

El Gato

THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF LOS GATOS HIGH SCHOOL

A. Coven

LG welcomes annual Holiday Parade

by Advika Anand and Abby Coven

Graphics and News Editors

The 69th annual Los Gatos Children's Holiday Parade marched through town on Dec. 6, featuring a lively variety of participants. Helming this year's parade was Grand Marshall **Kurt Kroesche**, LGHS's own treasured English and Philosophy & Ethics teacher. The parade starts at the intersection of North Santa Cruz and Almadra Avenues, weaves through downtown, and ends on the LGHS front lawn. This holiday celebration is an event that locals, young and old anticipate and cherish.



HOLIDAY HOORAY: Parade Grand Marshall Kroesche and spouse wave at crowd.

Sponsored by the Los Gatos Lions Club, Los Gatos-Saratoga Parks and Recreation, and the Town of Los Gatos, the parade is a beloved institution. Beginning in 1962 with only a handful of children and pets, the parade has grown into one of the largest holiday parades in Northern California, offering an opportunity to spotlight local businesses along with schools, community organizations, and kids' activities like dance and scouts.

The longtime tradition of selecting a parade Grand Marshall has been passed down through the decades. To his surprise and delight, Kroesche was selected this year: "It's a sweet and sincere gesture to be selected by members of the LG community. I'm honored to be included among past Grand Marshall recipients." Kroesche emphasized, "It's important to find a place to belong and a purpose that's bigger than yourself... LGHS and Los Gatos have been a large part of that place and purpose for me."

Every year the parade kicks off with local leaders followed by the LGHS band and cheerleading teams. According to sophomore **Olive Murrett**, a percussionist in LGHS's marching band, "The crowd's energy definitely made everything less stressful and more fun, and I think it made us all play and march a little better being more relaxed." Sophomore flyer **Kelly Huang** described her favorite part of the day: "Getting together with my friends and team and getting to see all the people and programs we have in our community." Dozens of Wildcats took part in the event through their involvement with other clubs and organizations.

This year, the floats included a mix of local activities combined with performance groups, spanning from dance companies to horse vaulting clubs. For many of the participants, specifically children, the parade is one of their first opportunities to perform in front of an audience, creating traditions that they will follow as they grow. Other floats that locals particularly enjoy are the iconic Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad train along with the local firefighters, their vehicles, and their families. One of the most anticipated moments, Santa's sleigh, occurred at the very end. Behind the scenes, Santa revealed that his adoration of taking part in a community event prompted him to play the role of Saint Nick for the past ten years.

Overall, the Holiday Parade offers the opportunity for students, local businesses, and volunteers to showcase their passions and proudly display them in front of an enthusiastic crowd during this time-honored occasion.



VRROOM: Local children joined the Los Gatos Police Department in the parade.

LGHS Drama puts on its fall show

by Hayley Strahs

Editor-in-Chief

The LGHS Drama Department kicked off its 2025-26 season with the fall play, Peter and the Starcatcher. After three months of rehearsing, Peter and the Starcatcher opened on Nov. 13 for a magical weekend of three shows.

Peter and the Starcatcher is a prequel to Peter Pan and follows the Aster family on two concurrent nautical expeditions on The Neverland and The Wasp. On The Neverland, Molly Aster, played by senior **Alexis Dorn**, must collaborate with orphans Prentiss, Ted, and Boy — played by freshmen **Oliver Hoffman** and **Nicholas Meighen** and sophomore **Ren Milos**, respectively — to protect the magical substance "starstuff." Meanwhile, Lord Lenard Aster, played by junior **Zanden Forbord**, harbors a decoy crate on The Wasp that looks identical to the one with starstuff. When the power-hungry pirate Black Stache, played by senior **Morgan Lum**, comes in search of starstuff, it is up to Molly and her orphan pals to protect the precious substance.

Much to the surprise of audience members, Peter and the Starcatcher featured prominent musical numbers, a rare occurrence for a straight play. Act two began with Mermaid Outta Me, a seemingly out-of-the-blue dreamy dance sequence. Senior **Renee Hary**, who played Mrs. Bumbrake, explained that the number was "so funny because it was so unexpected and out of pocket." While Mermaid Outta Me was a fan favorite, Hoffman regards Coming Down the Mountain as the most formidable song in the play. Coordinating entrances, exits, and movements across the stage proved difficult, yet rewarding, as Hoffman remarked: "It was pretty hard to get all that stuff down, but satisfying to pull it off correctly."



DRAMATIC DISCUSSION: Dorn and Forbord engage in animated dialogue on stage.

Throughout dress and tech rehearsals, junior **Lee Cummings**, who played Bill Slank and Fighting Prawn, shared a special ritual with Hary and junior **Kora Olivo**. In their dressing room, the three sang along to Zack's Academy vocal warmups on YouTube before each show. In reference to Zack, Cummings lovingly proclaimed, "He's my G.O.A.T." These warmup videos prepared the trio, along with the rest of the cast, for nights full of on-stage adventure.



HOOKED: Lum, as Black Stache, takes Dorn's character hostage during act two.

Even though the play is over, many of the cast members' shared jokes are still fresh. The cat stuffed animal prop, which the cast affectionately named "Puss-Puss," became the quasi-mascot for Peter and the Starcatcher and now sits in Hary's room. Hary explained, "I have a bunch of Hello Kitties on my bed, and [Puss-Puss] is in the center of all the Hello Kitties like the King." During the show, Hary and Puss-Puss were a dynamic duo. Between throwing Puss-Puss around and playing with him between scenes, the two were practically inseparable in rehearsals.

For those who missed the play or who want to see another production, LGHS Drama will put on its spring musical, Hadestown, in late March. Actors auditioned for the show earlier this week, and rehearsals will begin after Winter Break. With Peter and the Starcatcher down and Hadestown fast-approaching, the LGHS Drama department is in full swing.

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courtesy/wikimedia commons

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courtesy/B. Massa

TOM: Thomas Peters continues to elevate science classes

by Fuyu Banno and Claudia Casal Montserrat

Graphics and People Editors

From pursuing an interest in all things musical to inspiring passion in the physics classroom, **Thomas Peters** is a standout at Los Gatos High School.

Growing up amidst a strong music program at Branham High School in San Jose, Peters developed an enthusiasm for music, amassing an impressive list of the instruments. As he explained, "I picked up a habit of asking the band director each year, hey, what does the band need more of? Do you have enough trombones? Do you have enough trumpets? And so I ended up playing most of the band instruments." Peters applied this same adaptability throughout college as he found his calling in teaching.



STRUM: Peters plays the guitar with bandmates, continuing his music passion.

After joining the drum corps and conducting at San Jose State University, Peters pivoted from his dream of being a band teacher to following in his father's footsteps and being an engineer. Yet his physics instructor, Melvin Vaughn, at West Valley College, set him on the path to becoming a teacher once again. Peters recounted, "It was in his class that I realized, wait a minute, good teachers are still a really important thing. Even if I'm not going to be teaching music, I can give back to the community in that way."

Peters' path to teaching physics began at an after-school program where he taught elementary school kids physics and engineering through Legos. From there, he completed his student teaching with **Kate Magary** in her physics and AP physics classes. He then taught at Palo Alto High School for a year and a half before returning to Los Gatos High School full-time. Peters acknowledged how much the physics department helped him when he came back "The science department is really supportive, really knowledgeable, and just such kind and wonderful people...everyone's willing to help answer questions, whether it's about campus, policies, or best practices." Now, through supporting his students in the classroom, Peters is also currently advocating for an astronomy class at the high school, in hopes of expanding students' scientific horizons.

Outside of the classroom, Peters enjoys exploring the great outdoors. A lover of all things nature, Peters enjoys hiking, backpacking, sailing, and even just taking a walk out in the rain. Recently, he has enjoyed relaxing at Desolation Wilderness, a place just west of South Lake Tahoe.

Although Peters listens to a lot of different music, he recently reconnected with his passion for playing instruments. Originally a multi-instrument player, he now focuses his old music theory skills and aptitude for music through the electric guitar.

In his commitment to his students, Peters ensures a comfortable and fun learning environment. He emphasized, "One of the things that I often spend time stressing in class is the value of time spent thinking about things." Keeping this in mind, Peters continues to enrich students with his passion for the sciences, music, and teaching.



AWAY FROM WORK: Peters enjoys hiking and exploring the great outdoors.

LGHS teachers resort to different solutions for AI

by Kat Littfin

Editorial Editor

Like nearly every secondary and post-secondary school across the country, Los Gatos High School has to deal with the onslaught of challenges that come with the increased use and commonality of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. With ChatGPT's release in 2022, generative AI has become easily accessible, and with AI's growth, teachers have different approaches to regulating it in the classroom.

AI integrity violations tend to disproportionately affect English classes. English coursework encourages students to hone their writing, reading, and editing skills. Many teachers feel as though students who use AI in place of completing writing assignments themselves undermine their learning. In turn, teachers have resorted to using AI detection tools, including Turnitin and GPTZero, to catch students' generative AI usage. Other teachers have also increased their in-class writing or changed their curricula in other ways to avoid cheating via AI. **Brian Schunk**, who teaches AP Literature as well as Philosophy & Ethics, has minimally adjusted his curriculum: "I don't want to give up on assignments that I believe are interesting, challenging, and worthwhile learning opportunities just because students might be able to use AI to

complete them. If I have to assign work that is less valuable for my students just to make cheating more difficult, then I'm doing a disservice to the students who do their work honestly. My job is to provide the best learning opportunities I can and then support my students in their efforts."

AI affects more than just the English department. AP Psychology teacher **Chris Chiodo** remarked that in terms of AI, she was concerned initially, noting that "[not using] AI involves a lot of self-control as a teenager, self-control is not something teenagers



AI ALERT: ChatGPT is a common app that students turn to for generative AI.

possess in large quantities because their brains aren't fully developed yet." **Marcy Cooper** echoed this sentiment, as she has noticed lower test scores on her exams in AP US Government that largely require critical thinking. She attributed these scores to students' increased usage of AI tools. Additionally, AP Biology teacher **Cathy Messenger** noted that, at first, tools like ChatGPT were not very accurate when it came to AP Biology concepts, but AI search engines have since become more effective. "I don't really want to change a lot," Messenger said regarding her curriculum. She assigns many CER (Claim, Evidence, Reasoning) writing assignments, which she has continued to do because of feedback from former students who have largely agreed that the CERs are valuable to their learning. When AI violations became a concern for these writings, Messenger adjusted her grading: "What I'm doing is really tightening up if people are not citing references when I'm seeing statements being made that are beyond what we covered in class."

Many teachers know their longstanding curricula benefit students, so they must find resourceful ways to prevent or deter AI use while still maintaining the quality of their assignments. AI is difficult to deal with and regulate, but LGHS teachers and administrators are working hard to find solutions.

Kramer recaps trip to Catalina

by Nelson Kramer

Editor-in-Chief

Just past the Catalina Channel, 22 miles off the coast of Long Beach, students touched down, setting foot onto a wobbly dock, bleary-eyed from the flight but buzzing with anticipation. Every year, the AP Environmental Science and AP Biology classes offer a once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Catalina Island Marine Institute (CIMI). Upwards of 60 kids have the opportunity to explore the scenic islandscapes. The crew went hiking on island trails, dove into the ocean for snorkeling, and learned about their surroundings and the world of ecology and marine biology through scientific classes and labs. **Cathy Messenger**, **Jennifer Bryan**, and **Amelia DeLaPaz**, led the experience, offering students a fascinating and formative experience.

and oceanography. On day one, the team participated in hands-on labs about algae and sharks, on day two, they took their learning to the waters with an explorative half day of snorkeling. Every day, there was something new, and an opportunity for everyone to push themselves in new ways—students and teachers alike.



SNAPSHOT: A glimpse of the sun after a 20-minute sunrise hike.

At LGHS, this trip is a tradition, a rite of passage. It all started 35 years ago, thanks to former AP Biology teacher, and science department chair, **Steve Hammack**. His first Catalina trip in 1980 began with ten kids and two station wagons. In Hammack's last year of teaching in 2019, the trip involved over 150 students and multiple flights and ferry rides. Returning as a chaperone this year after his retirement, he reflected, "Going on this trip for the first time where I wasn't the organizer gave me a new perspective; it allowed me to see that this tradition is continuing as part of my legacy, and the impact it has on the kids." He added, "If you want to make people care about the earth, you have to make them find a way to fall in love with it. The Catalina trip helps kids fall in love with nature."

LGHS is fortunate to have had a science and travel-obsessed trailblazer like Hammack on campus and just as lucky to have this trip year after year, along with the amazing chaperones that lead the way. This is an experience that connects students to the earth, beyond the textbook or an AP exam, through shared effort, hands-on work, and vital peer connection.



READY TO DIVE: Students prepare to snorkel in Catalina Island.

This year, the trip started, as usual, predawn. Students arrived at Oakland International for their 5:00 AM flight to LAX, then took a bus to the Long Beach docks, ending with a two-hour ferry ride to the Channel Islands. For senior **Mariko Okubo**, the trip was tiring, acknowledging, "The travel was really long. Our first flight was super early, and the ferry rides were really bumpy. Once we got to the island, it made the travel worth it."

The days students spent at CIMI were jam-packed with activities from night snorkels to sunrise hikes. The labs provided fun opportunities for the group to explore while also offering a chance to connect deeply with the world of ecology, marine biology,

Winter ensembles prepare

by Annabelle Pan

Graphics Editor

With the Los Gatos Holiday Parade, winter percussion, and a concert, December has been a busy month for the LGHS' band. Although the marching band and color guard season officially ended in November with the Western Band Association Regional Championships at James Logan High School, the group performed together for the last time on Dec. 6 at the LG Holiday Parade, playing festive songs such as Joy to the World, Good King Wenceslas, and Hark! The Herald Angels Sing. Now that the marching band season has ended, several students joined its winter counterpart: winter percussion. Winter percussion has a similar schedule, but the only instruments in the show are percussion instruments from the Battery and Front Ensemble. Official rehearsals started on Dec. 1, and while the 2025 percussion show theme remains a mystery, students are getting to know the new group while learning important exercises and techniques. The winter percussion season will continue into the second semester as the group learns its show music and competes. They have four competitions scheduled, mainly following the Northern California Percussion Alliance (NPCA) competitions, with the first one happening at Fremont High School on Feb. 7.



SMILE: Color guard seniors take a photo prior to final competition.

Additionally, this year, the winter guard, a continuation of the marching band color guard, is following a different competition schedule than the winter percussion. Starting with the California Color Guard Circuit (CCGC) Evaluations Performance in late January, the group has four

other CCGC competitions later in the year. Their last performance is on Mar. 28 for the CCGC Championships at Independence High School.

After almost two months of preparation, the three school bands are performing tonight, on Dec. 12, at 7:00 PM in McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center. As is customary, the December concert features all LGHS bands and choirs, taught by **Ken Nakamoto** and **Maricel Riley**, respectively. Following the choir performance, the Symphonic Band, Crescent Ensemble, and Wind Ensemble will each take the stage to play their rehearsed music.



CADENCE: The bass drums from the percussion team rehearse.

This concert also includes a special set by the Wind Ensemble, the highest-level audition band. Instead of having students perform three pieces as a large band, Mr. Nakamoto split the class into three sections—woodwinds, brass, and percussion—and had each group play two pieces. During class, the groups often split off to practice their individual pieces before having a show and tell. Junior flutist **Darby Hou** shared, "It's been really fun to focus on a smaller group, especially one that we understand well since we're the same type of instrument. My favorite thing about it is hearing the voices we usually don't get to hear in full ensemble." The chamber music unit helps the players focus on improving as an instrument group without having to worry as much about blending with the rest of the band. The group's hard work in December shows their energy, talent, and commitment to producing outstanding music to share with the community.

California communities support families in need

by Advika Anand and Siyona Singhal

Graphics and Humor Editors

As the holiday season approaches, the need for community support grows, and volunteering is an impactful way to contribute. Giving time or effort to local organizations can make a real difference, especially for families experiencing hardships this season. The following community-based organizations are offering upcoming volunteer opportunities and are a great way to spread holiday spirit.

Second Harvest of Silicon Valley is one of the largest food banks in the Bay Area, providing meals to around 500,000 people each month. Their mission is to end hunger in our community, and volunteers play a direct role in helping achieve that goal. Volunteers can choose between sorting and boxing fresh produce and groceries or distributing food boxes to neighborhoods in Silicon Valley, including home-bound clients in Santa Clara and San Mateo.

During the holiday season, Shining Stars, a local program that supports children and young adults with special needs, hosts its annual Christmas event. This event takes place on Dec. 13 and consists of games, a craft station, Santa photos, and other festivities. Volunteers can assist with



HOLIDAY HELP: Volunteers serve meals across the Bay.

running the activities or by accompanying a family throughout the event.

Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley focuses on making homes safer and healthier for low-income residents in Santa Clara County. Since 1991, they have repaired thousands of houses and community facilities, mainly supporting elderly homeowners and people with disabilities who are unable to

manage home services independently. Volunteering with Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley during the holiday season is especially impactful, as safe and comfortable homes allow families to come together in celebration.

Kids Against Hunger Bay Area is an organization focused on distributing nutritious meals worldwide, particularly to malnourished children in developing countries. Teens, children, and adults can volunteer to help assemble the packages, weigh the bags, seal them, and load them onto a pallet to be shipped.

The Salvation Army provides many services for those in need, including food pantries, homeless shelters, domestic violence support, and more. If you want to give back to your community but don't have time to volunteer, the Salvation Army partners with Walmart to put on the Angel Tree program. Children write a wishlist on a tag, which employees then hang on a Christmas tree at a Walmart or Salvation Army location, and shoppers pick up a tag to buy the gifts listed.

House of Hope is a food pantry created by Calvary Church, which seeks to build relationships and connections. You can volunteer to restock the pantry, shop for items, or even deliver food to homes.

This holiday season, we encourage you to give back to the community and to find time to bring joy into someone else's life. There are so many opportunities to volunteer or donate. Even the smallest act can make the biggest difference.



HELPING HAND: Local charities expand aid for families.

SJ hosts cultural sunrise

by Abby Coven

News Editor

On Thanksgiving, local Aztec dance group Capulli Ocelochihuahatl co-hosted the 14th annual Sunrise Ceremony at the Mexican Heritage Plaza in East San Jose. Capulli Ocelochihuahatl, a women-led Aztec and cultural group, organized the event. The group preserves indigenous culture and tradition through dance and community work. Since 2012, the South Bay gathering has been co-hosted by the School of Arts and Culture and in solidarity with the International Indian Treaty Council. Often referred to as "Unthanksgiving Day," the annual gathering acknowledges and honors the truth behind the century-long massacre of indigenous peoples following European colonization of America.



UNITY IN MOTION: Ceremony gathers many cultures.

Organizers say the East San Jose ceremony draws its inspiration from the Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony on Alcatraz Island every year. Held on Alcatraz Island in 1975, the first Unthanksgiving Day commemorated the unsuccessful attempt by a group of Native Americans to re-occupy Alcatraz Island some years after the prison closed. The founders chose Thanksgiving Day to be a reminder of the losses the indigenous people experienced and to honor their survival and resistance.

Each year, Tamara Mozahuani Alvarado, a member of Capulli Ocelochihuahatl, which means "jaguar women," leads the ceremony. The morning starts with a land acknowledgement, recognizing the historical and continuing presence of the Muwekma Ohlone peoples in Santa Clara Valley. Tribal representatives and community leaders speak about the ceremony's meaning, including Julie Dominguez, Ambassador of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe in the Bay Area, and Rosanna Alvarez, local poet and West Valley College professor.

