldier just so close to you, holding an automatic rifle and aiming it at you."

PARENT Wang

April 1989: How a university student joined in the Tiananmen Square protests

As a first-year college student studying computer science at Tsinghua University in Beijing, Wang didn't see the lengths to which the government would go.

"At that time, protests were mostly spontaneous," Wang said. "The people felt the need to do something, and then the entire student body just spontaneously went out and had those gatherings."

The Tiananmen Square protests sparked from the death of the liberal CCP Leader Hu Yaobang on April 15, whose calls for reform and denouncement of Maoist ideals made him an enemy of the government but a popular figure among students and progressives.

On the day of Hu's death, students at Tsinghua University gathered in Tiananmen

Square, which housed various monuments symbolizing democracy and freedom, to grieve. Thousands mobilized during Hu's funeral on April 22 — the first week of the Tiananmen Square protests.

Many university students at the time already agreed on many political issues, such as ending government corruption and allowing more economic freedom. All it took was a catalyzing event — Hu's death — for them to act in unison.

"The protests started all of a sudden with a relatively small group of people gathering, and then it got bigger and bigger," Wang said. "A week later it was a huge body of students and teachers across many universities in Beijing going to the streets and demanding change."

Students from Beijing universities created and headed the Beijing Students' Autonomous Federation (the Union), led by the now-famous Wu'erkaixi and Wang Dan. Wang, along with thousands of others, was quick to join the movement, and on April 30, just a week after the Union was formed, more than two-thirds of Beijing's student body was out of their classrooms and protesting in the streets.

April and May of 1989: Building tensions

Wang remembers April 27 as a "huge, peaceful demonstration." One day prior, the People's Daily — the party's official newspaper — posted a now-famous editorial intended to calm protesters down.

However, the editorial condemned "an extremely small number of people" accusing them of manipulating the students' grief over Hu's death to wreak havoc and unrest and causing massive uproar.

On May 13, the leaders of the Union began massive hunger strikes in an attempt to ruin the CCP's global reputation ahead of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's visit.

By the time Gorbachev arrived, 1 million people had once again flooded the square. So in response, on May 19, the Chinese government announced that martial law would take effect in Beijing for the first time in over 40 years.

"That's the day I remember, when I think people, including me, started figuring that this was now not going to end well," Wang said.

Still, the protesters stood strong, Wang said. Students blocking Beijing's entrances and the CCP's prohibition against firing on protesters prevented any real advance. On May 24, the military withdrew, cementing a massive victory for the protesters.

However, what seemed like a victory soon turned to a nightmare — troops regrouped and mobilized a stronger force, coming in from distant places in the country to guarantee they would not sympathize with the students' cause.

In the meantime, however, students began to grow fatigued by the movement, which had already lasted over a month.

"A lot of students just went home because it was almost summer break in



CONTRIBUTED

Standing on the roof of the Tsinghua University dining hall, students protest against the CCP. The banner translates to a metaphor about how chaotic the social unrest at Beijing is.

the university," Wang said. "They needed to go live their daily lives and work."

As the sun set on June 3, 10,000 to 15,000 troops carrying weapons along with more than 100 tanks assembled outside the city.

Tension built. By then, Wang had already moved to the heart of Tiananmen Square to stand with around thousands of other students next to a massive granite obelisk named the "Monument of the People's Heroes."

Hours later, the military began its advance.

"People around the world held onto hope that there could be even the slightest possible ability of change."

PARENT Wang

June 4: The day of the massacre

Wang said he remembers June 4 as if it was yesterday. The military, concentrated in the east and west of the city, opened fire and began its siege on Tiananmen Square. At least 10,000 civilians were crushed to death by oncoming tanks while others were shot in the back while trying to flee. Wang had no guarantee that he would still be alive when the sun rose.

Through the night of June 3, gunfire shook the city.

In the square, a loudspeaker on the Monument to the People's Heroes, projected rallying cries in all directions. Despite these hopeful calls, Wang grew uneasy about their situation.

Before long, the soldiers had converged on the square, while Wang and his fellow students remained at the base of the monument.

Suddenly, their loudspeaker was shot down. Then, the soldiers began their attack.

"That's really an experience you'll never forget — when you see a soldier just so close to you, holding an automatic rifle and aiming it at you," Wang said. "You don't know what will happen in the next moment."

Wang was fortunate enough to be part of a group of several hundred students who, with the help of the Four Gentlemen, the four de-facto leaders that night, peacefully negotiated an exit out of the square.

Most of the others were not so lucky and paid the price with their lives.

Tiananmen Square Massacre's aftermath

For Wang, the most devastating part of the tragedy was China's censorship of the massacre that persists to this day. In fact, that withholding of information is the main reason the BBC's reported death toll of 10,000 is a widely disputed statistic.

"Unfortunately, there's still a younger generation that doesn't know the details and the truth of what happened 34 years ago," he said. "And there's no sign that the government will recognize any of it."

Eventually, he would move to the U.S. mainly for the increased educational opportunities and to follow in the footsteps of his wife.

"If the post-protest economic reform in the former Soviet Union had happened in China, maybe I would have stayed because there would have been more opportunities, but it's really hard to say," Wang said.

Now as a Saratoga parent, Wang has seen the stark contrasts between life in the U.S. and China. Although there are significant issues that threaten American institutions, Wang said that even today, China's policies concerning not just the media but also daily life are still far more extreme.

Despite the vast human cost of the Tiananmen Square and Eastern European revolutions, Wang feels that they became symbolic of the lengths humans will go to in order to ensure their freedom.

From the Monument of the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, where Wang stood firm with his fellow students, to the streets of the Soviet Union where citizens rose up against oppressive regimes, Wang feels that each movement was fueled by the same sentiments.

"People around the world held onto hope that there could be even the slightest possibility of change," Wang said. "That maybe they could right at least some wrongs." ♦

By BeverlyXu

Editor's Note: Ji is a pseudonym for a Saratoga parent in this story. The parent didn't feel comfortable sharing his name. University A and City A are also pseudonyms for a Beijing University and a Chinese city, respectively.

On June 4, 1989, at 6 a.m., Saratoga parent Ji, who was then a student of University A in Beijing, abruptly awakened to banging on his dorm room door. The noise was muffled by his makeshift barricade of chairs and pans. After struggling to tear down the cluttered mess, he opened the door to see his brother, tense but relieved to see him.

"We have to run," Ji's brother said. "It's a crisis; we need to get out of Beijing."

Still groggy, Ji then heard the news that would forever change his perspective on his country's govern-

ment: The previous night, the Chinese military rolled into Beijing's Tiananmen Square and shot thousands of peaceful protesters, most of whom were college students.

