



SAYING GOODBYE

County bids farewell to five retiring Captains

William Kluttz | *Managing Editor*
Aspen DeWan | *Business Manager*
Nur Mustafa | *Staff Writer*

Mark Alexander,
Social Sciences



Photo courtesy of Mark Alexander.

Mark Alexander has been a familiar face in the halls of County for the majority of his thirty year career. As a teacher of economics, he has had almost every student in the school at some point.

In an email to staff, principal **Michelle Lutrell** referred to Alexander as a “dedicated member of the Social Science Department, [who] has remained committed to his professional growth, consistently volunteering to teach new courses and excelling across all instructional

levels to meet the needs of every student in his classroom.”

Alexander grew up in Maryland with his parents and two brothers, and experienced a love of history from an early age. “I was more of a history and English guy than anything else. I liked to visit Battlefields,” Alexander said.

At 18, Alexander decided to go into the Air Force. “I didn’t have a lot of other options, [and] I wasn’t a great student,” Alexander said.

Alexander did a total of 21 deployments, six of which were active duty. One deployment in the Air Force is typically about four to twelve months. Alexander was an E-6 Tech Sergeant, and served Operation Enduring Freedom, for which he was given the Global War on Terrorism Medal.

After retiring, Alexander briefly went to work for World Airways, then went to study at the University of Mary Washington to become a teacher. All of this happened before Alexander turned 30.

Perhaps Alexander’s most lasting effect on the school will be his coaching career. Alexander coached basketball for 28 years and golf for four years. Under Alexander, County’s basketball team won multiple district and regional titles, even going all the way to the state championship back in 2022. “We had a good run there at the end, and I was able to do it with my sons here. They were really good players here for us, and it was fun to

watch them grow as players and love the game as much as I do,” Alexander said.

Alexander is involved with basketball as an assistant coach and plans to continue that into his retirement.

Alexander’s accomplishments as golf coach include three district championships, two regional championships, and three state championships.

Despite having taught multiple generations of students, Alexander maintains that during his thirty years, they haven’t changed at all. “The only difference is probably the cell phones, technology, but it’s still the same thing. You’re dealing with kids, and kids make good choices, bad choices, and you just got to hopefully help them make the best choices they can and learn as much as they can and try to keep them excited about that,” Alexander said.

Outside of teaching and coaching, Alexander enjoys working outside, fishing, and golfing. His best golf score ever is a 72.

Another one of Alexander’s passions is travel, something he hopes to do more of in his retirement. Alexander noted that his favorite places he has been include London, Germany, and Malaysia. He and his wife hope to travel to South America and Australia. “Just kind of travel around, keep seeing the world, and enjoy it,” Alexander said.

Tracy Cody,
Social Sciences



Photo courtesy of Tracy Cody.

After various zoom calls between the high schoolers and elementary schoolers, **Tracy Cody’s** annual trip to Evergreen Mill was in session. Her students worked with the younger kids to create history books related to the founding fathers and revolutionary times, and after the third virtual meeting, the high schoolers took a bus over to the elementary school. The younger kids cheered when the twelfth graders reached the school, an announcement sounding their arrival over the intercom. After a book editing session followed by lunch, the kids got ready to exit the

RETIREMENT, continued on page 12

Pierson Lee named 2025 commencement speaker

Taylor Helfer | *Editor-in-Chief*

All last summer, while other students were relaxing by the pool or traveling to various places, senior **Pierson Lee** was in the lab, doing science research at Duke University. There, Lee discovered his love for science, specifically biophysics, which he will be studying next fall at Duke.

Now, Lee will have one more accomplishment to add to his list. On May 7, school administrators posted an announcement on Instagram and X, announcing Lee as their pick for commencement speaker.

Throughout his high school career, Lee has been very involved in science, taking Research and

AP Chemistry, while also taking Independent Science Research with chemistry teacher **Terri Moulds**. In school, he also participates in math club, academic team, orchestra, and is a part of several academic societies.

“He is one of three students who I taught three years in a row,” Moulds said. “Obviously, I recognized how smart he was. One of the things that I really noticed is that he is intuitive about a lot of different things.”

Outside of school, Lee engages in archery and taekwondo, tutoring, and starting his very own environmental club outside of school to turn recycled materials into art displays. Over time, he realized



Pierson Lee sits on top of the school sign for a picture announcing him as commencement speaker for social media. Lee plans to study biophysics at Duke University in the fall. Photo courtesy of @itsgreattobeacountycaptain on Instagram.

how much he wanted to share everything he had learned through his speech.

“One of the biggest messages in

SPEAKER, continued on page

ICE should not be allowed in schools

Taylor Helfer | Editor-in-Chief

On January 23, **Donald Trump** authorized the conduction of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) targeted action—commonly referred to as raids—in sanctuary cities, those that try to limit cooperation with federal immigration policies, in places such as hospitals and schools in an effort to, “protect American citizens against invasion,” according to NPR.

Regardless of your opinion on immigration, ICE targeted action in schools and other “protected spots” is unconstitutional. If school is a place for learning and growing, committed to creating safe and inclusive environments, no school board should be allowing these policies that threaten children’s lives or supporting an administration that works against them. It’s purely unethical.

In the 1982 case of Plyler v Doe, the Supreme Court ruled that students cannot be denied free public education based on immigration status, citing the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause, which states that immigration policies cannot discriminate against people based on ethnicity, race, or sex.

However, according to data, updated to include 2024 and 2025 fiscal years, by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Administrative Arrest Statistics, the most deportations are of those from Mexico, 242,027, which make up about 10.6% of the undocumented immigrant population. Deportations for those from other countries such as India or China have no more than 3,200, while those from China or India have the second and third largest share of immigrants with 2.8% and 2.5%. Despite the large number

of undocumented immigrants from these countries, they do not compare to deportations of those from Central and South America.

Because Trump seems to be targeting minorities, there have been extreme rises in school absenteeism among these populations, which can impact how well students do in school. Furthermore, we have counselors and other administrators that are meant to help students overcome challenges, yet this rising sense of fear makes it much harder for students to even speak up about their feelings. Because of the fearmongering being contributed to by media outlets and the Trump Administration itself, students are affected academically, and our school community is impacted.

This fear has even impacted our teachers. In our very own school district, music teacher **Jesus Rodriguez**, from Forest Grove Elementary, left the country due to fear of deportation after the administration threatened to cut the humanitarian parole program Rodriguez was protected under.

To add to the already significant amount of fear, in March 2025, the Department of Homeland Security launched a multi-million dollar ad campaign, funded by American tax dollars, encouraging immigrants in the country to self-report, with Secretary **Kristi Noem** saying, “President Trump has a clear message: if you are here illegally, we will find you and deport you.” Overall, the Department of Homeland Security has made it abundantly clear: they will stop at nothing to “put America first,” despite threatening the well-being of people, especially on the American dollar. This ad isn’t just targeted towards immigrants, it’s meant to foster hate amongst Americans and divide

the people.