The ceremony is held in a giant circle, punctuated by Indigenous drums, songs, and dances. A fire lies in the center, accompanied by a traditional teepee in the backdrop. Alvarado elaborated, "It's traditional in native Mexican ceremonies and in other Indigenous cultures to make offerings to fire with tobacco or other plant material." Ceremony guests line up to toss the mixture into the fire as an offering and opportunity to pray and reflect, according to Alvarado.

Alvarado shared that "this ceremony, for me, is an opportunity to practice solidarity with my native relatives in this country. My native roots are in Mexico; however, we live here." Alvarado plans to continue the ceremony annually and hopes to shed light on Indigenous language, songs, and beliefs for not only Indigenous people, but others as well. All members of the community are welcome to join. (Sources: National Today, School of Arts & Culture, UMass Library)



INDIGENOUS PRIDE: Cultural dancers honor tradition.

Local tea shop opens up

by Tori Schubert

People Editor

Dazzling customers with a welcoming, bright pink interior, Ume Tea recently held its grand opening following the closure of boba shop Tea Fermata and is prepared to devotedly serve the community. Tea Fermata originally opened in 2019 as the first boba shop in Los Gatos. Since then, additional shops have been opened nearby, such as Auzzy the Bear Cafe and T4. However, none holds the same atmosphere as Tea Fermata, with its bright blue walls and lively signs. After a recent post on their Instagram (@teafermata), they announced the closing of their store for "internal upgrades," stating, "We look forward to welcoming you back in the future with a refreshed look!" Since then, Ume Tea has taken over the location, sure to uphold Tea Fermata's vibrant standards.



UME STYLE: Shelves showcase the shop's new look.

With grand opening events from Nov. 22 to 25, the shop held a variety of offers, including discounts, Buy-One-Get-One deals, and free merchandise. By providing customers with a unique offer each day, they certainly made their mark on Los Gatos, becoming the talk of the town immediately.

Ume Tea provides some similar and also new menu items compared to Tea Fermata, allowing for a refreshed look and taste, while still catering to customers' favorites. They also offer seasonal menu items and often introduce new flavors and blends throughout the year. The popcorn chicken is one of many returning menu items, along with certain drinks, making Ume Tea a new yet familiar

establishment. LGHS sophomore and boba fanatic **Kousha Ardakani** described Ume as "a great addition to downtown Los Gatos."

With locations spanning from California to Illinois, the franchise has kept a wide range of customers engaged, not only through its varying menu options but also with a unique rewards system. A certain category of menu items, known as Honor of Kings (HOK), can earn customers mystery HOK badges. If a customer collects every badge, they can win prizes such as an Ume Blind Box, gift cards, and even an iPhone 17. In addition, they hold a membership reward system, earning an Ume coin for every dollar spent. Customers can accumulate coins, receive rewards and coupons, or spend coins on drinks and food items. These systems ensure an interactive experience between the customer and business, while simultaneously creating memorable encounters. The company values more than just customer satisfaction, stating, "We believe in creating special moments that celebrate the unique connection between you and me."

With its lively ambiance, variety of food and drinks, and interactive quests, Ume Tea is waiting for your visit in the heart of downtown, eager to meet its next customer.



FRESH START: Ume Tea welcomes visitors inside.

News-in-Brief: LGHS teacher on Jeopardy! and more

Fantasy of Lights comes to LG: On Dec. 9 through Dec. 30, Los Gatos's beloved Fantasy of Lights Festival returns to Vasona Park for its 27th year. The festival is a mile and a half long display of lighting decorations showcasing different themes and settings. Some notable decorations that make their annual return include dinosaurs, a basketball Santa, and flowers. Prior to the event's official opening to cars, visitors had the opportunity to participate in the walk-through event on Dec. 6 and 7. This year, the fantasy is using new environmentally friendly LED lighting; therefore, visitors should expect this year's decorations to outshine past ones. Tickets are available on TicketSpice and are a must-buy to get into the holiday spirit. (Source: Santa Clara County)

- **Megan Saul**, Editor-in-Chief

Turkey trots take place nationwide: On Thanksgiving morning, 1,056 Turkey Trot running events took place throughout the United States; of those, 69 were in California. The Turkey Trot began in 1896 in an effort to "provide health, hope, and a home." Silicon Valley held its inaugural Turkey Trot in 2005



HOLIDAY RUN: Community races to support local charities for Thanksgiving.

and has been going strong since. This year, there were over 1,000 runners at the local Silicon Valley Trot, with all proceeds

going to nonprofit organizations including Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, Healthier Kids Foundation, Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County, and Home First. The countdown to the 2026 Turkey Trot has begun, and now is your time to start training to run and support!

(Source: Silicon Valley Turkey Trot)

- **Kloe Adams**, Games Creator

LGHS Teacher attends Jeopardy! after years of waiting: On Dec. 2, Jeopardy! featured LGHS ninth-grade English teacher, Anne Martyn. She became one of only 40 selected from 700,000 applicants. Martyn, a longtime fan of the show who began watching with her husband, auditioned for years before finally receiving the long-awaited call. When describing her experience, Martyn highlighted the incredible people who created such a supportive atmosphere, emphasizing that they encouraged everyone to "do the best [they] can and go for it and have fun," which made the show as much about camaraderie as competition.

- **Gowri Sunil**, News Editor

- Vaccine variants alter technology
- NYC selects Mamdani as mayor

Emerging mRNA vaccines begin effective trials

by Advika Anand

Graphics Editor

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines have become widely known and used in technology beyond COVID. Pharmacists have developed new vaccines, and in some cases, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has already approved them to fight seasonal flu, respiratory viruses like respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and possibly even combinations of diseases in a single shot.

One important development is Moderna's seasonal flu vaccine, mRNA-1010. In a Phase 3 clinical trial, involving over 40,000 adults aged 50 and older, mRNA-1010 proved more effective than a standard licensed flu vaccine. According to Moderna, mRNA-1010 offered a 26.6% increase in relative vaccine efficacy compared with a standard-dose flu shot. For adults 65 and older, the improvement was similar. Experts say that higher efficacy could reduce hospitalizations and protect older adults during severe flu seasons.

In 2024, the US FDA approved mRESVIA, also known as mRNA-1345, a vaccine against the RSV. That makes it the first mRNA vaccine approved in the US for a disease other than COVID. Companies are also working on combined mRNA vaccines such as mRNA-1083, which targets both flu and COVID-19. These combination vaccines could

make it easier for people to receive protection against multiple viruses in a single visit to the doctor. Clinical trials suggest that immune responses from combination vaccines are strong and comparable to taking separate shots.



TESTING: Scientists develop and improve mRNA vaccines to combat illnesses.

The arrival of mRNA flu and RSV vaccines could reshape how people in the United States approach yearly vaccinations. Adults may soon have access to more reliable protection, and combination vaccines could reduce the need for multiple injections. Regulators still need to review and clear some vaccines, and approval depends on demonstrating safety and effectiveness. Some experts question how much better mRNA flu vaccines will be in the real world, where virus strains evolve, and populations vary. The public's trust will determine whether mRNA vaccines become widely accepted or remain a niche option.

The rapid rise of mRNA vaccines beyond COVID represents a change in the way infectious diseases are fought in the US. mRNA-based flu shots, RSV vaccines, and combination vaccines could become part of regular health care, providing stronger protection against common illnesses and changing the way Americans view vaccination. Researchers are exploring how mRNA technology could eventually target other diseases, including certain types of cancer. Pharmaceutical companies are also investing in global distribution strategies to make these vaccines more accessible beyond the US. (Sources: ACCESS Newswire, Ars Technica, Benzinga, CIDRAP, CNBC, Moderna Inc, RTT News, US Pharmacist)

Mamdani secures mayor vote

by Quinn Hathaway

Media Production Editor

On Nov. 4, the New York City majority elected Zohran Mamdani as their new mayor, amidst controversy and heated political discussions. Mamdani, 34 years old and previously the Queens assembly member, is the first person of South Asian descent and the youngest mayor in over a century to head New York City. He is also a Muslim, socialist, and Democrat, all aspects he made a point to highlight during his campaign.

His mayoral opponents were Andrew Cuomo, the state's previous governor, who ran as an Independent, and Republican Curtis Sliwa. During campaign season, President Donald Trump openly endorsed Cuomo while castigating Mamdani. Trump posted on X: "Whether you personally like Andrew Cuomo or not, you really have no choice...He is capable, Mamdani is not!" Trump also slighted Mamdani a multitude of times, calling him "a communist lunatic" and referring to him as "whatever the hell his name is." Mamdani retaliated against these verbal attacks, promising to "Trump-proof" the city if elected.



SAY CHEESE: Mamdani poses with the New York skyline.

The mayoral election garnered more than two million votes, the highest number of votes in this century. Mamdani won with 50.4% of the votes, with Cuomo taking 41.6% and Sliwa garnering merely 7.1%. Mamdani's speech following his win continued to echo the themes promoted in his campaign: offering free bus fares for all, freezing stabilized rents, installing universal child care, increasing the minimum wage, and lowering the cost of living by raising taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers and businesses. He projected themes of hope and unity, explaining, "We chose hope together. Hope over tyranny. Hope over big money and small ideas. Hope over despair. We won because New Yorkers allowed themselves to hope that the impossible could be made possible."

Following Mamdani's win, Trump was less than receptive and continued to attack New York's mayor-elect with racist remarks, snide comments about socialism, and antisemitism, reiterating his view that New York City may be on a perennial downward spiral. Despite their media sparring, Trump and Mamdani met on Nov. 21 in the Oval Office and held a surprisingly cordial conversation. The two supposedly connected in the interest of working together civilly in support of New York City, with Trump saying he's "cheering" for Mamdani and Mamdani saying the meeting was "productive." Despite several awkward moments, including a reporter asked Mamdani if he still stood by calling Trump a "fascist," particularly when Trump cut Mamdani off to reply, "That's OK, you can just say it. It's easier, it's easier than explaining it," the country overall saw the meeting as a success in navigating the pair's political differences.

Mamdani begins his term on Jan. 1, the country watching to see how this young man will run New York City and live up to his campaign's promises.

(Sources: BBC, CBS, NBC, NPR, NY Times)

US troops create controversy

by Atharava Pandey

Sports Editor

On Nov. 30, US District Judge Jia Cobb ordered the Trump administration to end its deployment of National Guard troops in Washington, DC. She concluded that President Donald Trump's use of national troops was illegally intruding on the authority of the local officials already present. According to Cobb, while the president maintains the right to protect federal property, he does not have the right to deploy the National Guard or call in troops from other states. She has put her decision on hold for 21 days to allow for any response from the administration. There were many different reactions to this decision.

After Cobb's ruling, DC Attorney General Brian Schwab stated, "Normalizing the use of military troops for domestic law enforcement sets a dangerous precedent, where the President can disregard states' independence and deploy troops wherever and whenever he wants—with no check on his military power." The White House, however, stood its ground. According to spokeswoman Abigail Jackson, "President Trump is well within his lawful authority to deploy the National Guard in Washington, DC... This lawsuit is nothing more than another attempt to undermine the President's highly successful operations to stop violent crime in DC."

Just one week later, on Thanksgiving, tragedy struck as two National Guard members were shot in DC near the White House. It is suspected that somebody who entered the country in late 2021 carried out the shooting. Reacting to the crime, President Trump said, "I will permanently pause migration from all Third World Countries to allow the US system to fully [recover] and terminate all of the millions of Biden illegal admissions."

During Judge Cobb's ordered 21-day stay, in which she gave the Trump administration three weeks to appeal her decision, the shooting has

now further intensified debate over the constitutionality of the National Guard deployment. Some people have argued that this shooting shows the dangers in DC and the need for guards to protect the public. Others have argued that this attack shows that troops should not be used for routine patrolling, as it puts them in the line of danger and blurs the line between military and civilian.

The issue began in August, when Trump signed an executive order declaring a state of emergency in Washington, DC. As a result, the administration sent more than 2,300 troops from eight different states to DC. This was not the only city where national troops stationed, however; the administration also sent troops to Los Angeles and attempted to do the same in Chicago and Portland. It is unclear how long these deployments will last in Washington, but according to Schwab's office, they are likely to stay until next summer.

(Sources: AP News, Daily Caller, PBS)



ATTENTION: Two National Guard members take their post.

National News-in-Brief: Thanksgiving travel and more

Holiday travels surpass previous records: As travelers returned for their Thanksgiving break, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) confirmed that this was the busiest travel period in history, breaking several records. The Nov. 30 travel numbers broke the record from Jul. 22, 2024, when TSA scanned 3.1 million passengers. Over 82 million people traveled for the Thanksgiving holiday this year. Before 2024, TSA had exceeded three million passengers twice in its history. Each of the TSA's ten busiest air travel days since July 2024 have exceeded three million travelers. Many more cancellations have been due to the issue involving the Airbus 320 planes, and a vulnerability to solar flares has emerged after a recent mid-air incident on a JetBlue A320 on Oct. 30.

(Sources: BBC, CNN)

-Noah Gloege, World Editor

Trump pardons past Honduran convicted president: On Nov. 28, President Donald Trump announced that he will grant a pardon to former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, whom a US jury convicted last year in a major drug trafficking case. Hernández was president from 2014 to 2022, and his first term involved multiple corruption scandals that led to widespread protests. Less than a month after leaving office in 2022, Hernández was arrested and extradited to the US to face drug-trafficking and weapons charges. Although he denied tracking drugs, providing police protection to cartels, or

accepting bribes, a jury found Hernández guilty in March of 2024.

(Sources: NY Times)

-Jordan Park, Website Manager



HUSTLE: People rush to their gates for the infamous packed day of travel.

Monks walk for religious amiability: Two dozen Buddhist monks began a walk for peace on Oct. 26 in Fort Worth, Texas. Their main goal is to "raise awareness of peace, loving kindness, and compassion across America and the world," according to the Walk for Peace group. The monks plan to travel to ten states before reaching Washington, DC. Within Texas, the monks walked through several cities, including Austin and Houston. They walk along roads and highways while law

enforcement escorts them or a vehicle trails. While walking on the side of the U.S. Highway 90 on Nov. 19, a truck struck the monks' escort vehicle, ricocheting into two of the monks. One monk had substantial leg injuries, while the other monk sustained less serious wounds. The monks resumed their walk on Nov. 22, "with steadfast determination," Walk for Peace noted.

(Sources: AP News, Houston Public Media)

-Kloe Adams, Games Creator

Supreme Court discusses campaign finance limits: On Dec. 9, the Supreme Court looked into removing limits on campaign finance. Vice President JD Vance brought this issue to debate, challenging the current limits on national party committees' spending and insisting that these limits violate the First Amendment. While the liberal justices asserted their opposition to changing campaign finance limits, which currently grant Democrats a financial advantage during midterm elections, conservative judges were hesitant to voice their arguments. Although the Supreme Court expects the case to last until summer, lawyers are unsure whether the court will follow through in evaluating the case and approve granting political parties the ability to spend money on candidates without restrictions, or will dismiss it, keeping the current standard.

(Sources: NBC, NY Times, Politico)

-Megan Saul, Editor-in-Chief

- Brazil hosts UN Convention
- New moss survives space conditions

UN Convention on climate change takes place in Brazil

by Atharava Pandey
Sports Editor

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which is run by the The Conference of the Parties (COP30), was held in Belem, Brazil, from Nov. 10 to Nov. 21, resulting in many key outcomes for the world's environmental future.

The public opinion was that COP29, the previous summit, failed to achieve the breakthroughs it set out to accomplish. Mainly, countries initially agreed to mobilize 300 billion dollars per year until 2035 to finance climate action, which experts still view as well below the one trillion-dollar minimum needed to protect underprivileged

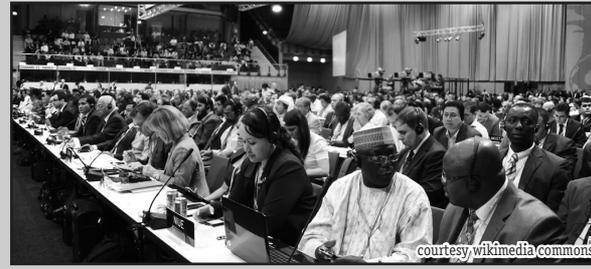


BOAS-VINDAS: International delegates gather in Belem, Brazil in November.

communities and mitigate climate change. However, this outcome indicated a broader call towards mobilizing the one trillion dollars by 2035. Despite the apparent difficulties in reaching a consensus that keeps global health in mind, there were many bright spots at COP29, including an agreement that promised to support well-regulated carbon markets. This made a lot of people believe that there was a bright future ahead of them. In addition, it also showed more commitment from countries such as Brazil. Overall, although COP29 disappointed many, it still resulted in a lot of hope that these climate summits could make valuable contributions.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva started COP30 by calling for the world to shift away from fossil fuels. However, this turned out to be a dead end, as oil-rich Arab nations and others, depending on this resource, quickly blocked any mention. Nearly three-fourths of the world's greenhouse gas emissions since 2020 have come from coal, oil, and gas. These statistics crushed da Silva's hopes for a quick transition from fossil fuels to clean energy.

This year's climate summit largely yielded a tenuous compromise that sidestepped most countries' key demands. However, it committed wealthy countries to triple their spending to help other developing countries adapt to climate change. The only real issue countries agreed upon was the need to show global unity in climate talks, as well as the idea that long-polluting wealthy countries should bear the brunt of the damage they caused.



MEETING IN SESSION: World leaders discuss future environmental legislation.

Overall, although leaders made some progress in determining who was responsible for fighting the global warming pandemic, fossil fuel giants mainly stymied efforts to end fossil fuel reliance. Even though COP30 managed to bring world leaders together, it struggled to shine a light on glaring issues such as deforestation. Because of its shortcomings, many view COPs as a waste of time and resources. However, the truth is that these summits are also the only space where a small island economy holds the same weight as an economic superpower. Although COPs need significant reform, they will remain necessary for years to come. (Sources: Reuters, The Conversation, The Nature Conservancy)

Deadly cyclone hits Sri Lanka

by Dylan Wadhwa
News Editor

Sri Lanka is confronting one of the most devastating natural disasters in its modern history after a powerful cyclone triggered days of flooding and landslides across the island, leaving more than 350 people dead and hundreds still unaccounted for.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said the storm's impact has stretched emergency resources beyond their limits, calling the situation "the most demanding national disaster we have ever faced." The storm destroyed entire towns, and damage estimates continue to rise as floodwaters slowly recede.

Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on Nov. 30, unleashing torrential rains on nearly every region of the country. By Monday, officials reported that more than a million residents had been affected, with tens of thousands displaced from their homes. Rescue missions remain ongoing, with teams navigating flooded roads, collapsed bridges, and remote villages cut off by landslides. Aircraft and personnel from neighboring India joined the effort as local responders struggled to reach trapped communities.



RECOVER: Citizens wade through high water level to safety.

The island of 22 million has weathered civil conflict, terror attacks, the pandemic, and a severe economic collapse all within recent history. Many residents say this disaster feels different because it has struck nationwide, sparing almost no district.

Humanitarian groups report widespread housing loss, with a United Nations assessment estimated more than 15,000 homes were destroyed. Community leaders say 22 of the country's 25 districts have seen severe damage, overwhelming local shelters and relief centers. In Colombo's outskirts, residents waded through chest-high water to reach points where volunteers handed out food and medicine from boats.

In the war-torn eastern districts, the cyclone has compounded years of hardship. Farmers who were still recovering from economic shocks and prior restrictions on fertilizer use say their crops have been wiped out again. "We survived the fighting, the shortages, everything," said one farmer in Batticaloa. "Now we are starting over once more."

Along the western coast, families camped in tents on higher ground, keeping watch over submerged homes below. Some said they feared looting once the waters receded. "We can't leave our houses unwatched, even if they're underwater," said resident Ganga Niroshini, who spent the night the cyclone first hit directing a flashlight toward her property.