That day marked the most recognizable instance of outright military force used by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against its own citizens. And despite the CCP's attempts to stifle the records of the massacre, the story of that night and its aftermath lives on through the memories of those who were there.

Ji flees Beijing with help of helpful citizens

Ji was nearing the end of his fourth year of university when the protests began. He recalls they started organically; news and organization traveled by word of mouth — and until late April, almost all demonstrators were university students.

"University students were really where the new ideas and reform concepts took root," Ji said. "Students not only had the intelligence and exposure to new ideas, but their youth really set them to think and reach out of the box. That's why revolutions always start with students."

Ji came of age during the second com-

munist regime, after the 1976 death of Mao Zedong, the leader of the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. At the time, China had just begun to open its doors to more international influence, so during the demonstrations, Ji recalls that most students, other than the most fervent student leaders, were protesting against government corruption and economic reform, rather than human rights such as free speech.

"Students really set them to think and reach out of the box. That's why revolutions always start with students."

PARENT Ji

At his university, halls were covered with posters calling for action against corrupt government officials, who were siphoning money from government-owned businesses. According to a study by the University of California Santa Barbara, the Chinese press reported more than 300 cases of "corrupt officials" from 1977-1980.

Like thousands of his peers, Ji joined the ranks of the student protesters. At the time, protesters had little indication a massacre would occur: No radio channels spewed unusual propaganda, no soldiers roamed the halls of his university campus and no student leaders he knew of were disappearing into thin air. Instead, the protests seemed almost harmless in their commonsense demands. So when the Tiananmen Square protests began in April 1989, Ji and his classmates eagerly missed class to join in.

In early May, he and a few friends walked to Tiananmen Square. After weeks of constant protests, nearby civilians had grown accustomed to the students, offering them free taxi rides, food and water and the occasional free accommodation. Ji himself took a free taxi ride to the plaza and sat and protested at the city center for an entire night.

"I remember while we were marching on the streets, the residents cheered for us. More and more civilians joined in to cheer or even march with us," Ji said. "There was a sense of camaraderie of 'we're all fighting for the same cause' that kept us going through the night."

However, near the end of May, the CCP had, suspiciously, without threats of violent removal, asked students to return to school. Many, including Ji's brother, did.

One day before the massacre, news channels announced an unusual curfew. When Ji returned to his room that night, he noticed all six of his roommates were gone. Out of fear of being alone, he stacked pans and chairs to barricade the door.

He fell asleep, unaware of the massacre occurring just 10 miles to the south, only to wake up to news from his brother that the government had massacred hundreds and possibly thousands of protesters in Tiananmen Square.

In a panic, Ji and his brother ran to the nearest train station. But every train to their hometown, Da Tong, in Shanxi province, was blocked, forcing them to resort to a train headed to Inner Mongolia. Once there, they were able to seek accommodations from sympathetic civilians in cities they passed through who were aware of what had occurred in Beijing.

Knocking on doors for help filled Ji and his brother with a mix of fear and hope — they were wary of identifying as students fleeing Beijing, but also had hope that, because the Tiananmen protests were such a widely respected movement, they would be protected.

And they were right. As they made their way back home to Da Tong, they were offered free rides by train conductors and found residents welcoming them into their homes.

Fierce propaganda takes over Beijing city

Due to the CCP's propaganda campaigns that isolated citizens from foreign influence, Ji took in the full breadth of the government's repression and militant actions following the massacre only after he came to the U.S. a year later.

What shocked Ji the most was the Chinese media's representation of the massacre: News anchors made no mention of the brutal violence and stated that protesters were attacking soldiers with a "secret agenda" to destroy China. They accused international anti-communist forces of manipulating young students and disrupting Beijing peace, he recalled.

In the months following the massacre, when Ji had made it home, he heard stories from other student protesters

that when they tried to share their horror stories of the massacre, ignorant citizens who had lived under the "old regime" were so embroiled in the state-generated propaganda that they invalidated victims' sufferings and dismissed the atrocities that occurred.

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Thousands of protesters fill Tiananmen.

Now living in Saratoga 30 years later, Ji continues to observe the CCP's control and manipulation over the information citizens receive. According to Radio Free Asia, a non-profit news corporation working to bring uncensored media to media-censoring Asian countries, most people in China under 40 know little to nothing about June 4th, 1989.

"The whole human rights concept was very, very new," Ji said. "But people were starting to realize: 'me as an individual, as a human, maybe I have certain rights.'" ♦

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1989 Tiananmen Timeline

April 15Hu Yaobang dies suddenly from a fatal heart attack and is mourned by citizens across the country, providing an opportunity for crowds to gather under one united cause.

April 22More than 100,000 students are on the streets protesting Hu Yaobang's death, and within a week, two-thirds of Beijing's students are protesting.

May 13In anticipation for Soviet Party Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's visit, 3,000 students go on a hunger strike.

May 20The People's Liberation Army attempt to occupy Beijing for the first time in 40 years of CCP rule.

May 24The People's Liberation Army is forced to retreat from Beijing, and regroup, humiliating the CCP and building tensions between them and the protesters.

June 2CCP party elders vote to use military force and remove the protesters from Tiananmen Square.

June 3Marching down the streets of Beijing, blocked by demonstrators, the People's Liberation Army begins firing relentlessly against the protesters.

June 4At 1 a.m., the People's Liberation Army surrounds Tiananmen Square from all sides, awaiting orders from the government.

June 4At 4 a.m., despite a majority support to remain in the square, student leaders choose to leave. Later that morning, parents and medical staff attempting to retrieve bodies are shot in the back.

June 5The military has full control of Tiananmen Square, but around noon, the infamous "Tank Man" steps out to stop the line of tanks, marking the protesters' last stand.



ALL STORIES BY AmyLuo

Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

Athletic director Rick Ellis: college football standout

Growing up, athletic director and PE teacher Rick Ellis was surrounded by passionate athletic relatives — some of his earliest memories include cheering on his uncles from the sidelines of the football field.

“I was always enamored by the look of their pads and helmet,” Ellis said. “That’s the atmosphere I was raised in. When I was little, I would wear tight pajamas and fold the socks in to look like the football players that I aspired to be like.”

His eldest uncle was the offensive coordinator at St. John Bosco High in Bellflower, a nationally acclaimed football team. At a young age, Ellis was the team’s ball boy.

“I was around to witness the football experience: the intensity on the fields, the players’ work ethics and dynamics,” he said. “It was all just incredibly influential to me.”

The powerful love for sports that Ellis was surrounded with from a young age later paved the path for him to become a stand-out college football player.

Inspired by his uncles and other family members, he joined the local flag football little league, La Palma Recreation. He advanced to playing for city leagues in middle school, which included playoffs throughout southern California.

