



Third annual Women's Summit helps to inspire and support young men and women



Guest speaker Annisa Jaghoori starts off her speech at the third annual LCHS Women's Summit. Photo by Brianna Martinez.

Sophia Casicano | Staff Writer

During late February, flyers were posted around the school and emails were sent out regarding the third annual women's summit. This event was advertised to all students in LCHS, allowing any student to sign up and learn about women leaders in our community.

The annual women's summit was originally organized by active

school volunteer **Arlene Lewis** in hopes of bringing support to young women in the school. Lewis focused on gathering only in-house speakers for the summit each year.

"I always wanted it to be in-house. I never felt like we needed an outside speaker. We don't need to look further than the LCHS extended community to find outstanding women: students, graduates,

faculty, and faculty and student family members," Lewis said.

During these women's summits, Lewis collects a guest speaker from our school community and invites them to speak about their story. This year, she invited **Annisa Jaghoori**, mother of EL teacher **Mustafa Jaghoori**, to speak about her experiences as an immigrant from Afghanistan.

Jaghoori covered topics rang-

ing from how she learned English and got her nursing license to the struggles of when the Taliban invaded Afghanistan. Lewis hopes that Jaghoori's story can inspire women in the school while also giving them someone to relate to and connect with.

"God brought me to this path; I can do this," Jaghoori said.

In addition to Jaghoori, Lewis, **SUMMIT continued on page 3**

April 8 solar eclipse viewing event: what you need to know

Vivian Lun | Staff Writer

On April 8, the first solar eclipse that can be seen from the US will occur after almost a decade. Solar eclipses occur when the moon positions itself between the Earth and the sun. There are three different stages in which a solar eclipse can be viewed: totality, partiality, and annular.

"If you are fortunate enough to be in the path of totality, the moon will completely block the light from the sun that we are able to see from the Earth," Earth science teacher **Holly Trevathan** said. Trevathan, along with the administration, has organized a school-wide viewing of the solar eclipse

on April 8, given the rarity of this opportunity.

Since the event will take place during the school day and include all students and faculty, the administration has conducted detailed planning regarding the logistics of the viewing to prevent chaos on the school lawn.

"When it's time for the eclipse, we will have very specific directions for how we're going to be outside," **Dr. Michelle Luttrell** said.

As principal, Luttrell is one of the heads of operations for the event. Along with being in charge of directions on the day of the eclipse, Luttrell has been working with the science department to

ensure safe viewing protocols are being followed.

"What we're able to do is get safe viewing glasses for every student and every employee that works here," Luttrell said.

This is extremely important to note, as solar eclipse glasses are required when viewing an eclipse directly. Experts say that looking directly at the sun, even during a solar eclipse, is never a good idea since it could damage the eye. In fact, staring at the sun even for just 100 seconds could cause permanent retinal damage.

Unfortunately, this eclipse's path of totality only includes a small stretch of land through Texas, Ohio, and parts of New York.

"In our immediate area we will experience a partial eclipse, where only a portion of the sun will be covered by the moon," Trevathan said. This means that the eclipse we will see from LCHS will not fully cover the sun's light since it takes a very special angle to reach this stage of totality. However, this does not take away from the uniqueness of this opportunity, as the next solar eclipse that can be viewed from the US won't occur until August 23, 2044, and it may not be during a time where the experience could be shared with such close friends.

"We are super excited that the eclipse will occur while we are in **ECLIPSE continued on page 3**

The “TikTokification” of the music industry and why talent matters more

Justin Goodhart | Staff Writer

As a society, we used to measure the success of a song or album by how much critical acclaim and support it received. Now, we judge songs based on how viral they go on social media.

The influence of social media on modern music is a complicated dynamic. The rise of said influence primarily started during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were no concerts or events that artists could use to promote their music, so the only route that gave good results was the route of social media, especially TikTok.

TikTok is an app where users can create short videos making whatever the user wishes. Once completed, the video is posted for everyone to see. This accessibility made TikTok the easiest way to reach large audiences during the pandemic, and that’s exactly what artists did.

For example, **Jason Derulo**,

a globally successful pop artist, created videos of him dancing to his own songs. Another example is **Dua Lipa**, another successful singer, who auditioned dancers for the music video of her song “Levitating,” using TikTok.

Artists were clambering to drum up publicity on social media, but the reverse of their mission started to happen as well. Suddenly, professional recording artists weren’t the only ones trying to sustain their music careers, famous social media stars started to make their own music as well.

These social media stars usually have no recording or performing background, but yet they still make music. Why? They did it because they could. At that time, social media influencers were the main pipeline for brand deals and other business ventures. It seemed as if the entire culture was determined by what they were interested in at the time, so they became the culture.

Influencers started to appear in cinema and TV. Some started their own brands of clothes and makeup. Most significantly, they were all over the music industry. For example, famous TikTok star **Dixie D’Amelio** released mediocre music with no cultural impact whatsoever, and other influencers followed suit.

This diaspora of social media creators into the music industry resulted in the industry becoming watered down and boring. This is because these influencers often had no real talent in the first place, and it has taken a long time to restore the music industry the prestige they knew before the pandemic.

This example of non necessity should make everyone ask themselves the question: Just because we can do something, does that mean we should do something.

As a society, we should aspire to artists such as **Billie Eilish** and **Frank Ocean**, who earned the right to produce music in a way that’s authentic and relevant. •

The harmful stereotypes in new Netflix series “Griselda Blanco”

Karen Martinez | Staff Writer

The new Netflix series “Griselda Blanco” has fallen into the harmful stereotypes of criminal activities such as drug trafficking, the show is based on the drug lord and murderer **Griselda Blanco Restrepo**, also known as the Colombian “godmother of cocaine” or the “black widow.”

On January 25, the Netflix series follows Blanco (**Sofia Vergara**) fleeing from Medellin, Columbia, to Miami, Florida, with false identification papers after murdering her abusive husband. Once in Miami, she breaks the gender barriers by entering the cocaine trade.

Throughout the show we can see harmful stereotypes within Blanco and the drug dealers introduced (minor characters). One of the major stereotypes is shown through Blanco herself, a Latina woman who enters the US with false identification papers with the intention of selling drugs for a living. Entering the US with false identification

papers is oftentimes the unfortunate situation for many Latino immigrants who immigrate to the US with the intention of having better opportunities.

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 20 million Latino immigrants lived in the US in 2021, around 7,410,000 have been undocumented or have had false identification papers. The majority of these immigrants flee Latin America with the expectations of a better life, escaping gang violence, economic hardships, and social injustices.

“The border is wide open for cartels & terrorists. Secure our border now. Build a massive wall and deduct the costs from Mexican foreign aid!” former President **Donald Trump** stated on a Twitter tweet on March 30, 2015.

Similar to the show, Trump proceeded to portray Latino immigrants in a negative light by stereotyping them as “cartels” and “terrorists.” Other shows like “Narcos (México)” and “On

My Block” fall into the same harmful stereotypes portraying Latino characters as uneducated criminals such as drug traffickers, gangsters, and cartels.

Producers and directors profit off the harmful stereotypes of Latino immigrants, making millions, not realizing the harm it does to the Latino community. According to the Juilliard School, many producers and directors seem to think actors of ethnicity are only believable and marketable when playing roles that help perpetuate stereotypes promoting public hostility towards specific ethnic groups and lowering ethnic minority individuals’ self-esteem.

What can we do to stop the stereotypes? We can’t get in contact with big producers and directors; however, we can stop supporting films and plays that contain harmful stereotypes, we can educate those who are uneducated about stereotypes, and we can stop attaching harmful, unnecessary race qualifications in characters’ descriptions. •

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SUMMIT continued from page 1 with the help of senior **Daniellah Etisi**, gathered eight female students to share presentations on topics that they feel passionate about, such as women in music performance and industry, women in sports, and women as social activists.

Juniors **Sofia Habibzai** and **Samantha Tinta** made a presentation on “Women as Powerful Leaders” and were both thrilled at the opportunity to share.

“I decided to present because

I believe in the empowerment of women, especially regarding leadership. There are so many women to look up to and learn from, and I wanted to share that with others to possibly learn from. If sharing this information meant I could inspire others and have them learn something new, I wanted to do anything to help make it possible,” Habibzai said.

During the second year, Etisi joined Lewis in the organization of this event as the president of

the Captains United club. Captains United hosted the past two summits.

“I had a wonderful time helping organize the annual women’s summit,” Etisi said. “Captains United is always striving to spread awareness about how people’s identities and experiences shape who they are. The Woman’s Summit is just another place where we’re able to spread this message. All the wonderful women and girls who presented their experience in their prospective fields and allowed people to have

better access to the resources they used are truly something the club loves to see.”

Lewis hopes to continue the women’s summit for years to come.