In LCPS, superintendent **Aaron Spence** released a statement on January 30 stating, “We follow the law.” However, Spence did cite Plyler v. Doe in that it guarantees that children are safe from targeted action in the school place, adding that, “Every child in LCPS belongs. Every family is valued,” and they will continue to work to make school places a safe place.

Compared to several other school districts across the country, Spence is taking action to protect students, and that is something that several parents and administrators in the school community should be supporting through advocacy for policies that protect their children.

For example, in 2017, New York Public Schools implemented a policy titled the “Non-Local Law Enforcement Action and Inquiries” in order to protect children by enforcing that school security officers uphold the law by disallowing officers to come into schools without proper documentation, such as a warrant or subpoena, a clear reason for the visit, or not without first contacting parents, the principal, and superintendent. Without any of this, it is unlawful for officers to enter the school

Because schools need to be a place to encourage growth, school boards need to implement policies such as these to promote safety and uphold the law. If students are not provided an environment which makes them feel comforted and secure, they cannot learn to their greatest capabilities. And for you, the reader, have some empathy towards those who do not look like you. Imagine moving to the United States for a better life, and you are treated with malice and hate. Don’t forget: immigrants are people, too. •

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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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Blue Origin: an unnecessary expedition to space

Nur Mustafa | Staff Writer

Our understanding of the moon and the solar system is majorly attributable to Apollo 11, the space launch of 1969. And our understanding of how uncaring, unsustainable, and monetarily absorbed celebrities and corporations are can be amounted to the Blue Origin, otherwise known as one of the most useless “explorations,” if that title is even applicable.

You may be asking: why is that? Well, although the launch was considerably popular and

took the media by storm due to the famous pop culture passengers, such as **Katy Perry** and **Lauren Sanchez**, it led to backlash online and even negative commentary from comedians and other celebrities. A prominent example being actress **Olivia Munn** labeling it as gluttonous.

She’s right on the nose with such a remark. This launch was nothing short of mass and overconsumption. The cost of this launch was \$341,000,000, and the seats to be a passenger cost approximately \$30,000,000. To put

into perspective how much that is, consider this: there are 771,480 people who were recorded in 2024 to be experiencing homelessness. That would be about \$442 per each of those people, or \$27,323 per homeless shelter within the states. That is more than enough to cover for food and clothing, maybe even for homeless infrastructure. There’s an evident disparity between those paying for these flights, and those suffering the repercussions of it. This disparity is inadvertently lessening the quality of life in America, all for seven

minutes in the atmosphere.

It’s inarguable that the short-lived experience contributed to carbon emissions, a continuous issue that has been exponentially growing with deleterious effects on human health and the environment. According to Curious Earth, the water vapor released can increase global warming, as well as partially deplete the ozone layer.

“This disparity is inadvertently lessening the quality of life in America, all for seven minutes in the atmosphere.”

While the media has called out its physical impacts, there’s been controversy upon its social implications. The launch was branded for feminism, hence the crew being all women. And yet, many people are unable to find feminism and women empowerment in it. No actual knowledge was gained, and that’s the issue many people find with it. The passengers were glorified in this expedition, and even fans of these celebrities have commented that it takes away from the feminist movement.

Feminism, by definition, is the advocacy of women’s rights, and lies within making a systemic change. Feminist leaders, such as The Suffragettes of the 1920’s, to this day are not as nationally recognized or well known as the passengers of Blue Origin. This absolutely undermines the definition and significance of feminism, and the relentless fight those women

endured.

This space launch is only one of many, as these are reportedly soon to become a commercial experience. It’s crucial as a society that we do not glorify these celebrities and corporations, as we grant them the attention and thus the funds to continue damaging our physical and social environment. Upon this, it’s important we educate ourselves, such as learning about actual feminist movements, and practice methods of sustainability and preservation. •

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Letter to the Editor

Media outlets need to be sharing the truth, not their biases

Matthew O’Hara | Guest Writer

To whom it may concern,

I’ve been lucky that my parents have always pushed me to think critically about all sides of an issue. I’m starting to realize this is not the case with everyone.

Watching election coverage this fall, I noticed subtle biases in the rhetoric of the NBC anchors. For Democratic nominees, clips of the rallies played, emphasizing talking points, while for Republican nominees, there were no clips of rallies, no mentions of policy, just a subtle nod as to where the rally had been the previous night.

Another night, my sister and I were at my grandparents’ house, and the FOX News channel that played was the exact opposite of NBC. They were singing to the masses about Republican nominees.

Statements like “This policy would save the country,” and “this person would turn a broken country around” contrasted coverage of the Democratic nominees, with insults feeling like a painful burn at the stake. “This person is an uneducated leech,” “We’d be closer to World War III with them in office than we would be with a hippo.”

People should be able to see

through these biases, yet ultimately few do. Effective societies should have a goal of being informed and knowing the truth. So often, we settle for just the baseline of what is given to us by our preferred news outlet, not knowing if it actually is the truth.

Americans waste about 20 hours per week mindlessly scrolling through social media, playing games, taking naps, or texting friends. If we used just two of those twenty hours to read and synthesize different news sources, we might be able to determine what is the truth based on the reliability and consistency of information.

Journalism is not the only place where what goes on in our daily lives and the planet we live on gets twisted. It also happens on our phones, or watching movies or shows. One time, when I was watching a movie on YouTube, I was thrown by a countless number of ads that all were from one political party, all bashing the opposite party. My first thought was, how could anyone buy this? But you can never count out what people will do.

Another example of this very similar style of bashing one party is on a TV show I love: “Saturday Night Live.” Believe me, I dream of being the Weekend Update anchor, and even

write my own satire and comedy material. However, TV shows like SNL imply a bias that is very clear to see even watching one or two episodes. Almost every single SNL sketch is very clearly anti-Republican, and will go out of its way to bash any person associated with the Republican Party. What’s worse is the writing is insanely clever, so it makes the viewers fully buy into it, and actually like what the sketch is trying to get at.

However, whenever SNL tries to mock anybody on the left side of the spectrum, they make cheap and lazy jokes about age. In comedy writing, you really never want to joke about age because it is a cheap shot, and it might offend the person you’re writing about.

These biases may seem subtle, but it’s the subtle biases that have the most impact on the viewer. One thing we need to do better at is picking out the biases in modern creation.

When we take in forms of creation, we often do it as a form of entertainment, and a way to ease the problems of our lives. When we do this, we shut our brains off, and allow for true thought to stop. In the process, we allow our brain to be spoon fed facts and information that may not have any amount of truth to them. Thus, we begin to believe these

facts, and start to take them as truth.

We must stop this. It may not be easy, but let’s start to focus on what’s fed to us in entertainment, so we can truly tell what is right and wrong. Because if one doesn’t have the necessary information, then are they truly making the decision best for them, or are they doing what the creator wants? This is also worrying, because if journalists also have this much power, then they, by having the freedom of speech to write what they want and present it as they want, are indirectly limiting the freedom of speech of another person.