While electricity and some transportation services were partially restored on Dec. 1, major repairs remain far away. Nearly ten bridges have been damaged, and more than 200 primary roads are impassable, according to national officials. Access to clean drinking water remains one of the most urgent concerns.

The government, already operating under the strain of an economic stabilization program and public skepticism, faces an immense rebuilding challenge.

(Sources: CNN, NY Times, Reuters, The Guardian)

Earthquake hits Bangladesh

by Lydia Liu
Public Relations Manager

A recent earthquake in Bangladesh has renewed attention to the country's vulnerability to seismic disasters. On Nov. 21, 2025, a magnitude 5.5 quake struck near Narsingdi, a city east of Dhaka. The earthquake hit at a shallow depth of about ten kilometers and produced vigorous shaking across central Bangladesh for roughly 26 seconds. According to data summarized in Reuters, at least ten people were killed, and more than six hundred were injured. Damage included cracked walls, collapsed railings, and weakened foundations, especially in older buildings.

Bangladesh's position at the junction of the Indian, Eurasian, and Burma Plates makes it highly vulnerable to earthquakes because constant pressure between these plates creates frequent seismic activity. This danger increases because much of the country sits on soft delta soil formed by the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna Rivers. Research published through ResearchGate highlights the ongoing tectonic stress, and scientists at the American Museum of Natural History explain that these loose sediments can amplify shaking and sometimes liquefy during strong quakes, which makes severe structural damage far more likely.

Historical records show that the region has experienced powerful earthquakes in the past, including an event in 1762 that may have reached magnitude 8.5-8.8, according to research summarized on Reuters.

With a population exceeding 170 million and cities packed with rapidly constructed buildings, the country faces significant structural vulnerability. A recent seismic risk assessment from the Global Earthquake Model Foundation found that many structures are non-engineered or were built

without proper earthquake-resistant design. Even reinforced concrete buildings often lack adequate seismic reinforcement. Adding to these concerns, the international disaster platform ThinkHazard rates Bangladesh as having a very high earthquake hazard level and cautions that a major quake could trigger widespread structural collapse.

The Bangladesh earthquake is an example of interactions between fast urban growth, geology, and infrastructure, prevalent occurrences in many developing countries. When cities expand on unstable ground without adequate safety planning, a natural event can quickly become a major disaster. Understanding how communities prepare for these risks helps explain why a moderate earthquake can have such serious consequences in places like Bangladesh.

(Sources: Daily Star, Think Hazard, Research Gate, Reuters)

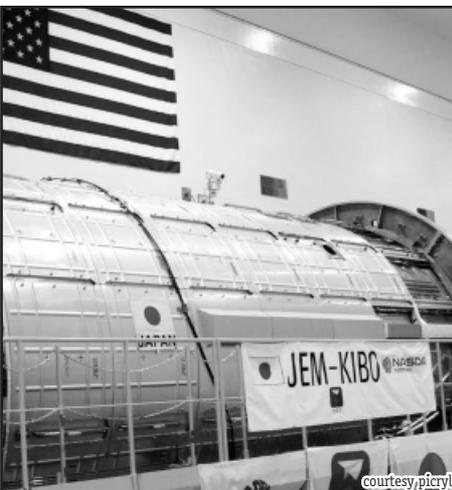


RUIN: Bangladesh recovers from deadly earthquake.

Japanese researchers discover moss survival in the ISS

by Tanvi Ambekar
Opinion Editor

Although Earth's life forms are incredibly diverse, most cannot survive more than a few seconds in the vacuum of outer space. However, a recent study



NEW DISCOVERY: Scientists test moss in the ISS lab.

found that spores of some moss species endured nine months of cosmic radiation and were still able to germinate after returning to Earth.

Japanese scientist Tomomichi Fujita at Hokkaido University led this study that focused on Physcomitrium patens, more commonly known as spreading earthmoss. This moss thrives in many extreme environments, including, according to ScienceDaily News, "the scorching deserts of Death Valley, the Antarctic tundra, and the cooling surfaces of active volcanoes," leading the team to wonder whether its cells might also withstand the conditions of outer space.

The researchers tested cells from three life stages of the moss: protonemata, brood cells, and sporophytes. Extreme temperatures and ultraviolet light quickly killed the protonemata. The brood cells fared somewhat better, but sporophytes proved most resilient with nearly 1,000 times greater radiation resistance, and surviving both deep-freeze and intense heat treatments.

With cautious optimism, the team launched hundreds of dried sporophyte capsules to the International Space Station (ISS) in March of 2022 to be mounted on a small exposure panel outside

Japan's Kibo laboratory module. After 283 days in the vacuum of space, subjected to radiation and solar UV, scientists retrieved and tested for viability; more than 80% of the spores had survived, and most successfully germinated into healthy moss. Fujita and his team suggested that the spores' resilience stems from the nature of their protective coverings, which absorb UV radiation and shield the DNA inside.

For future astronauts and space biologists, this discovery points to moss not as a food source but as a foundation for interplanetary infrastructure. Moss is compact, needs little soil, and can photosynthesize under minimal light. Dense mats could one day support future Mars or moon bases by trapping moisture, producing oxygen, binding dusty soil, and creating a first layer for essential, more complex crops.

These remarkable results have heightened concerns about planetary protection. The ease with which the sporophytes endured space conditions has caused scientists to question the unforeseen consequences of unintentionally contaminating other planets with Earth's organisms. As humanity advances towards inhabiting other planets, the role of strict scientific regulations and precautions becomes ever more important.

The adaptability of these sporophytes reveals both the opportunities and risks that come with humanity's efforts to expand beyond Earth, offering a potential building block for future colonies while highlighting the critical need for planetary safeguards.

(Sources: ABC News, Phys Org, ScienceDaily, Science)



GROWTH: The spores are thriving beyond typical conditions.

- Grab a friend to play Dots & Boxes
- Test your holiday fact knowledge

GAMES

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Connections

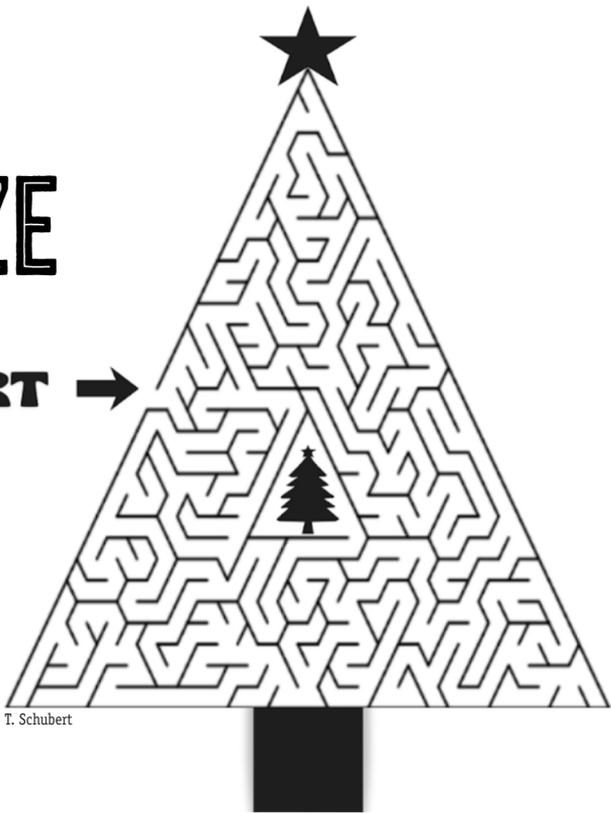
gingerbread	frat	ice skate	doll
grinch	rudolph	sled	kevin
baby	three kings	cradle	cookies
snowball	dog	sheep	buddy

C. Casal Montserrat

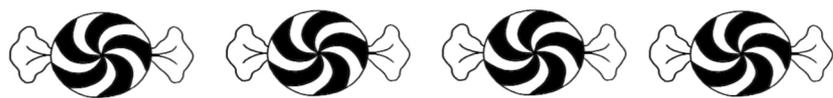


THE MAZE

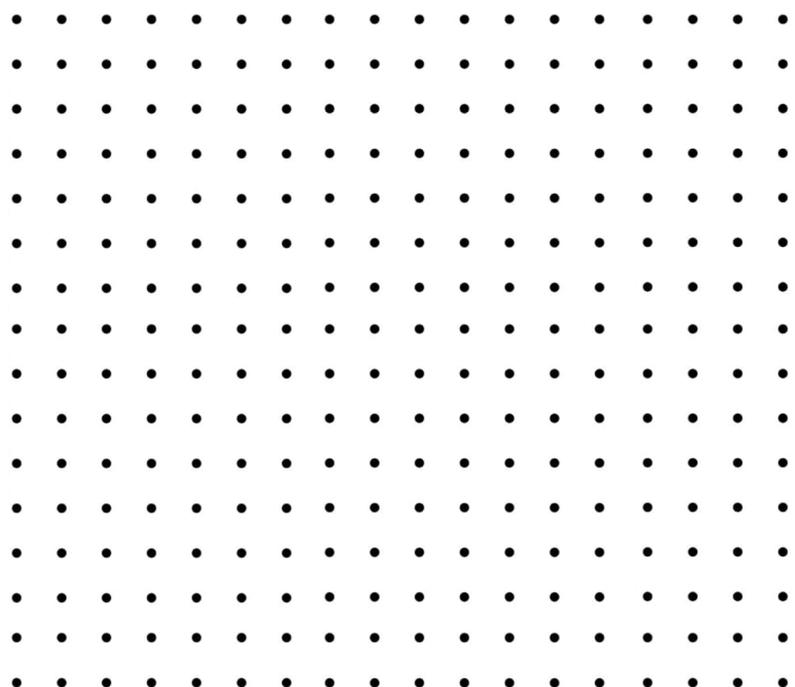
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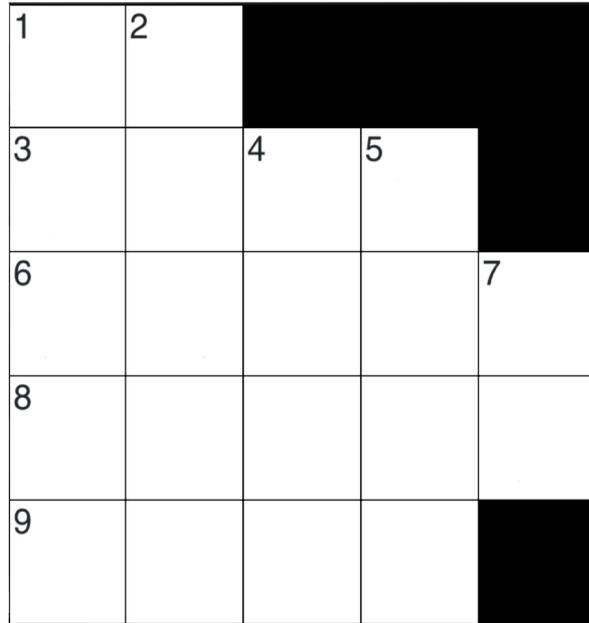
T. Schubert



DOTS & BOXES



Mini Crossword



S. Muthukrishnan



Down

1. Anticipate
2. Who might climb down your chimney on Christmas Eve
4. Speech impediment that prevents one from saying "S"
5. General ___ chicken
7. Airline code for Emirates

Across

1. First word in a 2022 Harry Styles hit
3. Disney's creator
6. Star ____, the winter spice that gives licorice its flavor
8. Response to a sincere apology
9. Knocks gently

CHAIN CONNECTIONS

Merry

C ____

D ____

T ____

Z ____

O ____

S ____

T ____

R ____

S ____

Bought

T. Ambekar



Holiday Facts

1. Start with the number of years of high school
 2. Add the number of days in December
 3. Subtract the last two numbers of the year we are going into
 4. Divide by the number of reindeer Santa has
 5. Lastly, add the number that the letter nun gives you in the Dreidel game
- Scan the QR code at the bottom of the page to find the answer!

$$(1. ___ + 2. ___ - 3. ___) / 4. ___ + 5. ___ = ___$$

M. Saul



RULES



SOLUTIONS

EDITORIAL

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• LGHS students should support the Los Gatos Library

El Gato urges students to support the LG Library

by Fuyu Banno, Hayley Strahs, and Gowri Sunil
Graphics Editor, Editor-in-Chief, and News Editor

Since its reopening in 2012, the gorgeously renovated Los Gatos Library has attracted community members of all ages to browse, work, and socialize amidst its stacks. With 77,000 books, 8,000 movies, and unlimited access to extensive e-book collections, the LG Library has a title for every demographic. Beyond its literary treasure trove, the library's facilities are state-of-the-art and provide a cozy yet spacious study spot for students at LGHS and surrounding schools. However, to maintain its environment and resources, the LG Library relies on citizens for service feedback. LGHS students should utilize the library's numerous teen offerings and lobby local politicians to fight recent budget cuts.

The LG Library is home to more than just books. For students, the Teen Room offers a place to chat, collaborate, and create art projects. Junior **Sam Ematrudo** goes to the library nearly every day after school and explained, "It has a really good energy and vibe. It can be calm, it can be loud, but it's just a nice place [overall]." During her frequent visits, Ematrudo often participates in the free Teen Room activities: "They've had painting and drawing. They had bracelet-making, which I really liked." In addition to its teen workshops, the library offers events for young children and the elderly, for which high school students can volunteer. New events constantly pop up on the library's online calendar, such as tech help for the elderly, English Second Language (ESL) conversation groups, and animal meet-and-greets. More than just a hangout space, the LG Library is a hub for creativity and community building.

Many students are unaware of the technology the library provides to Los Gatans. Through a form on their website, patrons can utilize the library's in-house

3D printer to produce objects from Thingiverse, a vast database of 3D design files. The library also loans out sewing machines, portable WiFi routers, telescopes, instruments, and other specialized items.

Yet the services that make the library so vital to the community require funding, which is currently facing challenges. The LG library is considered a stand-alone library, meaning it receives funding from the town and has a smaller budget than larger facilities. Although being a stand-alone library

means closer community connections, it also brings about greater strains on the library itself and its staff as a result of recent funding cuts. According to the San Jose Spotlight, "The Los Gatos Town Council unanimously approved a fiscally sound budget for fiscal year 2025-26 June 3 after facing a \$2 million budget deficit largely caused by expenses outpacing cash flow." Due to this two-million-dollar deficiency, the council decided to cut around \$900,000 in funding, which included \$104,350 to library services. So far, the effects of this have been

immediate and apparent to those who work there. LGHS senior **Natalie Schubert**, who shelves books at the library, pointed out, "We have had to cut a lot of the janitorial staff, and so now the librarians are having to take out the trash and vacuum and clean the carpets before we close."

Budget cuts also directly affect the number of books available to library patrons. Librarian Amanda Flowers discussed the ways in which cutting these resources affects the library's overall programming: "If we have less staff, that means less people are able to run a program. If we have less books, that means more legwork and making sure that we have the needed books on shelves sooner. So they all impact each other." Even amid these difficult cuts, the library tries to accommodate the community to make the facility as comfortable and accessible as possible. Flowers explained, "We try to keep the things people care about at the top [of our priority], making sure we allocate enough funds for those." Following the last budget cut, the library decided to eliminate two newspapers and streaming services. While insignificant to many library patrons, the service cut affected the minority that relies upon those resources.

The LG library continues to spark creativity and bring the Los Gatos community together through its many offerings. From helpful programs to technological resources, the library provides a variety of tools on a daily basis, not just to students, but to individuals of all ages. As much as the library helps students, students also need to help the library. By attending and using its teen-centered events and tools along with emailing the town's mayor, town council members, and youth commission library leaders about budget-related concerns, LGHS students can show the town that the library deserves a larger share of funding. LGHS students should express their appreciation for this beloved institution, a vibrant center of lifelong learning.

(Source: San Jose Spotlight)

A. Pan



DECEMBER/JANUARY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
14 Hanukkah begins at sundown	15 "Skinny Monday"	16 Finals Week	17 Finals Week	18 Finals Week	19 Winter break begins	20
21	22 Hanukkah ends	23 Boys' Basketball vs Hillsdale	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26	27 Girls' Varsity Basketball at Willow Glen Tournament
28	29	30 Boys' Varsity Basketball Palo Alto Tournament	31 New Year's Eve	1 New Year's Day	2	3 Girls' Basketball at Mountain View
4 Winter break ends	5	6 Boys' Soccer at Saratoga	7 Girls' Basketball vs. Fremont	8 Soccer at Mountain View	9 Basketball at Milpitas	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17



12/12/25

A. Pan

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Subscriber \$30

- Students should study abroad
- Corn is bad for our environment

OPINION

EL GATO • FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025 • LOS GATOS HIGH SCHOOL • WWW.ELGATONWS.COM

Pandey argues that betting ruins the integrity of sports

by Atharava Pandey
Sports Editor



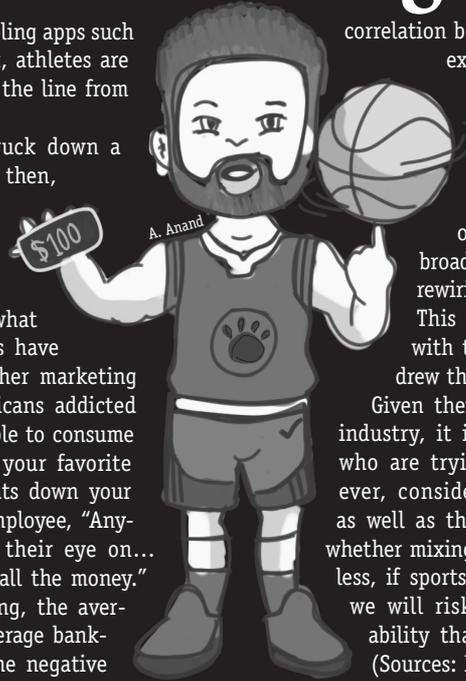
In light of the NBA's latest gambling scandal, the issue of sports betting — the act of placing money on sports for financial gain — is now impossible to ignore. What used to be a simple pastime has turned into a perfectly orchestrated obsession with odds, a player's over/under, and parlays. Fans, athletes, and coaches must focus on the sport rather than the money generated by betting. The rise of sports betting actively threatens the integrity of the sports that we love.

In October, the FBI's gambling investigation resulted in 34 arrests, most notably including Portland Trail Blazers head coach Chauncey Billups and Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier. Authorities charged Billups for running illegal poker games in collaboration with the Italian mafia; they charged Rozier for having thrown multiple games as a Heat player by faking injuries and intentionally making poor plays.

The arrests of Rozier and Billups raise a daunting question on the integrity of sports. After all, nothing is stopping a player from accidentally dropping a pass or catching a mysterious illness

before gameday. With the rise of gambling apps such as DraftKings and Caesars Sportsbook, athletes are more incentivized than ever to cross the line from competition to corruption.

In 2018, the Supreme Court struck down a federal ban on sports betting. Back then, Americans were gambling five billion dollars on sports games. Now, that number is close to an astounding 150 billion dollars. Make no mistake: the gambling industry knows exactly what it is doing. These betting companies have masterfully used advertising and other marketing techniques to get millions of Americans addicted to gambling. Nowadays, it is impossible to consume any sports content without having your favorite figures shove gambling advertisements down your throat. In the words of a FanDuel employee, "Anybody under twenty-five they have their eye on... [those are] the guys that bring you all the money." In states with legalized sports betting, the average credit score is lower, and the average bankruptcy rate is higher, pointing to the negative



correlation between gambling and financial metrics. For example, California is one of the largest states in the country that does not legalize sports betting. It is also, coincidentally, the largest economy in the US.