“I am looking forward to planning next year’s summit with a new group of students. It is my hope every year that the message of our keynote speaker and student presenters will resonate with both the male and female attendees, inspiring them to make their dreams a reality, despite any obstacles,” Lewis said. •

Annisa Jaghoori encourages students to persevere

Brianna Martinez | Staff Writer

Standing up on the podium in front of dozens of students is a woman who is ready to share her story of extreme heartache and perseverance. An inspirational speaker, and the mother of one of our teachers here at County who has an interesting perspective about being a woman in today’s world took the stage and spoke about her story of adversity and rising above even the most seemingly impossible events. **Annisa Jaghoori** stood at the podium as a humble woman and shared a story that can make everyone in the room leave even more grateful for what they have than they came in with.

Coming from Afghanistan in 2001, she and her entire family started their journey in an entirely new country knowing almost nothing about what

was going to happen to them. Some of the most basic tasks for us Americans were daunting tasks for her. “While my husband was somewhat familiar with the English language,” Jaghoori said, “mine was virtually nonexistent; all I knew were “yes,” “no,” and a few other basic words.”

She already started her professional career back in Afghanistan, where she was a registered nurse for 15 years and her husband was a hydrology engineer. Because of international regulations, her education was not credited here in the United States. “We started working as airplane cleaners at Dulles Airport, and I took English classes for adults two nights a week,” Jaghoori said. From having good, stable jobs, the Jaghooris basically had to start their lives over again.

After only a couple of years, more

jobs, and five children later, her husband was diagnosed with cancer and passed away shortly after. She was left to figure out life in an unfamiliar country with young and still dependent children without having much knowledge of what to do herself. Speaking at the podium, it was visible how much that hardship still weighs on her. “Sixteen days after his diagnosis, he passed on, and I was left with five kids,” Jaghoori said with tears in her eyes and a hoarse voice. She even audibly overcomes her struggles and continues to tell her story of perseverance. Her husband tried to offer as much support as he could in the time he had. “He would tell me, ‘Don’t work so hard, focus on your education.’ But what else could I do?” Jaghoori said.

In her journey to attempt life as a single working mother, she studied to

get her title as a registered nurse again in the United States and achieved her goal, something that she worked so hard to do. “At times, I felt like my body was present in class, but my mind was not; thoughts of all sorts would attempt to corner me, but I would not give in,” Jaghoori said. This was the catalyst for her to get her life back on track, even though nothing was ever really the same.

Her main message for young women from sharing her story was to persevere no matter what. No matter how unimaginable it may seem to keep going after such horrible situations, you have to think of the better outcome you will eventually come to. “Set yourself a goal and strive for it. You will face difficulties but those are the challenges that shape you and make you stronger,” Jaghoori said. •

SOLAR ECLIPSE

NEXT ECLIPSE: APRIL 8, 2024

WHAT IS IT?

A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and the Earth, fully or partially blocking the sun’s light. On April 8, in VA we will be witnessing a PARTIAL eclipse, with a ~75% coverage of the Sun.

PARTIAL ECLIPSE

The sun, moon, and Earth are not perfectly lined up, so a sliver of sun is still visible.

ANNULAR ECLIPSE

The sun, moon, and Earth are perfectly lined up, but the moon is at its farthest point from Earth, producing a “ring of fire” effect.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

The sun, moon, and Earth are perfectly lined up, so the moon completely blocks the face of the sun.

HOW OFTEN DO THEY OCCUR?

There can be up to FIVE solar eclipses a year, and a minimum of TWO.

Legend: Partial (light pink), Annular (medium pink), Total (dark pink)

Be sure to wear “eclipse glasses” when viewing a solar eclipse!

ECLIPSE continued from page 1 school,” said science teacher **Judy Shepherd**, who has also taken a lead in organizing the event.

Of course, while the viewing event will certainly be the star of the show, it would not be a school event without a bit of learning. To this end, the science department has been preparing a lesson on solar eclipses to share with the school prior to the viewing.

“They are going to share information about what is a solar eclipse, what does this mean, what’s the significance of this,” Luttrell said. The lesson will also include instructions on how to use solar eclipse glasses so that every-

one can enjoy the eclipse safely.

“Since the district is going to purchase the special glasses that will allow everyone to ‘look’ at the eclipse, we can share that moment with the kids,” Shepherd said.

Past the scientific facts, eclipses teach a lot about persistence and the beauty of nature’s laws. To be able to experience such a rare phenomenon with such a tight-knit community is the perfect way to start off the last quarter of the year. The event also embodies the true spirit of learning.

“If our little moon can block out our sun’s light, then the sky’s the limit. We can do anything we put our minds to,” Shepherd said. •



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Vivian Lun | Staff Writer

Gas leak leads to school evacuation



Karan Singh | Business Manager

It is a typical, cold Tuesday morning in January. Some students arrive at school early to partake in their clubs. Others are coming in waves as school buses drop them off. Suddenly, a voice is heard over the school speaker system, asking students and staff to evacuate the building as quickly as possible. All conversations stop for a sudden moment as the voice announces that there is a gas leakage in the building.

All the people inside the school building, and those that have just gotten off of their school buses, are rushed to the football stadium and onto the cold, metal bleachers. Chatters and murmurs are heard all around and everywhere, the same question is asked: “What happened?”

The first gas leak evacuation in County’s 70 year history took place on Tuesday, January 30. The leak was caused by a carbon buildup in one of the two boilers at the back of the school, according to an email that principal **Michelle Luttrell** received from **William Wohead**, director of facilities operations. Choir

Students enter the football stadium to evacuate the school building. The evacuation was caused by a gas leak in the school, and all students and staff were asked to quickly leave the school building and go to the bleachers in the stadium outside. Photo by Karan Singh.

teacher **William Rosenfeld** smelled the gas and immediately reported the odor to facilities. The boilers were then shut off and checked. A thorough inspection of the machines showed that one of the boilers was faulty and was expelling gas, which was heavily dangerous for those that breathed it in.

As per district policy, all schools must follow a step-by-step procedure in case of an emergency like this one. Once an evacuation has been set into place, the process needs to be followed precisely. First aid, like the fire department, are called as soon as an event like this occurs. Until then, administrators have to follow evacuation protocol.

“Security and admin position themselves in areas predetermined by a response plan,” Luttrell said.

As explained by Luttrell, school administrators have an initial level of decision making to do, like calling food services and other high schools to prepare for having to move evacuated students; however, most decisions come from higher authority.

As principal, Luttrell is the centerpoint of information and the person through which all information is channeled.

“I am essentially a liaison,” Lut-

trell said.

While all of this was occurring inside the building, evacuated students had to wait outside for approximately two hours, in 40 degree weather. Students were not prepared for these cold circumstances, but they came up with creative things to do to pass the time while waiting.

Sophomore **Caitlyn Kozowyk** and her friends huddled together to share Airpods and watch the “Shiny Happy People” documentary. Other students played card games, like Uno and Spoons.

“I was frustrated we couldn’t go home,” senior **Katherine Garvey** said. “My friends and I were going to get ice cream if they let us go.”

Not only did the evacuation affect students, but it also impacted teachers and their classes.

Science teacher **Terri Moulds’** AP Chemistry class was affected by the gas leak. Although the evacuation began before school started, Moulds’ students were scattered throughout the stadium, and she wished that everything was “more planned and prepared for.”

“We haven’t practiced a school wide evacuation in a very long time, so considering we did that in 15 minutes, that was still a very great thing,” Moulds said.

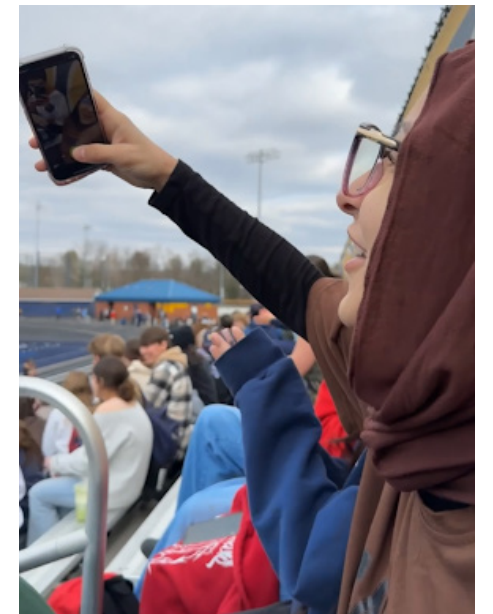
Back in the building, the fire department used special instruments to measure the amount of gas around the school, and later used other techniques, like opening all doors and windows, to pull the air out of the building. The building was then considered safe for students to

return back into the school.

A carbon buildup can cause restlessness and headaches, along with increased heart rates and respiratory problems, such as trouble breathing. These symptoms can be harmful, and excess gas can cause explosions.

To prevent problems like this from arising in the future, LCPS has also conducted an assessment of the entire school and removed any unnecessary parts from the boilers that may cause further issues.

“It was just beautifully done,” Luttrell said. “Everyone was quiet, focused, and followed directions, which is exactly what we need them to do. We cleared this building very quickly, and that was great.” •



Sophomore Hidayyah Ishaq vlogs her experience during the evacuation. The evacuation was caused by a gas leak in the school and students were told to go to the football stadium bleachers. Photo by Karan Singh.