So how do we determine what’s fact and what’s fiction? There’s a couple of resources that can help. AllSides, a news website, has a bias chart that shows how much every popular news site is biased, and how biased they are. Another good resource is consuming a news source that is considered the opposite of the news you view.

At the end of the day, the belief of the society falls on the hands of the creators, truth-twisters, writers, anchors, and journalists, who hold the fate of it, in their creative minds and powerful hands. You are the one who needs to be careful and always question what they will do with it. •

Loudoun Now hosts first annual ‘Excellence in Journalism’ awards

Taylor Helfer | Editor-in-Chief

With a spotlight on her face and several glistening trophies behind her, NBC 4 reporter **Julie Carey** welcomed student journalists from all over the county to the Loudoun Now Excellence in Journalism Awards on May 28. Loudoun Now, a nonprofit news organization owned by Loudoun Community Media, began the program this year to recognize and celebrate journalism students.

To begin the ceremony, Carey spoke of her experiences in journalism. Growing up in Iowa, she learned to find her passion for journalism at her high school and encouraged young journalists to stay involved. Other speakers added to her theme: pursue journalism.

“I sincerely hope that some of you will decide to pursue careers in journalism, because I can say with all earnestness: the world needs you,” Loudoun Community Media Executive Director **Renss Green** said.

Other speakers provided anecdotes of their own experiences in journalism or simply highlighting the importance of journalism in a rapidly evolving modern world.

“Your work matters. The stories you tell shape how we understand our world and each other.” LCPS Director of Teaching and Learning **Jeff Rounsley** said during his speech.

Loudoun Now offered students the opportunity to submit their stories in March. Each journalism program could nominate one piece per category: Feature Writing, News Writing, Photography, Podcast, and Videography. 64 students were

nominated. “It’s definitely important to recognize journalism because I think it’s a field that frequently gets overlooked,” Lightridge High School editor-in-chief **Pan-chami Rangaraju** said. “Especially in the area we live in, I feel like there is an overemphasis on STEM and not as much on humanities.” At the ceremony, many students took the time to reflect on

what journalism really means to them. “It means a lot to me,” Rock Ridge staff writer **Sanvi Challa** said. “I love writing and being able to meet different people.” Challa won Best News Writing alongside staff member **Melissa Waas**, while also taking home the grand prize and an internship with Loudoun Now. Loudoun Now and its partners hope to continue and evolve

their program of uplifting student journalists by providing professional forums for students to learn about the field, meeting with college journalism professors, which will take place in the fall, with a second awards ceremony planned for a year from now. “Tonight’s event is just the beginning,” Loudoun Community Media Board of Directors Chair **Tony Nerantzis** said in his speech. •



The County Chronicle nominees senior William Kluttz, sophomore Scarlett Ashford, junior Karan Singh and senior Berek Harrison pose during the first annual Loudoun Now Excellence in Journalism awards night, held at Loudoun County High School. Ashford’s podcast, during which she interviewed former superintendent Edgar Hatrick, won runner up in the podcast category. “I had little expectation going into the evening about how it would go since this is the first year that Loudoun Community Media was offering the awards,” librarian Patti Bagdasarian said. “I was impressed by the entire program, from the reception beforehand, to the emcee (News 4 Bureau Chief!), to the high level and involvement of the sponsors, but most importantly, how they created this program to honor the commitment, hard work, and excellence of our student journalist. It wasn’t lost on me that Scarlett won for an interview of Dr. Hatrick in the building where he started and spent much of his career.” Bagdasarian not only attended the event, but helped Ashford produce her podcast with the library’s recording equipment. Photo by Patti Bagdasarian.

SPEAKER, continued from page 1 my speech is about appreciating the people around you, the friends, teachers, and family who helped you get to this point,” Lee said. “As I wrote, I kept thinking not just about what I accomplished, but the moments I shared with others and how this school’s culture shaped who I am.” At first, Lee was reluctant to

even present his speech and try out for the speaker position. On April 28, Lee and several other students presented their speech in front of a committee made up of administrators and one of his peers. “It was definitely a bit nerve-racking, but it turned out to be a great experience,” Lee said. He adds that the process was more encouraging, saying, “It helped me organize my thoughts, clarify my

message, and improve my public speaking skills. I’m glad I did it.” Through his speech, Lee hopes to reflect on the positives of high school and what he would do differently if he was given the chance. “If I could do it over, I’d try to put myself out there more and really live in the moment,” Lee said. “I spent too much time worrying about what others thought, and not

enough time embracing new opportunities.” Although being anxious about the experience at first, Lee is looking forward to Graduation Day on June 18, saying, “Loudoun County High School has such a unique and supportive culture, and I’ve been lucky to be a part of it. I wanted to represent that and give something back to the class that’s meant so much to me.” •

On April 22, it was announced that Simpson computer applications teacher Kimberly Poole won the Washington Post’s teacher of the year award. Poole, in her 30th year of teaching, shared the award with third-grade teacher Miriam Schimmoller, who teaches at Oak Street Elementary School in Falls Church. Each winner received a \$7,500 prize and a profile in the Washington Post.

William Kluttz | Managing Editor

To see what we’ve written about Poole in the past, check out the Country Chronicle website!



Summer college tours are underway—here’s how to make the most of them

Cat Pizzarello | Guest Writer

As summer rounds the corner, the joys of warm weather and no school are likely all that are on most students’ minds. For rising seniors, the pressure of college and choosing where to apply can often be an uphill battle.

Regardless of how far along a student is in their college decision, taking a college tour impacts a students decision-making process greatly. In a survey done on 183 chief enrollment officers, 95% agreed that taking a college tour is “extremely important” in prospective students’ decisions to enroll.

College tours have been shown to help students pursue further aspirations at their university of choice. They help to improve a prospective students’ knowledge of a university, improve academic engagement, spark proactive discussions, and select advanced courses during enrollment.

Although just touring a school is better than nothing, preparing to get the most out of a college visit can be valuable in narrowing down

that list of possible applications. Here are some key points students should note when planning college tours.

Do prior research

Preceding the scheduling of tours, making a list of possible schools of interest is necessary for planning the long trip of college touring. Once a student has a list of schools, they can begin looking further into what interests them about each university.

If a student knows their chosen subject area, it can be helpful to condense which schools to visit based on the programs and majors they offer. If a school doesn’t offer a specific degree area, it might be time to reconsider visiting.

Attend information sessions

Information sessions are often overlooked because many prospective students and their families believe they can find the same information on the university’s website or elsewhere online. However, information sessions are key to connecting with current admissions officers who can answer questions and guide students in the application process.

Many universities offer informational sessions and events based on study area and major. These functions can help students see clearly what being in their specific program will entail and if it will be an appropriate fit.

Take notes

It can be very tempting to get swept up in the excitement of touring, but taking notes along the way is the secret to pinpointing the university a student wants to pursue. This can be as simple as making a pros and cons list by quickly jotting down obvious likes and dislikes. At the end of all a student’s tours, these notes will be beneficial to compare and reflect on.