It is time to make significant changes in the sports world. Cutting down on gambling advertisements during sports broadcasts in particular would go a long way in rewiring American minds away from gambling. This shift would also allow fans to reconnect with the genuine appreciation of the game that drew them in.

Given their power to influence a 150 billion dollar industry, it is difficult to pin the blame on athletes who are trying to secure generational wealth. However, considering the addictive nature of gambling as well as the popularity of sports, one must wonder whether mixing the two is a recipe for disaster. Nevertheless, if sports continue to be intertwined with betting, we will risk losing the excitement and unpredictability that made us sports fans in the first place. (Sources: Berkeley Business Review, ESPN, Statnews)

Study abroad in high school

by Britt Melinauskas
National Editor



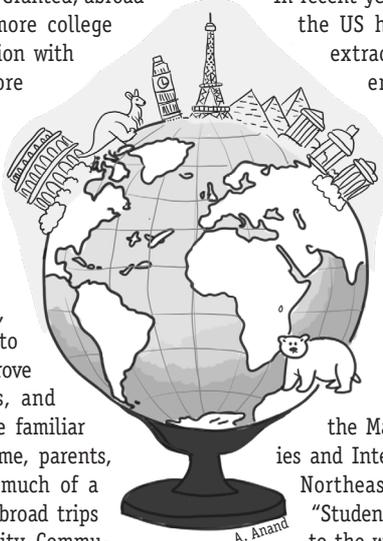
A typical summer for a high school student may consist of trips, college programs, extracurricular activities, and time to relax with friends and family. Yet, students rarely engage in summer abroad programs to immerse themselves in a new language or country. Granted, abroad programs typically attract more college students due to their affiliation with many universities. Still, more high schools should have accessible travel programs for students so that they may participate in overseas summer experiences.

Not only do these immersive summer programs expose students to diverse cultures, they also require students to adapt to language barriers, improve their problem-solving skills, and gain more independence. The familiar comforts that come with home, parents, siblings, and friends define much of a student's everyday routine; abroad trips encourage change and flexibility. Communicating, navigating, and adapting in an unfamiliar environment present challenges that traditional school routines rarely offer. Travel abroad programs help high school students become more self-sufficient and embrace positive pressures. Studying abroad also exposes them to different cultures and ways of life. Reading signs and

transit maps in another language, budgeting and spending money, adjusting to schedules, and learning new social norms all strengthen students' problem-solving skills.

According to the United States Department of State, "Every year, more than 300,000 American students study, intern, or volunteer abroad for academic credit on programs," yet, as noted by the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), "Only about 2% of U.S. high school students participate in study abroad programs each year."

In recent years, high school students across the US have submerged themselves in extracurricular activities to differentiate themselves from other candidates for university applications. Teens have the opportunity to stand out beyond internships and jobs by showing their willingness to engage with unfamiliar situations. Studying and learning in a foreign country shows ambition, curiosity, and a willingness to take on challenges. Marissa Lombardi, director for the Master of Science in Global Studies and International Relations program at Northeastern University, pointed out: "Students who study abroad offer more to the workplace than those who don't. They offer a fuller package than just a student who's looked at how things are theoretically, as opposed to students who have the opportunity to apply the concepts in their studies to real jobs and experiences across various cultures." (Sources: CIEE, Northeastern University, UC Merced, United States Department of State)



Film meaningful remakes

by Kloe Adams
Games Creator



Live-action productions of previously animated films and modern versions of nostalgic classics dominate Hollywood, with the industry prioritizing safe profits over creative risk. When remakes are well-produced, they are invaluable additions to a film franchise; however, film studios' overreliance on old ideas for guaranteed financial gains results in underdeveloped, low-quality movies. Studios must create remakes with intention and originality rather than for reliable revenue.

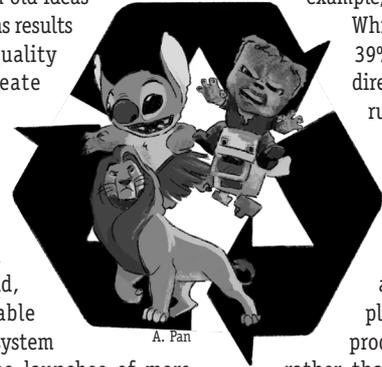
Moviegoers do not want to waste their night out on an obscure original that could be bad; instead, they prioritize recognizable titles. As a result, the ecosystem of competition crushes the launches of more innovate films. The novel Pixar film, Elio, which debuted in theaters on Jun. 20, made 154.2 million dollars at the box office despite its budget exceeding 200 million dollars. Conversely, A Minecraft Movie debuted in theaters on Apr. 4, making 957.9 million dollars in box office revenue, greatly surpassing its budget of 150 million dollars. Objectively, critics rated Elio 83% rotten tomatoes while A Minecraft Movie received 47%, suggesting the films' quality did not equate to their profits. Other examples of originals with subpar performances at the box office include Everything Everywhere

All At Once, Sinners, and Materialists, with Everything Everywhere All At Once even earning seven Academy Awards, including one for Best Picture. It is clear why studios prioritize remakes because they are safer from a profit standpoint and have a larger appeal to audiences; however, when studios rely on remakes for a big payday, the production quality declines.

Remakes can be good when they are not forced into creation. Disney, in particular, constantly releases live-action versions of previously animated films that did not need a revamp. For example, the live-action remake of Snow

White earned an underwhelming 39% on Rotten Tomatoes. Mediocre direction and production yielded a rushed result that failed to live up to fans' high expectations. Additionally, both Lilo & Stitch and Mufasa, although they performed better critically, were overall derivative, adding nothing to their original plots. On the other hand, when producers use remakes for artistic rather than commercial purposes, they produce high-quality and enjoyable results. For instance, Guillermo Del Toro's remake of Pinocchio adapted the storyline with a unique take, elevating the original plot and offering a new perspective for viewers.

When done right, a remake can boost an original's plot or even reintroduce a niche movie to a larger audience. But when used for the purpose of safe profit, they lack passion and depth. With this in mind, movie studios must offer more original material with intention and care. (Sources: Supercuts Delight, Wikipedia)



Gruetter advocates for nuance in queer representation

by Sam Gruetter
Editor-in-Chief



Ever since the introduction of traditional gender roles into society, those who stray from the conventional notions of femininity and masculinity have faced categorization, resulting in broad generalizations

about individuals who are in the LGBTQIA+ community and a failure to recognize the nuances amongst them. Society needs to abandon its adherence to strict gender expectations for queer men and women by no longer treating gay women like men and gay men like women.

As homosexuality grew more visible in the West during the late 1900s, it increasingly came to be asso-

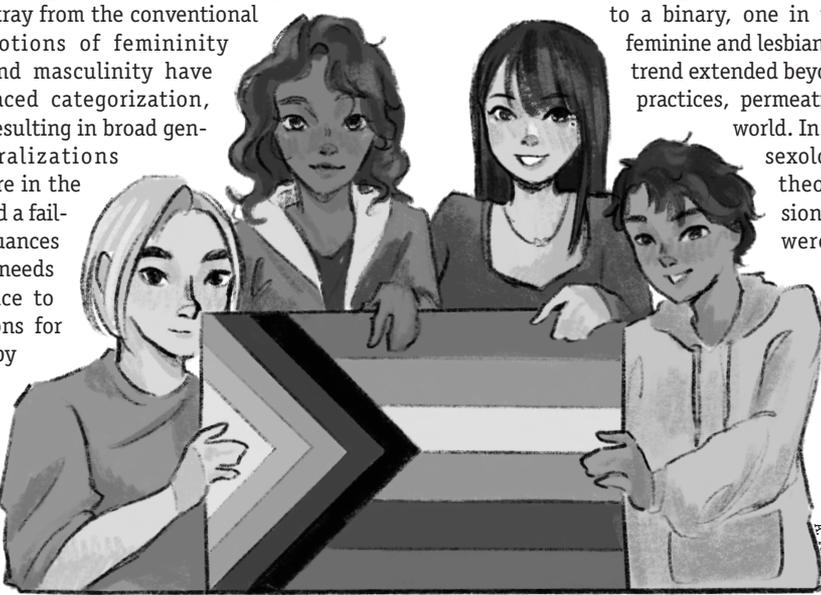
ciated with gender non-conformity. Instead of society accepting an internal duality within gay men and women where they are attracted to the same gender but still maintain traditionally masculine and feminine qualities, it sought to contain them to a binary, one in which gay men were

feminine and lesbians were masculine. This trend extended beyond social and cultural practices, permeating even the medical world. In the late 19th century, sexologists developed the theory of "sexual inversion," where gay women were inverted men and vice versa. As if the scientific reinforcement of these limiting stereotypes were not offensive enough, queer representation in the media has frequently emphasized the femininity of gay men and the masculinity of gay women. In

popular media such as Mean Girls, Glee, Modern Family, and Sex and the City, homosexual men behave in almost entirely feminine ways, with no acknowledgement of the gender spectrum.

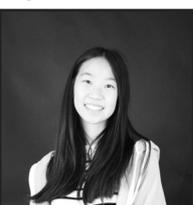
By treating members of the LGBTQIA+ this way, even within relationships, society reinforces the notion that heterosexual relationships are the status quo and that gender integrity cannot be upheld for both parties within homosexual relationships. That is to say, this dynamic is even replicated within relationships; just because one's girlfriend presents traditionally masculine, it should not mean they assume the boyfriend role. However, this is often not the case. The National Library of Medicine reported that within same-sex couples, the division of domestic labor is more equal between both parties, indicating that relationships do not have to conform to a heterosexual format in order to be successful or beneficial.

Gay men are still men and gay women are still women; the media and society need to treat them as such. Through adopting more realistic queer representation and avoiding indulgence in limiting stereotypes despite physical presentation, society can better understand the queer community. This simple behavior will lead to a broader social recognition of the gender spectrum and nuance within the queer community. (Sources: National Library of Medicine, University of New Hampshire)



Pan calls for civil debate

by Annabelle Pan
Graphics Editor



There is a thin line between a debate and a squabble. A debate is a respectful discussion on a particular topic in which two sides put forward opposing views. A pointless argument is a stubborn battle between two people, both trying to win. There is no point in fighting just to be right. People should argue to gain the right knowledge rather than trying to prove their knowledge is right.

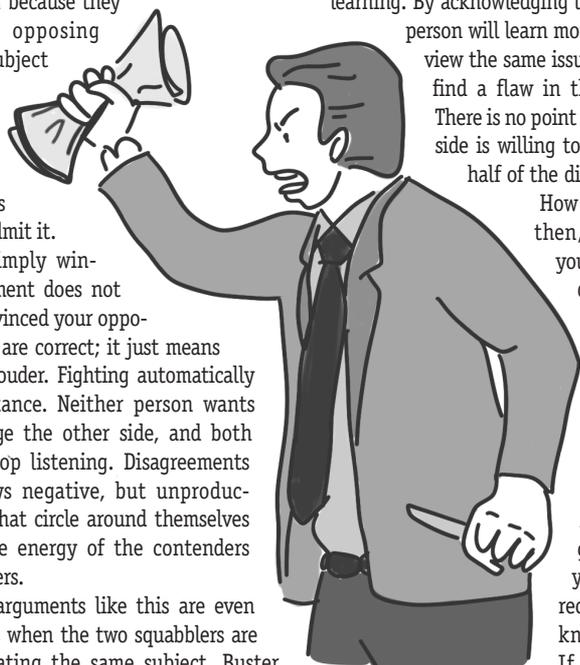
Winning isn't everything. When people squabble, it is either because they have strong, opposing views on a subject or because one person misunderstood the facts but is unwilling to admit it. Either way, simply winning an argument does not mean you convinced your opponent that you are correct; it just means you shouted louder. Fighting automatically triggers resistance. Neither person wants to acknowledge the other side, and both people just stop listening. Disagreements are not always negative, but unproductive quarrels that circle around themselves only drain the energy of the contenders and the listeners.

Stubborn arguments like this are even more pointless when the two squabblers are not even debating the same subject. Buster Benson, the author of *Why Are We Yelling: The Art of Productive Disagreement*, points out three different areas of disagreement: the head, the heart, and the hands. Head arguments draw from facts and focus on what is objectively true. Disagreements of

the heart emphasize what is meaningful; they are about personal taste and opinion. Arguments in the area of the hands are about use and practicality. Benson asserts that it is important to make sure both sides of the argument are arguing in the same realm to ensure minimal unproductivity.

Other sources of useless disagreement are anxiety and self-centeredness. Frequently, people think that a disagreement is a personal attack. They then become anxious about what will happen to their reputation if they back down from the challenge, and then all that remains is a pointless fight. People need to stop defending their honor and pride and start genuinely defending their argument so that the debate actually results in learning. By acknowledging the opposing view, a person will learn more about how others view the same issue and perhaps even find a flaw in their own thinking. There is no point in arguing if neither side is willing to listen to the other half of the disagreement.

How should you argue then, if not to defend your point of view to death? Ask clarifying questions to understand the other view instead of just yelling. Think for two seconds before you speak. Ask yourself if you genuinely believe your view is correct or if you already know you're wrong. If you are wrong, there's no shame in admitting it. Treat arguments like an opportunity to learn, not a method of forcing your thoughts and opinions onto other people. (Sources: NY Times)



A. Anand

Decrease corn overconsumption

by Abby Coven
News Editor



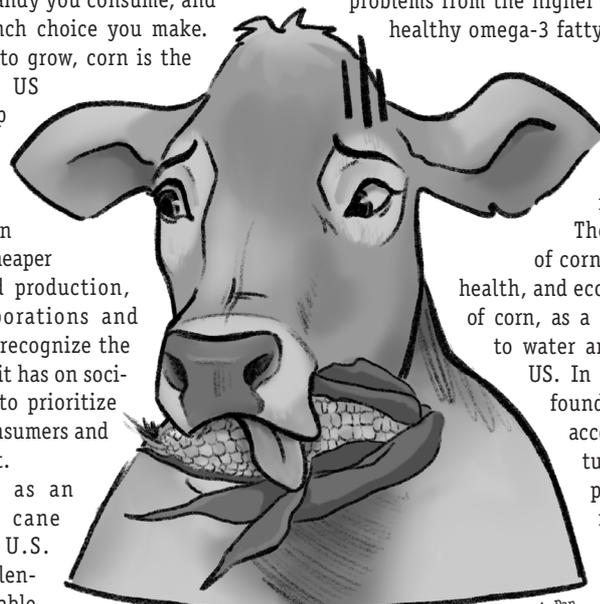
Around the holidays, it's customary to enjoy dishes like cornbread, corn pudding, and corn casserole. While prominent in these recipes, corn is an ingredient that sneaks into far more items on any family's holiday dining table. In reality, corn is present in almost every cereal you eat, every candy you consume, and nearly every lunch choice you make. Cheap and easy to grow, corn is the most produced US agricultural crop and is therefore overrepresented in the American diet. Although corn can provide a cheaper shortcut to food production, industrial corporations and farmers need to recognize the startling impact it has on society and choose to prioritize the health of consumers and the environment.

Corn began as an alternative to cane sugar in the U.S. because of its plentiful and affordable nature. Corn syrup, corn starch, and corn oil are present in all processed foods, soda, and confectioneries. Corn enhances flavor and sweetness. It's even used as a coating on candy to prevent pieces from sticking together. However, corn is stealthily contributing to health issues like diabetes and obesity due to excessive consumption of the added sugars and highly processed forms of corn.

Corn also affects the farm industry. The agricultural industry started using corn as animal feed because it is calorie-rich and easy to grow in large quantities. Many farmers are willing to force naturally grass-fed animals like cows to live off a corn-based diet in order to bulk them up and add intramuscular fat to improve the taste for consumers. Using corn as the primary food source offers a quicker and easier path to greater marketability and profits. Additionally, the overreliance on corn-based feed can directly impact the nutritional quality of animal meat, leading to human health problems from the higher fat content and lack of healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

Another negative impact of our country's heavy reliance on corn in our food system is environmental degradation. The high concentrations of corn harm biodiversity, soil health, and ecosystems. The production of corn, as a single crop, contributes to water and air pollution in the US. In one study, researchers found that corn production accounts for 4,300 premature deaths related to air pollution each year, primarily due to ammonia from fertilizer use.

Even though corn is contributing to all of these negative impacts, the true villain isn't the food itself but the corporations who choose to abuse its capabilities. Although ignorance may be more convenient, the truth is that every time we use corn-based products in human or animal food supply, we are slowly poisoning society. So, for your next holiday dinner, enjoy some whole corn so that you can keep you and your loved ones safe. (Sources: FDA, NPR, The Omnivore's Dilemma)



A. Pan

Anand encourages destigmatizing cultural practices

by Advika Anand
Graphics Editor

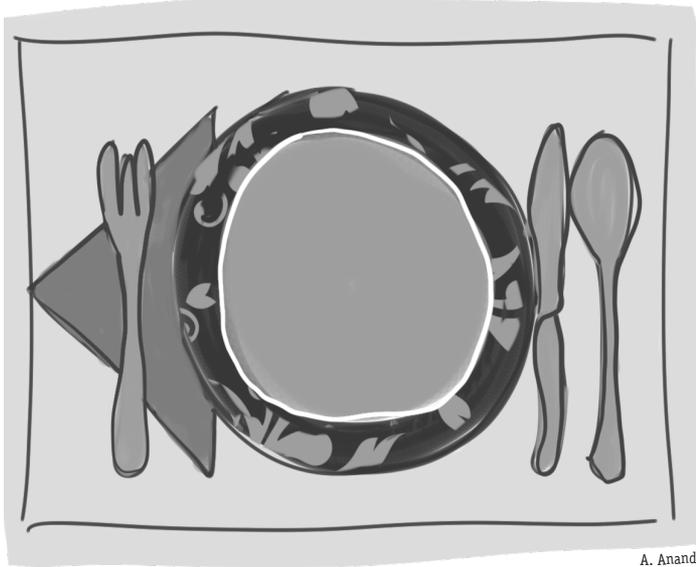


Eating is one of the most universal parts of the human experience. It bridges cultural gaps, connects families, and carries traditions from one generation to the next. Despite this, the way people choose to eat can become a point of judgment, especially when cultural practices differ from the mainstream.

Eating with your hands allows you to engage more deeply with your food, support digestion, and connect with diverse cultures, yet it remains unfairly stigmatized and deserves to be recognized as a legitimate way to enjoy a meal.

Across the world, food traditions reflect a culture's history and identity. In Ethiopia, the Middle East, parts of Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, eating with hands is intentional. Many cultures view it as a way to directly connect people with a meal while grounding them in mindful eating. But in the United States, people often criticize this practice only when it's associated with cultural or ethnic foods. The double standard is clear when considering that Americans casually eat ribs, hot dogs, chicken wings, burgers, and corn on the cob with their hands without opposition. The difference is not about hygiene, but more so about how certain cultures

are allowed to be "messy" and which ones Americans label strange or unsophisticated. This pattern reflects cultural biases that restrict what non-Western cultures can express without judgment.



A. Anand

The idea that eating with hands is dirty is rooted in misinformation. Hygiene does not come from utensils, but clean habits. According to the CDC, washing hands with soap can reduce diarrheal diseases by 23-40% and respiratory infections by 16-21%. These reductions prove that clean hands are perfectly safe when people follow proper hygiene; in fact, several studies have shown that people actually struggle with proper handwashing regardless of how they eat. In a USDA observational study, nearly 100% of consumers failed to wash their hands correctly while preparing or eating meals. Another study found that only 27% of food workers washed their hands appropriately when required. Poor hygiene practices can occur with forks, knives, spoons, or bare hands. As a result, washing hands before and after a meal is usually more intentional and consistent in cultures that eat with their hands, since the practice requires a deeper awareness of cleanliness than cultures that use utensils. The real issue is whether someone washes their hands while cooking and eating, not whether food touches hands during consumption.