Security officer plunges into numbing waters of Virginia Beach to raise funds for Virginia Special Olympics

Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer

School security officer **Jacob Dryden** decided to bring his support for the Virginia Special Olympics to County, joining Special Olympics Virginia in raising 1.62 million dollars for Special Olympics athletes from the polar plungers.

Dryden was one of the 3,254 “chillers” who braved the cold waters of Virginia Beach on February 2. For his fifth year in a row, Dryden wanted to show his dedication to the nonprofit organization that helps raise funds for Special Olympics athletes. To raise awareness for his upcoming fundraiser, he came to school best dressed in an inflatable sloth costume.

During the school day, Dryden wore the sloth costume and visited each classroom to explain to students and staff what the Virginia Special Olympics are, answer any questions students may have, and overall

promote awareness for the Special Olympics movement.

The Virginia Special Olympics holds many different fundraising events, such as the Law Enforcement Torch Run, Dulles plane pull, small fire truck and ambulance pulls, and the biggest, which is the Polar Plunges.

Dryden’s Polar Plunge journey began at his previous job at the Virginia Department of Corrections. “The prison sponsored a local team, and the department made it a memorandum that we had to be involved somehow. I started coaching the powerlifting team and track, then I started doing their fundraising,” Dryden said. He explained that for the little amount of time it took, he truly enjoyed it.

“I could simply say that I do it every year for the special needs children and adults, and I do, but I do it because when I started doing work with a Special Olympics team, it showed me

what a glimpse of true happiness is: these athletes would do anything and everything for anyone, and I feel that in return, not only should I carry that throughout my life, but I should also be willing to go above and beyond trying to help them,” Dryden said.

The bonds he created with these athletes and the competitive atmosphere in his previous job were the combination that drove Dryden to want to raise as much awareness and money as possible for this organization, then leading him to participate in the yearly polar plunges by jumping in waters with temperatures measuring in the negatives. “In Virginia Beach, there are tens of thousands of people lined up ready to jump in, so you are warm until you come back out. It is very rejuvenating, and running into some cold water in the cold weather is a great way to show you how alive you can be,” Dryden said.

Dryden does not plan to stop any-

time soon.

“Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave at the attempt,” Dryden said. •



*Dryden dresses in his sloth costume to visit students in their classroom. He posed for a picture with junior **Chris Duellman**, senior **Eddie Azzouz**, and junior **Ben Bilko**. Photo by Sophia Casciano.*

Athlete of the issue: Fallon Fetterolf Freshman follows in her siblings' footsteps

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

With an aching shoulder and several cramps all over her body, then-sixth grader **Fallon Fetterolf** reluctantly jogged with her track-crazed siblings in hopes that she would never do it again. Little did she know, three short years later, as a freshmen, she would win the 3200 and 1600 at districts for indoor track and love it.

Fetterolf has had several accomplishments this season in addition to her 3200 and 1600 wins, such as the regional win for 3200 for indoor track. During the cross country season, Fetterolf won districts and placed 10th at states. She has even set a new school record in the 3200 with a time of 11:30.11 during the indoor track season.

Fetterolf's siblings **Heath, Cece, Ricky,** and **Scarlet** all ran track at Loudoun Valley High School. To Fetterolf, they are her biggest form of inspiration and mentorship, and she chose the same speciality as them: the 3200.

"Having them to look up to has always been an inspiration, and anything I have set out to do, they have already done," Fetterolf said.

Since her unenjoyable start, Fetterolf has learned to love her sport.

"I learned to enjoy it by focusing on the small rewards. Talking with



(From Left to Right) Cat Pizzarello, Fallon Fetterolf, and Michael Tafe stand together after qualifying for the State Championships. The three distance runners are all participating in Cross Country, Indoor track and Track and Field seasons.

my teammates and having the satisfaction of hard work," Fetterolf said.

Over the years, Fetterolf has had many hard days and losses. What matters most to her is how well she deals with it.

"Don't always focus on winning because you're not always going to win," Fetterolf said. "Just try your best and focus on your smaller goals."

On the track team, Fetterolf's

coach **Courtney Campbell** is her biggest cheerleader.

"He wants to make sure that we have the best for us and that we aren't working too hard or getting injured easily," Fetterolf said. "The best part [about being on the team] is my coach."

Outside of track, Fetterolf balances a heavy workload while being in the NJROTC and taking several rigorous classes.

"It's so hard if we have an ROTC event," Fetterolf said. She later explained that academics will always take priority over track but how track has forced her to learn to manage her time well.

As Fetterolf and other track athletes begin the spring season, excitement for the season is predominant. "I hope for improvement, great race opportunities and lots of fun meets," Fetterolf said. •

Indoor track team progresses to states

Karan Singh | Business Manager

On February 26 and 27, select runners from the indoor track team traveled to Liberty University in Lynchburg to participate in the VHSL Class 4 state meet.

Sophomore distance runner **Gabe Cunningham** emphasized the importance of hydration and good sleep in the days leading up to the meet.

"The weeks before states, you try to cut down on the volume of running a lot," Cunningham said. This is done to prevent injuries before a race, and to increase recovery and rest.

Other runners concentrated on specific aspects of their technique leading up to their races, putting themselves in the best position for success.

"Before states, I focused on sharpening up my skills," senior sprinter **Matt Thorne** said. "I focused more on speed work and getting to the max speed."

Thorne ran the 4x2, 55 meter dash, and 300 meter dash, breaking the school record for the 300 meter dash with a time of 36.14 seconds. He ended his indoor track season with three school records.

The 4x8 team, consisting of Cunningham, freshmen **Jack Cassidy** and **Michael Tafe**, and junior **Joe Tafe**, also ran a 10 second PR at this meet. Their time of 8:33.87 was made possible by their training and proper running habits. "I was happy for the team," Cunningham said. "I'm glad we were able to make some ground there."

Several athletes also ran the 3200 meter race at the state meet. Michael placed fifth, freshmen **Fallon Fetterolf** placed sixth, and Joe placed twelfth. Michael's time of 9:29.62 broke the school record.

Fetterolf also placed seventh in the 1600 meter race, with a time of 5:19.29. Thorne, Juniors **Jonah Rosen** and **Cole Terhune**, and senior **Emilio Torres** sprint-



Senior Matt Thorne after breaking the school record in the 55 meter dash. Three weeks later, Thorne went on to break the school record in the 300 meter dash at the VHSL Class 4 indoor track state meet. Photo by Courtney Campbell.

ed the 4x2 race.

Following states, Thorne and junior **Matt Ramarge** advanced to the Adidas Indoor Track Nationals. At the meet, Thorne ran the 200 meter dash and Ramarge competed in the 1600 meter race.

Although indoor track has ended, many runners are con-

tinuing to train for the upcoming outdoor season.

"This group of runners are super self-motivated," head coach **Courtney Campbell** said, of the athletes' hard work. "I'm impressed with their work ethic and realization that to improve, you must train." •

Varsity Wrestling finishes third at states, three earn gold medals

Vivian Lun | Staff Writer

After a highly successful season, the varsity wrestling team finished strong at the VHSL Class 4 State meet, with five wrestlers earning medals and the team bringing home third overall.

“Going into the finals match, mentally I felt the best I ever felt the entire state tournament,” junior **Octavian Ashford** said. “It was less about winning, and I was focused more on how I needed to wrestle, and just wrestling good.”

Ashford was one of three wrestlers on the team to earn a gold medal, triumphing in the 175-pound category. Along with Ashford, sophomores **Lincoln Kelley** and **Justin Lowery** brought home gold in the 126-pound and 157-pound categories, while freshman **Rocco Zagorites** placed third in the 150-pound category.

During the season, the wrestlers pushed through tough matches to prepare for their ultimate game. “The two biggest problems were neutral movement and just being more fluid,” Ashford said.

While wrestling on the bottom, opponents would take advantage of

the wrestlers’ low vantage point by targeting their legs and hold them in a paralyzing position. “That whole season I was working to get better at that, which paid off because of my finals match,” Ashford said.

Sophomore **Bryce Schnelzer**, who placed second in the 113-pound category, also had his fair share of competition. Down 2-0 in the final period of the state semifinals against the defending state champion, Schnelzer escaped and pulled one of the biggest upsets of the tournament. “That win in the semis was a really big win for him, and it was a really big win for the team, it was part of the reason we finished third,” **Kent Nagy**, one of the wrestling coaches, said.

Yet it was the very competitiveness of the team that brought the wrestlers closer. “Everyone there is extremely goal driven. If you find the right people that still push you even more, because everyone is working to the best of their ability, that just makes you want to push more,” Ashford said.

Whether it was playing funky music and hyping each other up before their matches, or training together off-season, the wrestlers found



From left to right: Senior Octavian Ashford, sophomore Justin Lowery, and sophomore Lincoln Kelley display the Loudoun County State Champions banner after earning gold in their respective wrestling categories. Photo courtesy of @loco_wrestling via Instagram.

motivation in each other. “To be able to say I was actually able to practice and be able to participate effectively on teams like that... it’s like an ‘I was there kind’ of thing,” Ashford said.

