



Artist and historian Gertrude Evans speaks about the integration of Loudoun County Public Schools



(Left) Gertrude Evans poses following her presentation. Photo by Arlene Lewis. (Center) Evans's painting "Integrated but Still Segregated" depicts Gene Ashton and his friend in a French class at Loudoun County High School. They sat many rows over from the rest of the class before full desegregation in 1968. Photo by Gertrude Evans. (Right) Gertrude Evans's painting "We Want to Swim Too" depicts a young Evans looking towards the segregated Firmen's Swimming Pool. The pool was closed and filled in in 1968 after refusing to desegregate. Photo by Gertrude Evans.

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

In the 1960s, Gertrude Evans was a young woman who wanted to swim in the Leesburg Fireman's

swimming pool, but there was one problem: she was Black, and at the time, Loudoun County was refusing to desegregate. "As a child, my friends and I were not allowed

to swim," Evans said. "Although there was no White only sign, we knew our place. Some barriers we did not cross." Even after protests, Evans and fellow protesters could

not get the pool integrated. Later, a court order was brought on behalf of four Leesburg teens to open the pool to all.

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Creative writing club's The Crow's Nest wins VHSL Savedge award

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

After waking up and driving to school before some students are even awake, members of the creative writing club make their way to room 203 to begin collaborating on their main task, producing this year's issue of The Crow's Nest literary magazine. The atmosphere is light and inviting, and everyone, including Valerie Egger, the sponsor, is excited to be there.

Their 2023 issue, Patchwork, earned them another trophy class ranking from VHSL. Having earned five trophy class rankings since 2016 meant that the magazine also earned the Col. Charles E. Savedge Award for Sustained Excellence in Scholastic Journalism. The award, given to only four Virginia publications at the Virginia High School League (VHSL) media championships, was named to honor Savedge as a significant figure in the Southern Interscholastic Press Association (SIPA) who strove to nurture the growth of journalism.

"It was amazing to win," graduate Olivia DeWan said. "There's always so much work put into something like that and it's awesome to see that reflected." A former editor of the publication, DeWan was part of the group

during the COVID-19 pandemic and wrote for The Crow's Nest throughout her high school career.

The Crow's Nest features creative writing and artwork from students and staff and is organized around a yearly theme. Seniors Kai Arcano and Beck Jewell recount the issue's theme from last year.

The staff chose several different patchwork patterns. "Different patterns had different meanings," Arcano said. "Jacob's ladder was climbing out of adversity, crazy quilt was crazy and miscellaneous, and another one was folding in on oneself."

Arcano has been part of the Crow's Nest since sophomore year and asked Jewell to join last year.

"I like contributing to it. I like having the artwork and writing together," Jewell said. "It's really cool to see the finished product."

Egger, who also serves as the adviser for this newspaper, said that in honor of the school's 70th anniversary, The Crow's Nest is currently working on a "Past, Present, and Future" issue.

"I'm excited to work with a larger team this year, and I think this year's issue has a lot of potential considering the unique theme and all the different



Members of the Crow's Nest Literary Magazine display last year's VHSL awards. Left to right: freshman Hope Hathaway, senior Beck Jewell, freshman Scarlett Ashford, senior Kai Arcano, and sophomore Karan Singh. Photo courtesy of Valerie Egger.

people working on it," Jewell said.

Many members of the club graduated last year, including DeWan.

"The club definitely helped to build my confidence," DeWan said. "She [Egger] encouraged me to work on my weakness and suggested that I enter other writing competitions. I didn't win all of them, but one of the biggest things I've learned is that when it comes to writing, if you want to get really good, you have to push through barriers like that."

Having this confidence gave De-

Wan the aspiration and assertiveness to pursue a double major in communications and professional writing, and "only advanced [her] love of writing."

"To any aspiring writers, the most important thing you can do is keep writing no matter what. Even if you doubt yourself, or don't win competitions, every single word contributes to your progress," DeWan said.

This year's issue of The Crow's Nest is accepting submissions until March. •

Fentanyl overdoses: don't wait for a solution, be the solution

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

In October, 18 Loudoun teenagers overdosed on opioids on school grounds, eight at Park View. Overdoses lead to respiratory failure and cyanosis, and in 2021, 30% of state overdoses resulted in death.

According to Texas Health and Human Services, two milligrams of fentanyl, less than the size of the tip of a pencil, can lead to death. For comparison, a typical over-the-counter Advil or Ibuprofen pill is usually 200-500 milligrams in size.

Students must educate themselves to prevent overdoses. Most students are on social media, so anti-drug organizations should market directly to teens. Though students in sixth grade and up are required to attend drug prevention presentations, and parents are welcomed to attend fentanyl information sessions (the last of which was on January 18), those presentations are not having the desired impact.

Movies romanticize drugs and alcohol. Like many Hollywood characters, **Jordan Belfort**, a stockbroker in "The Wolf of Wall Street," doesn't face the consequences of addiction. These fictional characters may wake up after doing drugs, but students will likely suffer a different fate.

Pop culture is a perpetrator of the drug epidemic. Artists such as **Michael Jackson, Prince, Mac Miller, Juice WRLD**, and others

have died due to overdose.

Parents should monitor what their children watch and help them understand that consequences are more severe than portrayed. Then, youth may be experience a better future, less crime, and higher academic achievement, according to the Addiction Policy Forum. According to HealthTalk, the most effective deterrents are the knowledge and fear of the negative implications of drug use, including death, addiction, and physical, mental, and familial issues.

Illegal drugs are likely to contain fentanyl, and the smallest amount could end their lives. Some who overdose are not aware that they are being drugged. While fentanyl can be found in methamphetamine (meth), heroin, and cocaine, some students are being drugged by their peers with drugs that unknowingly contain fentanyl. Students should stay away from all illegal drugs, and be aware of where their prescription drugs are coming from. To repeat: teens should only be consuming medications prescribed to them and obtained from their pharmacy.

Criminal drug networks often produce counterfeit pills that appear safe and controlled, such as Xanax, Adderall, and Percocet. These seemingly safe pills actually contain fentanyl, which cannot be identified through sight, taste, or smell if in a pill.

Distributors often market these counterfeit drugs as a way to "solve

all their problems" or give drug users, especially teens, a feeling of relaxation. Drugs and opioids are never the answer and will only worsen the situation.

The Drug-Alcohol Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program introduced to fifth graders is significantly ineffective, according to a study conducted by **Steven West**, PhD, and **Keri O'Neal**, PhD, and several other sources. While students should be educating themselves individually, the D.A.R.E program should implement a more engaging curriculum, occurring in eighth grade, when students are more likely to access drugs.

For some organizations, using social media may be beneficial in spreading the message. If companies can create scary, but educational skits or infographics, some students may be more likely to listen. You, the reader, should take ten minutes out of your gaming, or mindlessly scrolling on social media, to research drug use and abuse; it could save a life. It could save your life.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) both offer online resources to educate students and also provide options if you are looking for help. In the case of a crisis, call SAMHSA's hotline at 1-800-662-4357. Do not be a statistic; be educated. •

LCPS AI detection software fails to detect AI

Berek Harrison | Managing Editor

Since the release of ChatGPT, AI has only become more powerful, popular, and accessible. Despite that, Loudoun County hasn't released information to parents and students on their position with generative AI until now. Early second quarter, an official blog post gave new light into the district's plan for the future of education technology.

The blog post covered a variety of different topics regarding AI and "generative AI." The term AI signifies a computer doing a task a human would normally do, for example autocorrect. Generative AI is more specific, being AI that learns to create completely new content in various forms such as text, images, or audio.

The blog mostly targets teachers, but provides new insights and information that applies to many students as well. In addition to information about AI and how to use it for work, the blog discussed the ability for teachers to give their students access to AI programs. "If

you find a tool that you are interested in using with students, you must submit that tool for review," the post read. Teachers that want to do this should contact the Instructional Facilitator, Technology, which at County is **Kayla Urban**.

The post also recommends teachers use turnitin.com to prevent academic dishonesty and catch students who cheat with AI. The district's subscription to Turnitin gives teachers its guess of the percentage of AI content in writing that students turn in and also warns teachers of problems with turnitin: "AI detection tools are new, and do not accurately flag AI writing 100% of the time."

Tests I ran revealed that turnitin.com was very poor at detecting AI content. I ran three sets of tests, each with three different pieces of writing that were run through the detector, totaling nine pieces of writing tested. In two of the three tests, one piece of writing was fully written by me, one piece of writing was partly by AI and partly human, and one piece was entirely generated by AI. In the third test,

all three were entirely generated by AI.

The detector only detected the presence of AI in three of the seven documents that contained AI, and likely saw any success at all because those pieces of writing had no attempt to hide the AI usage. When I asked ChatGPT to try a different writing style or even add slight grammatical errors, the detector gave a rating of 0% AI even in the pieces of writing that were entirely AI.

Many teachers have become too comfortable using AI-susceptible assignments, despite AI becoming more powerful. One of the few pieces of writing that the detector caught was an assignment dating to the prior school year that used an outdated version of ChatGPT. Multiple new versions have been released since then, so the power and complexity has increased.

"I don't recommend any AI detection tools. AI is evolving at a much more rapid rate than AI detection tools are, and their AI detection tools are just not going to beat it," Urban said. •

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The County Chronicle is produced by students in Newspaper Journalism I, II, and III under the direction of an adviser. Topics are student-chosen, student-researched, and student-driven, but all content is subject to administrator review.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The staff of The County Chronicle welcomes guest opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Pieces should be less than 400 words and must be founded on researched fact. Any student, faculty, staff, or alumni interested in contributing to the newspaper should contact the adviser, Valerie Egger, at valerie.egger@lcps.org.

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“In 1968 after refusing to integrate, the Fireman’s pool was closed to everyone and filled in with garbage, dirt, and cement,” Evans told a room of students and faculty on January 18.

Loudoun County was resistant to desegregation, even after laws and policies were put in place. It was one of the school systems that didn’t immediately integrate their schools after *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

Former English teacher **Arlene Lewis** believes current students can benefit from learning history. “I think a lot of people don’t really understand the history,” Lewis said. “While *Brown vs. The Board of Ed.* was decided in 1954, Loudoun County Public Schools resists until 1968. Even when selected students were allowed to come to Loudoun County High School, they were still split up in classes,” Lewis said, noting students chose to remain separated.

“I don’t think a lot of people realize how Loudoun County really resisted, from 1954-1968, and how it was really reflective of what was going on in the nation. We tend to think of *Brown vs. Board of Ed.* and that was it. There were pockets of resistance even outside of education,” Lewis said.

Lewis is a co-president of the Gamma Sigma chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa, an honorary organization for women educators. Lewis organized the January 18 presentation about the integration of LCPS, inviting local artist and historian for the Loudoun Douglass Alumni Association, Evans, to speak at this event.

This is the first time Alpha Delta Kappa has sponsored a school presentation, though the organization participates in the Teacher Cadet Signing Ceremony each year. “When we decided to invite Ms. Evans to speak, we were thinking it would really be informative for the Teacher Cadets,”

Lewis said.

The organization also sponsors the annual Women’s Summit. People invited to attend the presentation on January 18 included the Teacher Cadets as well as Educators Rising students, students in the Black Student Union, and anyone interested in local history.