Ellis found that sports always brought him joy. Having admired the high schoolers his uncle coached, he was determined to bring the same energy to help his own teammates, he said. Ellis, however, didn’t limit himself to football — he was a well-rounded multi-sport athlete who also played basketball in winter and baseball in spring.

At St. John Bosco, he made the varsity football team as a sophomore and continued to play varsity upon transferring to legendary sports powerhouse Mater Dei High in Santa Ana for his junior and senior years.

Ellis’s devotion to the sport paid off when he was offered an athletic scholarship to Saint. Mary’s College, a Division II and later Division I-AA independent football program in Moraga. As Ellis participated in the NCAA West Coast Conference (WCC), football became the biggest time commitment in his life. (For budget reasons, Saint Mary’s discontinued its football program after the 2003 season, though it had been a West Coast powerhouse in the 1920s and 1930s)

He sat through lectures for his social studies major during the day, practiced football on the fields until 7 p.m. and studied the remainder of the night; he repeated this cycle every week-day while playing for the Gaels.

During the fall, games took place on weekends with practices five days of the week. In the off seasons, winter meant physical and technical training, while spring shifted back to a regular practice schedule.

“Playing in college was an incredible experience,” he said. “Once you get to that point, everyone’s pretty good skillwise, so it really elevates the level of performance. It was also cool to meet people from all over the U.S., and I was able to build lasting relationships. With that being said, it was definitely a grind.”

For Ellis, pushing through four years of intensive training required much perseverance and resilience, especially with football

being an injury-prone and “uncomfortable sport.” During his lows, he motivated himself by appreciating the opportunities he received and pushing himself to improve his performance during games.

“You don’t get the energy, intensity and excitement of a game anywhere else. It was a dopamine kind of rush,” Ellis said. “A win was always so exciting, but even when you lose, it only makes you want to work harder.”

At the time, Ellis was 5’7” and weighed around 150 and played on the same field as towering giants who weighed in at 250 pounds or more. Although his build was not of a typical football player, he excelled as a wide receiver and punt returner with his speed and strength.

After graduating from college in 1995, he considered going professional and showed up for a few tryouts that recruited Bay Area and Northwest college athletes, for teams such as the San Francisco 49ers and the San Jose Sabercats.

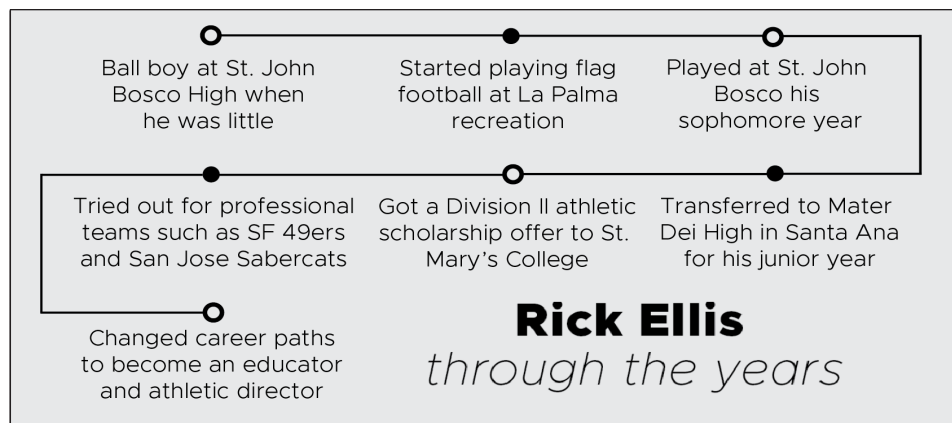
Although he ultimately did not make any

professional teams, the rejections guided him toward earning his teaching credential with his social studies degree.

Ellis knew he could impact the next generation of students and aspiring athletes with his knowledge as a college athlete and the influence of his own former coaches. He previously taught U.S. History and World Geography and has sometimes coached the football team here, including this year as an assistant coach working mainly with defensive backs and receivers.

Now as the school’s athletic director and track and field coach, going on 22 years, he works with students and the various sports teams’ coaches. While his college playing career as a player ended a quarter century ago, he was once again inspired by his early memories of watching his uncle coach on the sidelines.

“When I was in the credentials program, the vision [to coach] began to solidify,” Ellis said. “I enjoy what I do, and I haven’t looked back since.” ♦



Graphic by SAAACHI JAIN

Math teacher Kelly Frangieh: dual collegiate athlete at UC Davis

Math teacher Kelly Frangieh is known on campus for teaching Algebra 2 honors and Pre-calculus. Hidden behind her academic career, however, is the journey of an active athlete from childhood through college at UC Davis.

She began athletics by swimming and playing soccer starting at age 5. Eventually, she realized she had a stronger passion for water sports and focused on swimming when she reached high school.

As part of the Los Gatos High Class of 1988, she was a 4-year varsity swimmer and a member of the Los Gatos Rowing Club. She also played on the West Valley Water Polo club for a couple of years before heading to college at UC Davis.

The swimming coach for the D1 pro-

gram offered her a spot on the roster, but the team came out to be too competitive. Subsequently, Frangieh turned to the girls’ water polo team, which was yet to be NCAA-approved at the time and was officially considered a club.

“Girls’ water polo was a club, but it was intense and taken seriously,” Frangieh said. “We had practice every day and we traveled throughout the country to compete at nationals. The only thing [that was missing] was the NCAA approval, which no schools had at the time for the sport.”

Practices were held on weekday afternoons, consisting of lifting weights for an hour followed by two hours in the water. Throughout Frangieh’s 4-year career, UC Davis qualified for nationals every year, so-

liding themselves as a top eight program in the nation. UC Davis placed third in her freshman year and second in each of the next three years. She recalls the greatest and toughest matches to be against UC San Diego and Brown University.

Despite water polo being a spring sport, training occurred year-round, but off-season practices were not held as frequently. Hence, Frangieh also joined UC Davis’s ski club during winters. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, when she didn’t have classes, she often traveled with the team to the Tahoe area to practice.

“We had a cabin up north and we got to stay at different resorts, which always made the competitions fun,” Frangieh said.

Additionally, the top seven skiers in the club qualified for a free season pass at Sugar Bowl, their practice ski range, serving as a big incentive for Frangieh, who always made the top seven.

After graduation, Frangieh started on the path she always aspired to: being an educator. Her mother was a K-5 teacher for children in special education, and Frangieh always used to help out in her classroom. Additionally, at Los Gatos, her favorite teacher, Butch Cattolico, who taught trigonometry for 38 years and was the head coach of the football team for 28 years. The influence from the mentors in her life paved Frangieh’s path to becoming a teacher.