Yet the team’s competitiveness is far from over. “It’s really exciting... we have three state champions

returning, the most of any team in the state... four state finalists, five in the top three,” Nagy said. Nine out of 11 state qualifiers will also be returning to the team next year, as well as junior **Cason Kelley**, who was a match away from earning a state medal. “We’re going to be a very good team,” Nagy said. •

Swim team continues to raise the bar for success

Cat Pizzarello | Editor-in-Chief

The swim team worked hard for this season’s success. Progressive build up of anaerobic and aerobic activities sent the team to the ultimate success: the VHSL Class 4 state meet.

“Our swimmers continued to beat their personal best times week in and week out, and many swimmers gradually added new stroke events or longer distance events,” head coach **Jay Wareham** said. Wareham has assembled a team of 33 swimmers, 17 boys and 16 girls, and two managers.

Wareham is assisted by coach **Benjamin Graham** as the team practices three times a week from 8:30 to 9:30 at night at Ida Lee Park Recreation Center. “The challenge we have always faced is our limited practice time,” Wareham said.

The team continuously made efforts to improve and took to taking other swim opportunities to improve their skills. “A few of our swimmers train with a USA swimming club team as well in the early morning hours,” Wareham said.

Practice consists of a 15 minute stretch before a warm up in the pool. Depending on the day, some swimmers will work on drills and increasing fitness level, while some take to diving and improving technique.

“I was super proud of everyone this season,” senior **Kyle Armitage** said. Armitage has been swimming competitively for seven years and was introduced to the sport by senior **Robert Suttie**.

Armitage went onto states in two individual events, the 100 M and 200 M, where he successfully snagged a personal best in both events. “This was an accomplishment for me because since my freshman year, I only went to states for relays or one individual event,” Armitage said.

The girls finished third at districts, second at regions, and placed 25th at states. The boys team finished third at districts and regions, and scored points to place 18th at states.

“For the first time since I have been coaching here, we moved on swimmers in 24 of 24 events to the Regional Championship meet,” Wareham said. The team then advanced 18 more onto the state meet, with the girls team setting the record of the highest finishing score at regionals.

Out of the 18 swimmers that advanced, 10 made it onto the state finals which included the top 16 teams or individuals in each event from the state preliminary heats. “Overall, our season was excellent. I could not be more proud of our team. We are



“It was both of our last ever high school races, we just took it all in and enjoyed the moment,” Armitage said of his final race with senior **Kai Tjader**. (Left to right) Senior Kai Tjader, Senior Kyle Armitage, Sophomore Eric Akers, Junior Zach Bell, Senior Alan Crouse, Jay Wareham, and Benjamin Graham. Photo courtesy of Kyle Armitage.

continuing to maintain a high level of excellence and continuing to raise the bar in our program as a whole,” Wareham said.

“I was super proud of everyone this season,” Armitage said. “Even if they didn’t make it to postseason meets, everyone had their best times during the season.” Armitage expressed how much he saw his teammates overperform in their events and make achievements beyond their original goals.

“The swim team environment is like a family,” senior **Maya Kunzelman** said. Kunzelman has been swimming since doing SwimKids

when she was younger and competes primarily in the 100 butterfly and 200 freestyle.

“It’s a really fun way to stay active and push yourself while also having the support of your teammates and coaches,” Kunzelman said. “Everyone is welcome, and our great coaches and teammates build you up to your potential,” Armitage said.

As the season concludes, the team celebrates with visits to IHOP to celebrate their successes from a long season. “Our seniors ended their high school career on high notes,” Wareham said. “The future is bright for our program.” •

Search for the perfect sunny day picnic spot

*Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-chief
Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor*

As the warm sunlight hits your skin and the grass beneath your feet prickles your skin, you laugh and take in the time with your friends, enjoying the perfect spring hangout: a picnic. For those who love spending time outdoors, especially as the weather heats up, these top picnic spots will be the perfect place to sit back and relax.

LEGACY PARK, BRAMBLETON-9/10

Open from dusk to dawn, Legacy Park is surrounded by several residential streets, yet maintains an open, welcoming appeal. The park stretches a few blocks and features various recreational amenities.

As volleyball players ourselves, we were excited to find both a sand volleyball court and a grass volleyball court. A basketball court lies near one of the volleyball courts, and we passed an extensive row of tennis courts in another area of the park, with a few picnic tables clustered nearby. A dog-friendly and runner-friendly paved path winds through the trees, passing a small, picturesque pond and dotted with a few benches.

We chose to spend a little time on one of these benches with our picnic lunch and weren't far from the path, but far enough that it didn't feel like passersby were intruding on our conversation as they passed.

Farther down the park, we were ecstatic to find an extensive playground, whose small zipline, tire swing, and other unique play

structures gave it a definite edge over your typical monkey bars and slides. Regardless of age, this playground was so engaging that we would still readily spend some time there.

Seeming to lack only a wide open space for anything like Frisbee or a game of catch, Legacy Park is a wonderful place to spend a warm afternoon with friends, with plenty to do. If you'd prefer a more relaxed outing, the trail and benches are ideal for walking and talking with a friend, or bringing a bite to enjoy at the picnic tables.

The park is relatively condensed, but only in that all of its amenities are easily accessible by foot. Overall, it's still spacious enough where even if it gets busy on a beautiful day, visitors won't be crowded together.

Clean and well-maintained, with plenty of opportunity for recreation and enjoying the outdoors, we decided that Legacy Park is an ideal location to spend a spring afternoon.

WOOLSEY PARK, BRAMBLETON-6/10

According to the Woolsey Park website, this park is a medium sized, communal park located in the heart of a bustling Brambleton neighborhood featuring a larger open field space and a playground.

After a tough search for the park due to the confusing route of the neighborhood, we were met with the sight of an extremely small grass field and what looked to be an adequate playground for those of younger ages, despite seeing



A pavilion at Windmill Park, which is covering multiple picnic tables, is parallel with a large playground and a path, which leads to a green water fountain. Windmill Park is located in Ashburn, Virginia and has many amenities to create an enjoyable sunny day experience.

pictures of a park that was seemingly staged to look larger.

Although lacking much needed space for a larger picnic, Woolsey Park has just enough room for smaller background games such as spikeball or cornhole. This park may be ideal for those within a smaller group of friends as we strongly believe that this park will not be suitable for large groups, especially on a warm, busy day.

As we were only a small group, we enjoyed the park to an extent. We found ourselves out of options for things to do as a playground with swings was our only option. The stay at Woolsey Park was short lived as we enjoyed a short meal and a few minutes of conversation. To us, the park lacked the ideal park with lots of amenities and space that we had in mind.

Our joy at Woolsey Park was short lived, and was a park we think should only be visited a few times.

WINDMILL PARK, BRAMBLETON-9.3/10

With the right group of friends and plenty of activities, this spot could 7 a.m. and closing at 8 p.m., Windmill Park features plentiful picnic tables covered by a large pavilion. In addition, you'll want to make sure to bring your racquets as there are two large tennis courts. For the young-hearted, a large playground is available.

As volleyball players, we were upset to not see a volleyball court among the several amenities, but were happily satisfied with the numerous, large tennis courts that we

saw and a baseball diamond that was not advertised online. In addition, the park had a water fountain, situated along a large walking path, for not only yourself, but also your furry friends.

Unfortunately, we visited on a dreary day, but the qualities to make this park pleasant were still abundant. Searching for this park was easy for us as the park is located near a recreational center, The Ashburn Farm Association, which is sadly not open to the general public, only the neighborhoods near. As advertised, this park had a windmill at the entrance, making the rest of the park easy to spot.

Windmill Park had a great amount of space for a grassy picnic and enough tables, covered for shade. In addition, there are many large benches which all overlook the large pond which has a large fountain. This park would be great for those with larger groups as there is enough room to play your own games, play on the tennis courts or baseball diamond, and still have enough room to enjoy a meal. This park looked extremely enjoyable, and we were incredibly upset that we had visited on a rainy day.

Clean, and with ample walking paths, Windmill Park exceeded our expectations. Although we did not enjoy the amenities to the extent we hoped on our visit, the features and attractions of the park are guaranteed to create a happy environment for a picnic by yourself or with your friends. •



A sign at Legacy Park lists several of the park's features, including a walking and biking trail and the park's dog-friendliness, as indicated by several doggy bag dispensers along the trail. Legacy Park is located in Brambleton, Virginia and has many amenities making it ideal for the perfect sunny day picnic.

Cadets compete in the annual Area 5 competition

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

Each year the ROTC cadets compete in the annual Area 5 competition. This year they successfully earned places such as first for the armed exhibition drill team, third for unarmed exhibition, first for the relay race, second for academic and third overall.



ROTC Cadets compete in UPI (Uniform Personnel Inspection) where they get inspected head to toe on their flawless uniforms and shiny shoes while being asked significant Navy questions to determine their personal score for UPI. Some cadets earn perfect scores and some get small points taken off for minor issues. These UPI scores can help add to the overall score, which is determined based on how the other teams, such as color guard, standard drill, armed regular, unarmed regular, unarmed exhibition, armed exhibition, academic and PT perform. Photo courtesy of Aurora Mclaughlin-Peconom.