Get a taste of the dining

There is a reason universities compete for the best dining hall food: what a student eats on campus affects their learning. Having healthy, filling, and diverse food options on campus can promote productivity in students and boost success.

For the full college experience, students should take the opportunity to put each university’s food to the test by stopping at an on-campus dining hall. Dining halls are also a network of campus culture that will give students a feel of the campus’ real and raw environment.

Experience campus culture

Although quality of education is a huge factor when applying to college, campus culture and environment is not to be omitted. A sense of belonging is important to students in feeling comfortable

in their new home. When visiting a university, take the time to speak with current students and observe students outside of the classrooms. Academics are valuable, but campus culture can be pivotal when it comes to the well-being of an incoming freshman.

Explore

Scheduled tours can be advantageous on larger college campuses, but aren’t necessary for medium to smaller sized universities. Prospective students should try taking a tour of campus without a guide.

This allows a student to control the pace of their touring. Navigating campus alone also will help them become more familiar and informed with campus configuration.

On campus culture is crucial, but the off campus environment can be just as essential. Take the time to get to know the surrounding town and area around a university. Off campus environment is major in having an overall vibrant campus culture.

The long road to applying to higher education can be overwhelming, but it’s essential to remember that preparing for college should be an exciting process. Take the time to enjoy the ups and downs and look forward to the future. •

Cat Pizzarello is a freshman at Virginia Tech and an alumna of The County Chronicle. She currently serves as Assistant Lifestyles Editor at the Collegiate Times.



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Biggest Changes to the Grading Policy for the 2025-2026 School Year

TAYLOR HELFER | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The LCPS school board has been working since 2022 to change the grading policy. On April 8, 2025, a committee voted on final changes for the policy, which passed the same day. This policy was a part of Superintendent Dr. Aaron Spence’s Post-Entry plan, which hopes to ensure high quality education that prepares students for higher learning. None of these changes, aside from the limits on AI, apply to DE classes, as their rules are subject to the colleges’ policies.

Retakes to 70% and Missing Assignments

The floor for retakes on major summative assignments has lowered from 80% to 70%. Further, all missing assignments must be turned in before a retake. If you have any missing assignments, they will not be accepted past the date of when the assessment, correlated with the formative homework, is administered.

No Floor Grades for AP Classes

The new policy states that LCPS “will support a 50% for quarter grades and final grades for students demonstrating reasonable effort.” However, it also states that this floor grade does not apply to AP classes, or the final quarter of all classes, to make sure that these classes are mimicking the environment of a college class.

Homework & Formatives

Formatives can now now count for no more than 10% of your grade while homework, which can be practice or application of a subject such as a project or report, can count for up to 25% of your grade, a change from the 10% in the previous policy.

Limits on AI

The new policy states, “Utilizing generative AI on assignment” is considered cheating, a change from the policy not mentioning AI. Teachers must provide a recovery plan which can include a conference, retake, alternative test, or a lowered or failing grade.

STUDENT LIFE

Dance versus DC: Students chose to skip the prom in favor of pictures featuring a DC backdrop

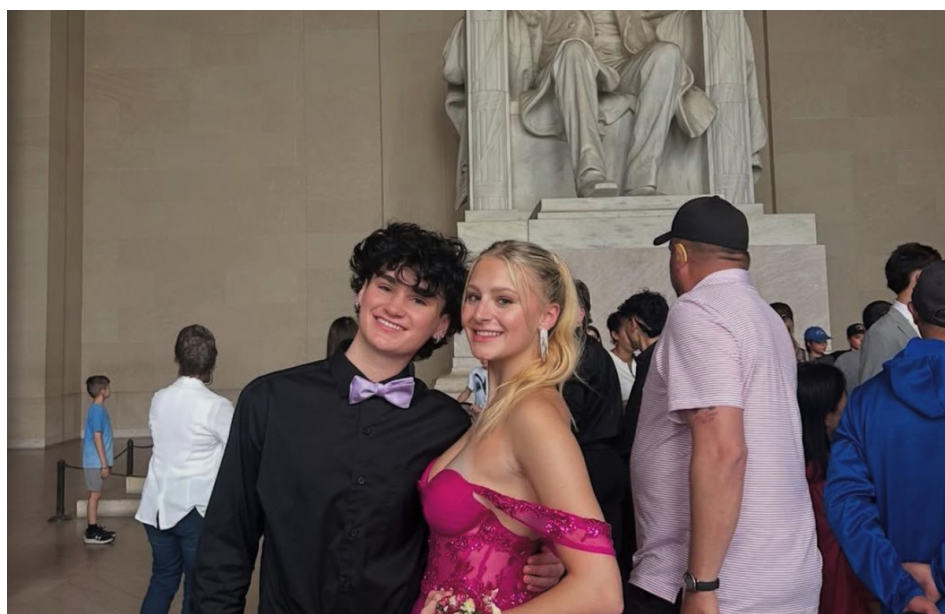
Taylor Helfer | Editor-in-Chief



Juniors Gabe Cunningham and Grayson Bradley stand back to back in front of the Washington Monument. Both wanted to go to DC as the monuments made for great photos. Photo courtesy of Grayson Bradley.



Juniors Olivia Weatherford and Avery Jeziorski stand together at the actual prom venue. Weatherford especially prioritized going to the dance saying, “I was definitely looking forward to it when I got to high school.” Photo courtesy of Olivia Weatherford.



Senior Alaina Janet and junior Kyle Bachand pose together in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Both opted for DC with their group, with Janet saying, “The real party is on my bus. I don’t know anyone who was planning to even go to the dance.” Photo courtesy of Alaina Janet.



At the venue, guests were greeted with a sign, covered in purple flowers and vines, officially welcoming them to the Secret Garden Ball, with several floral decorations, and activities at the venue, such as a dance floor, hosted by a “vibrant DJ” and a friendship bracelet making table. Patricia Arnold, who not only attended the dance as a chaperone, organized the event, saying, “Memories were made in the safe and fun atmosphere at the Dulles Marriott decorated with purple lights and florals for the Secret Garden Ball. It was a wonderful evening!” Photo courtesy of Patricia Arnold.



Juniors Fallon Murphy and Nathan Ko ride the Metro on their way to DC. Murphy and Ko decided to take the Metro to cut down on costs, with Murphy saying that it was “really easy to navigate.” Photo by Karan Singh.



Juniors Kathia Gaitan-Montoya, Karen Jimenez, and Kylie Walsh stand together, glow sticks in hand, at the venue where prom was held. On all the doorways, there were floral arrangements to coincide with the theme: The Secret Garden Ball. Photo courtesy of Nur Mustafa.

Seniors leave their mark on school with handprints

Karan Singh | Managing Editor



Arislan Telek leaves his handprint on the wall. Having been part of SCA, Telek has assisted in planning events for the school. “He is a young man who does everything that is asked of him,” SCA sponsor Ryan Dearman said. “He’s a hard worker, always looking to lend a hand and help others. I have been very impressed with his ability to navigate multiple responsibilities.” Photo by Karan Singh.