“I briefly considered going into business, hence my economics major,” Frangieh said. “But when I was done with college, I knew what I really wanted was to teach. I wanted to be like Catholic.”

Her first job was at Lynbrook High School as a math teacher and girls’ water polo coach, which lasted for seven years.

After switching to teach math at the school, she continued coaching for a couple of years until her daughters became a priority.

“The only thing [that was missing] was the NCAA approval, which no schools had at the time for the sport.”

MATH TEACHER Kelly Frangieh

Today, Frangieh no longer plays the intense sports of her childhood, but she stays active through hiking, snowboarding and wakeboarding with her family. Her husband Bill Frangieh is an athlete as well, having played football at South San Francisco High and later at Eastern Illinois University on a scholarship. He was in training camp with the 49ers for a month before an ACL injury ended his professional career. Afterwards, he was an assistant football coach at Saratoga High in the early 2000s.

Their two daughters, Karly and Zoe Frangieh, are following in their athletic paths. Zoe is a sophomore playing on Arizona State University’s D1 water polo team, and Karly, a senior who stars in water polo and swimming at Los Gatos High, will be joining her sister on the team next year, having verbally committed to the Sun Devils earlier in the year.

“I find it super exciting,” Frangieh said. “My daughters are similar to me in loving the team aspect of water polo; I’m glad I got them into swimming early.” ♦



Courtesy of KELLY FRANGIEH

Frangieh at the 1990 water polo National Championships held at Brown University.

Seniors in fantasy football league bond while competing for victories through intense rivalries

by NikhilMathihalli & DanielWu

The subject can eat pancakes and each one eaten will take an hour off their sentence.

In fantasy football, players create and manage their own teams composed of real NFL players within a league of between four to 18 teams.

Each league starts with a draft in early September, which coincides with the start of the NFL season. Players follow a “snake draft” where players are assigned to a random draft order and the first participant places their pick, followed by the second and so on. The order reverses in the following rounds allowing for fairness of picks.

Each week, players face off against another team within their league. Players within each team accumulate “fantasy points” — points awarded for various in-game feats players perform, such as a touchdown or yards gained —

and the team with the greater number of fantasy points each week wins.

The number of fantasy points awarded depends on the type of league — at the beginning of the season, fantasy footballers can choose between two different types of leagues: a pointer-per-reception (PPR) league, and a non-PPR league. Chakravarthi’s league is a PPR league, meaning every reception that a player makes contributes a number of points to their overall fantasy score.

In the Browntown League, a receiving or rushing touchdown is awarded 6 fantasy points, a passing touchdown is awarded 4 points and every 25 passing yards accounts for 1 point. Participants can also draft defenses, which are awarded points for interceptions and pick-6 touchdowns.

Once the draft is finished, every participant’s team roster is locked for the rest of the season. However, participants can still trade players with each other or pull from the waiver wire — a pool of unpicked free agents.

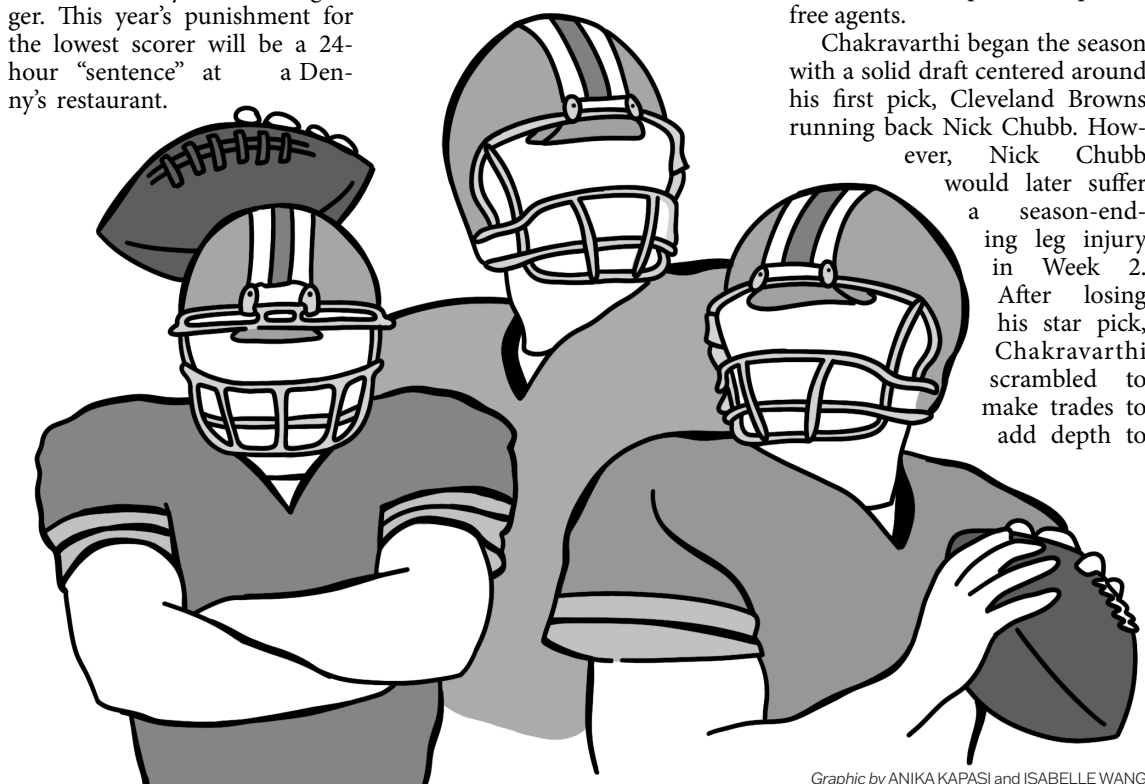
Chakravarthi began the season with a solid draft centered around his first pick, Cleveland Browns running back Nick Chubb. However, Nick Chubb would later suffer a season-ending leg injury in Week 2. After losing his star pick, Chakravarthi scrambled to make trades to add depth to

his roster. He traded Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson, Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver A.J. Brown and Minnesota Vikings running back Alexander Madison for Tennessee Titans wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins, Mike Williams, Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow and Seattle Seahawks running back Kenneth Walker.

“I was definitely angry and I had to make do with what I could,” Chakravarthi said. “I was really hopeful for Williams but obviously, it didn’t go as planned since he’s out now.”