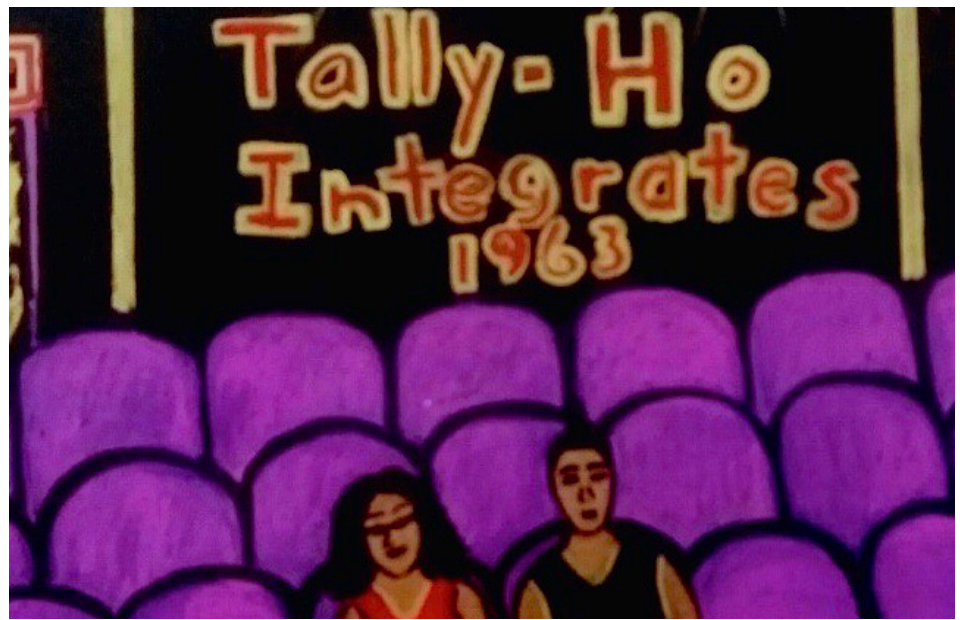
During the meeting, Evans talked about her childhood experiences with segregation. Being an artist, throughout most of the presentation she showed many pieces of art she had created that visualized her experience.

Evans was an alumna of the Douglass School, the only school for Black students until the end of segregation in LCPS in 1968. Evans explained the history of Douglass, noting that during the 1930s, Black parents pressed the school board for a new high school because the old high school off of Union Street was dilapidated and didn’t meet standards.

“The Loudoun County School Board told our parents there was no money for a school, and they didn’t have the land,” Evans said, but parents raised funds. “They purchased the land in secret, at night from a White man, Mr. Gibbons, for \$4,000, which is now equivalent to over \$90,000. After that they still had struggles as far as getting the school built, but eventually their struggles ended and Douglass was built,” Evans said.

Evans explained that the Douglass School was not as equipped as other schools, such as County, including being under-equipped in classroom supplies and sports equipment.

Evans told of an experience in a pharmacy in the 1950s. She described herself and her mother standing by the counter, waiting to get an ice cream cone. Evans wanted to sit on the stool, but it was against the law at the time. “In 1961, the Black community and White community leaders met;



Gertrude Evans’s painting “Tally-Ho Integrates” depicts Evans sitting in the Tally Ho Theater. The theater finally integrated in 1963 after protests from Evans and others. Photo by Gertrude Evans.

the lunch counters were quietly desegregated and other businesses followed in the next few years,” Evans said.

Artwork has helped Evans process the discrimination she experiences. One day at Douglass Elementary School, she painted a vase of flowers, and she entered into a county-wide contest and won a blue ribbon. “On this painting I had written words, ‘Segregation not only harms one physically, but injures one spiritually. It scars the soul. It is a system which forever stares the segregated in the face saying you are less than, you are not equal to,’” Evans said, quoting **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

She continued with her art. In 1963, her brother tried to sit in the White only downstairs section of the Tally Ho Theater instead of the upstairs balcony section; he was stopped and detained by the police. The teens in her neighborhood decided to protest in hopes of integrating the theater. She explained how the other kids decided not to protest because they were afraid, however, she and her brother stayed. Others later came to protest with them, including teens from Leesburg and Purcellville, organizing outside the Tally Ho Movie Theater for about a week. “Integration was achieved shortly thereafter,” Evans said.

Those signs are now at the Thomas Balch Library, after being found 45 years later. “A lady had kept the signs in her attic and I donated them,” Evans said.

In another piece of art, she painted herself and her friend sitting in the bottom section of the movie theater. “We were scared, I was scared. After integrating the theater, my friend and I sat downstairs. We saw the movie ‘West Side Story.’ The seats were very comfortable, unlike the seats in the balcony. I enjoyed the movie but I felt scared because I felt out of place,” Evans said.

At one point, Black students were allowed to transfer to County and other LCPS schools. Evans painted a picture of her friend who had

transferred to County. She explained how they didn’t get many new books at Douglass High School, and her friend had gotten his first new book. “After smelling his book, his teacher asked him what he was doing. ‘I’m smelling my book because I’ve never had a new book before,’” Evans said.

Showing a picture of a French class at County, Evans told of her brother’s experience. “He and his friend were the only Black students in his 12th grade French class. The White classmates sat many aisles over, four in fact. After class, a female student from England questioned why the White students sat so far away,” Evans said.

When integration finally came to Loudoun, Evans chose to stay at Douglass School. “Many of my friends who had protested that summer left Douglass High School to attend Loudoun Valley in Purcellville and Loudoun County in Leesburg in September 1963. I elected to stay at Douglass because I knew I couldn’t handle the trauma of entering a new environment, leaving a school where many of my friends were, and where I didn’t feel out of place,” Evans said, noting that many of her friends admitted that racism was present.

People in attendance seemed inspired by the presentation. “I really liked the presentation, I felt it was very informative, and it was really nice to learn about the history of someone who was in Loudoun County during the time of segregation. It’s also nice for it to come from someone who experienced even the bad parts of it,” member of the Black Student Union **Ihanna Arceneaux** said.

“You need to know your history, that’s all I’ve got to say. The good, the bad, the ugly,” Evans said.

During a Q&A section at the end of Evans’ presentation, **Laura Davies**, a member of Gamma Sigma, asked when Evans finally felt comfortable and included. “Not until I started sharing my story and this artwork,” Evans said. •



Gertrude Evans painted herself as a young girl waiting at the counter of Edwards Drug Store. Evans was unable to sit on the stools because it was illegal for Black people to do so. Photo by Gertrude Evans.

WILD Student Leadership Conference helps students become better leaders



Seniors Charlotte Edmonds (left) and Sela Campbell (right), representatives of the yearbook staff, give a presentation on the basics of yearbook creation, photography, and journalistic writing at the 2023 WILD Student Leadership Conference. The WILD Student Leadership Conference is hosted annually to give students the opportunity to grow their leadership and team building skills. Photo by Lacey Kimbrough.

Karan Singh | Business Manager

Students file into the room just in time for another breakout session to begin. They take their seats as another student stands in the front of the room, ready to deliver a presentation on public speaking. The room listens attentively as the presenter speaks, taking notes and hanging on their every word.

This past November, the We're Intentional about Leadership Development (WILD) program hosted their second leadership conference. Students were given the opportunity to participate in this event by either attending or presenting a breakout session.

Lynn Fiscus, overall organizer for the WILD Student Leadership Conference, asked the student engagement and activities coordinator at each school in LCPS to sponsor this event for their school.

"Once I saw the value and the information that was being presented at WILD and how the students could connect with kids from other schools, it wasn't just something that

they [Fiscus] wanted me to do, it was also something that I wanted to do," student engagement and activities coordinator **Lacey Kimbrough** said.

Kimbrough informed students about the event.

"My biggest goal in taking on this role as a student engagement coordinator was getting students more involved and making sure that they were aware of all the student leadership opportunities that were available to them, regardless of whether they were in a club or co-curricular, or an organization like National Honors Society," Kimbrough said.

The first ever WILD Student Leadership Conference was held during the 2022-2023 school year.

Senior **Charlotte Edmonds** attended the 2022 session. "Last year I got to attend [as a participant], so I really learned a lot of different tactics and methods that I could bring back to my own school and my own leadership roles," Edmonds said.

When positive reviews came in, the event was held again on November 7. Edmonds attended this year as a presenter and representative for

the yearbook committee. She, along with her co-presenter, presented a breakout session titled "A Guide to Creating Your School's Yearbook."

"It was a really cool experience to be there, both as an attendee that first year that it started, and as a presenter," Edmonds said.

"To me, it's a way for different student leaders throughout the county and all different schools to come together and share different ways that they have been able to serve as leaders at their own school," Edmonds said.

Edmonds called the event a "networking opportunity" for students.

The conference not only sparked ideas within students on how to become the best student leaders in their schools, but it also made students think about ways to help their communities and become better citizens.

Edmonds praised the organization of the event this year.

The Black Student Union also hosted a breakout session at the 2023 WILD Student Leadership Conference, with senior **Madison Ruff** being the keynote speaker for her presentation.

"It was an opportunity to meet other people that were like me, that were leaders in their schools. It was somewhere where I could ask any questions that I had and get insight from students my age," Ruff said.

Ruff helped host a breakout session on cultural clubs and their impact on the school community. The presentation talked about the process of getting a cultural club, like the Black Student Union, started, how staff interacted with it, and how the club has made a difference.

Ruff had thought of the conference highly and mentioned that she "got a lot of really good ideas" from the conference. She also mentioned that participating in the conference was really beneficial for her.

Overall, for participants and presenters alike, the WILD Student Leadership Conference was a place to share their thoughts on things that were going on in their community

and how to solve problems that may occur while leading a project, such as starting a new organization or club.

Kate Garnes, a motivational speaker and self-titled "Gladiator," as well as superintendent **Aaron Spence**, attended the conference.

Spence talked about how the conference was a way for student leaders to voice their opinions and give their insight on matters occurring in their communities.

Garnes gave a powerful speech on teen life and motivated teens to be the best version of themselves they could be.

"Why do we have to go to the negative when it comes to ourselves?" Garnes said, speaking about all of the negative thoughts she had to overcome when she was a teen. Her speech served as a motive for not just student leaders, but all teens, to get help when they needed it.

During the duration of the event, students were inspired to make a change in their communities. All participating in the event this year, presenters and attendees, learned more about the event.

"Try to branch out, talk to people that you didn't know before, that are from different schools," Ruff said. "That's where you really get your new ideas."

Ruff believes that being open to conversations with new people can help future students from benefiting at this event.

"I think they [students] should speak up more when attending the event," Edmonds said. "Definitely share your opinions about things if you're in a breakout session. Just be involved."

"The event truly is made for students," Kimbrough said. "There are so many opportunities at this one event for students to learn and benefit from."

As sponsors and students start to prepare for next year's WILD Student Leadership Conference, there is one clear message the organization wants students to know: Keep an open mind. •



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Simpson teacher Kimberly Poole nominated for regional Teacher of the Year award

William Kluttz | Staff Writer

During a yearbook meeting earlier this year, J. Lupton Simpson Middle School Introduction to Computer Applications teacher and yearbook adviser **Kimberly Poole** received flowers and an unexpected announcement: she had been selected as Simpson’s nominee for Teacher of the Year.

The award for Teacher of the Year, organized by both Loudoun County and The Washington Post, was a huge surprise for Poole. “I knew it existed, but I had no idea I was going to be asked.” Poole said her words upon learning of the nomination were “I am not

worthy” and “thank you.”

“I just do this because I love kids, and they’re fun, and it’s an amazing thing,” Poole said, gesturing to her room full of students.

Poole spent the first 25 years of her career teaching English, before starting to teach Introduction to Computer Applications (ICA), four years ago. All of those years have been spent at Simpson.

ICA is the revamped equivalent of Keyboarding. One of the new components of the class is involvement with the Amazon Think Big Space program. Renovations to the old Tech-Ed rooms provide a space that is the headquarters of the program in Loudoun County.

The process that saw Poole becoming nominated began with students and parents submitting forms voting for who their favorite teacher was and why, and Poole came out on top. Some of the responses “made me cry,” according to Poole. The entire school leadership team along with many teachers and students cast their votes for Poole. She added that she received responses from students she had taught nearly 20 years ago, and that the number of people who voted for her were in the hundreds.

Poole was amazed by the things students remembered, even from years ago. “Some things that

people wrote down that I would not have expected that would have made an impact or be something that someone remembered. And little things,” Poole said, noting that one student wrote: “one day my water bottle broke and Mrs. Poole gave me her very own Deer Park water bottle.”

“It was things like that that were really cute,” Poole said.

After her first class ended, and after her nomination, Poole spent several minutes walking around the sixth grade area greeted by almost every student in the halls. Many students were very appreciative of Poole’s work in teaching. “Mrs. Poole is awesome. She’s a really great teacher,” sixth grader **Ryan McElhannon** said.

Other students agreed. “She’s the best. She’s one of my favorites,” sixth grader **Cassie** said.