Seniors Ava Peitzak, Ashley Conner, Grace McGuirk, Sophie Bourgeois, Kat Wheat, and Grace Porter win third place in the unarmed exhibition drill team for their senior year where they have to put time and dedication into learning steps and movements for their routine. Photo courtesy of Aurora Peconom.



Seniors Grace Porter and Taylor Downer hold the trophy for armed exhibition as captain of the armed exhibition team and the cadet commanding the routine where the cadets flip guns, sync steps and motivate their team for the win. This year the armed exhibition drill team got first in their category. Photo courtesy of Grace Porter.



Sophomore Isabella Boland, sophomore Anna Buer, sophomore Evie Calvert, sophomore Elaine Buer, sophomore Andrew Massey, sophomore Logan Delarante, junior Daniel Rosen, senior Grace Porter, freshman Mikah Buer, senior Grace McGuirk, freshman Lilly Gingerich, sophomore Easton Porter, junior Josh Taylor, junior Jonah Rosen, junior Rowan Mendenhall and senior Sophie Bourgeois earn first in the 16X100 relay race where eight girls and eight boys from each unit unite to do a full length football field sprint. Photo courtesy of Isabella Boland.



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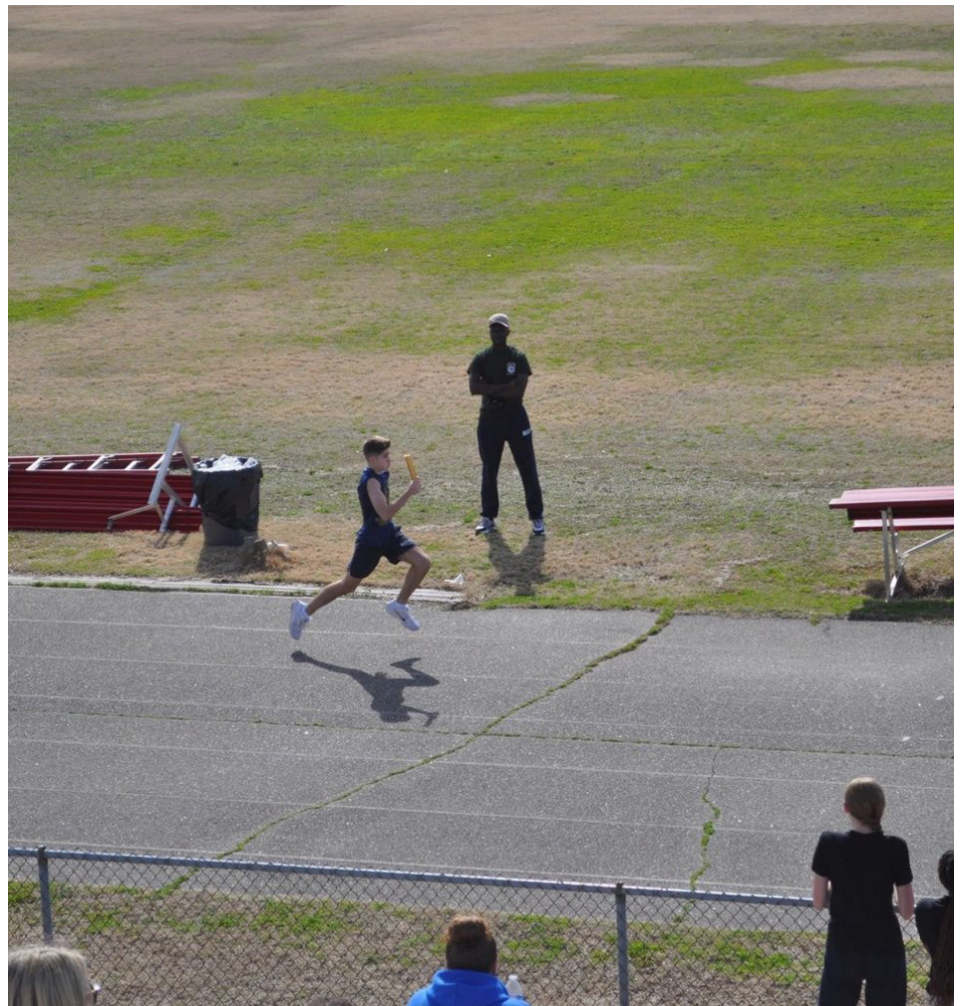
The NJROTC Unit gets into formation along with nine other teams such as Norview, Green Run, Patuxent, Calvert and more high schools for the 2024 Area 5 award announcements where our team earned third overall with other exciting achievements. Photo Courtesy of Aurora McLaughlin-Peconum.



Sophomores Isabella Boland, Anna Buer, Kellan Bohret, Evie Calvert, Ben Lierni and Logan Delurante get excited on the way down to the biggest competition of the year for the unit at Virginia Beach. These Cadets are involved in teams such as PT, unarmed exhibition drill and the armed exhibition drill team. Photo courtesy of Isabella Boland.



The unarmed exhibition drill team performs their routine for the judges at Area 5 with swift steps and precise movements while having a confident bearing. These Lady Captains successfully earned third in their category. Photo courtesy of @LCHS.NJROTC via Instagram.



Junior Josh Taylor sprints in the 16x100 relay to secure the PT teams win once again in the run. These cadets wake as early as six in the morning to stay in shape for the relay, sit-up and push-up section of the competition. Sophomore cadet Eric Buer earned an individual third place award in sit-ups for doing over 330 sit-ups with no breaks. Photo courtesy of @LCHS.NJROTC via Instagram.



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Blossom into Spring with Leesburg's 33rd annual Flower and Garden Festival

Sofia Hernandez | Staff Writer

Held in historic downtown Leesburg, the annual Flower and Garden Show is held in the third week of April to celebrate the upcoming of spring. The town (or vendors) showcase all things gardening by transforming the historic district into a beautiful garden, with flowers and plants everywhere, and flavorsome food and various activities. April 20 and 21 marks Leesburg's thirty-third year hosting this grand festival. No matter the weather, the celebration continues, always free and open to the public.

This festival is widely loved throughout northern Virginia. "This event is an awesome community building opportunity for all the small businesses in Leesburg," said **Heather Donahue**, owner of Catty Corner Cafe.

"In addition, it's very fun for the local residents and people that come from out of town to partake in this massive showcase

of vendors. It's a great way to support small, local businesses."

Catty Corner Cafe is a unique downtown business featuring a snug cat lounge, where cat lovers can come in and hang-out with cats, and have the opportunity to adopt these cats. Animal cafes have spiked in popularity since the early 2010's, though many of these unusual cafes are located in South Korea.

It is Catty Corner Cafes' second year attending the Flower and Garden Show. "This is such an amazing event for us to be a part of," Donahue said.

"We are located in downtown Leesburg, so this show gives us an opportunity to reach new customers that did not know we existed or even know what a cat cafe actually is. We can talk to so many people about our rescue operation and how we adopt out rescue cats which most people find fascinating and supportive."

Beyond all the fun, the Flower and Garden show holds many memories for Leesburg and its

citizens. It's not all about the flowers and beautiful displays, people make new memories, hear new stories, make new friends and enjoy hearing local businesses' past stories about the show, the vibes in the festival are like no other, the infectious laughs and smiles from all the people around is what gives the show such good energy and warm feeling. The Flower and Garden show is not just a show; it's a celebration that spreads much love all throughout the community.

The festival will cover most of downtown Leesburg, one can expect to see a vast majority of vendors, food trucks, performers, and many activities for children. There are plenty of activities and businesses that suit people's preferences. Parking is limited and runs out quickly, parking spots can be found at 10 Loudoun St. SW, 210 Church Street NE, 1 Harrison St. SE, additional parking near Ida Lee park and a free shuttle to downtown during the festival's hours are available. •



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Black Student Union celebrates Black History Month

Justin Goodhart | Staff Writer

Throughout our country's history, the road to full acceptance for Black people has been complex and tumultuous. As a marginalized group, Black citizens have repeatedly had their culture suppressed through slavery, segregation, and systemic barriers.

As a result, many organizations believe it is important to consciously reverse every trace of oppression, which was legal-

ized and normalized for over 100 years, especially at a high school that was not fully integrated until 1968. The Black Student Union (BSU) did just that by raising awareness and spotlighting Black people's successes during Black History Month this past February.

Since the inception of our BSU in early 2023, the goal has been to cultivate a culture of acceptance and inclusion. According to the BSU mission statement, "This BSU aims to be a safe

place where people of all races can come together and to create a community...." These values came to light when it was time to celebrate Black History Month.

Senior **Madison Ruff** is a co-leader of the Black Student Union. "We were inspired to create the club after realizing that we have never had one before," Ruff said. "It was also February and we had so many ideas on how the school could celebrate Black History Month. Since Black history

is so overlooked in the general school curriculum, I feel like Black History Month gives us the opportunity to educate people."