TOP 6

1. MOHIT GANDLURU
2. ABHINAV KIRAN
3. DHILON PRASAD
4. SHREY JAIN
5. RAGHAV RAJAN
6. KALI DUWURI

AS OF OCT. 19
Graphic by ANIKA KAPASI

Graphic by ANIKA KAPASI and ISABELLE WANG

Sophomore wins bronze with Youth National Team at Artistic Swimming World Championships

by AmyMiao & EmilyWu

Standing on the podium at the 2023 World Aquatics Youth Artistic Swimming Championships held in Athens, Greece, from Aug. 30 to Sept. 3, sophomore Sophia Tsives felt an overwhelming sense of pride and accomplishment. As part of the U.S. Youth National Team, Tsives’s team placed third out of 12 countries in the Team Free event at the end of the 4-day competition, with Japan finishing first followed by Spain.

Out of over 100 top swimmers in the country ranging from ages 13-15, Tsives

was one of the 12 accepted into the Youth National Team after passing an extensive qualification process in January. She was required to pass a land and water test — which assessed endurance and speed swimming — and perform individual and group artistic routines to show off her technical abilities.

Qualifying for the Youth National Team for the second time, Tsives traveled to Las Vegas over the summer to train for eight weeks with other elite swimmers from all over the nation to prepare for the World Championships. After training, the team flew to Athens in August to compete.

Tsives started the sport at age seven after seeing an ad for an artistic swimming summer camp. The sport, previously known as synchronized swimming, combined aspects of what she had already been doing — swimming and gymnastics — so she decided to give it a try. After quickly developing a strong passion for the sport, she joined the Santa Clara Aquamaids, an artistic swimming club, and has been swimming there ever since.

During the school year, Tsives trains with the Aquamaids six days a week, for four to

five hours per day on weekdays and up to six on weekends. Competition season for artistic swimming starts around March and local club nationals take place in April before the team is off on break for the summer. However, since she made the Youth National Team in early May, Tsives continued to train over the summer.

“It’s really fascinating to see how other teams do compared to us.”



SOPHOMORE Sophia Tsives

Due to competitions with the Santa Clara Aquamaids and the National Team, Tsives frequently travels around the nation. The 2023 World Championships, however, was her first time competing outside the coun-

try. “In 2022], the World Championships were hosted in America, so this year it was really interesting to compete in another country,” Tsives said. “It’s really fascinating to see how the other teams do compared to us.”

Though she has an intense practice schedule and travels frequently, Tsives said she tries her hardest to balance her artistic swimming hours with her school work. For the most part, her competitions line up with school breaks, but when they don’t, she finds that catching up can be extremely difficult and she often needs to squeeze in homework when she has downtime during competitions.

In the future, Tsives hopes to qualify and compete with the Junior National Team, for athletes ages 16-19. She is also looking forward to continue pursuing the sport after graduation.

“My goal is to get recruited into a top college with a great artistic swimming program like Stanford, UC Berkeley or UCLA and continue my swimming journey there,” Tsives said. ♦

FOOTBALL

Falcons close senior night with controversial loss

BY WilliamCao

Senior night game on Oct. 20 ends with painful 9-7 loss after officials reset clock

The fans, decked out in America-themed colors, cheered for the senior football players as they walked down the gridiron before the game, each holding a bouquet of flowers.

During the Falcons' game against Jefferson, the Grizzlies initially scored two field goals in the second quarter, leaving the Falcons down 6-0. However, senior wide receiver Cooper Call caught a touchdown pass from freshman quarterback Anson Hulme with 5 seconds remaining before halftime. After a successful conversion by senior kicker Yul Hong, the Falcons led 7-6.

With 11 seconds left in the game, the Falcons' defensive line repeatedly stopped Jefferson's attempts to score at the 10-yard line. As the clock dwindled, Jefferson's quarterback appeared to want to spike the ball but took a knee instead. Fans roared, thinking the Falcons had clinched a 7-6 victory. However, officials controversially reset the clock back to 11 seconds left in the game, giving the Grizzlies opportunity to kick a field goal. The result: a 9-7 loss for the Falcons.

With hunched backs and tears in their eyes, the seniors and coaching staff made their way back to the locker room for the

post-game talk. With this loss, the Falcons hold a 1-4 league record in the Peninsula-Lake League as of Oct. 20.

Saratoga forfeits against South San Francisco on Oct. 13

Football has long been battling shortages in its roster. According to senior defensive back Tristan Hoang, potential players are cautious about joining the team due to football's reputation as a dangerous sport. As a result, the team has only 26 players this year, compared to last year's 33-member roster, who finished with a 1-6 league record.

Hoang said the lack of players has been a challenge this season and a concerning trend for the future. This situation reached a point where head coach Stephen Matos decided to forfeit their away game against South San Francisco on Oct. 13. Instead, the Falcons helped the JV team win their game that day with the addition of several regular varsity players like Hulme, junior linebacker and tight end Doug Bettinger and sophomore running back and linebacker Brennan Pak. This plan worked out, as JV won 7-0.

33-0 victory against Monta Vista on Oct. 5

As the clock trickled down in the third quarter, senior defensive back Raghav Rajan caught two interceptions and the Falcons

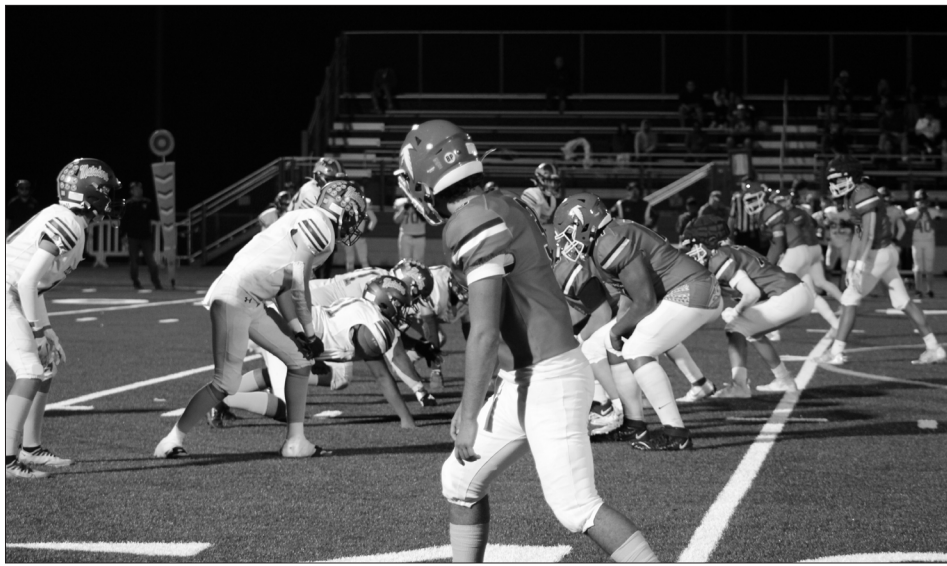


Photo by ANIKA KAPASI

Senior Cooper Call lines up to run his wide-receiver route against Monta Vista on Oct. 5.

plowed through the defense, securing their first league win, 33-0. It was a particularly memorable night for Call, who was nominated for Bay Area News Group boys Athlete of the Week. Call caught six passes for 227 yards and scored two touchdowns.