Clara Jolly and Taylor Keys paint the mural to accompany the handprints. The main quote reads “non scholae, sed vitae discimus” which translates to “we learn not for school, but for life” in English. The phrase highlights the education one receives in school and implies that this knowledge remains “for life.” Photo by Karan Singh.



Chris Luku gets his hand painted by Olivia Eastlake in a half orange, half red pattern. “The handprints are an everlasting tradition,” Dearman said. “It’s an opportunity for seniors to know that there will always be a part of them at County.” Photo by Karan Singh.



Maya Segura signs her name next to her handprint. These spirals were a popular pattern this year, which seem like sea shells that sit on the edges of the big wave that the handprints are a part of. Photo by Karan Singh.

What are seniors doing after high school?

College:	88.7%
Gap Year:	3.2%
Work:	3.2%
Trade School:	1.6%
Military:	3.2%

Most popular majors

1. Elementary Education
2. Political Science
3. Computer Science
4. Computer Engineering
5. Mechanical Engineering
6. Biochemistry

Berek Harrison | Editor-in-Chief

Seniors spend last days giving back during outreach

Aspen DeWan | Business Manager



(Left to right, bottom to top) Seniors Ellie O’Brien, Athishaya Srinivasan, Abby Taliaferro, Jordan Garman, Sofia Habibzai, Aly Miltenberger, Gemma Vogel, and Sadie Byers spent their two weeks of Outreach volunteering at Love Your Mother Co. Their first day was spent creating college crafts after discussing Love Your Mother Co.’s mission and impact on the environment and respecting the Earth. Photo courtesy of @luvyourmotherco on Instagram.



Seniors Chloe Ortiz, Brooke Young, and Kai Rothwell stop for a break during their time volunteering at our school library. The students help to organize books, including retrieving and sorting the study hall reading crates, which need to be stored during the summer HVAC work. Photo courtesy of Brooke Young.

Arts programs travel to Disney

Scarlett Ashford | Copy Editor

Scan for video



This spring, fine and performing arts groups traveled to Disney World near Orlando, Florida. Choir and orchestra groups competed in front of judges, the marching band marched through Magic Kingdom, and the fine art and drama groups attended clinics to improve their artistic skills. Along the way, they got to have a great time at the parks. •

‘Third mascot’ greets students while awaiting hatching eggs

Aspen DeWan | Business Manager

The newest addition to the school lives right near the outdoor track, squawking when students walk by to protect her nest of four eggs.

“It is a killdeer,” said bird photographer **Karen Jimenez**. “They’re like a kind of plover, so it’s kind of a beach bird.”

Jimenez’s passion for birds started around a year ago, and she currently works at a wild bird store where they sell anything bird related, like bird feed and feeders. After investing in a Canon camera, Jimenez has been taking pictures of different birds, most of which are featured on her instagram account @flockstar_photography.

“It takes twenty to thirty days for them to lay their eggs,” Jimenez said. “It will definitely be cool to just see when they hatch, because they’re really cute when they’re babies.”

“I do know there are two,” Jinenez said. “And both the male and female will do something really cool where they pretend they

have a broken wing in order to lead people away from the nest. The broken wing display is really cool because it’s not something you see typically in birds.”

Jimenez says it’s migration season now, meaning birds can be seen now that are not present at other times of the year. “You’ll see different kinds of warblers, wood thrushes are here. It’s just cool to keep an eye and an ear open because you never know what might be around, and it might be a bird you never expected to see,” she said.

“There’s also a map called the Merlin ID, and you can record and it will tell you what bird song you’re hearing. And also if you take a picture you can put it on the app and it will tell you what bird it is.”

According to athletic director **Kathleen Cassidy**, the bird first showed up the day after County played Broad Run, on April 21st.

“Last I checked there were four eggs,” Cassidy said. “Several people have asked about moving the nest, and, that’s like the number one rule with birds, you don’t

move a bird nest.”

“It’s more of a nuisance to our visiting (baseball) teams,” Cassidy said. “She hasn’t hurt anybody yet.”

“Now it’s our, I guess, third mascot,” Cassidy said. “We have not named her yet.”

The name Sandy was suggested by **Stephen McNamara**.

“I’ve only seen the other one one time, and I think it’s the male,” Cassidy said. “He doesn’t come as close to her nest. I’ve seen him in the outfield, just sitting there.”

“Luckily everyone has pretty much left it alone,” Cassidy said.

“Until she has those babies, she’s gonna be there.” •



The female killdeer bird keeps a watchful eye to protect her nest near the outdoor track. Photo by Aspen DeWan.

Student vs faculty basketball: Last second win for students for the first time in three years

Alexa Sterner | Staff Writer

The student versus staff basketball game has been held at a pep rally for the last three years, with the teachers winning each one—until this year. During this fourth annual basketball game, the students finally broke the three year winning streak of the staff team with a win in the last seconds of the game that left the gym echoing in cheers.

One of the members of the

staff’s basketball team included math teacher **Jarod Brown**, who scored the majority of the points for the teachers. Brown isn’t new to playing sports. He played four years of varsity golf in high school, basketball his freshman year of high school, and even golf at Bridgewater College.

“I love playing basketball, and I enjoy interacting with students any way I can,” Brown said.

“It was fun playing in the game,” Brown said. “Obviously,

I am not as young and limber as I used to be so I started to tire near the end. I thought we had them in the end with a comeback, but C hit a big shot. It was hopefully fun to watch for the students.”

One member of the student basketball team was junior **Montez Dyson**. Dyson played basketball and plays football currently. The students for the game had to volunteer and sign up to play.

“What made me play was definitely my friends encouraging me,”

Dyson said.

A lot of the students that played in the game are athletes.

“Playing in the game was really fun. It’s fun having a good time with friends and teachers,” Dyson said.

The game took place at the pep rally so the energy and excitement was very high with students and staff each cheering for their team.

“It [makes me] feel like a champion to beat the staff for the first time in years,” Dyson said. •



Junior Montez Dyson and business education teacher Schuyler Henderson reach for the ball following the tip off at the start of the game. Team Students was pitted against Team Staff in the annual basketball game that takes place during the spring pep rally. Students watched in anticipation as the court was set into motion. Photo by Karan Singh.



CTE teacher Nicholas Guglielmo cheers following a pie to the face. The Environmental Club hosts a “pie your teacher” fundraiser before the spring pep rally, where a teacher is chosen to be pied in the face. This year, senior Beaunita Nith, who donated the highest amount, got the chance to pie Guglielmo. The club raised \$330, half of which was donated to the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, while the other half went to the club. Photo by Karan Singh.