Simpson principal **Tripp Di Nicola**, assistant principal **Jarrold Dungan**, and assistant principal **Kjersti Oliver** were all present during the yearbook meeting to surprise Poole with the nomination.

“Mrs. Poole’s heartfelt dedication to the Simpson community extends back thirty years and represents a continuously immense impact on so many students both present, past, and future that is truly unmatched by many in our profession. She is quite simply stated one of the greatest teachers in Loudoun County Public Schools,” Di Nicola said. •



(Left) Simpson teacher Kimberly Poole poses in front of her classroom door on December 20, 2023. Poole was nominated for Loudoun County’s Teacher of the Year award a few weeks prior. (Right) One of many posters thanking Poole for her contributions to the school and students’ lives. Poster by Scarlett Segersten. Photos by William Kluttz.

First two snow days strike back to back

William Kluttz | Staff Writer

On January 16, Loudoun County Public Schools had its first snow day of the year. Subsequently, on the morning of January 17, the status of school operations was changed from a two-hour delay to fully canceled.

Prior to the 16th, Students and teachers were largely disappointed with the lack of snow days. After all, it had been about 700 days since the last measurable snowfall of over one inch. “I’m a little disappointed to be honest. I would love a snow day here and there. It would be nice to wake up to a call in the morning,” Chemistry teacher **Stacie Leonard** said.

About three inches of snow fell during the night on January 15. The refreeze led to the January 17 cancellation. This came nearly four hundred days after Loudoun

County’s last snow day, in which rain fell for most of the county, came on December 15, 2022.

What was promised to be a cold, snowy winter by many meteorologists has finally started to live up to expectations. The average temperature in Loudoun County during November was 45.9 degrees, according to Weather Underground. December was 43.4 degrees, and the average temperature for January so far has been 35.7 degrees. The cold temperatures in mid-January this year were largely responsible for the snow days, since anything melted easily refroze.

The average temperatures for November, December, and January in 2022-2023 were 49.5, 37.5, and 42.5, making December the only month that was colder than the 2023-2024 temperatures.

Students were generally happy

with the day off. “Having snow days makes me feel motivated to do my schoolwork when I’m at home,” junior **Ben Griffin** said.

Senior **Evan Barnhart** also enjoyed his time off. “I thought it was pretty cool...I called it at the beginning of the week. I said we’re going to have off on Tuesday because of the snow, and on Wednesday they’re going to call a two hour delay, then they’re going to call it, and I said Thursday they’d call a two hour delay, but I was wrong about that,” Barnhart said.

There is still plenty of opportunity for more snow days too. Friday, January 19 was called off due to another snowstorm that dropped around three inches across the county. “I would [be happy with more snow days], I need the break,” junior **Pierson Lee** said. •

LCPS SNOW DAYS IN THE PAST 10 YEARS

2013-14: 14

2014-15: 13

2015-16: 10

2016-17: 2

2017-18: 9

2018-19: 11

2019-20: 6

2020-21: 6

2021-22: 5

2022-23: 1

NHS volunteers support community programs

Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-Chief

On a Saturday morning in mid-December when they could have been sleeping, hanging out with friends, or anything else, dozens of students filled the cafeteria to volunteer their time. A couple hours later, they'd filled hundreds of string bags, some to support cancer patients and some to prepare for an upcoming student cybersecurity conference.

For the past six years, the National Honor Society and Future Business Leaders of America clubs have undertaken an annual donation drive to create Smile Kits, which are bags of items to support female breast cancer patients. They include items to help keep the women comfortable, like blankets and fuzzy socks, as well as ways to stay occupied, like coloring books with colored pencils.

"Anything that you would think that they would need going through chemo," NHS officer **Maya Gonen** said. "That's pretty much our purpose."

The clubs partner with the Barnett-Searing National Cancer Foundation to distribute the kits to local cancer patients.

"We are one of the biggest supporters of Barnett-Searing," NHS sponsor **Jennifer Marden** said. "It's pretty near and dear to my heart because this is named after a girl I went to high school with, **Jenny Searing**, who died of cancer. Her brother started this foundation, so when he asked me to get involved, I said absolutely."

This year, volunteers collected items for and packed 370 kits, surpassing their goal of 250. In addition to practical and functional items, each Smile Kit includes a colorful card with a handwritten message of support from a student. "It makes it a little more personalized for these cancer patients," Marden said. "You can go on to the Barnett-Searing website and look at all of their thank yous, which is really touching."

It isn't only the recipients of the Smile Kits that are moved by them. It means a lot to the students who volunteer their time and energy to put them together for the patients, Gonen said.

"It's just knowing you made a difference," Gonen said. "You made a difference for somebody who's going through a really hard time. It'll make them brighten up. It'll give them positivity in a time of such negativity."

"Their efforts are worthwhile," Marden said of the volunteers' work. Next year, NHS hopes to again exceed 350 kits, Gonen said.

In addition to the Smile Kits packing, NHS volunteers were also putting bags together to prepare for CyberSlam. "It's good to have two things going at once," Gonen said.

CyberSlam is a day-long conference event for cybersecurity students all across the state, hosted at George Mason University on January 19. The event was created by Marden and a teacher at Briar Woods High School and has grown dramatically since its start three years ago.

"The first year we had a little



(Left) Students sort Cyberslam swag bags into boxes organized by school. The Cyberslam event in January brings students from all over the state to participate in a conference on cyber security. (Right) Smile Kits are lined up outside the cafeteria, waiting to be packaged and delivered. The kits are given to local female cancer patients to support them as they undergo chemotherapy. Photos by Evelyn Kuzminski.

over 100 kids, last year we had over 300 kids, and this year we already have registered 575," Marden said. Each student receives an individualized bag for the event, and Marden said that having NHS volunteers help pack the bags was "incredible" and "saved us about five days of work."

At the conference, students are grouped by experience and can choose from 12 different workshops to attend. A keynote speaker with experience working for both the Central Intelligence Agency and United States Postal Service will share stories with students of his work in cybersecurity.

"It's fascinating," Marden said. "Hopefully it sparks some interest for cybersecurity." As an industry,

cybersecurity has a 0% unemployment rate. Marden hopes CyberSlam will help build students' intrigue into the cyber field and potential cyber-related careers.

The Smile Kits and CyberSlam packing was one of several service events NHS and FBLA host throughout the year, such as the annual food drive for the Tree of Life food pantry in Leesburg.

"That was a huge success and very, very needed for our community," Marden said.

Coming off another round of success with the Smile Kits and CyberSlam, student volunteers will have more opportunities for community service, but "what we decide to do in the spring, I'm not sure," Marden said. •

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Athlete of the issue: Sabrina Simpkins dominates the floor as a dual athlete

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

Blinding white lights fill the gym and reflect off of the rhinestones on sophomore **Sabrina Simpkins'** leotard. As she steps on the mat, adrenaline rushes through her veins, and excitement gives her the energy to perform her complicated tumbling passes for her first routine of the year.

Simpkins and the cheer team won the 2023 State Championship with a final score of 242.75. At the end of their routine, they performed an innovative pyramid in which flyers linked together to create the shape of a pyramid.

“Winning states was the most amazing feeling ever, truly like nothing I had ever felt before,” Simpkins said. “Being able to win and persevere with such an amazing team was just so incredibly rewarding. Even though it wasn’t our best performance it was really nice to know all the hard work we’ve put into this season had paid off.”

In preparation for competition, the cheer team had a rigorous practice schedule.

“Preparation for the competition was crazy,” Simpkins said. “We had all of our morning practices but I also was insanely superstitious when it came to the days leading up to the competition. Every time I thought about cheer, I would have to knock on wood to ensure I didn’t jinx the team.”

When it comes to gymnastics competitions, Simpkins specializes in floor despite having a background in many skills such as tumbling and trampoline (TNT) cheerleading, artistic gymnastics, and dance.

“I think I just fell in love with it [floor] because there were endless

combinations of tumbling passes and always something to learn,” Simpkins said.

Her initial love for gymnastics came from the creativity and diversity of skills one can perform. Over the years, she has further fallen in love with tumbling by simply learning.

“No matter what skill you are doing, there is always something to improve on, and I think that kept driving me to be the best I could,” Simpkins said.

To Simpkins, teammates are her biggest role models.

“In each of my teammates’ skills, I think I know I can improve on myself,” Simpkins said. “I kind of just look to everyone for different reasons.”

Within the learning process, advice and reassurance from her coaches and teammates help make Simpkins better, mentally and physically.

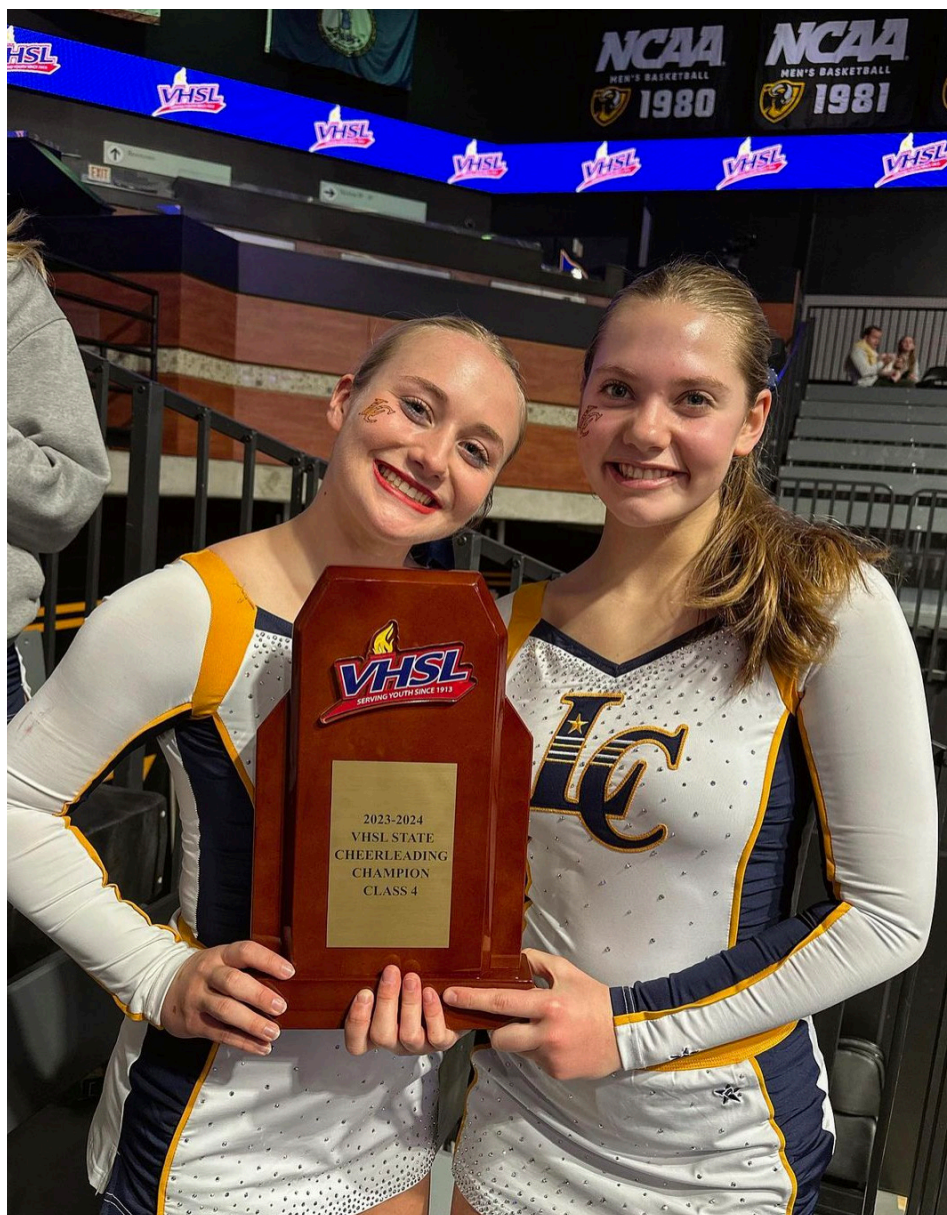
“My coach at the time said that I didn’t have to be perfect because that was unachievable,” Simpkins said. “I had a problem with trying to be perfect and execute my skills to a tee. But, him saying this reassured my worries that no one is perfect. I knew if I kept learning and kept striving to be my best, I would only progress.”