"[Call] had an impressive game, but what is even more remarkable is that it was not

his best performance," Hoang said. "He is our X factor and can make any play a touchdown. The whole team looks up to him — he brings energy and makes football fun."

The Falcons hope to achieve similar positive results for their remaining games away against Gunn on Oct. 27 and away against Lynbrook on Nov. 4. ♦

GIRLS' GOLF

A long shot: After losing a star player, Falcons suffer losses

BY KathyWang

Earlier this year No. 2 player junior Sarah Lim made the difficult choice to scale back her participation in the golf team's practices and matches. This is one reason, among others, that the team has lost more matches this year. Due to a heavy junior year workload, Lim — after thoroughly discussing with her parents and head coach Dave Gragnola — decided to only attend occasional practices with the team and play seven of the 12 total matches.

"Because school golf is right in the begin-

ning of the semester, it's difficult to find your way through," Lim said. "And you'll also be missing a lot of classes because you have to leave school pretty early for matches. It's just tough, especially with the academic rigor."

Additionally, Lim already practices individually for six to seven days a week, which makes it difficult to balance her time between school and individual golf.

Lim played in the final match of the season on Oct. 16, which the team won 229-244 vs. Los Gatos at the Sara-



Lim

toga Country Club. However, she didn't attend the two previous matches on Oct. 11 against Palo Alto and Oct. 5 against Monta Vista, which both took place at the Baylands Golf Course; the results were 252-219 and 236-225 losses, respectively. Though the loss to Palo Alto was anticipated, as the Vikings are one of the top teams in the league, the loss to Monta Vista was disappointing. The Falcons, with a record of 5-7, finished in third in the De Anza division.

The team was disappointed, but they

supported her choice. Additionally, Lim feels that modifying her playing and practice time was the right decision, though she does feel slightly disconnected from the two new players, sophomore Arista Survana and freshman Jaqueline Chico, compared to the rest of the team.

No. 1 player sophomore Millie Wang, Lim, No. 3 player junior Eunice Ching, No. 4 player sophomore Stella Cho and No. 5 player Lydia Li were set to play in the league finals on Oct. 25 at Santa Teresa. (The Falcon was unable to cover it because of printing deadlines.) ♦

FIELD HOCKEY

Freshmen take key offensive roles

BY AnamikaAnand

As the clock ticked down during the field hockey team's senior night game against Santa Clara on Oct. 18, the Bruins tied the score 3-3 during the fourth quarter. The Falcons battled all the way through, putting forth a few coordinated offensive attacks until Santa Clara slipped through their defense and scored in the fourth minute of overtime, resulting in a disappointing 4-3 loss.

As of the game, they stood in fourth place in the El Camino League with an 8-4 record under the guidance of head coach Sam Ng. The team had two games left: against Presentation at home on Oct. 23 and Lynbrook away on Oct. 25. (The Falcon was unable to cover them because of printing deadlines.)

Through team bonding activities like boba runs on 'Pumps Tuesday or Secret Santa-style snack gifting rituals on game days, members grew more comfortable as a team, contributing to a mid-season comeback.

After more intense practices, the Falcons went on a five-game win streak before falling to Santa Clara.

"In our first game we were really disconnected," Green said. "Since then, we have really gotten to know each other and we're able to communicate if there's something

we need to do better [in games and practices] without taking it to heart."

Another factor contributing to the team's success is the strength of their freshman players, who have significantly contributed to the team's accomplishments. Two rising stars on the team, freshmen left and right forwards Evelyn Williams and Giselle Adams, have played a key role in the Falcons' offense and have kept up well with the pace of the team.

"It's a big deal for freshmen to be on varsity," Green said. "At the beginning [Williams and Adams] were nervous, but they've definitely become more comfortable."

Having little experience, both freshmen did not expect to make the varsity team. Though they were happy to make the team, they were also nervous about how they would do.

"The first few practices I felt like I was doing so badly, so I was really surprised [to be put on varsity]," Williams said. "I was also kind of nervous that I'd mess up, but everyone's so nice, and I definitely feel supported even when I make a mistake."

With more confidence and a great experience on the team this year, both freshmen plan to play next year as well.

"I thought I wasn't going to enjoy it as much [because there were so few freshmen on the team], but it's been really fun," Adams said. ♦



Adams

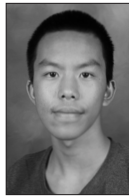
BOYS' WATER POLO

Santa Clara wins senior night game

BY AgastyaVitaldevara

The boys' water polo team took the lead in the first quarter against Santa Clara on their Oct. 19 senior night game, with senior co-captain and center defender Yanis Herne scoring the first goal. After the score went back and forth for the first two quarters, a weak third quarter left the Falcons down 6-5. Though senior left wing Jarrett Singh kept the team in the game with a quick shot off a rebound, Santa Clara edged out an 8-7 victory.

The team ended with a 1-13 record in the El Camino League after struggling with a full, healthy roster and adjusting to a new coach. They played Home- stead in the first game of league



Fung

and COVID got in the way, even though it's evident that we're playing better in games than at the beginning of the season."

The biggest adjustment for the

finals on Oct. 23. (The Falcon was unable to cover this game due to printing deadlines.)

The boys' season was plagued by sickness, often leaving them without their full set of starters. Key players like senior co-captains Herne and Mitchell Chen, senior left-wing Singh and junior right-flat Kirby Fung were unable to play multiple games.

"We were really hoping for a late season turn-around like our last season; we beat most teams the second time we played them," Fung said. "Unfortunately sickness

and COVID got in the way, even though it's evident that we're playing better in games than at the beginning of the season."

The biggest adjustment for the

team came from the new head coach Utku Karhan. Under the previous coach, Class of 2022 alumnus Kendal Jarvis, practices would often stretch to three hours, while this season, practices often lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours due to Karhan's busy schedule.

After a long string of disappointing losses, the Falcons got their first win of the season at home against Wilcox on Oct. 5. With two underclassmen, Shah and freshman Brian Le, playing vital roles in the starting lineup. For his part, Shah is optimistic about the program's future.

"We have so much talent on our team this year, and more incoming from JV," Shah said. "I know that with some direction, we'll definitely be in contention for league championships next year." ♦

GIRLS' WATER POLO

Fierce mentality leads to strong 11-1 record

BY RichardFan

The girls' water polo team has concluded their season in first place with an overwhelmingly successful league record of 11-1 as of Oct. 20. They won every game in the El Camino League except for a 7-2 loss away to Mountain View on Oct. 3 and put themselves in a position to advance to SCVAL league finals held on Oct. 24, Oct. 25 and Oct. 27. Those matches will determine whether the team will qualify for CCS. (The Falcon was unable to cover these games due to printing deadlines.)