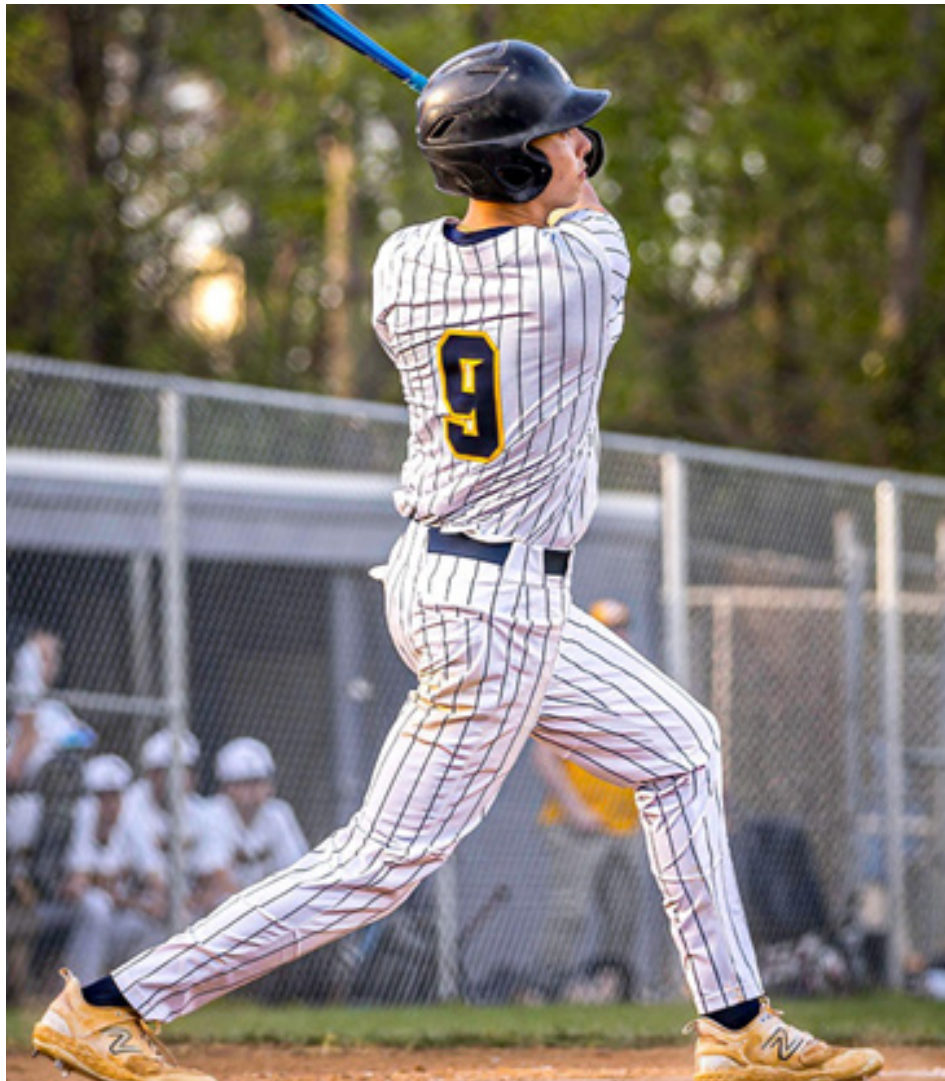


PE teacher Matthew Reidenbaugh scores three points for his team. The game, which was fast-paced and exhilarating, had Team Staff winning for a majority of its course. Top scorers from the team were Math teacher Jarod Brown and Reidenbaugh. Photo by Karan Singh.



Reidenbaugh interferes with senior Chris Luku’s pass to teammate as the game progresses. Team Students won the game as senior Christian Narh scored the buzzer beater shot, which led to the final score being 42-41. Photo by Karan Singh.

Athlete of the issue: Senior Quin Miller reflects on his career as a County baseball player



Quin Miller steps up to the plate and swings during his game versus Broad Run on April 24. The Captains won 4-3. Photo by Kikocamera.
Alexa Sterner | Staff Writer

Ever since he was four years old, senior **Quin Miller** has been

on the baseball field. Miller wanted to try out sports and see if he liked them but ended up falling in love with baseball.

Miller just won athlete of the month for baseball in the month of May. The team’s coaches chose him due to his outstanding plays, which reflect his dedication and work ethic.

“What I enjoy about baseball the most is being out there with my guys,” Miller said.

Baseball became Miller’s second home and he practices whenever he can. Miller, an infielder, has been on the varsity baseball team for all four years.

“This season, one of my goals is to win the district tournament,” Miller said.

Districts were held May 27, with semi-finals on May 28 and finals on May 30.

As a senior Miller had to make a big decision on whether to play baseball in college. Instead of playing baseball, he has decided to focus on academics and will be majoring in statistics.

“It was a tough decision, but I decided against playing baseball at a smaller school and go to a bigger school, Virginia Tech,” Miller said.

Even though Miller isn’t playing baseball for a college sports

team, he still has great memories of playing.

“My favorite memory was when we beat Woodgrove on the road last year in our second to last game of the season,” Miller said. “They were the number one seed in the district at that time.”

Baseball hasn’t just given Miller memories but skills he can use in his daily life.

“Baseball forces me to think about decisions outside of baseball that could affect my playing ability, whether it’s physical or mental,” Miller said.

He credits his coaches for helping him develop as a player and as a person. One coach in particular Miller gives a lot of credit.

“Our assistant coach, Coach DeProspero, has definitely helped me improve the most since my freshman year,” Miller said.

Jim DeProspero is the varsity assistant coach for the team. He has been coaching Miller throughout his whole high school career.

“Quin is a talented athlete, great teammate and person to be around,” DeProspero said. •

Girls and boys tennis battles through season, ending at districts

Alexa Sterner | Staff Writer

The boys’ tennis team ended the season with a 10-8 record. They won some important matches, such as beating Briar Woods, who they lost to last season. Despite a loss at districts, the team has improved since the beginning of the season, with one pair making it to the Region 4C Doubles Tournament.

“We had a massive win over John Champe. We beat them 5-4. We lost to them 3-6 last time,” said junior **Aidan Armistead** after the May 15 match.

Though tennis is either played as doubles or singles, the outcome affects the team’s overall win, so athletes still feel that sense of teamwork during a match.

“I helped my team by winning a very close match at one doubles when it was 4-4 against our main rival, getting us the win,” sophomore **Tyler Partlow** said.

“I beat one of my most difficult opponents today grunting the match,” Armistead said.

With the team’s hard work, they are able to achieve important wins, which is just one of

their strengths.

“One of our other strengths is commitment and encouragement among one another,” Armistead said.

“Our team works well together because we are always joking with each other and having a good time,” Partlow said.

“My favorite part about the team is going out to eat after matches that we win,” Partlow said.

The girls team finished the season well with an overall record of 7-9, losing in the first round of district playoffs on May 20 against John Champe.

“We made it pretty far, so I think we did really well,” sophomore **Ivy Tomaszewski** said.