The BSU kicked off Black History Month by posting a message on Instagram, which read in part, "We would like to wish everyone a happy Black History Month. Spend this month celebrating and remembering the impact of Black people in the U.S. this month."

As the month progressed, BSU members featured "Teacher Spotlights" in which they interviewed Black teachers about what Black History Month means to them, including business teacher **Stephane Longchamp**, school counselor **Jarrel Taylor**, and career center assistant **Langston West**. These teachers highlighted remembrance of their ancestors and celebration of culture as important aspects of Black History Month, adding insight about it being an opportunity to celebrate the achievements and successes in Black history.

The BSU celebrated Black History Month in a way that valued the achievements of Black people, and also ensured a future environment where Black students feel seen and heard. •

Black Student Union Hosts First Spirit Week

1 February 20- Jerseys and Jordans Day

Jerseys and Jordans Day was used as a way to spotlight Black athletes in sports.



Seniors **Cyre Davis** (left) and **Madison Ruff** (right) strike a pose in their outfits for Jerseys and Jordans Day.

2 February 21- Unity Day

Students wore red, green, and yellow for Unity Day, representing the migration of African culture into the United States, and uniting those that have roots and heritage in Africa. The spirit day was also used to bring awareness for Black culture and to celebrate Black History Month.

4 February 23- HBCU or College Gear Day

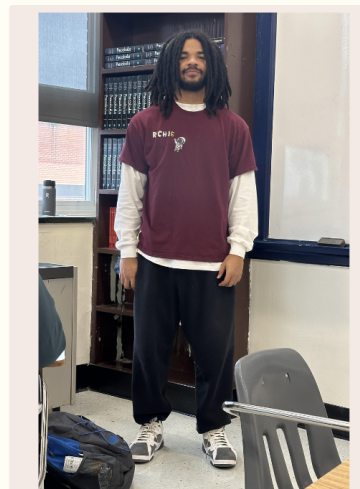
Historically Black Colleges and Universities Day highlighted Black schools for students.



Seniors **Semira Cummings** (left) and **Aisha Damti** (right) wear college spirit wear on HBCU/College Gear Day.

3 February 22- 90's Day

90's Day showcased the contributions to fashion by the Black community.

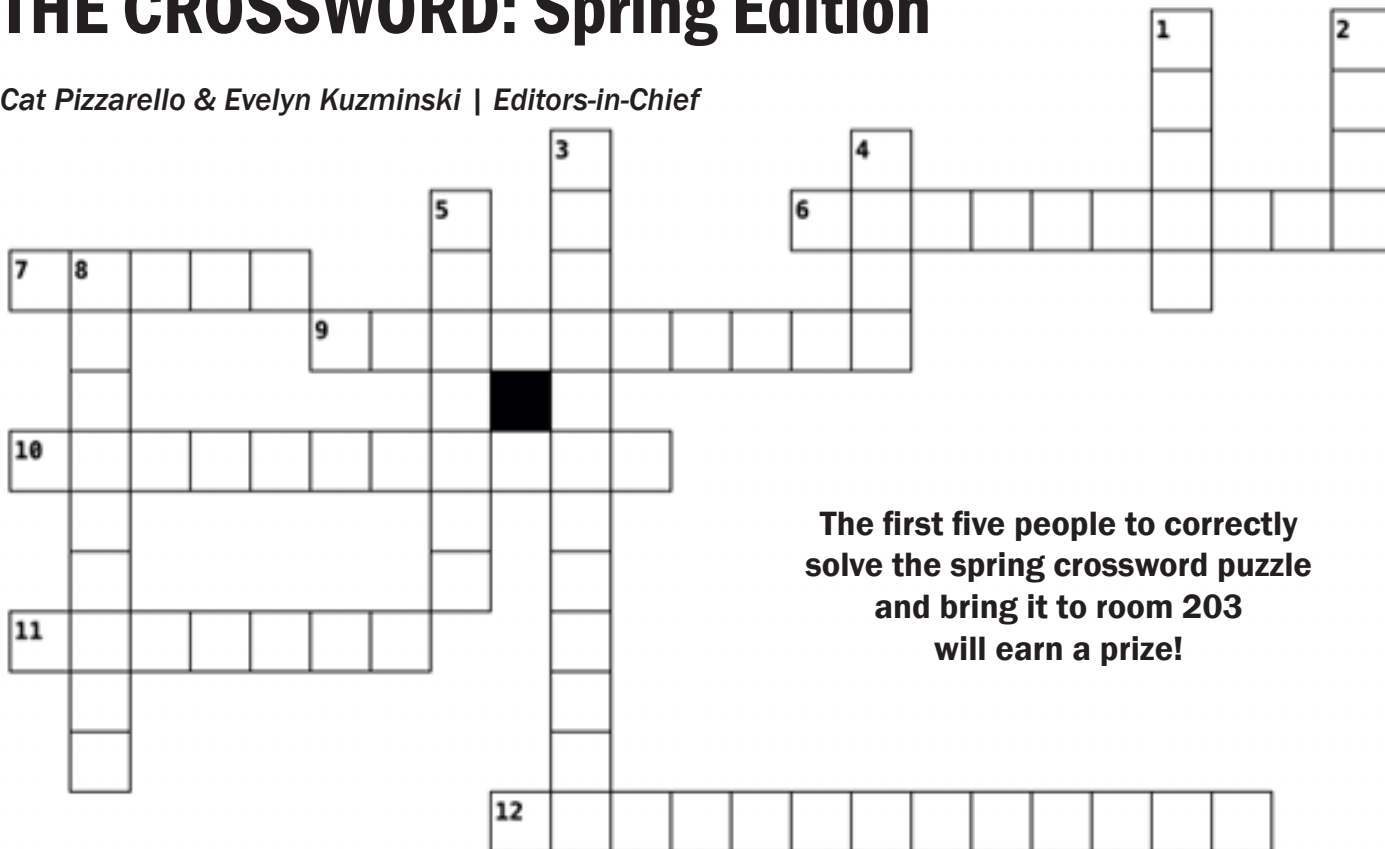


Senior **Shaun Trammell** dresses for 90's Day and smiles for the camera.

Infographic by **Karan Singh**. Photos courtesy of **Cyre Davis**.

THE CROSSWORD: Spring Edition

Cat Pizzarello & Evelyn Kuzminski | Editors-in-Chief



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

ACROSS

- 6) How many teams qualify for March Madness?
- 7) What country is home to the biggest flower festival?
- 9) What is the Greek goddess associated with Spring?
- 10) What country has the largest flower field?
- 11) What is the birthstone of April?
- 12) What is the first day of Spring called?

DOWN

- 1) In North America, what bird is often associated with Spring?
- 2) What part of the body does a butterfly use to taste?
- 3) What is a group of butterflies called?
- 4) How many eyes do bees have?
- 5) What weather phenomenon is most common in Spring?
- 8) What is the biggest Spring ailment?

Our school's least favorite quarter

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

The data and quotes in this infographic are based on an informal poll sent out to the student body. The poll asked for their favorite and least favorite quarter throughout the school year.

Lindsay Ricci: senior

Quarter 3 vote: "Most tests and stress with the fewest breaks. For seniors it's pointless since you're accepted to college and having to still do a ton of school work to keep your grades up."

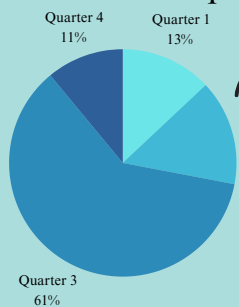
Anna Nimtz: freshman

Quarter 4 vote: "It's the end of the school year and I have to say goodbye to everyone at the end. And there is rarely any work that is given out in classes."

Sarah Sikander: junior

Quarter 3 vote: "You start to reach the end of the year, where you take SOLs and have to say goodbye to everyone."

Least favorite quarter



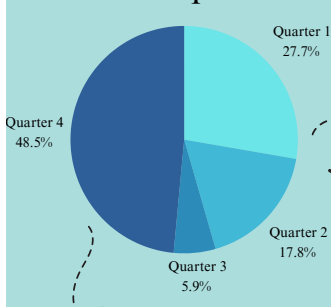
Daniellah Etisi: senior

Quarter 3 vote: "I have lost the motivation, and the work is at its peak. Testing is right after and 3rd quarter grades tend to affect your GPA the most."

Paige Knox: senior

Quarter 4 vote: "It's close to the end of the year and it's typically easier."

Favorite quarter



Erin Lavery: senior

Quarter 1 Vote: "When the year begins, I think the novelty of new classes, teachers, and friends creates a sense of excitement that fades as the year goes on. In the first quarter, I don't feel as tired or stressed and it's easier to enjoy the day and keep up with my work."

Priya Chowdhury: sophomore

Quarter 3 vote: "I am used to the class dynamics."

Grace Mcquirk: senior

Quarter 2 vote: "Fall and winter are my favorite seasons, and I'm used to the way the classes work at that point. The breaks give time to keep up and catch up with work."