"What went well this season was probably our mindset, think-

ing that we would go into games ready to give our everything," junior wing Cassidy Coghlan said.

"What went well this season was probably our mindset."

JUNIOR Cassidy Coghlan

Cassidy also partly attributes their success to the team's familiarity with head coach Michael Allegretti's coaching style. Because the team has worked with him for the past 2 years, they have found a sense of stability, in contrast to previous years when their coaches changed every season.

Having a skilled roster this year also contributed to their results — five players on the team play club water polo outside of school. Along with this, freshman point Riona Coghlan found that the team's high morale has helped them win. She noted that the team always has a loud bench, with the girls constantly screaming in encouragement to each other.

"We're really excited to advance to league finals, and it's going to be a really fun time playing at another level as a team and hopefully taking home a few wins," Cassidy said. ♦

CROSS COUNTRY

Team looks toward CCS

BY KevinYang

After the cross country regular season ended, the boys' team was 5th out of 7 teams in the El Camino league and the girls' team was 6th.

At the team's recent SCVAL League meet on Oct. 18, the boys placed 11th out of 14 schools and the girls placed 12th out of 13. Runners are preparing for their last two meets: SCVAL League Finals on Oct. 31 and CCS on Nov. 11.

According to junior captain Adi Hebbalae, one major issue for the boys' team is that freshman runners are not consistently running with full strength because they struggle to keep up motivation during long

distance runs. However, under head coach Ian Tippetts's guidance, many members of the team have set reachable goals for themselves to help push themselves to the fullest. On the other hand, the girls' team's biggest challenge



Rahut

is that it has only seven runners — the minimum number needed to be eligible to race — and no seniors. Junior captain Anisha Rahut believes that if they had a larger roster with more experienced runners, the team would have performed much better.

"I'm excited for the freshmen who will come from eighth grade," Rahut said. "There will be more experienced runners next year and I know we can do better." ♦

GIRLS' TENNIS

Falcons end in second place

BY SashaPrasad

After winning 8 of their last 10 matches, the girls' varsity tennis team is in second place in the El Camino League with a 8-2 record as of Oct. 20.

Despite this, the Falcons will not move up to the De Anza league as they hoped. Due to their 6-1 and 7-0 losses against Lynbrook on Oct. 10 and Sept. 19, respectively, Lynbrook will be the team to earn advancement.

The team had two games left in the season against Gunn on Oct. 24 and Fremont on Oct. 26. (The Falcon was unable to cover these games due to printing deadlines.)

These consistent wins have given players such as singles No. 1 sophomore Mihika Singh newfound confidence in her game. Singh was initially unsure of her capability to play in the top spot early in the season, but she rose to the occasion. When playing Lynbrook for the first time, Singh lost both sets 6-0 and 6-1. She improved and took a 3-0 lead the second time, making her opponent forfeit. Singh said she sees this season as a success.

"We all improved so much this season and even though we were slightly beaten by Lynbrook, I think everyone should be proud of how they played," Singh said. ♦

GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL

JV players move up to varsity team

BY NatalieChua
& SarahZhou

Junior libero Caitlin Lee locked eyes with Homestead's server and passed the ball. With senior setter Ariel Zhou's quick set, freshman Aanya Hotha slammed the ball for a point. Despite their efforts, the Falcons fell 3-0 to Homestead during their senior night home game on Oct. 18.

"JV and varsity levels are really different, so moving people is tough."

JUNIOR Narmeen Khericha

Earlier in the season, when only eight players were available for a game against Fremont on Oct. 4, the girls' volleyball team managed to scrape by with a tight 3-2 win. However, with the consistently low numbers due to illnesses and personal conflicts during games, head coach Yakgna Arumugam began pulling JV players onto varsity.

"We practice according to how the starters play, and if they don't show up, then a new player plays in that position. This has made it really hard to adapt to new players," freshman outside hitter Iris Jin said.

With a small roster, the rest of the team has been pushed harder than usual, with starters such as Jin finding themselves overworked.

"I think it's pretty frustrating sometimes because when you're not playing well, you don't have anyone to sub in and it feels like you're the only person who can really step it up and do better," Jin said.

Coach Arumugam pulled up JV players such as freshman outside hitter Aneiya Thomas, and sophomores outside hitter Jena Lew and middle blocker Elizabeth Kline to practice with the varsity team.

However, the addition of new players this late in the season was a difficult adjustment for the varsity players, as the JV team practices different drills and has had little time to build team chemistry with the varsity members.

"The level on JV and varsity is really different so moving people is tough on both JV and varsity players," junior setter Narmeen Khericha said.

Despite this, the Falcons have been resilient in fighting for every point during games. With a 3-0 win against Santa Clara on Oct. 16, a 3-1 loss to Lynbrook on Oct. 11 and a 3-2 win against Fremont on Oct. 4, the Falcons were in place third in the El Camino League and hold a 5-4 record as of Oct. 20.

"I think we have a good shot at making it to CCS, so we're all really excited for the competition," Khericha said. ♦

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Courtesy of SARATOGA SPORTS BOOSTERS



Photo by ANIKA KAPASI



Photo by FLORENCE HU



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO

The varsity field hockey team huddles in a circle and raises their sticks in celebration after a goal in an 2-1 victory against Monta Vista on Oct. 9.

Seniors Erika Andersson, Anna Bui and Michelle Wan pose while performing dance team routine during the Oct. 5 football game vs Monta Vista.

During the Drama 4H period, seniors Arushi Maheshwar, Ashly Henry, Ryan Cagliostro and Ariana Tootoonchi rehearse with drama director, Benjamin Brotzman, to prepare for upcoming fall play, "Almost Maine."

The school's FTC team, 6165 MSET Cuttlefish, discuss upcoming community outreach initiatives during the team's weekly all-team meeting.

A Spongebob-less childhood allowed me to experience real TV

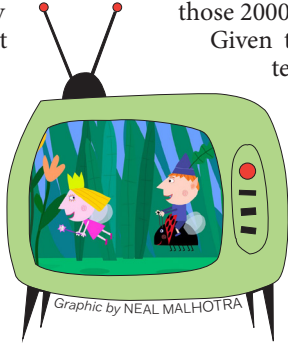
Tara Nat-an
American
Tara Natarajan

When I tell people I never watched "Spongebob" growing up, it elicits gasps of horror. "You've never watched SPONGEBOB?" they ask, faces pale with shock. After all, "Spongebob" is considered a television staple in the American childhood experience. The simple response is that I didn't have an American childhood — I grew up in India. But in terms of children's television, I didn't even have an Indian childhood. My parents were pretty strict with the TV I watched — cable television was a big no because of the constant advertisements. As a result, we hoarded many DVDs animated British TV shows my father would bring over from his trips to London — shows no one, let alone my classmates, had heard of.