Tomaszewski made it to district semi-finals in singles. She and teammate sophomore **Lexi Bryson** made it to district finals for doubles. They finished the match as runner-up, meaning they still advance to regionals in June.

In boys tennis, Armistead and Partlow won the Catoctin District Doubles Championship, moving on to the Region 4C Doubles Tournament in June.



Sophomore Ivy Tomaszewski plays a match in spring at County. Tomaszewski advanced to regional during post-season play with teammate Lexi Bryson, along with Aidan Armistead and Tyler Partlow. Photo courtesy of Victor O’Neill studios.

The team this year got a new coach, which Tomaszewski says helped. The new head coach for the girls’ team is **Angie Tomaszewski**, who is in their first year of coaching the girls’ tennis

team and is also Ivy’s mother.

Everyone makes sure to cheer for one another at the matches.

“The atmosphere and everybody is so supportive,” Angie Tomaszewski said. •

Artist of the issue: Brooke Keller tells stories through her paintings

Berek Harrison | Editor-in-Chief

On May 9, senior **Brooke Keller** submitted her AP art portfolio, the sum of her artistic work throughout the past year and the entirety of high school. The 15 pieces contained in her portfolio include a mix of oil paintings, watercolor pieces, and oil pastel pieces to answer the question “how has anatomy influenced society throughout the years different kinds of cultures?”

Keller first discovered her love of art when she was seven. “I was bored and my parents just gave me this random little sketchbook.” Her artistic interest increased from there.

“Ninth grade is when I got into oil paints,” Keller said, noting that oil became her main medium. Keller doesn’t only use oil paints, however. “I draw every single day,” Keller said. “There’s so much that goes into that,” including ink and markers.

In her painting and drawings, Keller gathers inspiration from a variety of sources. “I really do enjoy movies and I sometimes draw movie clips to try and figure out lighting,” Keller said. Along with movies, Keller is inspired by nature and occasionally paints landscapes. Solitude, such as what appears in

nature, is impactful to Keller’s art. “Whenever I’m alone, I like looking at everything around me,” Keller said.

On the other hand, she enjoys the business and energy of cities. “I feel like you get every kind of person,” Keller said. “Everything’s going on.”

Keller also draws inspiration from artists. “[For] Rembrandt, I really enjoyed the texture he captures in his paintings,” Keller said. “And Waterhouse, I feel like he captures that era of Art Nouveau painting perfectly. Everything’s fantasy, but still real.”

Keller tries to apply aspects of these artists to her own art. “I always appreciate any piece of work that has a secret meaning to it,” Keller said. “That’s why I enjoy Waterhouse because he’s always got a story with it.”

Keller replicated this in her own portfolio, for example creating three pieces that work together. “I was trying to play on Christianity with Adam and Eve and the sacrifice of the rib,” Keller said.

Keller is constantly trying to improve. “I feel like it’s just good for me to go back to the basics with anatomy, and I would really love to figure out more about lighting and color,” Keller said.



One of Brooke Keller’s AP Portfolio artworks portrays a surreal scene with a fish and a human head. The artwork showcases how Keller combines a realistic style with fantastical elements.

Stylistically, Keller characterizes her art as a fusion between realism and fantasy. “It’s my interpretation of realism,” Keller said. Keller’s description is captured in her paintings that, while appearing life-like, contain fantastical subjects and features resulting in interesting compositions and heightened meaning.

Keller is going to college for nursing, but she still wants to continue drawing and painting. “I would definitely love to keep [art] on the side as a hobby at the very least,” Keller said. “It will definitely be in my life

somehow.”

Keller’s work shows the importance of taking inspiration in carrying out self expression, but she makes the distinction between that and comparing yourself to others.

“Don’t compare yourself to anyone else. I know there’s everything online with all these artists, but they’ve been doing it for years and years and years,” Keller said. “Just focus on what you want to improve and what you like about what you’re drawing, and I think you’ll find satisfaction in your art.” •

Indie movie recommendations for you to binge this summer

Scarlett Ashford | Copy Editor

THIS BEAUTIFUL FANTASIC (2016)

This UK film is one of my favorite comfort films, and tells the story of quirky girl **Bella Brown** who attempts to conquer her deathly fear of nature and ends up making life-long friends along the way. It is simple and wholesome with a more modern filmmaking style. If you’ve ever felt out of place, this is a great movie when you want to feel understood. As a bonus, it also stars two of my favorite UK actors, **Jessica Brown Findlay** and **Andrew Scott**.

- More Like This:
- “Grand Budapest Hotel”
 - “French Dispatch”
 - “Big Fish”



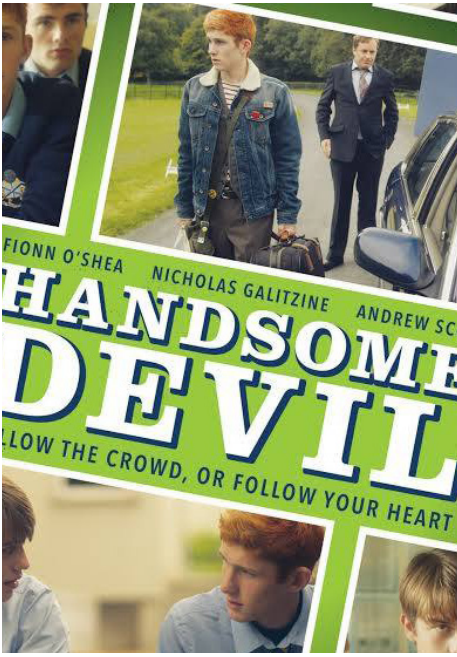
CRY-BABY (1990)

I discovered this film after reading the description and immediately deciding to watch it. Half musical, half drama, it feels like a parody of “The Outsiders” without the heart-wrenching emotions and absolutely all the humor. The amount of times I had to pause the movie because I was laughing too hard was innumerable. It tells the story of good girl Allison (**Amy Locane**), who falls in love with Wade Walder, nicknamed Cry-Baby (**Johnny Depp**). Perfect for a good laugh, it encapsulates all that is ridiculous about teen movies.

HANDSOME DEVIL (2016)

A lesser known **Nicholas Galitzine** film, it’s still one of my favorites. Starring Irish actor **Finn O’Shea**, best known for “Dating Amber,” it pairs an excellent soundtrack with the classic quirky Irish filmmaking I’ve come to love. This movie discusses issues that LGBTQIA+ teens face in a relatable way while placing the emphasis on accepting one’s true self rather than focusing on the labels and identities that are forced upon oneself.

- More Like This:
- “Dating Amber”
 - “Billie & Emma”
 - “But I’m A Cheerleader”



I SAW THE TV GLOW (2024)

I have heard fairly mixed reviews about this movie, but the premise seemed so interesting I couldn’t resist watching it. Starring **Jack Haven**, “I Saw the TV Glow” is a psychological thriller discussing the danger and fears of repressing yourself and confronting those fears. Distributed by A24, this film is sure to be original and something new to experience.