The truth is that eating with hands is not only normal but also enhances the experience for many. The various textures, temperatures, and sensations bring comfort and connect a person to the way their families and ancestors ate. People should approach unfamiliar eating traditions with curiosity, not criticism. Clean hands are as safe as utensils, so try the food, learn its history, and understand what it means to the people who eat it. (Sources: BMC, CDC, NIH, USDA)

Gloege encourages the pursuit of global and local travel

by Noah Gloege
World Editor



Many people spend their lives within a small, certain radius, returning to the same places over and over without expanding their horizons. Visiting more unknown places, whether locally or internationally, is one of the greatest feelings there is. Go to those places that make you feel the rush of adrenaline, the smell of the food carts in the streets, and the trees that surround that pristine lake or beach.

There are countless places in the Bay Area that many people do not know about yet offer some of the most incredible views, stories, and sights. Often, people only go to places they have been before, whether restaurants, beaches, or towns. Exploring the unknown — a trail in Marin, a quiet corner in the Los Altos Hills, or a café tucked away in a San Francisco alley — reminds us that the world is much bigger than our routines and daily activities suggest. Yet, exploring these unfamiliar places is impossible to describe unless you experience it firsthand. The sense of freedom and adventure makes you wish you had been there before. Natural locations are usually the most beautiful, as humans have not overrun them, leaving them untouched. In

cities and towns, the experience is entirely different when untrammelled by tourists, and you spend time with locals. These adventures can change how you view the world, as you can see how people actually live as opposed to visiting often inauthentic tourist attractions.

The best way to find these locations is to ask locals or to check social media. Visiting new places allows you to figure out who you really are. A quiet mountain town might reveal your love for silence, while a chaotic city might resonate with your more adventurous side. By contrast, when you stay in the same environment every day, the same version of yourself shows up.

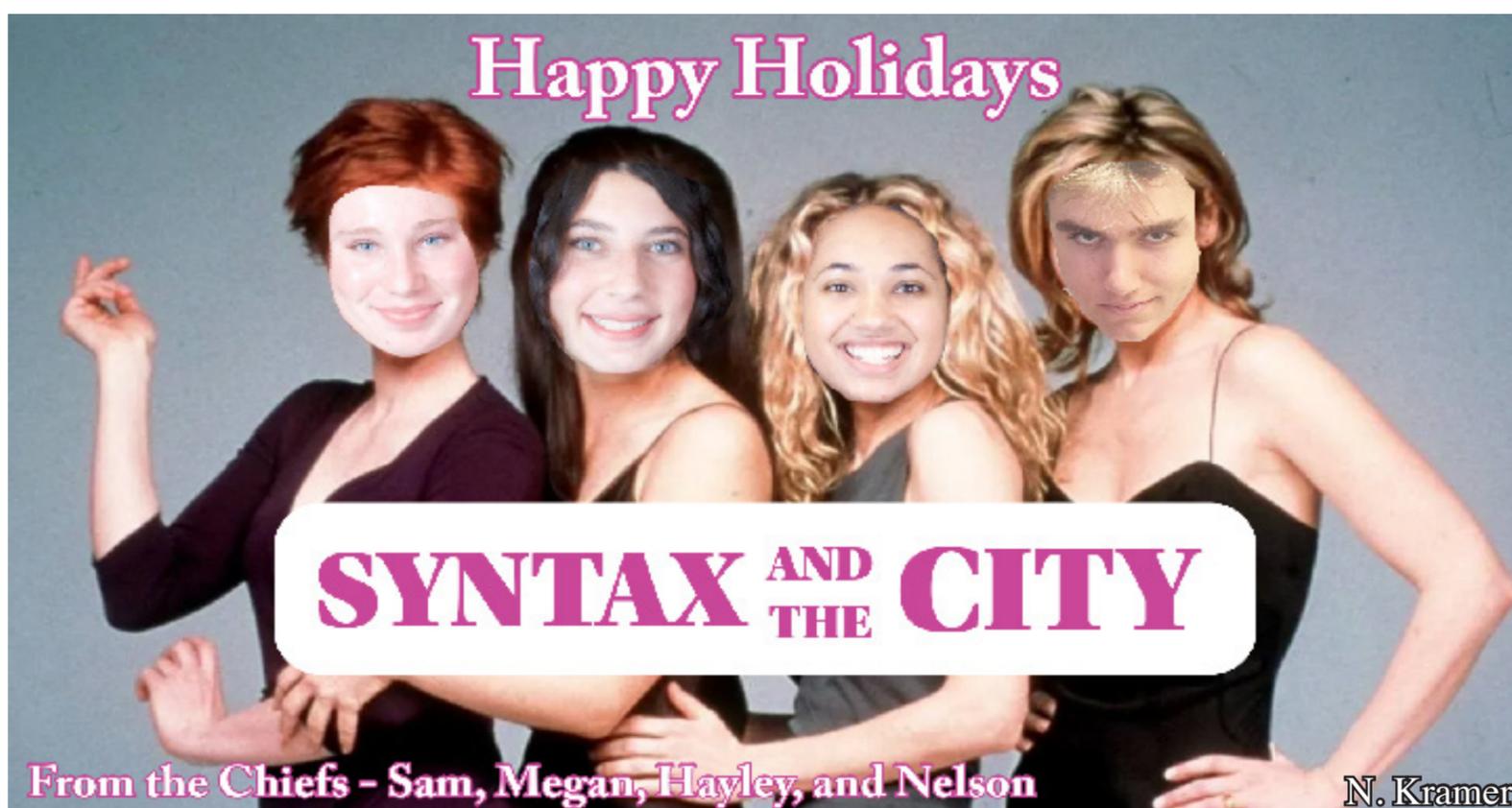
Go somewhere with few or no tourists, somewhere that makes you wonder about the daily routines of the people living there. When locals, instead of tour groups, surround you, you learn to appreciate a place's values and traditions in a far more genuine way. These experiences broaden your view of the world while also making you wonder what you thought it was. It teaches you to be comfortable with being uncomfortable and builds confidence that you cannot develop any other way. New places make you learn to rely on yourself and your instincts, and, eventually, that discomfort becomes independence.

Travel to places without the postcards or tour buses. Visit the trail no one talks about, the town that isn't known, or the country that doesn't appear on everyone's bucket list.

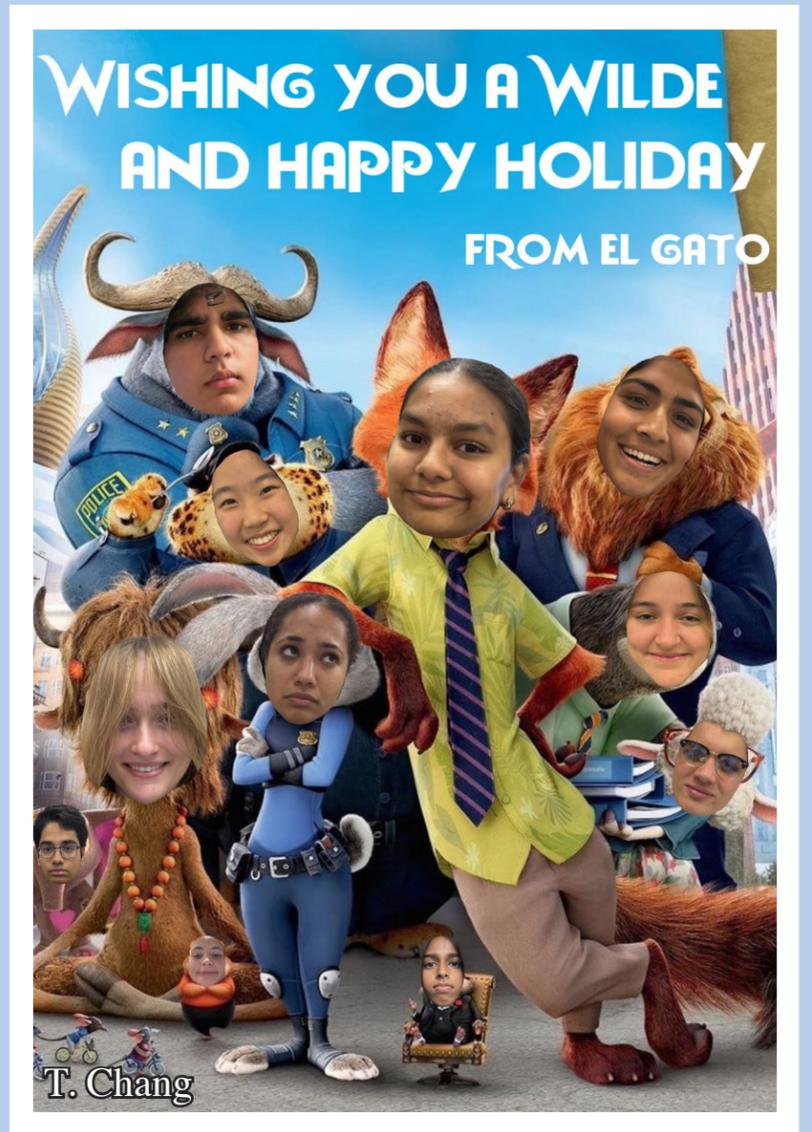


A. Anand

Wishing You a Happy



ay Holiday Season!



- Hathaway overviews Regretting You movie
- Wilson discusses new IT series

CULTURE

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Hathaway discusses release of Regretting You movie

by Quinn Hathaway
Media Production Editor

A new movie adaptation from bestselling romance novelist Colleen Hoover hit theaters on Oct. 24. The popular novel, *Regretting You*, garnered so much love and attention when Hoover released it in 2019 that Paramount Pictures bought the film rights, started production in March of 2025, and premiered the film in the fall of the same year. As of Nov. 20, the film has brought in over \$80 million, surpassing the break-even point with its production budget of \$30 million, and is set to play in theaters for several more weeks.

The drama/romance follows Morgan and Clara Grant, a mother-daughter duo living in Atlanta, Georgia. Morgan is fiercely protective of Clara and willing to sacrifice almost anything for her daughter's happiness. Clara is a sharp 17-year-

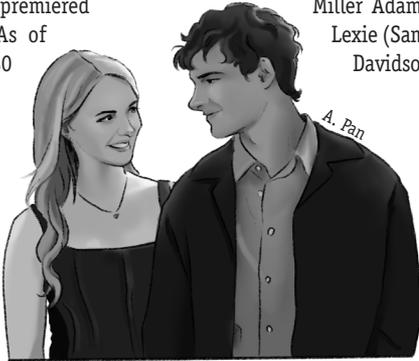
old high schooler, focused on finding herself, even if that means clashing with her loved ones. These contrasting personalities result in a tenuous relationship, one in which a tragic familial accident only aggravates. The plot follows a tale of healing, highlighting the juxtaposing ways in which Clara and Morgan seek solace and forge new relationships amidst disaster. Other main characters include Miller Adams (Mason Thames), Jonah Sullivan (Dave Franco), Lexie (Sam Morelos), Christ Grant (Scott Eastwood), and Jenny Davidson (Willa Fitzgerald), all of whom are friends or family of the Grants. A main theme of the movie is finding love in unexpected places, and the characters capture the catharsis of these moments well.

The cast for the movie includes both renowned actors and new faces. McKenna Grace, reprising the pivotal role of Clara Grant, appeared in many productions throughout her childhood, most notably *Gifted*, co-starring Chris Evans. Grace also appeared in numerous hit shows, including *Young Sheldon* and *Fuller House*. Mason Thames

took on the role of Miller Adams, less than a year after his main role in the popular movie *How to Train Your Dragon*, and only a week after his second *Black Phone* film hit theaters. The cast also includes lesser-known actors, such as Sam Morelos, who plays Lexie, Clara's best friend, and Willa Fitzgerald, who portrays Jenny Davidsen. This myriad of actors brings forth cast chemistry, the result of combining actorial experience with novelty.

While many of Hoover's novels are geared towards a younger audience, *Regretting You* tackles broader themes of loss and self-discovery, appealing to a much larger age range. Some of the characters, including but not limited to Lexie, Clara, and Miller, are high school kids, but other characters, such as Hank Adams Sr., the grandfather of Miller, bring the older generation's wisdom and relatability to the screen. The film also boasts an incredible soundtrack, featuring both emerging artists such as Rolemodel and established icons such as Noah Kahan. Teenagers to grandparents would love the variety that both the characters and music provide.

Regretting You brings the bestseller to life with its stellar cast and wide range of characters. Check it out in theaters today!



Wilde reviews *Wicked: For Good*

by Jane Wilde
Humor Editor

Warning: Spoilers ahead for *Wicked: For Good*

On Nov. 21, the highly anticipated *Wicked For Good* was released. Within its first week of the debut, the film has already made nearly 400 million dollars at the box office. *For Good* is based on the Broadway musical's second act and has been in the works for over four years. The film is, as expected, more melancholy than the first, as Ozians continue the vicious hunt for the supposedly wicked witch, Elphaba. Although it is not the most upbeat film, it will surely leave a lasting impression like a "handprint on your heart."

The first half of the film predominantly focuses on Elphaba's attempts to unveil the wizard's corruption and save the animals from lifelong oppression. As for Glinda, she slowly begins to realize the political system she's a part of is built on lies, as she has no real powers like Elphaba. As Glinda battles between her perfect image and doing what is right, Fiyero remains forcefully by her side, although his heart still lies with Elphaba. The film does an excellent job of providing meaningful flashbacks of the characters to explain their behaviors. For example, it shows glimpses of Glinda's childhood, where, in response to her crying about not having powers, her mother tells her, "everyone loves you, that's all you'll ever need," subsequently resulting in her lifelong need for external validation.

It's no secret that the first act includes more iconic songs than the second; however, I found these ones to be just as enjoyable.

A personal favorite song of mine was "The Girl in the Bubble," sung by Glinda, played by the famous pop singer Ariana Grande. The song is about Glinda realizing she can no longer hide behind the facade of "goodness" when she had no real powers to begin with. Another one of my favorites, and perhaps the most well-known, is "For Good." The beautiful, touching ballad tells the story of the two girls' undeniable impact on each other. From the brilliantly crafted melody to the effortless live vocals, *For Good* is easily the best song in the film.

My main and only critique has to do with director Jon Chu's choice of ending. Gregory McGuire, the author of *Wicked*, created the story to emphasize the importance of friendship. However, *Wicked: For Good* ends with Elphaba stealing Glinda's fiancé and leaving Oz with him. Since friendship is such a foundational part of this story, it was distasteful to watch Elphaba leave Glinda, not even telling her that Fiyero is still alive after Glinda thought he had died. It seemed as though the story gravitated towards Elphaba and Fiyero's love story rather than the most essential part of the plot, the unexpected bond between Glinda and Elphaba.

Although the film didn't quite meet my expectations (they were quite high to begin with), I would still consider it a must-watch. From the live vocals to the fantastical sets, *Wicked: For Good* is a well-crafted, emotionally resonant film that is great for the whole family. (Source: NY Times)



Muthukrishnan assesses Fight the Oligarchy

by Sahil Muthukrishnan
Culture Editor

Warning: Spoilers ahead for *Fight the Oligarchy*

Progressive American politician and activist Bernie Sanders published his sixth book, *Fight the Oligarchy*, on Oct. 21. In the release, Sanders details the splintered state of our political system and the importance of systematic reform. The book shares the same name as his national tour of political rallies with fellow progressive politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC). Sanders conducted the rallies from February, following President Donald Trump's election, to September. In his rallies, Sanders supported aspiring progressive political candidates, such as New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Maine Senate candidate Graham Platner, and inspired crowds with anti-corporate and pro-grassroots messaging, following trends the book strongly pushes.

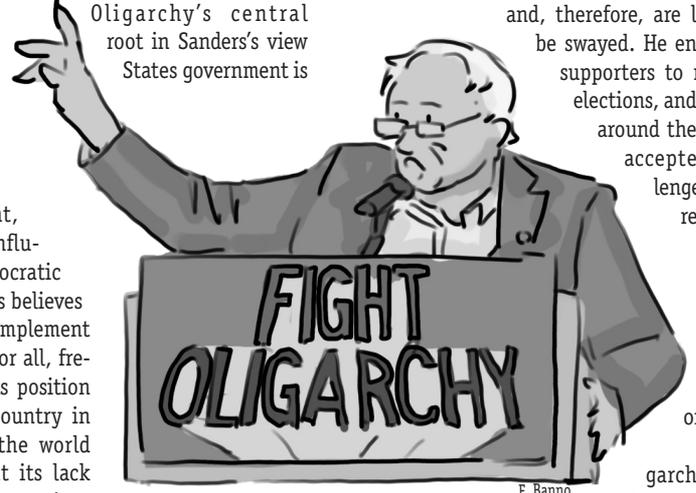
Fight the Oligarchy's central themes take that the United States government is failing its constituents in key areas, such as healthcare, the environment, and corporate influence. As a Democratic Socialist, Sanders believes the US should implement free healthcare for all, frequently citing its position as the richest country in the history of the world and stating that its lack of guaranteed protections is embarrassing.

Sanders also highlights the lack of environmental reforms, with the government stripping those in place in the rush for progress and profit. He frequently mentions his plan for investments into renewable energy and green jobs, as well as the government's failure to act decisively, often catering to special interests rather than its people's needs.

Arguably, his most impactful point is the insidious creep of corporate interests into politics with the advent of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, a Supreme Court case whose ruling prevents the government from restricting spending from corporations, associations, or labor unions in candidate elections. Sanders is staunchly against the decision and strongly believes that the political shift toward corporate interests contributes to the loss of the democratic process, as corporate political action committees (PACs) can primary any politician who strongly opposes them, leading to corruption and a limit to their constituents' direct influence.

The book also focuses on the impact of grassroots movements in politics. Sanders believes the people gain power every time a politician like AOC is elected. These candidates don't take corporate PAC money and, therefore, are less likely to be swayed. He encouraged his supporters to run for local elections, and hundreds all around the nation have accepted the challenge. The release received praise from readers, achieving a 4.8 out of 5 on Audible and a 4.4 out of 5 on Goodreads. *Fight the Oligarchy* is a rousing work tackling

the origins of many of our nation's hotly debated dilemmas. It is not just a book; it is significant to the movement Sanders leads nationally to inspire change and give power back to the people. Even those who disagree with Sanders on key political issues can benefit from his unique perspective and hands-on insight on topics. (Sources: *Fight the Oligarchy*)



Littfin evaluates Netflix's Boots series

by Kat Littfin
Editorial Editor

Cutthroat and campy: Netflix's TV series *Boots* is an unlikely combination of the two. Released on Oct. 9, *Boots* has swiftly become a highly watched and praised Netflix original TV show.

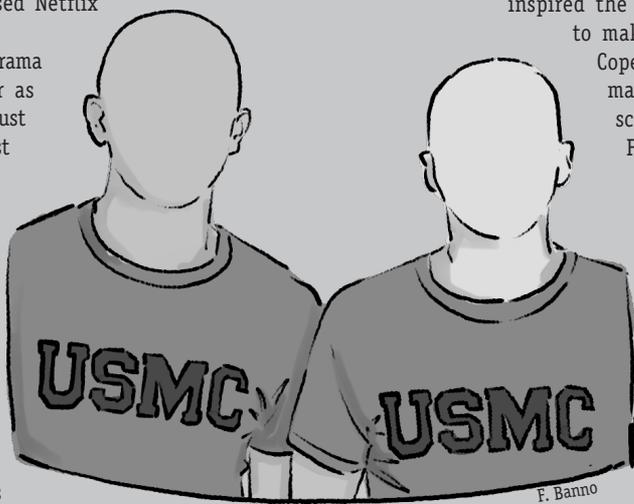
Boots is a coming-of-age military drama set in 1990 that stars Miles Heizer as Cameron Cope, a loner teen who has just graduated high school. When his best friend and former Air Force trainee, Ray McAffey, introduces Cope to the Marine Corps's Buddy Program, they join the Navy together. Cope joins to find some sense of belonging outside of his small hometown, where he feels out of place as a closeted gay man. However, it is strictly against Marine Corps regulations to be homosexual. While Cope has to struggle through already grueling and painful Naval training, he also feels

suffocated keeping his sexuality secret. However, he begins to learn that he is not the only recruit or officer with a secret, as many of his peers have a complex past.