As a County gymnast and cheerleader, a welcoming environment and team of talented gal pals make it all worth it for Simpkins.

“The gymnastics team is so extremely welcoming and we are all close,” Simpkins said. “I am proud to call every girl on that team one of my friends.”

At seven years old, Simpkins began her gymnastics career.

“My parents put me in Gym-Kids and I quickly fell in love,” said Simpkins. “They said I was



Sophomore Sabrina Simpkins and junior Emily Pyle pose with their 2023 VHSL State Championship trophy. Simpkins is a cheerleader and gymnast. Photo courtesy of Sabrina Simpkins on Instagram (@sabrina.bina256).

constantly tumbling around the house.”

In college, Simpkins plans to pursue a career in acrobatics and tumbling, which combines two of her favorite things, cheerleading and gymnastics.

“The sport is a new coming sport for the NCAA and I’ve really taken interest in it because it’s a mix of my two worlds,” Simpkins said.

Outside of athletics, Simpkins is a hard working student, managing

a heavy workload with her busy schedule.

“Balancing school and gym can be difficult at times because practices are at night but I try to find times during the day to get all my work done,” Simpkins said.

Simpkins emphasizes having good friends, teammates, and a positive attitude to allow her to be successful. “If you’re not having fun in your sport, then all the hard work you put in just seems useless,” Simpkins said. •

FALL SPORTS RECAP

Cat Pizzarello | Editor-In-Chief

CHEER

Cheer was the Catoctin District Champions, 4C Regional Runner-Ups, and on November 4, 2023, took the title of Class 4A State Champions. (Photo courtesy @lchscaptainsathletics via Instagram)



FIELD HOCKEY

Field Hockey was regular season and tournament champions 3-0 against Woodgrove. They were 4D Region Runner-Ups and on November 7, 2023, advanced to the Class 4A State Championships where their season came to an end. They finished the season overall 15-5. (Photo courtesy of @lcpfieldhockey via Instagram)



CROSS COUNTRY

Cross Country advanced to 4C Region Champions with boys placing first and girls placing second. Fallon Fetterolf, Michael Tafe, and Cat Pizzarello advanced to Class 4A Championships. On October 31, 2023, Fallon Fetterolf medaled in fourth place, and Micheal Tafe medaled in third place. (Photo by Courtney Campbell)



GOLF

Golf was Catoctin District Champs and individually Liam Howard placed second and Ayla Browning placed fifth. Golf was Region 4C runner-up and advanced to Class 4 State Championships placing third shooting 292. Ayla Browning placed sixth and Reed Theiss placed tenth individually at Class 4A States. (Photo courtesy @lchscaptainsathletics via Instagram)



FOOTBALL

Football advanced to 4C Region Championships beating Woodgrove 42-2 in the quarterfinals. After advancing to semifinals, their season came to an end with a loss to Tuscarora. (Photo by jklimphotos)



VOLLEYBALL

Volleyball was Catoctin District Champions 3-1 against Woodgrove, followed by being Runner-Ups at 4C Region Championships. Their season came to an end at Class 4A State Championships and finished the season overall 17-7. (Photo courtesy @lchscaptainsathletics via Instagram)



Competitive cheer finishes a historic season with a state championship

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

The competitive cheer team made history three times in one season.

On Thursday, October 19, 2023, the cheer team made history and won the district title. This is the first time the competitive cheer team has ever won districts in the history of our school. The team dominated districts with their flips and tricks, then proceeded to compete at regionals on October 25 at Tuscarora High School. Because the team won the district title, they performed last at 7:20 pm.

Leading this team to victory are the captains of the team, senior **Sky-lar Arnold**, senior **Ava Dekenipp**, junior **Emily Pyle**, and senior **Tristen Stansbury**.

Competitive cheerleading can sometimes be overlooked when it comes to sports, but the team has worked hard to get far in the competition and it's not because of their perfect ponytails and new uniforms.

Recently, not only parents of cheerleaders on the team but many students that compete in sports like football and volleyball are showing up to support the girls at their competitions.

This year, competitive cheer competed in the 2023 Catoctin District Competition, which included Woodgrove, John Champe, Park View and Broad Run. The team remained victorious with a score of 245 on October 19, 2023.

"Districts was a day full of nerves but also a lot of excitement," sophomore **Haley Rosberg**, MVP,

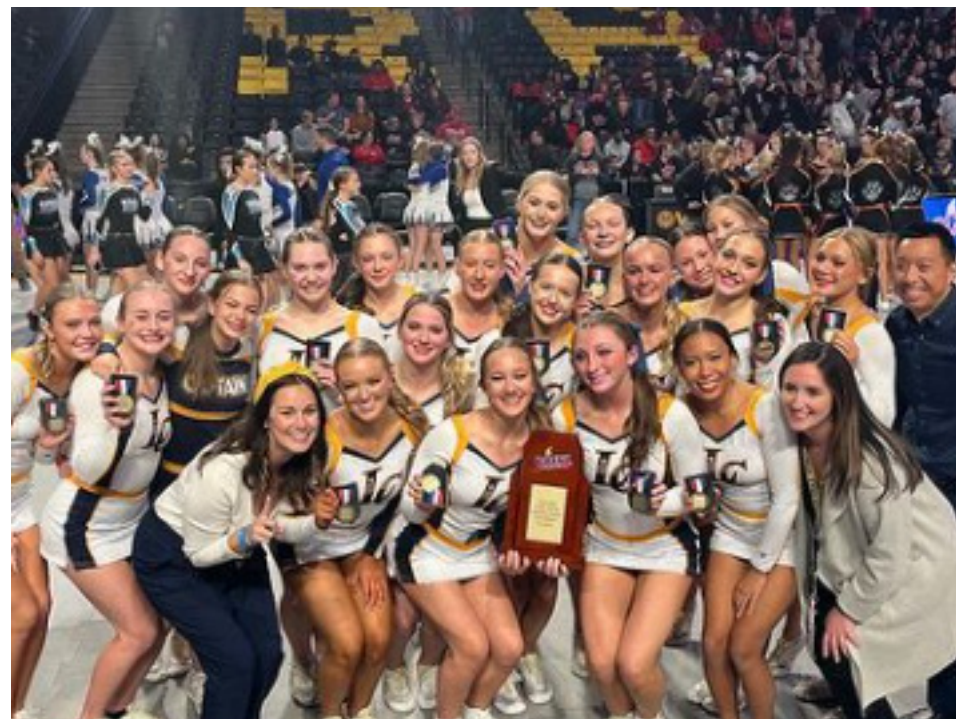
said. "The team is like a family and I'm so happy to be here with them."

On October 20, the team raised the district champions flag in front of the school to celebrate their victory. Going into this season, the team had to prepare themselves even before the school year began and give up some of their summer to work hard at winning competitions like districts.

Districts was only the start for the team because at the Catoctin Regionals on October 25 the cheerleaders earned the title of 2023 Region 4C Runner Up with a 245 which means they proceeded to states on November 4.

The team's family and supporters are always there to cheer on the team because not only the cheerleaders performance counts but the crowd cheering for them takes part in being loud and supporting. After the team competes, they often change into tank tops that say "guttsc" which means "Get us to the Siegel Center." Last year they made a trip to VCU's Siegel Center but didn't place as high as they hoped when they placed fifth. This year things are different.

The night before states, they spent a night at a hotel near the center to get them ready to perform, even skipping County's senior night to prepare for competition. Coaches **Samantha Mancini** and **Molly Allen** have shown support through the last few practices, with captains and coaches making practice fun with dressing



On November 4, the cheer team captured the 2023 Class 4 VHSL State Cheerleading Championship title. This team has made history three times in one season with winning Districts, Region runner up and now State Champions. Left to Right: Skylar Arnold, Emily Pyle, Marty Martin, Jocelyn Hall, Sabrina Simpkins, Valerie Lindquist, Coach Sam, Lilly Johnson, Caroline Ahearn, Sammy Debolt, Lindsey Cunningham, Alana Woehr, Caroline Sesin, Ava Dekenip, Tristen Stansbury, Haley Rosberg, Aria Williams, Claire Pho, Abby Lippincot, Taylor Norton, Ella Griffin, Coach Jeremy, Coach Katie. Photo courtesy of @lchs Captainscheer on Instagram.

up as things like favorite holiday, old uniforms, and dress like your type. The team also received small gifts like bracelets and cups to get spirits high for states and the end of the reason.

"I'm so proud to be a captain of this team. We have come a long way," Arnold said. "I was so happy we won states for my senior year and I'm so sad to be leaving this following year."

The state cheer competition has two rounds where eight teams competed and the best four teams, including County, moved on to the second round, to compete for the state title a second and last time. This competition on November 4 was very long because not only is the school's team competing but other teams in their 4c group and other teams in the 1c, 2c, 3c, 5c and 6c categories. •

SCOREBOARD

BOYS VARSITY FOOTBALL

08/25/23
 Vs. Woodgrove (19-15) - WIN
 08/31/23
 Vs. Briar Woods (14-27) - LOSS
 09/09/23
 Vs. Tuscarora (0-7) - LOSS
 09/14/23
 Vs. Dominion (35-16) - WIN
 09/22/23
 Vs. Loudoun Valley (20-27) - LOSS
 09/29/23
 Vs. Riverside (17-10) - WIN
 10/06/23
 Vs. John Champe (21-28) - LOSS
 10/13/23
 Vs. Broad Run (44-7) - WIN
 10/27/23
 Vs. Parkview (49-7) - WIN
 11/3/23
 Vs. Heritage (34-21) - WIN
 11/10/23
 Vs. Woodgrove (42-22) - WIN
 11/17/23
 Vs. Tuscarora (16-28) - LOSS
GIRLS VARSITY FIELD HOCKEY
 08/24/23
 Vs. Rock Ridge (7-0) - WIN
 08/28/23
 Vs. Tuscarora (7-0) - WIN
 09/05/23

Vs. Independence (1-5) - LOSS
 10/26/23

Vs. Woodgrove (3-0) - WIN
GIRLS VARSITY VOLLEYBALL

08/22/23
 Vs. Briar Woods (2-3) - LOSS
 08/24/23
 Vs. Riverside (1-3) - LOSS
 08/28/23
 Vs. Lightridge (3-2) - WIN
 08/30/23
 Vs. Stone Bridge (3-1) - WIN
 09/07/23
 Vs. Tuscarora (3-0) - WIN
 09/11/23
 Vs. Loudoun Valley (3-0) - WIN
 09/18/23
 Vs. Woodgrove (3-1) - WIN
 09/19/23
 Vs. Independence (3-1) - WIN
 10/03/23
 Vs. Rock Ridge (2-3) - LOSS
 10/10/23
 Vs. Woodgrove (3-2) - WIN
 10/18/23
 Vs. John Champe (3-1) - WIN
 11/11/23
 Vs. James Wood (0-3) - LOSS
VARSITY GOLF
 08/30/23
 Vs. John Champe (151-162 pts) - WIN
 08/30/23
 Vs. Woodgrove (167-156 pts) - LOSS

08/30/23
 Vs. Rock Ridge (148-182 pts) - WIN
 08/30/23
 1st Potomac Falls (161 pts) / 2nd LCHS (163 pts) / 3rd Park View (185 pts) - 2nd Place
 08/30/23
 Vs. Loudoun Valley (154-174 pts) - WIN
 09/22/23
 Invitational at Shenandoah Valley Golf Club (290 pts) - 1st place
 09/22/23
 Vs. Heritage (147-146 pts) - LOSS
 09/22/23
 Vs. Broad Run (161-194 pts) - WIN
 09/22/23
 Invitational at Hidden Creek Golf Club (313 pts) - 4th place
 09/22/23
 Invitational Tournament at Shenandoah Valley Golf Club (485 pts) - 4th place
 10/13/23
 District Competition at River Creek Country Club (301 pts) - 1st place
 10/13/23
 Regionals at Algonkian Golf Course (303 pts) - 2nd place
 10/13/23
 State Finals at Williamsburg National Golf Club (292 pts) - 3rd place
VARSITY CROSS COUNTRY
 08/23/23
 Meet at Morven Park - 112 pts