- More Like This:
- “Fanfik”
 - “We’re All Going to the World’s Fair”
 - “Giant Little Ones”

MOONRISE KINGDOM (2012)

Director **Wes Anderson**’s style is evident throughout the film, filled with symmetrical shots and unique characters. The plot involves two 12-year olds living on an island who fall in love and run away together. Although it was a bit awkward at times to see the romantic interactions between the two characters, I feel that it was essential to showing the comfortability that they had with each other, and the innocence of their otherwise mature personalities. This film does a spectacular job at showcasing how children are misunderstood, and the difficulties of living in a world where you simply do not conform.

- More Like This:
- “I believe in Unicorns”



RETIREMENT, continued from page 1

building for recess, something they always try to incorporate during the trip. “Recess! Time to play!” said one of Cody’s twelfth graders, and the students hurried outdoors, grabbing jump ropes and playing different games, a moment that Cody would never forget.

This was one of Cody’s stand out moments in her career, an activity they had done for years, where they took social studies students to Evergreen Mill Elementary School where her daughter taught fourth grade, and they would make history books. The little kids would draw pictures and the bigger kids would write stories.

“I had students jumping rope in their heels,” Cody said.

Aside from that annual tradition, Cody said that her first and last year “will always be very special.” Teaching hybrid classes in 2020 and 2021 was one of her favorite eras to teach because the students had to work really hard, which challenged the staff to really make it work.

“I think that kids today are more savvy than they were in ‘96,” Cody said. “I think that our knowledge base is greater, we have more access to a whole lot more information.”

“When I first started teaching, we did seven 50-minute classes, and I liked that a lot because you saw everybody every day,” Cody said. “But we can do more things in a 90-minute block.”

As for her retirement plans, Cody says she’ll “probably stay here in Loudoun for a while.”

“I’m going to do some traveling. I have spent a lot of time hiking all over the world, so I’m going to do some more hiking,” Cody said. “I’m going to go to Alaska when I leave in July. I don’t know where I’ll go after that.”

“I have loved teaching, I love this building. I’ve made a lot of friends,” Cody said. “It’s never a good time to leave something that you teach, something that you like, but there’s a right time.”

“It’s been a great experience. It’s home, it’s family.”

Laura DeGroat, Teaching Assistant



Photo courtesy of Laura DeGroat

Situated in geometry and government classes, **Laura DeGroat** has taught a variety of students and watched them grow throughout her 25 years of teaching. She’s amicable among students and has encouraged students to thrive in their classes.

Prior to teaching at LCHS, DeGroat had begun her teaching career in her hometown in New York before teaching in Fairfax County. She initially taught general education, but in her recent years, had moved to special education. Taking some time away from teaching, she took a break and spent time with her kids. She ultimately settled on LCHS because she wanted to teach high school and did so for eight years.

DeGroat says that making time for hobbies is difficult and upon retirement, it’ll open up her calendar. “I like to spend time with friends, spend time with my family, play with our dog. Pretty much now I’ll have more time to be able to do things that I want to do.”

Although a busy schedule comes with teaching, she reflects on her achievements and growth within her career. She finds it most accomplishing to assist students in their growth in the classroom.

“I just feel like I’ve helped kids in class,” she said. “To support them, figure out what they needed and just help them learn. That’s really great.”

DeGroat said she will “miss kids the most,” as she enjoys catching up with students in the hallways. “I love seeing kids in the hallways,” she said, including “just saying hello.”

The most memorable part of DeGroat’s career has been watching her previous freshman students grow into seniors. “This year I switched from geometry to government, and that’s been a real blessing for me because I got to work with seniors, and a lot of them I [have] had as freshman, sophomores,” DeGroat said. “None of you as a senior are the same as when you were as a freshman or sophomore. And I got to see that.”

DeGroat shares a piece of advice for students as they start their life following high school: “Find your passion in life. I hope that whatever you major in, whatever you do, whatever you work or apprentice or whatever, it’s something that you love. And your job, whatever you choose to do, should be something that you love to do. And because it brings joy, it shouldn’t be a burden, although it’s hard work, but it should bring joy. I’m one of those lucky people who always knew she was going to be a teacher and I’ve always loved

every minute of it, and that’s important, even when it’s really hard. If you love it, it’s joyful.”

Captain Bill Johns, NJROTC



Photo courtesy of Scarlett Ashford.

On May 14, to honor Johns, the entire NJROTC body held a ceremony for him in the annex parking lot. After eight years that only tell of a fraction of an amazing career, Captain **Bill Johns** is retiring after this school year.

Before working at County, Johns was a member of his high school’s NJROTC program, which is what inspired him to go into service. “I experienced a lighter version of this [NJROTC], because what you do is amazing. It’s nothing like what I did. We only had a couple of teams,” Johns said.

After enjoying himself so much during his own tenure in NJROTC, Johns wanted to continue to be a part of that. “I wanted to be a part of giving back,” Johns said, “so what better way to do that than to be on the other end of that in a classroom?”

Prior to his tenure at County, Johns served in the Navy, being tasked with finding enemy submarines. Afterwards, Johns began his teaching career at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1976, the university has since been a mecca for those hoping to work in national security.

While Johns found it difficult to conjure up a single standout memory, he noted that “seeing you all graduate, seeing you all achieve your dreams, either in post-secondary education, athletics, [or] other things. Putting it all together, probably the most memorable combined experience is the laughter, the fun that we’ve all had in class, and the growth going from brand new NS1 followers to leaders, all the leaders. And then demonstrating your potential so that when you move on from here, we are all,

especially myself, confident that you’re going to make this world a better place,” Johns said.

During his retirement, Johns plans to travel and get some work done around the house. “I have a lot of projects at home that I’ve been tasked to do,” Johns said. “I’m looking forward to it because it’s fun.”

Despite this, Johns noted he will still miss his post in the NJROTC program. “It has truly been an honor and privilege for me to be with you during this time, and I’m going to miss it,” Johns said.

“We’re going to miss you,” several of his students replied.

Tony Rayburn Physical Education



Photo by John Klimavicz.

Tony Rayburn will retire at the end of this school year. He has worked at County since 2016, teaching Health/PE 10 and Driver’s Education. According to principal **Michelle Luttrell**, Rayburn “earned the respect of students and colleagues alike as a great teacher, trusted colleague, and true team player.”

As head varsity football coach from 2016 to 2019, Rayburn led “a period of significant program growth,” according to Luttrell, which included a co-district Championship in 2017, and regional playoff appearances in both 2017 and 2018.

After retirement, Rayburn still plans to stay busy, perhaps working as a fitness specialist. Thinking back to what made teaching and coaching special, Rayburn says that relationships were most meaningful. “I think just everybody having a good time with the students, with other coaches, other teachers and the day-to-day,” Rayburn said. •

Megan Brinton, Sofia Crespín, Michael DuPlessis, Jordan Gorman, Natalie Logan, Clara Manning, Elle Shin, Alexa Sterner, Athishaya Srinivasan, and Andrew Wilson contributed to this story.