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DECA students surpass District meet, compete in State meet

Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer

DECA (Distributive Education Club of America) is a club for emerging entrepreneurs and future business leaders. The club teaches business tactics and prepares students for future careers. Students compete in case studies, present products or business pitches, and role play business scenarios. These students placed in top spots at the district meet to earn a ticket to compete in the state competition.



(Left to right) Ryan Kunitiz, Anthony Immel, advisor Schuyler Henderson, Rand Harrison, and Braden Nyce at their States DECA Meet after each of them qualified. DECA members have the option of competing in role plays or presenting a business pitch. Role-play topics range from sports marketing to business finance. There is a wide range of options to fit students' expertise and make it easier for members to choose a new topic for the following years. Students who choose role play are given a business scenario to analyze and form a business decision to present to judges in 10 minutes while being graded on terminology and accuracy. Members who choose to do role play have to take a 100-question test before, testing their knowledge on their topic; if the test is failed (under 60%), they will be disqualified and unable to compete. If students choose to present they are required to write a 20 page paper on their topic and the contents. Presentations can be about a product or a company. Students will speak on their presentation in front of voting delegates and are graded on the content in their presentation along with presentation and accuracy.



(Left to right, top to bottom) Buddy Florenza, Roan Eisenreich, Johnny Kilbey, Jack McCully, Brett Coughlin, Jake Miller, Patrick Groves, Ryan Appel, Jake Andrews, Braden Nyce, Brady Stejbach, Will Chamberlin, Rand Harrison, Crawford Holmes, Ryan Kunitiz, Will Dunleavy, Jinu Manalel, Anthony Immel, Sophie Webb, Samantha Tinta, Abby Graham, Sofia Habibzai, Bryn Griffith, Kate Klere, Kiley Florenza, Izzy Miller, Maura Santelli, Kayla Thrower Lauren Scott, Diana Schragger, Ari Gallos, Alaina Plasmier, Olivia Rowand, Maggie Fisher, Addison Cook, Sophie Wiggins, Addison Sternbeck, Salem Schonitzer, Mary Anderson, Maggie Salem, Reva Khare, Anoushka Aggarwal, Leanne Mathew. DECA President William Dunleavy enjoyed his second year going to the States competition. "This was the biggest group we've brought to States so far, I'm really proud of the people we had there," Dunleavy said.



Sophomore Reva Khare stands in front of her promotional materials as she runs for Virginia DECA state office. She presented her poster after giving a speech in front of over 100 voting delegates. "The best part about these trips is not only the competitive aspect but building relationships with people I never would have talked to. DECA is all about networking, building your skills, and new connections. Although I did not win the election, I did place and get a medal for top presentation score with my partner Maura Santelli."



Braden Nyce (left) and his advisor Schuyler Henderson (right) after his Social Media Freshman event. For his event, Nyce had to create pieces of advertising media for a company and present it during his roleplay.

Artist of the issue: Vanessa Carranza

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

“I like singing songs with a lot of vibrato because when I sing I have a lot of vibrato just singing normally. People like **Ariana Grande**, **Whitney Houston**, and **Christina Aguilera** have that vocal range that can go up to those high notes. That’s my vocal range,” senior **Vanessa Carranza** said.

Carranza explains she definitely started getting into singing at three to five years old. She joined chorus

in third grade, and has continued throughout her middle and high school years. “Each time I’ve gone into the next school year and joined chorus, it’s always been filled with multiple opportunities and I’ve enjoyed it. I have loved it moving onto the next grade,” Carranza said.

Carranza has been a part of some notable singing events with her time in chorus. This included her joining the district choir in seventh grade, as well as doing the same in her current senior year. She was a part of an

American Choral Directors Association or ACDA regional competition, which involved Virginia as well as other states across the country. Carranza is involved in chamber choir and advanced treble choir.

Carranza enjoys pop, soul, and R&B music, and her favorite musical artist is Ariana Grande.

Carranza is very passionate about singing and has loved singing for a long time. “Since the minute I was born, honestly ever since I could have spoken,” Carranza said. •



Seniors **Vanessa Carranza** has been in chorus since third grade and is very passionate about singing. Photo by Dylan Johnson.

Students perform at All-District Band

Justin Goodhart | Staff Writer

From February 1 through February 3, the annual All-District Band event took place at John Champe High School. Over 300 talented brass, woodwind, and percussion instrumentalists from all over the county auditioned to make one of two coveted ensembles, concert band or symphonic band.

One of the students selected for the District XVI Concert Band was French hornist and County Chronicle staff writer freshman **Scarlett Ashford** (Concert Band, third chair French horn). A member of our school symphonic band, Ashford began playing French horn in middle school and is passionate and committed to music.

“My love of band comes from being able to express myself through music, and having the opportunity to put myself out there,” Ashford said. Other Captains who performed at the event were band members junior **Cole Strickland** (Symphonic Band, third chair bass clarinet) and freshman **Maddy Strickland** (Concert Band, first chair bass clarinet).

The audition to earn an opportunity to play amongst the district’s most talented band students requires advanced preparation of an etude selected for their instrument as well as almost flawless performances of major scales, a chromatic scale, and sight reading for a panel of judges who remain behind a partition to keep the process anonymous. The judges are typically music educators from around the region. They assess the audition and score students on 13 technical qualities such as tone, intonation, musicality, and dynamics.



*District XVI All District Concert Band is being directed by Doug Martin. Students performed at John Champe High School. Captains represented in this picture are freshmen **Scarlett Ashford** and **Maddy Strickland**.*

“I practiced almost every day, and I worked through each part and I really broke down the piece to make sure I was ready for it,” Ashford said. Maddy also worked towards full preparation. “I prepared for the audition by practicing every day. The twelve major scales had to be memorized, so I prioritized repetition,” Strickland said.

After the audition, students waited for their results. The judges spent time reviewing their notes and score sheets on every student who auditioned. Their mission was to assemble a group of musicians that would sound cohesive. Once the judges came to an agreement, they let the students know if they had been selected to represent their high schools at District XVI’s main event.

“I was really happy, but I was also scared because this is high school now. In middle school, I was confident, but this is a different level,” Ashford said. Maddy was also quite ecstatic about getting in, and furthermore, she was very happy to be given first chair (the best player in a section

of instruments). Strickland was first chair bass clarinet. “I was excited when I found out I got in, and somewhat shocked by my chair number,” Strickland said.

The event itself included 12 hours of rehearsal over three days for each band, leading up to the concerts on Saturday afternoon where passion for the arts and both individual and group preparation come together for an impressive two hours of music. Performances included music arranged by **Andrew Boysen, Jr.**, **Brooke Pierson**, **JaRod Hall**, **Ron Nelson**, and **Grace Baugher**, among others.

Students performed for gathered families, friends, and the community general public; their efforts were on full display. The music they made together was truly beautiful, and highlights the importance of the arts in education.

“You can feel that everyone cares about what’s happening. You can feel the emotion in the room. I would rate the final product 10/10,” Ashford said.

“Although it was exhausting from long rehearsal hours, the concert and every full-run of the pieces was unbelievable.” M. Strickland added. •

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Despite snow, Captains Playhouse presents “Love Lessons”

Vivian Lun | Staff Writer

The lights dim throughout the auditorium to reveal four statues on stage. The hush of the audience only amplifies the surprise when one of the statues, who isn’t really a statue at all, begins to move and

speak. Thus begins “Love Lessons,” the One Act play presented by the Captains’ Playhouse on March 1.

Written by the former drama teacher, **John Wells**, the play follows the journey of a girl who stays after hours at a museum only to discover that the statues are alive. The

statues then begin giving her love advice to help her with her love life, hence the name “Love Lessons.”

“It’s a fun script, there’s a lot of great characters in it, and a lot of great acting choices to be made,” **Nathan McGraw**, director and theater teacher, said.

Originally scheduled for January 19, the play was initially canceled due to a snow day. This presented challenges with rescheduling, as the play was set to be put on after school hours. “Some of them are not always available after school, so we had to find a date that would work where everyone is available,” McGraw said. Maintaining interest in the play among the theater class was also important. “It’s been about keeping it fresh so that everyone’s still invested in it, so that everyone’s still finding fun in the show, both myself and the students,” McGraw said.

Aside from the show at County, the play was also entered into the VHSL One-Act Play Competition. Competing against schools all around the region, the Captains Playhouse placed first in districts

and third in regionals, marking the first time in eight years that County’s theater department made it to regionals. Despite the Captains’ Playhouse’s clear skill, the competition was always more about passion than placing. “Usually the events are filled with a lot of support, a lot of positivity, and a lot of camaraderie... it’s more like a day of performances and less of a competition of performances,” McGraw said.

During the performance, both the actors’ and McGraw’s love for theater and storytelling shone through. “You could do something really simple with just four boxes like we’re doing, and still convey a larger than life story,” McGraw said. Despite the set not being the biggest, and the budget not being the highest, the Captains successfully captivated their audience with a beautiful show that held a compelling message.