09/02/23
 Meet at Hood College (443 pts) - 15th place (Girls) 2nd place (Boys)
 09/09/23
 Meet at Great Meadow Park (530 pts) - 13th place (Girls) 4th place (Boys)
 09/13/23
 Meet at Ida Lee Park (30 pts) - 1st place (Boys and Girls)
 09/20/23
 Meet at Oatlands Plantation (90 pts) - 2nd place (Girls and Boys)
 09/23/23
 Invitational at Oatlands Plantation (678 pts) - 15th place (Girls) 3rd place (Boys)
 09/30/23
 Meet at Woodgrove High School (184 pts) - 6th place (Girls) 1st Place (Boys)
 10/11/23
 Meet at Woodgrove High School (229 pts) - 4th place (Girls) 6th place (Boys)
 10/14/23
 Meet at Millbrook High School (719 pts) - 22nd place (Girls) 5th place (Boys)
 10/25/23
 District Meet at Woodgrove High School (98 pts) - 3rd place (Girls) 1st place (Boys)
 10/31/23
 Regionals at Oatlands Plantation (220 pts) - 6th place (Girls) 5th place (Boys)
 11/11/23
 State Finals at Oatlands Plantation - 3 athletes raced

STUDENT LIFE

ASL club expands the program and culture

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

ASL teacher **Barry Deuel** begins each class with a greeting and a 10 minute break to allow students a chance to prepare themselves to learn ASL. He realizes that students need a chance to “defocus” before their next class. This climate is then translated to ASL club, and its engaging and wholesome atmosphere is one aspect that makes the club so enjoyable for students.

“We have donuts, and we have fun, and we don’t take ourselves seriously,” Deuel said. “We try our very best to be signing most of the time, but we also realize it’s a club, it should be fun.”

Deuel is one of two American Sign Language teachers, along with **Sheila Hall Price**. He is a CODA (child of deaf parents), and ASL is his first language. During meetings, the club plays relay games using signing to help with memorization. They also make slideshows to teach new signs.

“I would describe the atmosphere of the club as comfortable. We always start the meetings with donuts or candy and chatting,” senior **Maddie Moskal** said.

She’s been taking ASL for three years, and will be graduating this year. The club is important to her for two reasons.

“The first is because I was one of the people that created it, so I feel very responsible for it,” Moskal said. “Another reason is because I am very passionate about learning ASL, and I want to share it with other people at our school.”

Deuel also finds the club meaningful, not just to him as a teacher, but to the student body as well. Due to the Academies of Loudoun, many students are unable to participate in the electives they’d like to.



Lily Elahi, Jess Miltenberger, Zoe Kolodziej, and Maddie Moskal (left to right) are all senior leaders for the ASL club. Moskal and Miltenberger started the club last spring with Barry Deuel endorsing the club. Photo courtesy of Barry Deuel.

“It gives them a chance to stay connected,” Deuel said.

In addition, teaching gives him a chance to engage with students, and to help them uncover new methods of learning.

“This is so different from English or other world languages, not better than, but different, and for a lot of kids that are better with their visual learning ability, it’s a home run,” Deuel said.

In a society where learning tends to be taught in a specific way, ASL can be a fresh take for those who need a system more unconventional. Furthermore, general knowledge of ASL culture is lacking.

“I think that culture is really tough to teach if you don’t have a lot of folks who understand deafness and American Sign Language,” Deuel said. “It gives us avenues to ex-

plore and discuss ways that the deaf communicate outside of the school building.”

To learn more about ASL culture, they watch videos and have discussions during class. One topic they discuss is the Deaf President Now protests at Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college for deaf students in the world.

“Gallaudet University protested the naming of a new president that was hearing, with literally no understanding of deaf culture. That led to the resignation of that person, and the elevation of the first deaf president of Gallaudet University,” Deuel said.

He describes it as a “cultural awakening” and is an example of how the deaf have to fight to be understood.

“The only thing the deaf cannot do is hear. They have all the emo-

tional intelligence and communicative abilities they need, and they make all the adaptations needed to fit in with the hearing culture,” Deuel said.

The reason ASL club is so important is because it brings more hearing people to acknowledge the struggles deaf people face, and recognize that they are just as human as everyone else.

Right now, club leaders Moskal and senior **Jess Miltenberger** are working to recruit some new, younger members to help the program grow.

“We are still a relatively new club and are still actively looking for new members, specifically from the freshman and sophomore class,” Moskal said. “I want to be able to build up the club so that it is able to have a strong connection with the deaf community in our town.” •

UPCOMING CALENDAR



FEBRUARY



02/09- No School (Lunar New Year)
02/14- Valentine's Day
02/19- No school (Presidents' Day)
02/19-02/23- Spring sports tryouts
02/27- Orchestra Pre-Assessment Concert
02/28-02/29- Spring picture day



MARCH



03/01- Rowdy Ruff game
03/04- Women's Summit
03/05- No school (Student holiday)
03/13- Wellness Wednesday
03/22- Spring pep rally
03/25-03/29- No school (Spring break)



APRIL



04/03- Guitar Pre-Assessment Concert
04/04- End of Quarter 3
04/05- No school (Student holiday)
04/10- No school (Eid al Fitr)
04/12- 70th Anniversary Concert on the Lawn
04/26-04/28- Spring Musical



NJROTC hosts annual Military Ball

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

Each year, the Naval Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC) program hosts the Military Ball to celebrate their accomplishments, such as placing first in several drill, academic, and physical training competitions this year. The program is made up of NS1s, who are usually freshman, NS2s, who are usually sophomores, NS3s, who are juniors, and finally NS4s, who are usually given a leadership role as seniors. The event includes a multi-course dinner, speeches, crowning of king and queen, and several pictures for social media.



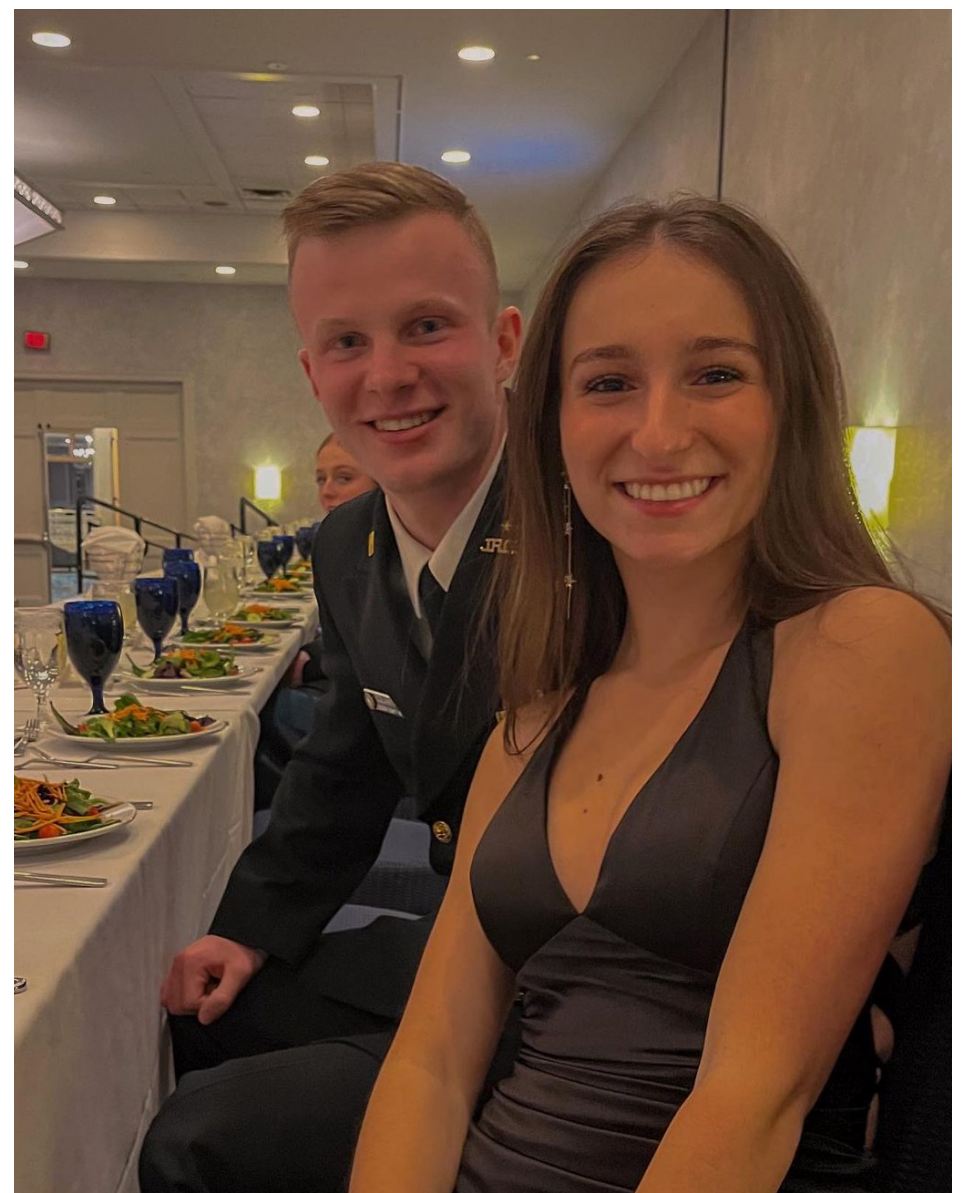
Sophomore Isabella Boland and senior Kayla Boland. Photo courtesy of Isabella Boland.



Junior Molly Graham and Heritage junior Allie Foelsch. Photo courtesy of Molly Graham (@molly_graham007 on Instagram).



Freshmen Bailey Welch and Nava Gessesse. Photo courtesy of Nava Gessesse (@navagessesse on Instagram).



Senior Ryan Colavita and his date, Rock Ridge senior Hayley Sutton. Photo courtesy of Hayley Sutton (@hayleyysutton on Instagram).