The 2016 memoir *The Pink Marine* by Greg Cope White originally inspired the show's creator, Andy Parker, to make *Boots*. The memoir details Cope White's experience as a gay man in the late '70s. Acclaimed screenwriter, producer, and Air Force veteran Norman Lear was an executive producer of the show, and served as White's mentor. *Boots* was the last show Lear worked on before his death in 2023. The production of the show faced many setbacks as filming occurred amidst the 2023 strikes in the film and TV industry. Still, the show's production team persisted, leading to its release in late 2025.

Unlike most military dramas, *Boots* is creative and quirky. The show has a score with many '90s classics as well as arrangements by Jongnic Bontemps that use military instruments to create authentic yet innovative interpretations of Marine Corps anthems. The acting in the show is often alarmingly over-the-top and unbelievable. However, the creators wanted to make a show that was not of the typical "drab and bleak" military variety, according to an article in the NY Times. The series is certainly engaging, as it retains the drama and harshness of many military shows while still being lighthearted and eccentric.

The release of *Boots* came about at a poignant moment. Recently, military leaders, including Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, have discussed returning to 1990s standards. While this mainly includes stricter training and fewer regulations on commanding officers, it also includes banning homosexuals from the military. In a time when politicians have challenged the presence of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the Armed Forces, the show purposefully portrays the Marine Corps in an unmanly and playful way as well as including female, queer, and racially diverse commanding officers. Challenging the modern anti-DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) sentiments, *Boots* is more than just an entertaining TV show. (Sources: NY Times, Politico)



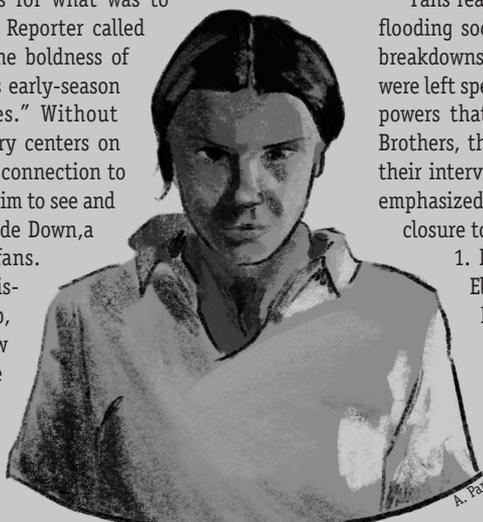
STRANGER THINGS SEASON 5 PREMIERES TO CRITICAL ACCLAIM

by Lila Zamansky
Media Production Editor

After nearly a year of anticipation, delays, and theories, the long-awaited final season of *Stranger Things* has arrived, closing the portal to one of the most popular sci-fi series of the twenty-first century. With the first four episodes of the season released on Nov. 26, Volume 2 on Dec. 25, and the finale on Dec. 31, the season brings the story of Hawkins, Indiana, to an emotional and explosive conclusion.

Production for Season 5 began back in January of 2024, marking the start of the show's last chapter. The cast members repeatedly described the finale as both epic and deeply sentimental, noting how surreal it felt to close out a story that shaped their careers and entertained millions. The directors of the show, the Duffer Brothers, approached the season knowing the weight of what it represents, not just as a conclusion but as a farewell. The series has been a sensation hit globally, becoming Netflix's Top Ten in 93 countries. Additionally, Season Four was the first-ever English-language series to cross one billion hours streamed on a platform, an achievement that shocked Ross Duffer, who stated, "When we started, Netflix was an underdog, we were an underdog... so it is a strange thing, ten years later, to be the opposite of that."

Carrying the fast-paced, horror-driven energy of earlier seasons, Season 5 dives more deeply into the show's emotional core. Season four was released in 2022, leaving on a long, inevitable cliffhanger that set high expectations for what was to come next. The *Hollywood Reporter* called the early twist "some of the boldness of the Duffers' most ambitious early-season twists of the entire series." Without spoiling too much, the story centers on Will, whose hidden psychic connection to Vecna is revealed, allowing him to see and eventually control the Upside Down, a stunning revelation for fans. Additionally, a shocking disappearance rattles the group, Eleven and Hopper face new enemies, and the rest of the gang splits up in the real world, put into high-risk missions, revealing how deeply the Upside Down has infiltrated Hawkins.



The exciting first volume balances action and emotion, grounded in the relationships that made the show such a phenomenon in the first place.

Fans reacted to Volume 1 with a mix of shock and excitement flooding social media within hours of the release, with theories, breakdowns, and celebrations over long-awaited answers. Many were left speechless after the final episode, as Will suddenly gained powers that control the Upside Down. According to the Duffer Brothers, that is the reaction they anticipated and hoped for. In their interview with the *Hollywood Reporter*, the Duffer Brothers emphasized their production incorporates emotional depth and closure to resolve the mysteries that have lingered since Season

1. Long-standing fan questions about the Upside Down, Eleven's powers, and how everything ties back to Will and Hawkins will finally be answered in the finale.

Stranger Things is preparing to end with ambition, passion, and a level of closure that honors a decade-long journey. With two more volumes still to come, fans everywhere are bracing themselves, not just for the twists, but for the emotional rollercoaster that will mark the end of an era.

(Sources: BBC, *Hollywood Reporter*, *The Guardian*)

New It series hooks viewers

by Chloe Wilson
Culture Editor

A new television adaptation of Stephen King's novel *It* premiered on Oct. 26, and, like its predecessors, features the antagonist, Pennywise. These movies were all variations of the *It* franchise, released in 1990, 2017, and 2019. The new series, entitled *It: Welcome to Derry*, explores Pennywise's origins in the fictional town of Derry, Maine, the setting of the previous movies.

The series includes eight episodes, each about an hour long, all set in the year 1962. The *Welcome to Derry* production team created both *It* (2017) and *It: Chapter 2* (2019), two adaptations that audiences and critics received warmly. Fans of the series are satisfied with the adherence to the source material that the team showed in the previous movies.

Chase Palmer, Cary Fukunaga, and Gary Dauberman wrote the two-part movie adaptations, which amassed \$1.17 billion worldwide. This trio is notably one of the best teams at bringing King's novels to the big screen, along with other writers who created *Carrie*, *The Shining*, *Stand By Me*, *Misery*, and *The Shawshank Redemption*, all of which were strong candidates for major Oscar categories such as Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Film Editing.

Welcome to Derry's writers keep faithful to the principles King showcases in his novels, maintaining his iconic timing, effects, and pace. The similarities among this new series and

previous movies play a large role in maintaining the eerie ambiance for which King is so famous.

The show features Major Leroy Hanlon (Jovan Adepo) and his wife, Charlotte (Taylour Paige), along with their son, Will (Blake Cameron James). The family arrives in Derry where Leroy is stationed at the local military base. Slowly, the show portrays inexplicable events such as children disappearing and characters experiencing horrifying visions. The show heavily focuses on fear, a driving force

for the evil clown, Pennywise, who feeds off this emotion throughout his pursuit of havoc. It also touches on the horrors of their town: for example, the nature of evil in Derry. A pattern in the novel and its adaptations is that the absence of adult interference drives the children to bully and harm their peers and friends. This highlights the rampant evil in

Derry and makes the adults oblivious to Pennywise's cruelty.

Overall, viewers of the show are heavily anticipating future episodes of *Welcome to Derry*. After the immense success of the 2017 and 2019 movies, the show is on track to become a great thriller and provide even more closure and backstory for fans. The series releases new episodes every Sunday, hooking audiences as Derry's haunting past is revealed and Pennywise's origins come to the surface. The detailed storytelling adds to the topics that were previously touched on in the movie adaptations. (Source: *Forbes*)



A. Pan

Zootopia 2 warms hearts

by Siyona Singhal
Humor Editor

Warning: Spoilers ahead for Zootopia 2

After nine long years, *Zootopia 2*, the long-awaited sequel to *Zootopia*, has come out, and it's safe to say that it has met everyone's high expectations. The movie revolves around the same two main characters as the first movie, Judy Hopps and Nick Wilde, picking up immediately after its predecessor ended. *Zootopia 2* preserves all the charm from the original while touching on more mature topics, such as racism and family dynamics, that connect to broader society.

One of the best parts of the first *Zootopia* was the lighthearted plotline, which still maintained viewers' attention, and that was replicated in the second movie. A little bit of mystery tied in with jokes and jam-packed action scenes kept me literally on the edge of my seat. The storyline didn't end there, though. When Judy and Nick experience problems in their partnership, I almost cried. When they reconciled with each other, I clapped. Of course, a *Zootopia* movie would be incomplete without a crazy plot twist, and *Zootopia 2* delivered. When the movie reveals that Gary's grandmother had originally written the plans for *Zootopia* and Lynxley stole her work, I was shocked. I was even surprised when Pawbert ended up being evil, though any true fan could have seen that one coming.

Another reason *Zootopia* was so successful is because of the amazing fictional world it conjured. The city of *Zootopia* is built in such a way that every animal has its own unique details and environment,

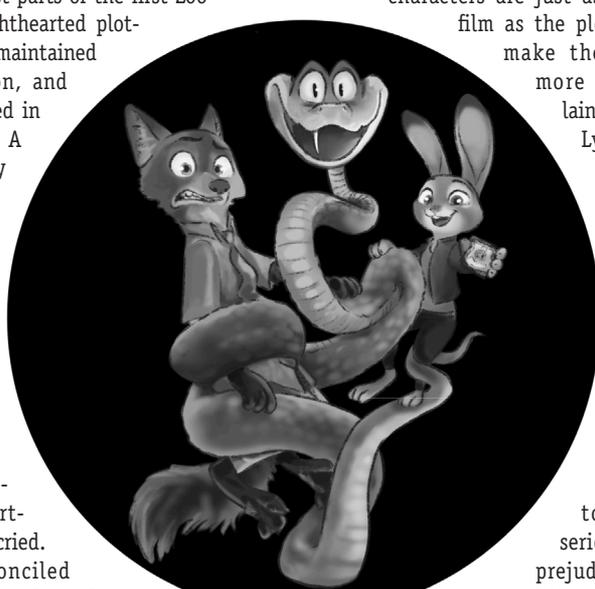
making the whole movie feel cute and clever. In *Zootopia 2*, we get to see even more of this, especially in the new Marsh Market area, where dolphins are bartenders and animals travel through water tunes.

The new characters introduced in *Zootopia 2* further enrich the plot. I personally was a huge fan of Nibbles Maplestick, the podcasting beaver, and Mayor Winddancer, the majestic mayor of *Zootopia*. Though these new additions are wonderful, I also appreciated the references to characters from the first movie. The cameo from Flash the sloth made me so happy, and the development of Mr. Big's family is adorable. The

characters are just as important to the film as the plot, and truly, they make the movie so much more lovable. The villains of the movie, the Lynxley family, were well-constructed, memorable villains; I don't know about the five-year-olds watching in the theater with me, but they were creeping me out for sure.

I also appreciated how the movie touched on more serious topics, such as prejudice. Society shuns reptiles and forces them to stay in Marsh Market, living in fear of being discovered. It brings attention to how many minorities in the real world are treated unfairly and live in fear, facing constant judgment. While it seems like too deep a topic for a children's movie, *Zootopia 2* presents the issue with grace and simplicity.

Overall, *Zootopia 2* is an outstanding film that presents important themes while still keeping the sparkle and charm of a family movie. I highly recommend *Zootopia 2* to everyone, but maybe I'm biased because of Nick Wilde...



A. Pan

Now You See Me: Now You Don't continues to stun fans

by Jordan Park
Website Editor

Now You See Me: Now You Don't, the third installment of the beloved movie franchise, is in theaters now. Having been almost a decade since the release of the second movie, fans are ecstatic to see the Horsemen back on the big screen.

Carrying on the fast-paced energy from the previous films, *Now You See Me: Now You Don't* delivers the same blend of illusions, magic, and good, plain fun. This time, the Horsemen, J. Daniel Atlas (Jesse Eisenberg), Jake Wilder (Dave Franco), Henley Reeves (Isla Fisher), and Merritt McKinney (Woody Harrelson), team up with three new illusionists: Charlie (Justice Smith), Bosco Leroy (Dominic Sessa), and June Rouclere (Ariana Greenblat). The Eye, the secret society that guides the world's best magicians, assigns them the high-stakes mission of stealing the Heart, the largest diamond in the world, currently in the possession of Veronika Vanderberg (Rosamund Pike), the head of a South African diamond company. The mission sets off an epic heist aimed at exposing the corruption of the Vanderberg family. With the return of Morgan Freeman's character Thaddeus Bradley and other familiar faces, the group has to reconcile their differences, trust each other, and push their magic to new limits.

Even with a running time of 112 minutes, the film flies by. It's entertaining and easy to get caught up in thanks to its quick pacing, clever illusions, and the upbeat, slightly mischievous energy the

movies are known for. What really makes this installment feel new is the introduction of the three next-generation magicians. Charlie, Bosco, and June don't just show up as background characters but shift the group dynamic in a fun way, with each bringing a different style of magic and personality to the mix. Together, they add a sense of curiosity and unpredictability that keeps the story from falling into familiar patterns. Their presence also impacts the original Horsemen, giving the team interactions more depth and humor. In this way, the movie doesn't just continue the series but expands it, making the whole experience fresh, engaging, and genuinely enjoyable to watch.



F. Romano

I will point out that this film leans more heavily on movie magic and CGI than its predecessors. At times, it feels like the emphasis is on the flashiness of the tricks rather than the creativity behind them. Even so, the great thing about these movies is that you can never really know where they're heading. They thrive on misdirection and constantly shift the story just when you think you've figured it out. This film, in particular, pulls this off exceptionally well. As expected, the final scene delivers the biggest illusion of them all, and the movie takes its time walking you through exactly how it works. They break the trick down, step by step, yet somehow, revealing the illusion only makes the whole thing feel even smarter. Instead of ruining the moment, the explanation becomes part of the fun, highlighting just how intricate and playful the storytelling really is.

If you're looking for a lighthearted watch that is sure to keep you on your toes, check out *Now You See Me: Now You Don't!* (Source: *Variety*)

- Strahs and Kramer expose Big Boba
- Gruetter adapts to her new phone

HUMOR

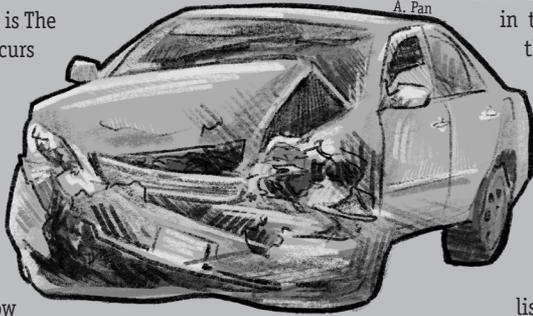
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Hathaway and Wilde describe canon events

by Quinn Hathaway and Jane Wilde
Media Production and Humor Editors

We all love to think our experiences are original and that all of our disasters are one-of-a-kind. However, nothing humbles you more than finding out that half the school has already lived the exact same oddly specific moment as you. These inevitable moments, that somehow everyone has been through, are best described as “canon events.”

One of the most common canon events is The First All Nighter. Typically, this event occurs during freshman year of high school and is entirely avoidable. Classes are not super hard yet, and extracurricular activities do not take up too many hours of your day. Yet here you are, the night before the semester-long project is due. You definitely had weeks or possibly months to prepare for something worth around 30% of your grade, but you chose peace, and now you're up at 9:00 PM with a blank Google Doc in front of you. But then, something clicks: this is high school. It is time to grab your preferred form of caffeine, a snack or three, some AirPods, and a prayer. And easy as that, The First All Nighter is complete. Bonus



points if you either failed the project OR everyone got a hundred regardless of whether or not they put in effort.

Another universally shared experience happens during either sophomore or junior year, right as everyone is getting their licenses: The One Where Jesus Took the Wheel. That's right, your friend who used to crash in Mario Kart is now behind the wheel of a brand new Bronco, whipping around corners mere hours after getting their license. And there you are, tucked

in the passenger seat, holding on to the ceiling handle for dear life while simultaneously typing out your will in your Notes app. Slamming on your imaginary brake pedal, you suddenly hear music start to play out of nowhere. No. But yes, the driver has one hand draped casually on the wheel while the other is scrolling through a playlist called “Crashing Out and Maybe

Crashing the Car.” Trying to calm down has gone out the window (you almost suffered the same fate on that last right-on-red). The One Where Jesus Took the Wheel. The drive of your life, and possibly the last.

The last canon event that we're going to discuss can occur anytime in your high school career. The Tenured Teacher. Oops, we meant the teacher who also doubles as a therapist. The Therapist-as-a-Side-quest Teacher. Long title, but they truly do everything. This teacher could teach any subject, but the most typical candidates include history and language teachers. You do not have to be good at their class for them to bless you with their advice. They help with it all: relationship problems, complaining about coaches, planning your academic comeback, and even the friend groups' disintegration; they help with it all. Tutorial visits still happen years after you had their class — of course they need an update on your long-distance situation and that one trip to Europe with your insane family. Meeting this teacher is probably one of the most meaningful canon events and leaves you with one of the dearest friends you will make in high school. Remember to say thank you to your unpaid therapist every once in a while!

Whether you like it or not, canon events will follow you wherever you go; it's simply a matter of what they are going to be. You might have stayed up all night to ace that test, you may've tried to use crystals to manifest your crush to like you (quarantine canon events are especially rough), or you might have had an aggressive side part all throughout your adolescence. However, it's in these shared, occasionally disastrous, events that we truly become who we are.

Pandey discusses winter finals week

by Atharava Pandey
Sports Editor

As the winter finals week descends upon campus once again, LGHS students will soon start feeling the all-too-familiar sentiments of panic and hysteria that characterize this week of torture. Winter finals are the academic equivalent of being stuck at a red light while the road ahead is completely clear; they are the final obstacle before two weeks of doing absolutely nothing.

Finals week actually starts tormenting students just before Thanksgiving break. Every year, I find myself pondering the different ways in which I want to use this break to get ahead on studying for finals. I confidently declare things like, “I am going to spend two hours daily doing calculus practice problems,” or “I am going to start reviewing all of the past physics units,” only to spend my break working on improving my fantasy team, which is honestly more important than finals. The closest I ever get to studying is opening Canvas on my laptop while simultaneously scrolling through Instagram on my phone.

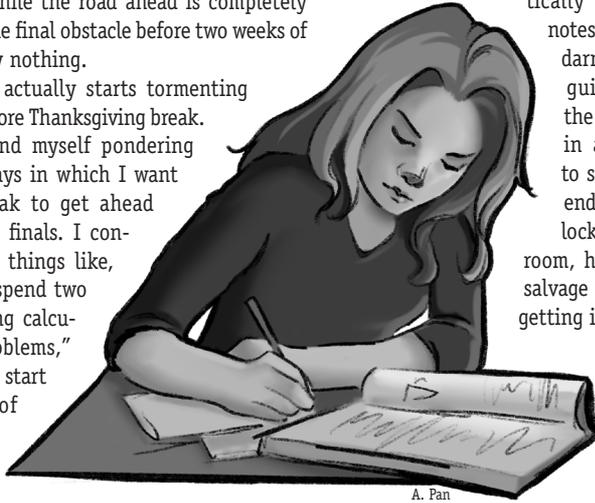
Unfortunately, the delusion does not end there. The week following break, teachers start casually mentioning final exams in class. However, it still seems like an event looming in the future, something far off in the distance. After all, there is a lot of time left to catch up on the fourteen-page study guide that encompasses all the material tested on the final. Most of it is just review and common

knowledge anyway. However, the bitter truth is that you don't remember a single thing you learned after September.