Every piece of media I consumed between the ages of 3 and 10 came straight from the little island of Great Britain. "Peppa Pig" is just the tip of the anthropomorphic animal iceberg; think "Angelina Ballerina," "Paddington," "Olivia," "Pingu," "Noddy," "Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom." I'm exclusively referring to the glorious hand-animated treasures from the 2000s, not the horrendous CGI ones. I can't underestimate just how good these shows were. Aside from the beautiful animation, the storytelling was first rate. Each one felt like its own perfectly created world, with funny, captivating and well-crafted characters. The stories and themes could get complex, but the execution was wonderfully simple — and never overstimulating. Shows like "Noddy" and "Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom" were set in their own, unique universes. Toys were alive and fairies existed; all I wanted to do was join them in their intriguing Toyland mysteries and magical forest escapades. Peppa Pig's camping trips and vis-

its to the museum were mesmerizing, giving me a glimpse into places I had never been. Paddington Bear's curious adventures took me around the enchanting stores and train stations of London like a proper tourist. Angelina Ballerina made me feel like I was gracefully dancing the ballet right next to her. Many of them were either based on books I had read, or had book adaptations for children: Take Pingu and Olivia, for example. Both of those characters were so important to me because they taught me how to feel complex emotions at an early age. Olivia is a pig with a very sensitive personality, and Pingu is an equally sensitive penguin. The nuanced family dynamics in those shows also showed me how to communicate well with my own family. They were gentle shows, not brash or loud, and they suited my own introverted personality.

Most were distributed by Ceebeebies, the children's wing of BBC, but produced by smaller animation studios that took great time and care in developing each episode's story and aesthetics. I've never seen any children's TV that was of better quality than those 2000s shows. Given the disastrous state of children's television today (see: "Cocomelon"), I feel lucky to have been raised by Cbeebies and I truly believe the quality of media I was exposed to as a kid shaped the way I think, write and speak even to this day. Even now, the thought of my box sets fills me with an overwhelming sense of nostalgia at how simple they made life seem. The joy was in the beautifully developed characters and their meaningful interactions with each other. I might not have watched "Spongebob" like so many of my peers, but I don't have a single regret. In my mind, my British shows are as perfect as any television show can get. ♦



Graphic by NEAL MALHOTRA

A series of unfortunate events: tenth grade

Kavya Pa-tell
me about it!
Kavya Patel

Coming off a freshman year spent largely at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was more than excited to begin my true high school experience as a sophomore. In retrospect, I realize my second year of high school really felt like a freshman year — it was a new environment with different kinds of people around me. As a naturally clumsy teenage girl, I was bound to embarrass myself one way or another. I just didn't realize how often that would occur. Choking on swedish fish: As sophomore year neared its conclusion, I found myself nestled in the far corner of English teacher Megan Laws' class as a normal period proceeded. One of my friends popped out his pack of Swedish Fish, and naturally, everyone went crazy trying to get a piece. After some pushing, I managed to secure one for myself. I immediately popped it in my mouth and chose not to chew it yet, trying to savor the taste. Engrossed in a lively conversation with my friends, I gradually became aware of a peculiar sensation. Words began to elude me, and panic slowly took hold. Then it dawned on me — I had inadvertently swallowed the entire Swedish Fish. WHOLE. I haven't dared to lay a finger on a Swedish Fish for nearly two years. They

In the midst of Mrs. Laws' lesson, my throat rebelled, unleashing a torrent of violent coughs. To the oblivious on-lookers, mainly the guys at my table, I must have appeared comically dramatic. Laughter filled the air as I struggled, gasping for breath. My friends rushed to my side, handing me water to help clear my throat. Unfortunately, that only made it worse. I ran outside and started coughing up all the water I still drank, but the fish was still lodged in my throat. Passersby peered through the window, their eyes fixed on me while my face turned beet-red. It took a long 15 minutes of running back and forth, alternating between sipping water and trying to expel the Swedish Fish before it finally yielded. I haven't dared to lay a finger on a Swedish Fish for nearly two years. They

should really include a safety warning on the packaging. The Great Desk Fiasco: Flashback to my AP Euro class. A seemingly normal day, the bell had just rung and I was talking to my classmates as I nonchalantly rested my hand on the desk in front of me. As I leaned on it, I felt the desk, which had a chair connected to it, slightly rock, but I dismissed it as an imbalance in the chair's leg. But I was mistaken — there was NO bottom leg. The desk only had three legs, likely the reason why teacher Jerry Sheehy hadn't assigned anyone to sit there. It's little surprise what happened next. My leaning on the desk caused it to fall to the ground, and as it fell, the chair leg on the other side swept me off of the ground with the desk-chair. A loud BANG reverberated through the classroom as everyone looked to find my limbs tangled in the desk, my lunch thrown across the class, and my face turning tomato-red. "Are you OK? That noise almost gave me a heart attack!" Mr. Sheehy said. "I'm great!" I replied, my voice still emanating from the depths of the destroyed desk. Classmates helped me up while my friend tried to contain her laughter. It's now two years later and I still double check to make sure the desk I sit at has four legs. ♦



Graphic by AMY LUO

topten

WAYS TO GET OUT OF MOSAIC

- 10 Hope for a fire alarm. I feel that we would benefit more from standing in a single file line than from a Mindful Moment.
- 9 Gaslight your teacher. You got an email about presenting this slideshow? Strange! My second period teacher said it was next week...
- 8 I have a doctor's appointment. My horoscope told me I might be sick... Can I go to the Wellness Center?
- 7 My geriatric family member fell. Don't worry, I'll be sure to do the de-stressing techniques that I learned to get me through these trying times!
- 6 After "heavily concentrating" in MOSAIC, I've gotten a migraine and need to go to the Wellness Center. I'm not lying.
- 5 Just don't give a reason. No means no. Nobody needs to be nosing their way into your private life anyway!
- 4 I tested positive for COVID-19. Thank you to the school for handing out those expired tests.
- 3 I got pulled over on my way to school. Missing MOSAIC is my worst nightmare, so I had to speed to get to school...
- 2 Call the office to excuse your absence by impersonating your parents. Bonus points if you accidentally drop the accent.
- 1 "I'm not feeling socially emotionally appropriate or relevant enough to be here today." I need my ME time.

>> Sarah Zhou