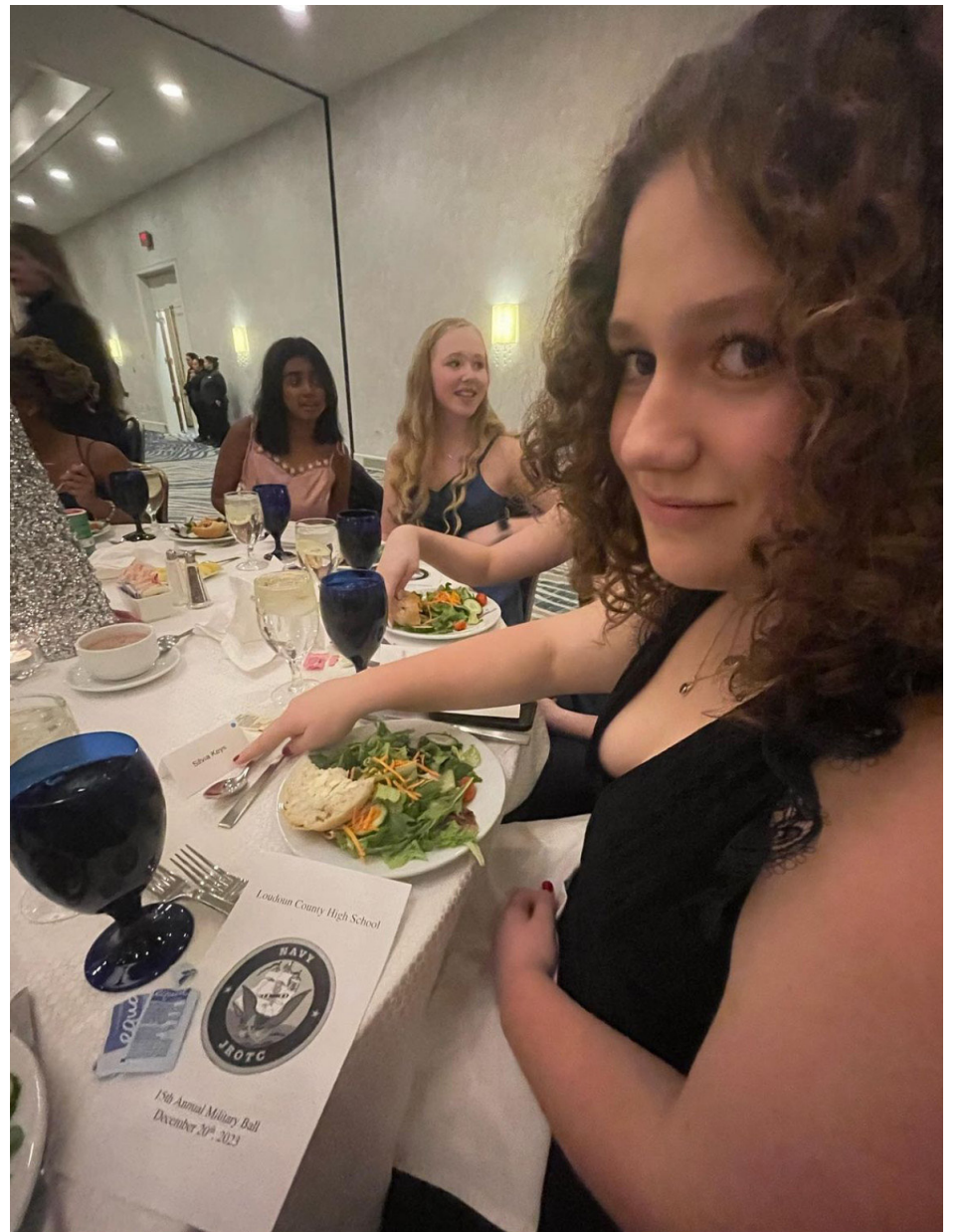
Seniors Taylor Downer and Grace Porter are crowned as the Military Ball King and Queen. This tradition is subject only to seniors and is a highly anticipated part of the event. Photo courtesy of LCHS News (@LCHS1954 on X).



Sophomores Evie Calvert, Isabella Boland, Kellan Boehret, and Anna Buer. Photo courtesy of Evie Calvert.



Junior Ameena Faisal and Captain Bill Johns. Photo by Tanner Vogel.



Sophomores Silvia Keyes, Priya Chowdhury, and Maddie Pugh. Photo courtesy of Silvia Keyes.



Contact Edward Pizzarello to learn to travel like a pro!
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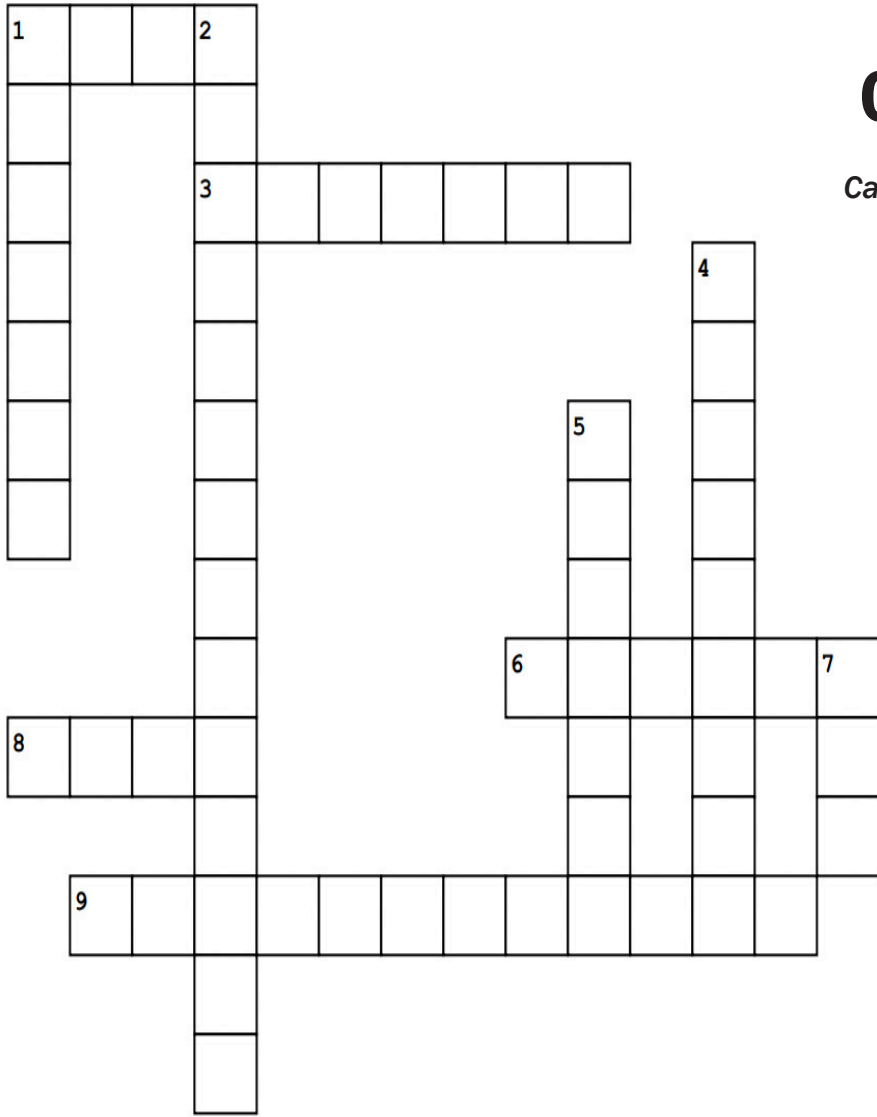


Pizza
 in motion

Life Is Too Short To Fly Coach!

THE CROSSWORD

Cat Pizzarello | Editor-in-Chief



The first five people to solve the winter crossword and bring it to room 203 will earn a prize!

ACROSS

- 1) Chionophobia is the fear of what?
- 3) The US state home to most ski resorts
- 6) What do moose eat in the winter?
- 8) On what other planet have scientists discovered falling snow?
- 9) The only country to have won a gold medal at every Olympic Winter Games

DOWN

- 1) The classic winter boot, UGG, was originally created for _____
- 2) The shortest day of the year's name
- 4) A stick of sugar originating in Germany in the 1670's
- 5) The state with the coldest temperature recorded in the mainland US
- 7) The number of sides a snowflake has



Listen to the Miles To Go Podcast to learn all things TRAVEL!



Seniors devote months of work to college applications

Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-Chief

Time-consuming. Stressful. Tedious. These are words seniors have used to describe their college application process.

"It's just a lot of work," senior **Jack Martin** said. "It's a lot of writing. It's a lot of different things to organize."

As 2023 closes out, some students who have chosen to apply early to some schools are already starting to hear back. But for others, there are still deadlines on the horizon.

"They're spread out," senior **Nevin Alvarado-Aziz** said of her application due dates, which ranged from James Madison University's early November deadline to Virginia Commonwealth University's in mid-January.

The deadlines loom over the seniors' already-full plates. "I think that the hardest part is at the same time you have to balance that you're in school," Martin said.

To balance working on applications with her five Advanced Placement classes and extracurriculars, senior **Shelby Aquilina** has begun practicing her music in the car. "The most random places, I have to start practicing," she said.

Aquilina keeps herself to a schedule upon returning from school, avoiding procrastination. "Once I get home every day, I go to the computer, I sit down, and I

study."

Martin has also found that an agenda helps to keep him on track. College applications "give you a little less time to do school work," Martin says, so he uses the Google Calendar app on his phone to manage his workload. "I had to kind of have a rigid schedule of when I have to do things."

Senior **Sienna Longendyke** takes a slightly different approach. Rather than completing her applications a little bit at a time over the course of weeks to months, she prefers to concentrate her work time into a few longer sittings.

"For me, it was setting aside full, entire days to just get it done," Longendyke said. "I could have split it up and done it a little bit every night. But that's not the type of person I am."

Longendyke devoted a weekend entirely to working on her applications. It meant she missed a football game and other fun activities, but she favors that over missing out on something every weekend.

College applications involve a lot of writing, both short responses only around 50 words and longer essays over 600 words. For some seniors, this is the easiest part of the application process, while for others it's the most difficult.

"I'm a writer by nature," Longendyke said. "All of the supple-



Senior Emma Pearson reacts as she opens her first college acceptance letter. Pearson has now committed to attend American University, with plans to major in business and entertainment. Photo by Kat Pearson.

mentals and all the essays were something that came really easy to me." Longendyke expressed an interest in creative writing, which she said was "an easy switch to make" to a form of writing more aligned with personal statements and essays.

Meanwhile, Aquilina said that essay writing has been the most challenging part of her application process. She is applying to over a dozen schools, each with their own supplemental questions. What she's found, however, is that she can often use the message of one essay to answer another school's question.

"I don't use the exact same

thing," Aquilina said. "But it makes it easier for me to know what kind of story I need."

Alvarado-Aziz described the pressure put on the writing portion of her applications. "Virginia Tech had four questions and you had to really think about what you're going to say because they base your acceptance on what you write."

She summed up the Common App's main essay - which students can send to multiple colleges - as "having to figure out challenges in your life and put it towards your future of how you're going to apply it."

Martin pointed out that al-

though there are many stressful parts of the application process, many seniors are going through the same experience, which creates a strong support system for the students.

“Pretty much all your friends can relate to it because all your friends are applying at the same time,” Martin said. “The first people I’d ask for questions are my friends because they’re going through the same thing you are.”

Students also find support in their counselors, who meet with each senior to discuss their plans and provide them with resources as they navigate applications. Aquilina also mentioned the help she’s received from her youth minister. But most students cited their parents as their biggest supporters throughout the process.

Alvarado-Aziz said her mom made sure she didn’t “wait until the last minute.”

“Before my senior year started, I hadn’t even started on any application stuff,” Alvarado-Aziz said. “But she was telling me, ‘you have to do this.’”

“They’re heavily invested in it and they want me to do well,” Martin said of his parents and their support of his applications.

The seniors also shared some of their advice for underclassmen on how to approach their applications. The most common recom-

mendation was to start early.

“Find out what you want to do,” Martin said. “I waited too late. It’s a lot less stress if you a) figure out what you want to do and b) know where you would want to go, what you would want to look for in a college.”

Alvarado-Aziz shared the same sentiment. “I would start early with what you’re looking for, what you want to do, what you need, so you can plan it out,” she said. “I would look for scholarships too, that’s a big thing I had to do.”

“Always do it way before you think you need to do it,” Longendyke said. “Tour everywhere, research everywhere, talk to people.”

Longendyke described visiting many colleges over the last few years as she narrowed her list to the 20 she’s applying to, both through planned trips and impromptu stops at schools that happen to be nearby wherever she’s traveling. “Every spring break was college touring, since I was a freshman. You go on this trip, you go here, check on college.”

As far as knowing what they’re looking for, the seniors mentioned a few big ideas that guided their college searches.

“I looked first at what majors they had,” Alvarado-Aziz said. She plans on studying animal

science or biology, which has focused her search on schools that are strong in those programs, such as Virginia Tech and Texas A&M University.

Martin also looked at whether schools had his intended major, architecture. He also prioritizes location. “I want somewhere closer to home, so not a plane ride away,” he said. “So it’s mainly location and academics.”

Aquilina also values whether the school has a strong program for her interests, which are cyber security, business, and computer science, but she also puts emphasis on the community aspect of a school.

For Longendyke, a school’s campus is a critical feature, followed by academics and student life. “My first priority is, ‘can I see myself living here?’” Longendyke said. “I want to surround

myself with a school community that is striving for greatness.”

She also described wanting to feel challenged at a school. “That’s really important to me. I never want to be the smartest person in the room.”

Longendyke acknowledged the long, time-consuming process, from narrowing down interests and college searches to writing essays and finding scholarships. She encouraged juniors to start early, but ultimately advised them to take their time with it, emphasizing the importance of putting forth an application that genuinely represents themselves.