The bubble of delusion finally pops the week-end before finals week. You start calculating your math grade and realize you need a 116 percent on the final to pass the class. As a result, you frantically start reviewing your notes, looking through that darn fourteen-page study guide, and revising all the past units of the class in a desperate attempt to save your GPA. By the end of the weekend, you lock yourself in a sunless room, hopelessly grinding to salvage your poor chances of getting into college.

During finals week, you show up, running on two hours of sleep and 1000 milligrams of caffeine pumping through your system, ready to go for the first final. When you look at the test, you helplessly realize that studying was a waste of your energy. You spend more time calculating your possible grade than actually taking the test. At some point, you catch yourself inventing new formulas during the test and disproving the laws of physics.

Alas, all the efforts become worth it once that final bell rings. You look forward to two glorious weeks off from school instead of worrying about homework or tests. Let's hope, this year, your winter finals will end up better than every past year, unlikely as that may be. Good luck, Wildcats.



Big Boba takes over Los Gatos

by Hayley Strahs and Nelson Kramer
Editors-in-Chief

Boba is the biggest food fad from the past 15 years, so widespread that even corporate executives who have no life outside of work know about it. Following the success of the first Taiwanese immigrants who chased the American Dream, a genius brought boba tea to Los Gatos. By 2019, it seems like LG had it all: a vibrant downtown, bustling streets, but most importantly, mounds of bubble tea. All it took was one review praising a single shop, and LG caught the attention of Big Boba, an underground government agency to which the President funnels extra funding. Big Boba crushed the town that once seemed perfect. Where three shops once stood, none remain.

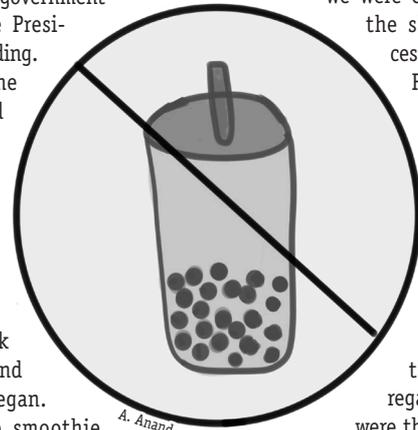
As Tea Fermata dominated the LG boba market. Posh Bagel's perfunctory attempt at the drink fell into obscurity, and the Fermatian age began. The Dragon-O-Mango smoothie became a local staple, and boba fanatics patiently awaited each year for the holiday drinks to resurface. For a while, it seemed like Tea Fermata would last forever. But of course, nothing good ever lasts. That's when Big Boba struck.

The nonbelievers will argue that the first attack was a mistake, but Big Boba didn't stop there. In Los Gatos, the property next to Salt & Straw used to house Boba Guys, a successful chain across California that generated significant local interest. However, before the beloved store

could open, it sat vacant for years. For the first few months, Los Gatans couldn't wait for Boba Guys to finally open. But the longer it took, the more hype died off. This wasn't a coincidence. Once Boba Guys finally opened in Old Town, no one cared anymore! In fact, people didn't even realize when Boba Guys closed because they were too focused on the drama surrounding Tea Fermata and... Sharetea. Gosh, we haven't heard that name in months.

Sharetea opened on Main Street in late 2021. As long-time fans of its Valley Fair location, we were ecstatic. Oh, but they lived in the shadow of Tea Fermata's success. Why, with the success of Tea Fermata, would they (Big Real Estate) bring in another boba shop with a mall location only twenty minutes away? Well, Big Boba was at work. You see, they opened Sharetea knowing it wouldn't last more than four years here. In theory, the closure of Sharetea should have paved the way for the weakened Tea Fermata to regain its bubble tea prowess. Boy, were they wrong.

No one saw the final attack. Tea Fermata lasted the longest out of our tapioca treasure troves, but Big Boba eventually took it down. What began as a weeklong “renovation” turned into despair, months with no boba, and finally Los Gatos's very own Ume Tea. This was Big Boba's plan all along: create a boba drought so we'd accept a new tea spot with open arms. Alas, Ume Tea's sickeningly pink interior has grown on us, and we, too, have fallen victim to Big Boba and our sugary greed.



CATNIP: CLUB PENGUIN, HAIR TIES, AND MORE

Recently, my sister has started watching anime. As much as I wish I could do something about it, I can't; it's just something she has to experience. She is really into it; in fact, this year for Halloween, she dressed up as Nezuko from Demon Slayer, bamboo gag and all. She also watches some pretty strange shows like Toilet-Bound Hanako-kun (some guy who died on the toilet and is stuck in the bathroom as a ghost, I think) and The Disastrous Life of Saiki-K (the main character has pink hair and neon green glasses...he also has antennae). Now, she has started begging to visit Japan and is obsessed with the convenience stores there. I hope that this is just a phase and soon she'll be normal again.

-Siyona Singhal, Humor Editor

On Mar. 29, 2017, my childhood melted away alongside the snowy servers of Club Penguin. The iconic mass multiplayer online game paved the way for Animal Jam, Roblox, and countless other breeding grounds for hackers to farm IP addresses. But I didn't (and still don't) care. Club Penguin may have shut down its servers, but my love for the game will never power off. Sure, there was Club Penguin Island, but after Disney wiped out the #BissOnMickey protests to let the penguins wear pants, the game

tipped the iceberg of no return. In the words of Arctic pop singer Penguin Glacier Swift, “Help, I'm still at the Pizza Parlor, still sitting in a corner playing Pizzatron.”

-Hayley Strahs, Editor-in Chief

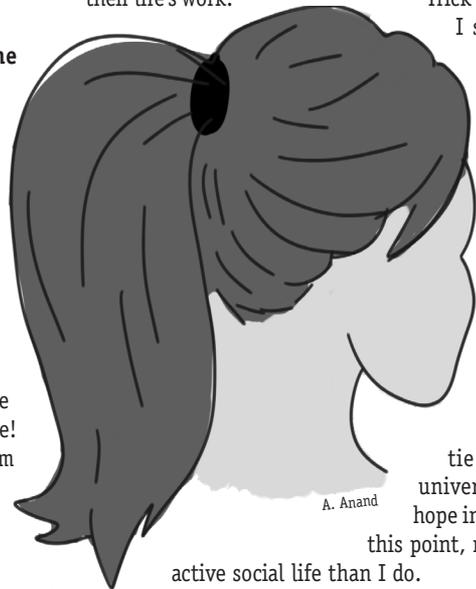
Cars have reached a plateau in the quality of their designs, and while buyers argue whether to keep buttons and knobs or digitize, most accept that a sedan or SUV is the perfect base on which to build. I would agree, but one glaring flaw blinks back, or rather, blinds me: brights. High beams are the bane of my existence; don't even get me started on their usage late at night. I would appreciate their utility and simplistic design, but literally no one knows how to use them anymore!

I turn ONE corner on Kennedy Road, and I'm suddenly burned by the piercing light of a thousand suns, permanently damaging my corneas and leaving me swerving off the side of the road. Well, there goes any hope of my insurance rate falling.

-Sahil Muthukrishnan, Culture Editor

Spot the difference: me finding a hair tie in the depths of my backpack versus an archaeologist discovering the subject of their life's work.

Trick question, there is none.



I suppose the only difference might be that the archaeologist probably doesn't spend an outrageous amount of money replenishing their hair ties each week? Still, the high is the same: the burst of triumph, the fleeting sense of superiority, the smug certainty that I've finally outsmarted the universe... only to misplace the hair tie once again. Alas, the universe crushes my fleeting hope in a never-ending cycle. At this point, my hair ties have a more active social life than I do.

-Tanvi Ambekar, Opinion Editor

MITCHELL ADDRESSES THE CONS OF GIFT GIVING

by Kayla Mitchell
Public Relations Manager

Buying a gift for someone who literally owns everything is one of the most aggravating challenges forced upon us. Forget hot pilates or running a marathon; try shopping for a dad who has somehow managed to collect every object known to mankind. The hardest task of the year comes around when the months leading up to Christmas start to creep up on you. After deep-diving each year into probably-banned markets on the internet and discovering some of the world's most obscure objects, I always summon up some magical item and await my father's reaction on Christmas morning.

After going through this crushing cycle annually, I have developed a deep hatred for the stereotypical "man gifts" I see each year. A knife set? I've never seen my dad cut more than a cucumber. Mugs with clever sayings? He already has one for every mood and occasion, including the cliché "World's Best Dad" mug I purchased when I was seven trying to get him to finally admit

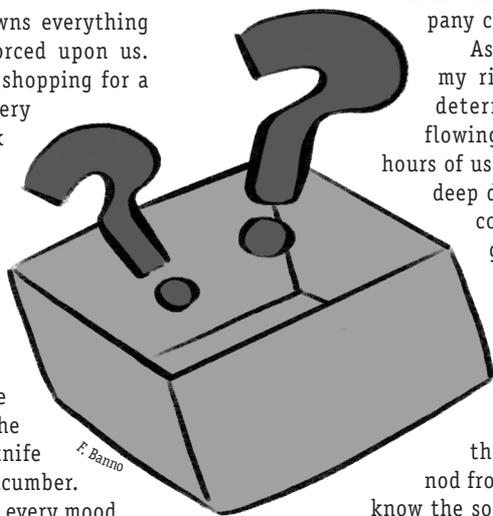
I was his favorite child. Maybe a new gadget that came out online? He owns so many, a big tech company could hire him for spare parts.

As December approaches, I begin my ritual. I sit down fueled with determination and creative juices flowing, open my laptop, and after hours of useless scrolling, I always end up deep diving into online markets that could (allegedly) be slightly illegal. By the end of my routine, I never fail to end up on pages with broken English descriptions and shipping estimations ranging from twenty minutes, a little too close for comfort, to 2067. As long as the gift earns more than a slight nod from my father, he doesn't need to know the source of my unique find.

By now, I've been forced to get experimental. I have bought my dad so many gifts that ranged from

thoughtful to "where did I discover anything like this?" that he has formed the habit of shaking my gifts before opening them, as if a wild raccoon is going to jump out and scare him. One year, I entered a bidding war at 4:00 AM, fighting for a purple crystal that was supposed to bring good vibes. Another year, I handed him a jar and tried to convince him it was full of positive energy. He did not like what I was implying with that gift.

And yet, despite my professional level of investigative experience, I still have no clue what to get my dad this Christmas. You'd think I'd have a ironclad system, an online blog with ideas, maybe a well-developed list of life-changing gifts, but instead I am back to a state of profound confusion. Maybe I could buy him a Labubu and convince him it is a new type of yard protection so he can plant the little gremlin and let it scare off the animals. Will he understand the gift? Definitely not, but he will confusedly smile at me like he does every year and accept my convincing argument that I am trying to keep him "with the times." That's the true spirit of Christmas: giving your dad something so weird he questions your sanity, but still heartfelt enough that he will wait until you're distracted by eating Christmas cookies to shove your gift in a random closet.



F. Banno

Pan gives alternatives to hyperfixations

by Annabelle Pan
Graphics Editor

We all have that one friend whose eyes light up at the mention of their favorite topic: be it a video game, activity, or some random historical figure like Louis XIV. They then proceed to assault your ears with facts you never asked for. Eventually, after weeks upon weeks of one-sided Louis XIV conversations, you find yourself a fan of him as well. How did that happen? Obsessions are contagious. It's as if the fixation is a virus; it infects one person, then that patient zero sneezes over the entire friend group, and suddenly, everyone is contaminated.

If one of your friends ends up with an obsession, you are in danger. To avoid getting sucked in, you can either run and hide, or you can plug your ears for all eternity. Of course, as a kind and understanding friend, you can't escape; that would be very rude and un-supportive of you. But, as you sit through another lecture about the different zodiac signs and how they all interact with each other, you can't help but wonder if there's any way to steer clear of the virus.

Of course, the original virus has to come from somewhere, so if you simply avoid it from the start, no one will get infected. Sounds easy, right? Not quite. All it takes an Instagram reel, a random thought, a comment from the history teacher, or suspiciously cute raccoon dancing in your brain. Then, it's over. You fall into the rabbit hole of obsession and, for the first two days, you have minimal sleep and maximum Google tabs open, researching as much as you humanly

can. At that point, you're stuck. You could try to swear off Google forever and unplug your WiFi to avoid the rabbit hole altogether. It sounds like a foolproof method. After all, if you can't learn more about the obsession, then you can't be hooked in. Except...now you're too busy trying to figure out how to turn off your WiFi with endless YouTube tutorials, and then you realize you sidestepped one hole just to fall into another.

There's one option left: go outside, touch grass, and suffer through Vitamin D intake. It's a very drastic measure to take for a tiny obsession, and it might hurt you a bit, both physically and emotionally, but the grass will distract you from all intrusive thoughts.

You will be completely mentally occupied. That is, until you start thinking about the chlorophyll and its green color, and THWUMP. You just hit the bottom of a deep, biology-filled rabbit hole. Well, gopher hole.

It looks like there's no effective way to avoid contracting the fixation virus. If you can't avoid the creation of patient zero, you can at least protect yourself from catching the cold. Get vaccinated: if you give yourself a dose of every possible obsession subject topic, then you will be safe from contracting the real disease. Unless, of course, you become obsessed during your vaccination process. In that case, the only solution is to accept your fate. Just give in and dedicate the next few months of your life to the obsession virus. Don't worry, it always leaves...eventually. Probably. Hopefully.



A. Anand

Gruetter adjusts to new iPhone 16

by Sam Gruetter
Editor-in-Chief

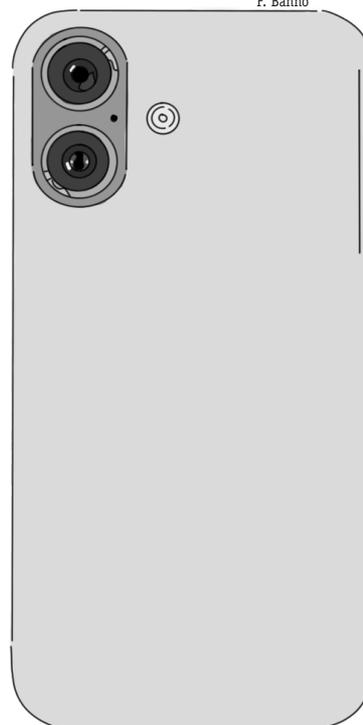
I recently made a substantial, luxurious, and adulating purchase (at the expense of my parents): I got a new phone. This new device has several qualities that make it a noteworthy contribution to my already eccentric lifestyle. Most notably, the fact that the color of the display is so pink that it rivals only Barbie's humble abode. Now, one may incorrectly assume that the transition from an iPhone 11 to an iPhone 16 is an insignificant shift, but just like the extremely tumultuous years of my life between the ages of 11 and 16, I have experienced a multitude of changes with my new cellular device, not all of them positive.

The first adjustment I had to make is that my phone (generous even calling it that due to its insurmountable girth) is an absolute behemoth of technology. Every time I whip it out, I might as well announce to the world, "Hi everyone, I'm such a loser that I require a mini-tablet to function, rather than a reasonably-sized phone like the rest of you." As a matter of fact, the first text I ever received on this phone was from the International Space Station asking if California had acquired a new rocket landing spot, an easy misconception that has occurred much more frequently than you'd think. It's always "Are you holding a rocket landing spot in your hand?" and never "How are you doing today, Sam?" You may think this is the last of it, but boy, it is just the beginning of my plus-sized phone journey. Jeers such as "the San Diego

Zoo called and wants its rare, largest-on-Earth elephant back" and "that phone would need to buy two seats on an airplane" are frequent and never-ending. However, I choose to ignore the haters because the only thing bigger than my phone is my dairy intolerance, and that occupies a significant portion, if not all, of my thoughts.

The abrasiveness of my phone does not end there. Sporting a hard-to-miss Pepto Bismol pink shade, I might as well walk up to your face, scream a couple of times, and top it off with a good smack, because taking my phone out in public has the same effect. While the outside of my phone sucks, the inside is really what matters, and it sucks, too. Remember when everybody was getting motion sickness because Teslas drove too smoothly (not to be confused with the abhorrent nausea I get from the values of the brand itself)? Well, I have the same experience with my phone. My apps open and close quicker than Kris Jenner can diffuse a scandal, causing me to immediately recoil at their swiftness. While I greatly appreciate the efficiency, its effects on my circadian rhythm make me want to personally bring Steve Jobs back from the dead and tell him to get back to work, because my tummy still hurts every time I open an app.

While I am extremely grateful for my new iPhone and all of the several applications it possesses to my benefit, I must admit that when it comes to technology, I have the approach of a sixty-year-old white woman who frequently abuses Facebook. It is fair to say that I found the adaptation period rather tumultuous.



F. Banno

SINGHALS ADDRESS LONG RUNNING RIVALRY

by Siyona Singhal and Arnav Singhal
Humor and Sports Editors

Years ago, an epic rivalry began, a rivalry that would grow into a complicated relationship, filled with moments of compromise and others of pure hatred. Just two students who have the same last name, Siyona and Arnav Singhal. Their destinies were woven together, and the two were stuck in an endless cycle of arguing. And through all the chaos and conflict, one question refused to fade: WHY do they carry such a strong dislike for one another?

Let me explain how it all started. I'm Siyona, the clearly superior Singhal. I can't truly pinpoint when my distaste for Arnav started, but I'm almost sure it began in second-period PreCalculus Honors during my sophomore year. Unfortunately, our teacher decided to plan the seating chart by last name, which meant Arnav was right behind me. As we took our seats, our teacher said something I never forgave her for: "Wow, you guys must get sat next to each other all the time!"

I tried to ignore Arnav's presence in the class, but he made it quite difficult. It started with one question: "Do you have a pencil I can borrow?" After rolling my eyes, I handed over a pencil to the irresponsible freshman, thinking it was a one-time thing. But boy was I wrong. Day after day, Arnav asked to borrow a pencil, and day after day, because of the kindness in my heart, I gave one to him. At least, I did, until one day when he asked me, "Can I borrow some

pencil lead?" Unsurprised by his lack of materials, I handed him my container without thinking. God, if I could turn back time, I would have never done it. Later in the day, when I ran out of lead in my own pencil, I reached for my container only to realize there was no lead left. The crashout that ensued went down in history. Was I a little overdramatic? Maybe, but try to understand, lead gets expensive, and I have about 25 cents to my name. Yet after all this, a few weeks later in math, I heard a voice behind me: "Do you have a pencil I can borrow?"

Alright, now that you've heard Siyona's dramatic monologue, it's time you learn the truth. Yes, I'm Arnav, and I may have asked her to borrow a pencil or two, but her rendition of the story makes it sound like I robbed a bank. While I do admit I could be a little more prepared, I don't think her

reaction or her attitude toward this problem is at all mature. Even through the thousands of blatant lies she made over the past year, she completely overlooked the reality that our conflict never started with me in our PreCalculus class last year. It began in middle school when she began to berate me whenever I walked past her. To be honest, I don't even know when she gained a distaste for me. I think the real problem originated when Siyona realized how superior I am to her in both math and personality. Every time I encountered her, you would think I committed a war crime, hearing her screeches across campus.

Since then, she has created this fabricated personality of mine while hers shines through in her 1,500-character rant about a pencil or her weirdly specific obsession with stalking my house. I think we can all tell who the unstable one really is.