“There’s a saying where you can take cardboard and turn that into magic,” McGraw said. The Captains’ showing of the “Love Lessons” play certainly solidified the truth of that saying. •



Junior **Jamie Faye-Mcknight** and senior **Katlyn Guevara** struggle, while junior **Zea Davis**, a statue, looks on, as they enact a scene from “Love Lessons.” Photo courtesy of @snapzwithash via Instagram.

Alayna Riley’s “The Rainbow Bridge” featured at Brambleton Library

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

Junior **Alayna Riley** earned the right to display her art at a micro-gallery at Brambleton Library. As a great way to start the new year, this art series “The Rainbow Bridge” was displayed throughout the whole month of January, with an hour-long reception where people could talk or ask questions about Riley’s pieces. Her work “The Rainbow Bridge” was inspired by the dog she currently has named Bailey and past pets that she has owned.

“I was surprised when I got picked because I was sure someone else would’ve gotten picked,” Riley said.

Riley’s art teacher, **Stephanie Woshner**, received an email during COVID from artist and art instructor **Troy Wingard**, who helped bring opportunities for student-artists to places like Brambleton.

Riley’s six, four-by-four pieces took about a week and a half to create, according to the artist. Riley describes her work as generally more of a cartoon style but recently she has been trying to experiment more with realistic pieces, which is why she chose to draw her animals. “The Rainbow Bridge” is solely black and white being made up of ink. “I named it [The Rainbow Bridge] because it represents all the pets I’ve had and how most of them

have passed already,” she said.

The art process for Riley can include different types of music which varies due to her wide music taste, though sometimes she requires just peace and quiet to concentrate on her work.

Riley hopes to become a writer or illustrator when she gets older. “I hope this experience can be used as a stepping stone to help me with resumes, future jobs, college and hopefully people can see it and be impressed,” Riley said.

Being supported in your passions can be very important especially to Riley. Riley’s friends and parents have been extremely supportive throughout her whole artistic journey ever since she decided to get into art in third grade.

“I think people are so drawn to it because it brings them a lot of joy because there is a lot of happiness involved in it,” Woshner said. “Also the way she drew it with the strong lines and patterns make it very eye-catching.”

Woshner has always encouraged her students to submit their art for this experience and luckily Riley’s ink and creativity won over the crowd even though it is a selective gallery. Woshner is an art teacher at Loudoun County and this year will be her sixth year teaching. She loves to encourage her students to be able to present their work at opportu-

nities like these.

“I was very excited, very happy for her and it was very well deserving,” Woshner said. “It’s a really great opportunity and it’s

really easy for art students to apply, but when they get in it’s like a legitimate gallery space that is a really good experience for artists.” •



Junior **Alayna Riley** stands with her artwork featured at the Micro Gallery at Brambleton Library. Riley’s work “The Rainbow Bridge” was featured for a week in January where she got to talk and answer questions for an hour. Photo courtesy of @LCHS1954 via X.

Cabaret “soars and flies” above and beyond

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

The friendly chatter stops, the lights go out and slowly fade back in with rainbow colors while gentle singing begins to mesmerize the crowd. Just the morning before, choir students went to work and constructed a stage, transforming the library into a space more like an amphitheater.

Famous melodies from varying movies and musicals were performed, such as “Breaking Free” from “High School Musical” and “Therapy” from “Tick, Tick... Boom.” Desserts lined the tables while the full ensemble began the show with “Somewhere” from West Side Story.

All this happened as part of the Choir’s Library Cabaret, held by the music department for the ninth year in a row now.

“We use [the cabaret] mainly as a fundraiser for the choir program,” sophomore **Norah Lee** said. While it is free to attend the show, the music department asks for donations in exchange for the music and dessert it provides.

Lee sang “Shallow” from “A Star is Born” as a duet with senior



Members of the choir program join together for a final encore after a night of duets and solos. Here they sing “Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In” from Hair while the audience listens. From left to right: sophomore **Rae Creppon**, freshman **Justin Goodhart**, sophomore **Norah Lee**, junior **Sam Takemoto**, senior **Grayson Weber**, senior **Cy Starr**, senior **Jayden Reynoso**, sophomore **Collin Diem**, senior **Kevin Jennings**, freshman **Emma Nicholson**, and senior **Vanessa Carranza**. Photo by Scarlett Ashford.

Kevin Jennings, as well as a solo performance of “I Need a Hero” from “Footloose.” The cabaret is an opportunity for choir students to share the music they love with people they care about.

“Some of my best friends are here,” Lee said. “I had so much fun

singing with them.”

While on stage, some students spun or acted out the scene from the movie, truly encapsulating the heart of the song.

“You just let things go, and if you stop thinking, it sounds better,” sophomore **Collin Diem** said.

Along with junior **Sam Takemoto**, Diem sang the duet “Only Us” from “Dear Evan Hansen.” After intermission he soloed, singing “One Song Glory” from “Rent.”

“It was awesome,” Diem said. “Every year Mr. Rosenfeld puts on something spectacular.” •



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Oscar Winner “The Boy and the Heron” controversially breaks movie records

Berek Harrison | Managing Editor

Last December, after a nearly 10 year wait since his last movie, **Hayao Miyazaki**, the legendary director and co-founder of Studio Ghibli released his newest and maybe most successful movie ever with it winning the Oscar for Best Animated Picture. Yet, the movie received surprisingly harsh criticism, so is it actually bad?

Back in 2013 Miyazaki announced that he would be retiring from his position in Studio Ghibli, so three years later, fans were surprised when he announced he would be coming out of retirement to direct a new feature length film, “The Boy and the Heron.” This isn’t the first time he’s announced his retirement, but then continued making movies. Now at 83, Miyazaki may have just released his final film, so how does it compare to the rest of the Ghibli catalog?

In terms of reception, audiences were split on what they thought of the movie. It is only rated 3.7 stars on Google, a seemingly moderate score. One viewer wrote, “I have never left a Google film review before, but this film left me so baffled, bitter, and bamboozled that I feel compelled to write this.” However on other review platforms and audience members scored the movie higher. On Rot-

ten Tomatoes the audience rated it an 88% (and critics rated it 97%). One audience member on Rotten Tomatoes said, “Absolutely brilliant movie—visually stunning and the story is intriguing. This is one of those movies that will stay with you. Will need to see it again.”

This split reaction is quite not just uncommon, but downright unheard of for Ghibli movies directed by Miyazaki. Of all the Ghibli movies he directed, excluding “The Boy and the Heron,” the lowest rating on Google is 4.8 stars. The lowest. A whole 1.1 stars more than the rating of “The Boy and the Heron.” So what’s the reason for a comparably terrible rating, and is it actually a bad movie?

The film follows **Mahito**, an 11 year old boy who just lost his mother during WWII. Mahito moves into a new house as his wealthy father marries his dead mother’s sister. Throughout the film Mahito goes on a spectacular adventure through a different world while figuring out how to cope with the death of his mother and learning to love his new one. It’s an interesting and adult-centric plot for an animated movie, yet the census between critical reviewers seems to be that the movie is confusing with random or hard to follow events, and I can see where they’re coming from.

This movie is described as Mi-

yazaki’s most personal film, with supervising animator **Takeshi Honda** saying in an interview with *The Ringer*, “when he showed me the first part of the storyboard and it was more than 200 cuts, I instantly could tell that it was a very personal story to him and it was very autobiographical.” Many events and characters in the movie are reflections of Miyazaki’s own life, for example he lived through the firebombing of Japan during WWII that is pictured in the movie, and his father owned an aircraft manufacturing factory just like Mahito’s (the main character’s) father in the movie. Perhaps audience members didn’t understand these personal references, or they seem out of place, which isn’t helped by the fact that “The Boy and the Heron” is also much like a combination of all prior Ghibli movies and shares vibes or themes that can relate to all of them, perhaps offering a whirlwind of elements for the audience to consider.

Despite negative audience viewpoints, “The Boy and the Heron” is an incredible movie. In terms of 2D visuals and animation, Studio Ghibli has always perfected them and this movie is no exception. The main cast and supporting characters have extreme depth and are emotionally portrayed very realistic, allowing viewers to understand emotions without needing

uninspired renditions of them which other movies may need monologing to explain. And, though sometimes random, to me the movie wasn’t confusing. The plot flowed smoothly and let me understand what led up to events without jumping around or becoming overly complicated. It’s an experience similar to the feeling you get when dreaming. And most of all the plot was interesting and kept me engaged.

But don’t take my word for it. “The Boy and the Heron” is one of Hayao Miyazaki’s most successful and award winning films to date. It was the first, original anime film to reach the number one spot on the American Box Office, was the first anime film to ever win a Golden Globe award for Best Animated Picture, the second anime movie to win an Oscar for Best Animated Picture, and was the first non-American film to win a BAFTA for best animated picture. This comes without mentioning the numerous other awards it has won since its release on December 8.

If you get the chance to watch the movie in the future I recommend it regardless of whether you enjoy animated movies in the same genre or not. Sometimes forming your own opinion instead of relying on the opinions of others allows you to learn more and experience new things. •