“There’s no point in submitting an application if it’s going to be anything less than what you are, if you’re not really proving who you are and doing what is your best work.” •

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From classroom to cubicle

Where do our students work?
Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer



Paige Knox
Employer: Loudoun School of Ballet

Job titles: dance instructor & retail associate
Wages: \$15.00 (dance instructor) \$12.00 (retail associate)
Job responsibilities: “As a dance teacher I teach groups of kids dance skills, choreographed pieces I make, and overall helping them learn. At the retail store I ring people up and do pointe shoe fittings.”

What is your least favorite part about your jobs?
“I work with parents and kids and I always want to make sure they are pleased with my work which is a big stressor.”



Dex Holt
Employer: Dog Day Afternoon

Job title: Daycare Attendant
Wage: \$12.00 an hour
Job responsibilities: “My job is mostly just taking care of the dogs that come in for daycare; making sure they stay out of trouble, cleaning up after them, at the end of the day I mop and clean everything.”



Aly Miltenberger
Employer: Stone Tower Winery

Job title: support staff
Wage: \$12.00 an hour plus tip
Job responsibilities: “As a support staffer I keep the wine, glassware, and inventory stocked, I also bus tables and keep all of our sections clean and organized.”

“My favorite part about having a job is earning my own money!”



Rae Creppon
Employer: Texas Roadhouse

Job title: hostess
Wages: \$7.00 an hour plus tip
Job responsibilities: “Me and my coworkers will have a board that organizes the tables and when a customer asks for a table it is our responsibility to seat them.”



Sophie Webb
Employer: Leesburg Public House

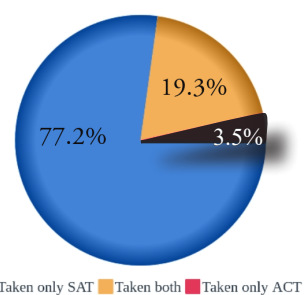
Job title: hostess
Wages: \$7.00 an hour plus tip
Job responsibilities: “When working I mainly greet people, I will seat them to their tables, and then I take the doordash and to go orders over the phone.”

“Since getting a job my communication skills have improved especially when people are stubborn and do not want to work with you it is important to develop good communication.”

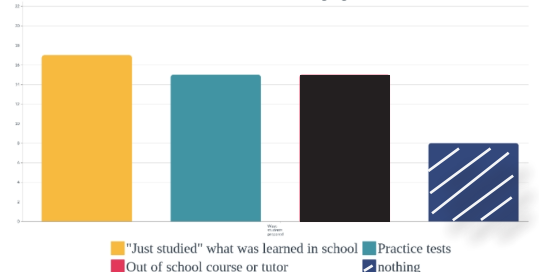
SAT vs. ACT: how do they compare?

The SAT and ACT are both tests that one might choose to take. They are a measure of academic skill and something for colleges to use when accepting people into their school.

What tests did students take?



What did students do to prepare?



SAT

Focus
SAT is more English, reading, and writing focused.

Length
Overall similar time. It just depends on who is taking it.

Difficulty
“For me, the SAT is honestly easier than ACT; I liked the format better.”

ACT

Focus
ACT incorporated more Science and STEM elements.

Length
Overall similar time. It just depends on who is taking it.

Difficulty
“ACT had more questions, had a faster pace you needed to go at”

Students thoughts of SAT:

“I believe it was less stressful than the ACT and gave a more specific score to highlight performance.”

“I think it definitely got easier as I took it more times, the last time I took it my timing was perfect so I believe I got used to it.”

“I didn’t love how long each reading was because it made it harder to understand in a time constraint.”

“Overall the test wasn’t too bad it was just really long.”

“It’s not hard if you can decipher your problems and focus on the English section but it’s more like working on your weaknesses rather than your strengths.”

Students thoughts of ACT:

“It was way more stressful and I felt more rushed, but still did around the same as I did on the SAT.”

“I’m a STEM kid, so I liked the ACT a lot more. I got a 36/36 on the science section on my first practice test. I liked the science section and the more stem focused math. It helped bring my composite score up.”

“It was much nicer than the SAT and had a more interesting English section.”

“Very easy questions with hard timings.”

“Hard, mostly due to the time limit.”

Conclusion

People tend to take the SAT a lot more than the ACT, and only a few people only take the ACT. Depending on what one wants to do with their career they might take one over the other, if not both.

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

Why seniors push themselves despite time constraints

Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer

The buzzing of senior **Robert Suttie's** alarm clock starts his day. After an intensive seven hour school day of four AP classes, Suttie is far from done. Suttie commutes straight to his four hour shift working as a lifeguard at Ida Lee Recreation Center. 8:30 declares the end of his shift before the quick transition to his 9:00 swim practice. 10:00. Suttie is finally home and jumps into his schoolwork in order to maintain pristine grades in each of his seven AP classes.

Suttie is not the only senior that experiences this work-driven schedule, considering the average GPA is increasing, according to K12 dive reporter **Anna Marold**. Students often take classes that challenge them despite the tight schedule that follows.

"I have taken honors and higher level classes the majority of high school," senior **Charlotte Marland** said. Marland is the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America communication manager and the

parliamentarian of the National Honors Society. She focuses on pushing herself to take challenging courses ranging between Advanced Placement, Dual Enrolment, and honors classes.

Senior **Izzy Miller** holds a similar opinion. "It is worth taking higher level classes because everyone here takes them and if you don't it can act as a disadvantage to you," Miller said.

The competition among students has been increasing as quickly as academic scores, considering that colleges will review test scores, essays, grades, schedule, and GPA. Competing with fellow students impacts the student atmosphere and mentality.

According to school counselor **Beth Kosakow**, most students who chose to take higher level classes plan on moving onto the college level.

"I would like to believe colleges focus on your essays and letters of recommendation, though I think it is ultimately your academics, and if you are not going to a test-optional

school, then SAT and ACT scores are a huge factor," Suttie said.

As the current senior class valedictorian, Suttie said he wished colleges would focus more on how well rounded students are but still continues to believe that colleges are being the most equitable when they concentrate on "the numbers."

The stress from senior year easily takes a toll on students academically, and balancing their focus between extracurriculars and college applications can have a major effect on students' time management. Senior **Carolina Martinez-Alvarado** is active in extracurriculars, including National Honors Society, along with Science, Spanish, and Music National Honors Societies. After school she finds herself at practice as a drum major in band and is taking on a new role as field conductor and leads her band during the daily practices during the season. Martinez-Alvarado also is one of the crew team captains. Similar to many other students, Martinez-Alvarado's packed schedule creates

many obstacles when trying to balance her time.

"When I am not at practice, my after school consists of a lot of homework. Definitely during marching season it gets difficult to manage my time," she said.

Many factors play into the role of making a course challenging between the workload, teacher, peers, and subject.

"There is a difference between conceptually hard and a large workload. Is it hard to manage or is it hard to understand? The combination of both really makes a difficult class," Suttie said. "At the end of the day you should be happy with the subjects you are taking, but what really matters is the people in your class and your teacher," he said.

"Aside from the basic benefits such as the GPA boost and college credits, I think that these courses help students learn how to tackle more challenging material and it helps set them up better for college," Kosakow said. •

NHS tutors elementary and middle school students

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

Led by co-sponsors **Paige Illig** and **Jennifer Marden**, the National Honor Society is continuing to work with elementary and middle school students this year.

With Illig overseeing elementary tutoring and Marden covering middle school, NHS started working with Simpson Middle school for the first time on November 9, 2023. NHS has worked with the new principal at Simpson **Dr. Tripp Di Nicola** and other administrators to have students travel to Simpson for tutoring before or during school. Students are able to drive to Simpson during their study hall time to tutor.

"One of the new things Dr. Luttrell has approved of students leaving campus during study hall to help out at Simpson, which is really a great thing," Marden said. The middle school students can be

tutored in reading or math, and also have teacher support.

Marden explained that the group received an email from **Jarrold Dungan**, an assistant principal at Simpson, asking if NHS would be interested in tutoring. From there, Di Nicola connected Marden with **Kjersti Oliver**, another assistant principal at Simpson. According to Marden, the tutoring efforts so far have been going well and NHS is excited to continue throughout the year.

"It seems like the students are enjoying it as well," NHS president **Gracelyn Daniel** said.

NHS has tutored elementary schools in the past and they are continuing that this year with Evergreen Mill Elementary School. Elementary students come to the high school on Wednesday afternoons after our dismissal to be paired with high school tutors. "We try to make it the same tutor each time so that they have some familiarity with them. The high

school students then tutor them on whatever they need help with," Illig said.

"Usually they come with specific work, sometimes it's just that they're really struggling in math so then they will run math problems with them or do spelling things with them. Sometimes it's a really specific goal in mind, sometimes it's just getting them that general help," Illig said.

Tutoring for Evergreen has not yet started this year, since teachers are waiting for first semester testing, such as WETA, which determines which students may need help preparing for their SOLs.

"We have to wait for those scores to come back before we can really get started because there obviously are students who are of need early in the year, but it's going to be such a significantly lower number, and the reality of them coming every single week when it's so early is pretty unlikely," Illig

said. Elementary school tutoring started on January 18.

NHS provides many other services within the community. "At each meeting we will present a couple different volunteer opportunities that we think they should take advantage of for that month, and then throughout the month if we get more volunteer opportunities we'll send it out to them," Illig said.

"One of the biggest events that we are doing right now is the smile kits project where we are making these little kits for female cancer patients, we are tutoring, we do a lot of events here and there throughout the year as well," Daniel said.

"NHS is a great organization, a great club and organization, and I would highly recommend that any sophomores thinking about doing it next year apply, and be part of our great society," Marden said. •

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Artist of the issue: Gloria Wu's vibrant style brings her inspirations to life

Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-Chief

When junior **Gloria Wu** watched the newly released “Spiderman: Across the Spider-Verse,” she, like many others, was drawn to its dynamic and artistic animation. The highly-stylized visuals of the film stuck with her so much that when it came time to choose a subject for her own art project, she chose the guitar featured in the film.

Wu created the guitar during her time at the PAVAN Regional Governor’s School for the Arts, a rigorous program for students to develop their skills in visual, performing, and musical arts. Approximately 30 students from northern Virginia are invited to participate each year.

“It’s really fun and you get to meet a lot of like-minded people that are peers,” Wu said. “The instructors are really kind and it’s really engaging.”

Students in the PAVAN program are first introduced to a variety of mediums to explore, “widening the range of work you could do,” Wu said.

They then spend their time working on a final project to be presented at the end of the program.

Wu constructed the form of the guitar from materials such as cardboard and styrofoam, capturing the “punk” and abstract style of the instrument. “At the time, the new Spiderman movie had just come out,” Wu said. “So I made Hobie’s guitar. It was really cool.”

Students in the PAVAN program are first introduced to a variety of mediums to explore, “widening the range of work you could do,” Wu said. They then spend their time working on a final project to be presented at the end of the program, for which Wu chose to create the guitar.

Wu is also in the process of applying to the Residential Governor’s School for Visual Art for the upcoming summer. State governor’s schools are prestigious, multi-week programs hosted at various Virginia colleges that provide opportunities for students to study their interests at a deeper level with experienced professors and

instructors. Like PAVAN, the residential visual art governor’s school is hosted alongside the performing arts programs, allowing students to engage with others with different and sometimes overlapping interests.

Wu sees these kinds of programs as engaging and welcoming opportunities for students. “They’re very open to artists and different styles and I would definitely recommend other younger artists in our school or county to try out the programs,” she said.

As part of the application process, students submit samples of their portfolio for consideration. Wu submitted a piece she refers to as “Rainy Street” in her application to the upcoming residential governor’s school.

“It’s a piece I drew from when I went to China and I really just like the atmosphere of the picture,” Wu said. “It was bright colors and the street life and it was rainy. It’s just overall one of my favorite pieces so far.”

Wu frequently draws inspiration from her travels. She looks to her camera roll for ideas, she said, to “draw something that’s memorable to me.”

Instead of making art with any particular audience or message in mind, Wu chooses to create something simply because she likes it. “But art can have a message no matter what, it really just depends on how you’re looking at it.”

Wu also finds inspiration from drawing celebrities. One of her favorite muses is a singer from a K-pop group called ZEROBASEONE.

“I really like drawing portraits of celebrities or people I find attractive on Pinterest or something,” Wu said. “I just doodle a lot.”

“She is always drawing or sketching or making art,” art teacher **Stephanie Woshner** said. “She specializes in painted portraits but also dabbles in other areas like figure drawing. She stands out because she is not afraid to tackle difficult subjects like portraits and the human figure.”

Wu’s preferred medium is acrylic paint. Her style has been described by peers as very realistic, and the bright

colors and lifelike style of her own work reflects some of her favorite artists, such as comic artist **Dan Mora** and painter **JC Leyendecker**. “I love the way he paints,” Wu said. “It’s very graphic but also it’s in a realistic way. It just looks really amazing.”

Woshner described Wu’s “unique” and “painterly” style in a similar way. “Gloria has a very expressive style that is layered with lots of brushwork and mark making.”

With schoolwork and other activities, Wu doesn’t have time to draw every day, but when she does, she spends a couple of hours on it. She likes to follow tutorials to learn new techniques because “you can find what spots you make mistakes in a lot easier.”

Wu appreciates her art classes for the fundamentals they’ve taught her and the feedback she’s received. “It really taught me the basics and really set the ground for me to make more things that are continuously getting better and better as I grow as an artist.”

Wu started in Art 1 last year as a sophomore, but has advanced to Art 3 as a junior this year. “I saw in her great potential and a strong artistic voice,” Woshner said.

Wu has seen great improvement in her art since she started drawing seriously in middle school, especially in her proportions and figure drawing. “It’s just easier for me to draw those things that I thought were hard before.”

Woshner has also seen Wu’s growth over the last couple years. “She has become a more confident artist, challenging herself with new and different media and subject matter while continuing to strengthen her own unique and individual style as a portrait painter.”

Wu hopes to study art in college and make a career out of it. She currently gifts some of her art to family and friends, but hopes to start selling it. “I want to have people look at it and enjoy my art, but I also want to make money with it, too,” she said. “Hopefully it’s in some sort of gallery or I could display it somewhere.” •



At a summer art program, junior Gloria Wu created a piece inspired by a character’s guitar in the recent release “Spiderman: Across the Spider-Verse.” Although Wu’s preferred medium is acrylic paint, she explored new techniques and used cardboard and Styrofoam to construct the guitar. Photo by Gloria Wu.

Highly-anticipated “Mean Girls” movie fails to deliver

Justin Goodhart | Staff Writer

This highly-anticipated on screen adaptation of “Mean Girls: The Musical,” from award-winning writer **Tina Fey**, hit theaters on January 12, ahead of the long **Martin Luther King, Jr.** holiday weekend. Despite a robust \$28 million turnout for Paramount’s hopeful smash, “Mean Girls” disappointed many returning and would-be fans with a frenetic plotline and sloppy, dis-

jointed transitions.

Criticism aside, the film managed to achieve two noteworthy goals in reshaping this classic: increased diversity in casting and high energy in production. The original “Mean Girls” (2004) was comprised of a primarily white cast, so it was refreshing to see new groups represented in this story. The addition of **Avantika** and **Auli’i Cravalho** were particularly good.

The energy through the film

was consistent...ly frenetic. It was exhausting to sit through repeated scene transitions, from high energy dance numbers to high speed montages back to high energy dance numbers. Musical scenes should add substance and impact to story and character development, but they felt like fluff or filler, serving only to distract from the shallow plot.

Writer Fey and directors **Samantha Jayne** and **Arturo Perez Jr.** had a noble goal. They tried to

deliver the moral of “Mean Girls” to the next generation that crudely judging others is not character-building - a message as relevant today as it was in 2004. It just would’ve been more palatable if it had not been drowned in confetti and drowned out by too many chaotic musical scenes. Perhaps they should have followed **Regina George’s** own advice: “Stop trying to make fetch happen.” •

Overall rating: 5/10

Review: "Now and Then," the "last Beatles song," generally delivers

William Kluttz | Staff Writer

54 years after they broke up in 1970, The Beatles are releasing a new song, "Now and Then." The song features all four Beatles, **Paul McCartney, John Lennon, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr**, despite Lennon and Harrison being deceased.

"Now and Then" shot to number one in the UK and on streaming. It is the Beatles' first number one since "The Ballad of John and Yoko" in 1969, 54 years ago. In the UK, that's the longest gap between number one hits of any artist.

The recording is based on a demo by Lennon from the late 1970s. Lennon, who was murdered in 1980, contributed vocals to the final recording. The piano from the original recording was redone by McCartney in 2022.

McCartney, Harrison, and Starr first worked on "Now and Then" in 1995 for The Beatles Anthology project. The song was shelved due to the low quality of Lennon's voice and piano, and the inability to remove a buzzing

sound that spanned the whole song. The Beatles ended up recording two other Lennon demos for the Anthology project that did get released, "Free As A Bird" and "Real Love."

The song stayed shelved until 2022, when AI was used to separate Lennon's vocals and piano, as well as eliminate the buzzing sound that caused the recording to be shelved in the first place. Harrison, who died in 2001, had contributed guitar and backing vocals to the song during the 1995 sessions.

Of the two remaining Beatles, Starr provided backing vocals and drums, and McCartney played guitars, bass, piano, electric harpsichord, and shaker. A slide guitar solo from McCartney and a string section was added, and "Now and Then" was released on November 2, 2023.

After listening to it a dozen-plus times, "Now and Then" isn't a top ten Beatles song, but it didn't have to be. It would be unreasonable to expect a timeless masterpiece from this. It just had to be a respectable finale for one of the greatest musical

acts ever.

The first complaint is that the original recording by Lennon had a sort of pre-chorus, "I don't wanna lose you..." This is completely missing from the final song. There is no real explanation for this, and the song feels slightly disconnected without it. The song also sounds overproduced at points, as well as too modern in comparison with their 1960s recordings and the original demo.

Starr's drums are way too up front, and the strings, while they do add to the recording, are too much at points. Strings used on earlier Beatles recordings, like "Yesterday," added to the recording without being too noticeable. The original, raw recording, while the quality was poor, had a charm to it that is somewhat lost in the final song.

Released along with "Now and Then," is a new version of the Beatles' first big hit, "Love Me Do." It would have been nice to get the original, unedited Lennon recording from the late 1970s. "Love Me Do" is fine, it's just not very exciting.

A final complaint is the final note of "Now and Then." The final note is the strings fading out, and it sounds fine, but if this is the "last Beatles song," as it has been advertised, the final note of Beatles' history should be played by a Beatle, not a group of hired musicians.

"Now and Then," though, isn't a poor song. In general, it's captivating to listen to. The slide guitar solo by McCartney is fantastic, and the song is excellent lyrically too. So yes, it's a good thing that this was released and the world gets to hear it. Every critique mentioned here is fairly minor and doesn't keep the song from being great.

The fact that the world is getting a new Beatles song in 2023 makes it special. It's almost unfair to compare it to "Eleanor Rigby" or "Strawberry Fields Forever." It was made across a 45-year period from a demo made in an apartment in New York City by Lennon. •

William Kluttz has been playing guitar for five years and has listened to The Beatles for six.

Taylor Swift's 2023 Wrapped

How Time Magazine's Person of the Year rose to fame.

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

MIDNIGHTS ERA

After many episodes of "Midnights Mayhem with Me," Swift dropped *Midnights* on October 21st, 2022. *Midnights* sold rapidly, becoming Swift's fastest-selling album so far. It held the top spot on popularity charts for five weeks after its release. Not to mention, it was also taking over many fans' and non-fans' TikTok "for you pages." *Midnights* gained popularity from the amount of people commenting on Taylor Swift-related TikTok posts and posting videos with her music. Her fanbase and listener demographic grew exponentially. Within this era, Swift announced the highly anticipated Eras Tour.

REPUTATION ERA

In 2016 and 2017, news outlets turned their backs on Swift. On August 18, 2017, Swift vanished online, seemingly "going dark." On November 17, 2017, Swift released an album that put West to shame. Then, Swift split with her record label, Big Machine Records over their decision to sell her music to Scooter Braun. This meant that all rights to Swift's music would now be owned by Braun. Swift decided she would reclaim what she lost.

DEBUT ERA

The "Debut [Taylor Swift] era," as well as Swift's career, was born in 2006, and so was the start of her country music career as she signed a contract with Big Machine Records. Her style was primarily country, with releases such as "Tim McGraw" or "Our Song."

LOVER ERA

Swift released *Lover*, which, in comparison to *reputation*, focused more on love and healing. During this time, Swift was unable to go on tours due to the pandemic, leaving fans wondering what she would do to compensate for lost time. During this time, Swift also took a stance on politics, something she had avoided her entire career.

FEARLESS ERA

Swift accumulated thousands of fans, dubbed "Swifties," after songs such as "You Belong With Me" and "Love Story" played on radio stations everywhere. Swift won Album of the Year, and during Swift's acceptance speech, Kanye West came onto the stage and proclaimed that Beyonce deserved the award for "Best Female Video."

Read more about Taylor Swift online!

Money fans have spent on The Eras Tour: \$5,000,000 mostly on traveling, tickets and merch.

Keys to cities gained: 2 to Arlington and Santa Clara, where she was declared honorary mayor.

Billionaire status: Reached On October 26, Swift reached billionaire status with a net worth of 1.1 billion.

Cities visited on tour: 31 across the United States, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. This number will continue to grow into 2024.

Book review: "A Very Large Expanse of Sea" helps to expand the mind

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

"A Very Large Expanse of Sea" by **Tahereh Mafi** is a lyrically written romance novel depicting the rage, hate, and stereotypes that stem from the ignorance of uneducated peoples.

It centers around Shirin, a sophomore in high school who is intelligent, independent, and shows strength through breakdancing and fashion.

Due to her Muslim faith and wearing a hijab, she faces discrimination and xenophobia. This discrimination is intensified because it's 2002, only a year after the September 11, 2001 attack. Her family is constantly moving

around because of this, and the book begins with her making her way through the first day at a new school.

When she meets a junior named Ocean James who becomes her lab partner, they begin to fall in love. After they start dating, Shirin forces Ocean to keep their relationship low-key, but he doesn't want to appear as if he's ashamed of dating her, and manages to convince her to let him drive her to school.

And then everything comes cascading down.

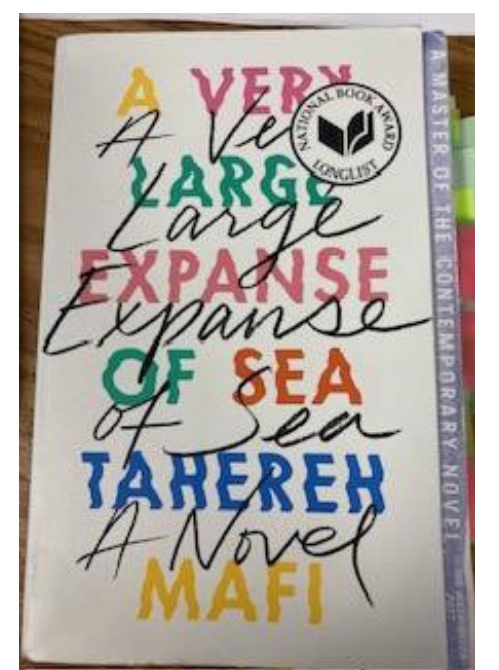
The book is written to convey the profound emotions of Shirin, and eloquently tells her story through the lens of her emotions. When I was reading the book, I felt

just as confused and enraged as she did because the author completely immerses you into her world.

Ocean is oblivious to the amount of discrimination that still exists, and meeting Shirin opens his eyes. Both Ocean and Shirin had well developed character arcs, and I really enjoyed how they had to learn about each other's cultural issues to solve their own problems.

It is a love story stripped down to its purest form, and the ending will leave you the most bittersweet form of hope.

Even if you're not a fan of romance novels, you will still gain perspective as the author goes out of her way to teach you about culture and cultural experiences. •



"A Very Large Expanse of Sea." Photo by Scarlett Ashford.