Siyona here again, as you can see, Arnav and I aren't the biggest fans of each other, which makes it so much worse when people think we're related. Sharing the same last name is hard, but even harder when you share it with someone so annoying.



A. Pan

- Lu pursues seasonal adventures in SoCal
- Robison succeeds in soccer

PEOPLE

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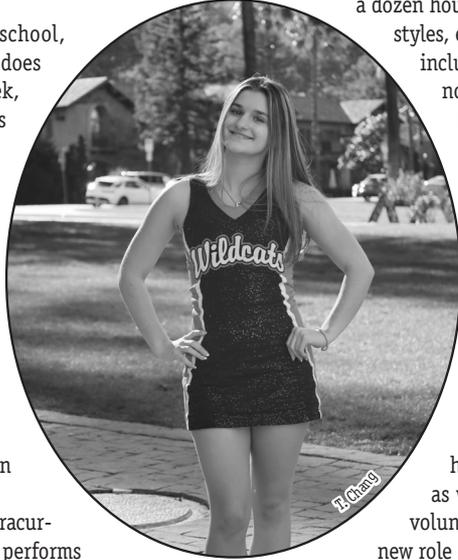
Gaylord makes a difference in the Los Gatos community

by **Tori Schubert and Lila Zamansky**
People and Media Production Editors

Entering her second year of high school, ambitious sophomore **Emerson Gaylord** does it all, balancing 12 hours of dance per week, volunteering, and taking rigorous courses while leaving a lasting impression on her surrounding community.

This year, to enrich her academic experience, Gaylord has taken on a tremendous course load. Her packed schedule includes English 10 Honors, Spanish 3, Chemistry, AP European History, Algebra 2 Accelerated, and Graphic Design. Despite the rigor of these classes, Gaylord stays on top of her workload by mapping out her tasks and assignments, stating that organization is key to success.

Outside of the classroom, Gaylord's extracurricular schedule is jam-packed. Gaylord performs with the LGHS Dance Team, bringing her vibrant energy to every football game, school rally, and practice. Outside of LGHS,



she competitively danced with the West Valley Dance Company, dancing a dozen hours a week. Gaylord immerses herself in a variety of styles, explaining, "I do multiple different types of dance, including jazz, lyrical, hip-hop, and contemporary,"

noting that contemporary is her favorite style. Since the age of seven, Gaylord has grown up in the dance community. Dance has become more than a hobby for Gaylord — it's a form of art, "allowing me to express myself in a way words can't."

Gaylord also spends countless hours giving back to the community. A fifth-year member of the National Charity League (NCL), Gaylord has experience leading her peers as well as being immersed in many volunteer opportunities, taking on a

new role each year, including her most recent term as president. When describing her time as president, Gaylord shared, "I felt very honored to be nominated as the president by my NCL peers and

appreciated the chance to embrace this leadership role." Her shining gratitude and versatile nature ultimately earned her the Modelette Award at the end of last year, as the ideal role model of her class. Gaylord is an active member of the community, having performed over

250 hours of community service. She has worked with many organizations including Book-Go-Round, Animal Assisted Happiness, House of Hope, and Friends of the Library. Approaching the end of her fifth year as an NCL member, Gaylord describes her volunteering as something that makes her feel more involved in the community, as it "boosts my mood, knowing that I am able to benefit others in need, as one part of a whole society."



While juggling a busy schedule, Gaylord prioritizes her mental health, finding time for recreational interests and hobbies. In her rare free time, she enjoys playing pickleball, traveling, hiking, and trying new things, while also maintaining her high academic standards. Looking to the future, she advised her peers to "make time for yourself, make time for others, and live life to the fullest."

Lu makes the most of senior year and summer life

by **Kat Littfin**
Editorial Editor

Go-getter, learner, and storyteller: senior **Megan Lu** is all of the above. Though only in high school, Lu has had many interesting experiences ranging from odd jobs to pageantry. In any interaction with Lu, her humorous spirit, intelligence, and narrative abilities shine through.

Whereas most students spend the majority of their summer break relaxing and recovering from the stress of the school year, Lu took the road less traveled. When a highly competitive summer program rejected Lu, she did not let setbacks stop her from having a productive summer break. Relocating to Southern California for the summer, Lu took four community college courses — the equivalent of a semester of university coursework — which filled her afternoons Monday through Thursday. Still motivated to do more, Lu spent her mornings volunteering at Newport Beach, where she planted over 200 pickle weeds. Lu especially enjoyed this activity because of the emotional connection she had to the location. She described: "I love seeing the Newport coastline. It's a very beautiful spot, and it has a lot of sentimental value to me because when my brother first got into UCLA, we went there and celebrated."

Even on her off days, Lu worked at a ranch where she taught horse riding lessons. She also tutored a student who was taking the same course as she, Bio Lab, and worked several odd jobs on Fiverr. According to Lu, her most memorable job involved "a board game maker want[ing] an Excel sheet in the next 24 hours because he had a pitch to Hasbro." Not daunted by the task, Lu told herself, "I got this," and used Adobe and YouTube tutorials to create a final product that ultimately contributed to the success of the Hasbro pitch. Lu said her summer vacation was "the summer of hustling," which aptly illustrates her jam-packed summer extravaganza.

After summer, Lu rolled into her senior year. Lu admits that this school year is "really hard," but throughout her academic career, she has been inspired by her courses and teachers. Lu specifically highlights **Kristen Austin** because of her warmth and conversational abilities, **Timothy Gaylord** because of his "radiant positivity [...] and intellect," and **Paris DeSoto** because she is "a fabulous dancer." While Megan takes AP Literature and AP French at LGHS, she can also speak Mandarin and some Russian

thanks to the supplemental BYU online course she took over the summer. Notably, her favorite Russian words are *Поезд* (stop) and *Кока-кола* (Coca-Cola).



Lu also involves herself in a multitude of after-school activities. She volunteers as co-president of Adults Towards Independent Living, a club that helps adults living with spinal cord injuries. Additionally, she works at Oak Meadow Dental Center twice a week, doing administrative tasks and chair-side care. To open up to new experiences and improve her public speaking, Lu started participating in pageants this year. According to Lu, her favorite part of the events is "that people aren't afraid to be more girly." She added: "At school [...] if you wear a lot of makeup or dresses, people think, 'why are you trying so hard?' But I feel like [at pageants] people can just be themselves."

If you see Lu on campus, feel free to strike up a conversation, as you will likely hear a quick quip, a nice compliment, or an interesting story.

DeGraff excels in rowing

by **Tanvi Ambekar**
Opinion Editor

Junior **Luke DeGraff** is kicking off the year with an academic and athletic load many high schoolers would shy away from. Balancing rigorous courses with a year-round rowing season, he is charging into his second-to-last year of high school with an unmistakable determination to make the most of every day.

With AP Physics, AP Environmental Science, and Spanish 4 Honors stacked into his schedule, along with almost daily practices and weekly regattas, DeGraff certainly has his work cut out for him. Despite this, he approaches the school year with optimism, determined to enjoy the challenge of finally being an upperclassman. He especially loves his AP Physics and Spanish classes, even wishing he could have taken AP Psychology or AP Biology if his courses "weren't already pretty loaded."

Rowing, however, remains the core of DeGraff's routine. He discovered rowing through a summer program in middle school, and to his surprise, he fell in love with the competitive nature and team spirit the sport inspires. After the summer, he began rowing in his free time and went on to win the annual San Diego Crew Classic in March of his freshman year. As he recalled, his favorite parts included "spending time with my friends in the hotel rooms, during car rides, and eating food." His coach was also extremely supportive throughout the process, and it became increasingly likely that rowing was to be his sport.



Although Los Gatos High School does not have an official school rowing team, DeGraff rows with the Los Gatos Rowing Club, a private organization that affiliates its teams with the school to better reach high school students. Consisting of nearly 80 people, DeGraff's team may seem too big to foster close relationships, but he said he thoroughly enjoyed the energy and "team unity" the sizable group brings to every regatta they participate in. This collective passion, combined with his natural competitive spirit, has led to DeGraff being a dedicated and talented team member for five years.

Amidst the chaos, DeGraff still finds time for his hobbies. One of his longest-standing hobbies is baking, which he has been doing since before he can remember. He acknowledged: "As a rower, I am pretty busy, so I just bake whenever I can." Although he usually bakes alone, he finds the process to be a calming break from the mayhem of student-athlete life—and it can result in some delicious creations. His favorite so far is a lemon poppyseed cake he baked from scratch a couple of years ago.

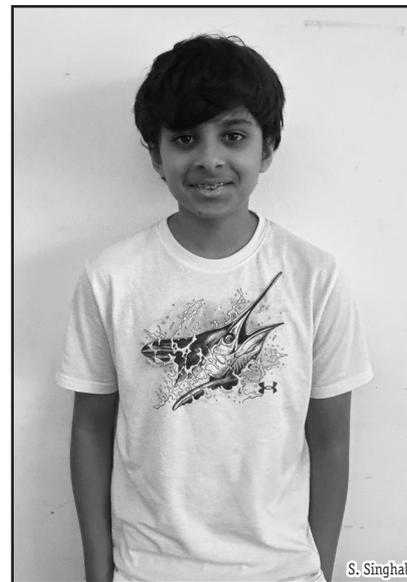
Overall, DeGraff strives to blend academic rigor, athletic commitment, and personal passion without losing his drive. His ability to handle a heavy course load while finding time to spend on hobbies he loves shows that high school doesn't always have to be chaotic: it just needs to be the right mix of challenging and fulfilling.

GUPTA ADJUSTS TO FRESHMAN YEAR

by **Arnav Singhal**
Sports Editor

Whether in the robotics workshop or the Manutech lab, **Aarav Gupta** is a freshman tackling high school head-on. This year, Gupta's schedule is ambitious; he is taking Manufacturing Technology 1, Spanish 2, Precalculus Honors, English, Robotics, Biology Honors, and Health and Fitness. With Gupta's challenging classes, he always manages to have fun. He could be visiting Nina's, a local Mexican restaurant, with his friends or competing at robotics tournaments with the school's First Robotics Competition team.

Transitioning from middle school to high school is not an easy phase for everyone to adapt to, but Gupta is breaking that barrier entirely. Gupta says his biggest challenge in this transition is time management. He recalled, "In middle school, there's not really much work to deal with. But in high school, it's not like that. I had to learn how to balance a much higher workload." Right now, he struggles most with procrastination, which he is overcoming through his classes this year. Not only has he skipped Algebra 2 over the summer and is taking Precalculus Honors, but he is also taking Robotics, a time commitment that exceeds all others, as his teammates would recall. Through his ability to adapt to his environment or his work ethic, Gupta



consistently stands out as someone willing to grow and turn his challenges into opportunities.

In Robotics, Gupta excels in the control team, where he is learning the ropes. Gupta said his goal in robotics is to learn as much as possible so he can apply his knowledge outside of the workshop. His favorite experience has been going to the off-season competitions to compete and bond with other team members. He said his most treasured moment was in an off-season competition: "when we got to go to the finals, when we got chosen. That was a look in the top alliance. Though we were last picked, it was still a crazy moment, and we got so far."

He stated that his biggest inspiration for learning to work with tools and electricity has been a YouTuber named Ben Eater, who takes courses on digital electronics. Through his interest in STEM, Gupta hopes to pursue a career in aerospace engineering at Lockheed Martin or NASA.

Gupta's personality and interest in engineering make him a truly remarkable student and engineer. He says his biggest advice to students who want to get started in engineering and robotics would be to take their time and do their research. Gupta shared, "The worst way to learn is to just do it all on your own. You want to utilize tools that you have so that you can do it more efficiently." With his drive, curiosity, and willingness to learn, Gupta is not just adapting to high school; he's thriving in it.

Robison gears up for an eventful season

by **Isabella Langner and Jordan Park**
Center Editor and Website Manager

If you've ever wondered how one student can juggle soccer, singing, kickboxing, volunteering, and ambassador work, meet senior **Callan Robison**, because he's doing it all.

Robison has been playing soccer, as he described, "since I could walk." He struck up a passion for the sport in his hometown of Seattle, Washington, where his babysitter would take him out to the fields, eventually leading him to play competitively. He moved to Los Gatos before sixth grade and joined the Los Gatos United Soccer Club soon after. To continue his athletic career, he joined the LGHS Boys' Soccer Team freshman year. He played as a goalkeeper, first on junior varsity and eventually on the varsity team. Regarding the upcoming season, Robison stated, "I'm definitely excited for it. I think we have a lot of young talent...so I'm definitely excited for the future of the program."

Another one of Robison's athletic pursuits includes kickboxing: "My brother had done taekwondo for a long time, switched to

kickboxing and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and I thought martial arts was something that I wanted to give a try." He began in the spring of his junior year after he decided he did not want to continue his club soccer career. Robison shared,

"It is really fun to learn something new when you've been doing the same sport your whole life, and it's nice, the individualism of it."

Along with his athletic talents, Robison is musically gifted as well. He is a member of the LGHS choir through which he participated in the Coastal Regions Honors Choir, which consists of the most skilled singers in the Bay Area. Each year, the group performs its main concert in a designated location; this year's was Berkeley.



photos courtesy C. Robison

Outside of athletics and choir, Robison is also deeply involved in community service through the Street Dog Coalition, an organization that supports unhoused individuals and their pets. Each month, the organization offers free veterinary services, food, clothing, and pet supplies. Robison's role at these events involves greeting clients, enrolling them in the system, and ensuring the clinic stays organized. He added that the work is incredibly meaningful to him: "I love dogs. Always have, always will... I hate the idea that some of these dogs go without good treatment, and I want to help them in every way that I can." The organization's mission is close to home for him as he has two labradoodles, Edison and Hopper.

An additional aspect of Robison's extracurricular life is his role as an ambassador for the UC Berkeley Business Academy for Youth, a position he earned after attending the program last summer. "I had an absolute blast," he said of the experience. He now gives presentations to middle and high school students, encouraging them to explore and contribute to the academy's after-school and summer programs.

NELSON PREPARES FOR A BUSY YEAR

by **Chloe Wilson**
Culture Editor

Freshman **Caliana Nelson** has quickly immersed herself in numerous Los Gatos High School activities, ranging from sports to instruments. Whether she is rushing on the football field or practicing tunes on her trumpet, Nelson commits fully.

In the short time she has been at LGHS, she has already found a healthy balance between school and extracurricular activities. Nelson explained, "I just find the little spots of time that I can study and do homework." She is taking various classes, including Geometry, Spanish, Band, Health and Fitness, Biology, and English. Her favorite class so far this school year has been Spanish because of its creative assignments. Nelson is also involved in several school clubs, including the Self-Care Club and the Psychology Club, and she is a member of the school band.

In terms of her athletic talents, Nelson has many. She was one of the few freshman players on the varsity flag football team and found numerous ways to connect with both under and upperclassmen. Nelson described her time on varsity as "a really good experience, getting to play with much more advanced players. I connected with everyone by just making jokes and laughing together." Despite making varsity, flag football was

a brand new sport for Nelson, as she pointed out: "At first, it was really scary. I remember the first practice I did not want to go to, but my mom was the one who convinced me." Taking on an unfamiliar sport was clearly an important decision for Nelson that paid off, as she and the team achieved significant success this season. One of her favorite memories during the games, she pointed out, was "when I made the last defensive play of the quarterfinals. It was just so fun to have my whole team around me."

Nelson also plays for the school's JV soccer team. She is looking forward to "bonding with my team, it should be really fun." She competes in club soccer for Almaden Fútbol Club. When comparing her club team to her school team, Nelson said, "School soccer, so far, seems like there is a lot less pressure and I am just excited to play." Nelson's position of striker for both soccer teams requires her to stay close to the opponent's goal and score.

Nelson has also started to make her mark socially at LGHS, not only bonding with teammates but also, as she shared, "spend[ing] time with friends, just by talking, or maybe going somewhere to hang out."

Nelson's ambition, mindset, and kindness have helped her navigate her first year at LGHS, and she has had an eventful and successful start to her high school path. Nelson's commitment to trying new things while continuing with more familiar activities showcases her spirit and drive. Watch out for Nelson as she continues to succeed in school, band, and sports.



courtesy C. Nelson

Sacco thrives in cross country

by **Arnav Singhal**
Sports Editor

Thriving on the trail and the track as well as in the classroom, wherever sophomore **Kevin Sacco** ventures, he makes sure to leave a lasting impact.

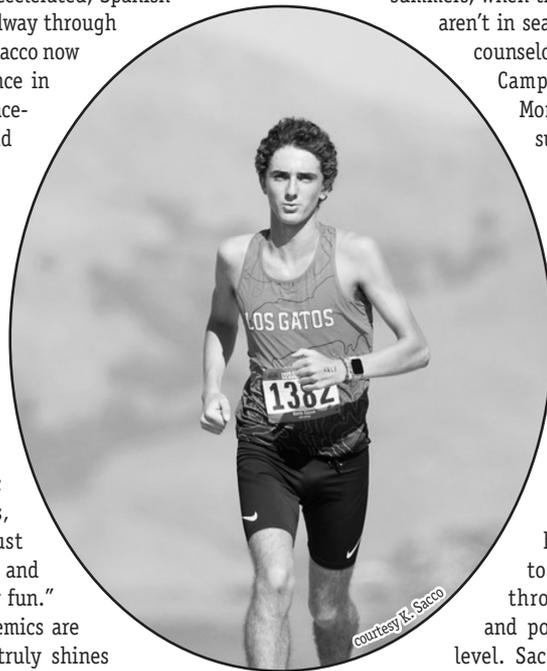
Sacco started this academic school year strong. Currently, he is taking a diverse range of classes, including Chemistry, AP European History, Honors English, Algebra 2 Accelerated, Spanish 2, and Orchestra. Midway through his sophomore year, Sacco now has enough experience in his first Advanced Placement (AP) class, and he has noticed a vast difference in effort from a grade level class. While Sacco excels in every aspect of school, he particularly enjoys his AP European History class with **Tom Hughes**. Sacco credits his academic success to Hughes, enthusing, "He's just an amazing teacher, and he makes class really fun."

Though his academics are outstanding, Sacco truly shines in terms of athletics. At Los Gatos High School, Sacco has been running for the LGHS Boys' Varsity Cross Country Team and Boys' Varsity Track & Field Team. He has succeeded in both the past few years, where he has had the honor of competing at the Nike Outdoor Nationals, Stanford Invitational, and the New Balance Indoor Nationals. He attributed his triumphs and motivation to his father and track coach, stating, "I got into it because my dad. He used to run in college, and so

he was the track coach and cross country coach at the middle school. And so I did it, and I just stuck with it." Now, as the cross country season comes to an end, he is moving on, motivated for his off-season training with the ambitious goal of running a sub-4:30 mile.

Sacco's athletic endeavors extend beyond running, as he loves to surf as well. Over the summers, when track and cross country aren't in season, Sacco works as a counselor at the Club Ed Surf Camp at Marisa Beach in Monterey Bay. His love of surfing began through his time as a camper at Club Ed years ago. He recalled, "I went to the camp as a camper, like a summer camp. I was very interested in it, and eventually managed to get a job there."

When asked about his future, he expressed a desire to continue his career throughout high school and possibly on the college level. Sacco is now taking on more of a teaching role in track, cross country, and surfing, and he is on his way to becoming the mentor his dad was. As Sacco steps into his fourth semester in high school, he shared his best tip for both running and life more generally: "You won't regret trying too hard. Like you won't regret putting in the work." Clearly, Sacco takes his own advice by continuing to put in the work to reach his goals in sports and school.



courtesy K. Sacco

VICTOR EXCELS WHILE AT LGHS AND IN HER COMMUNITY

by **Siyona Singhal**
Humor Editor

Aspiring doctor and avid volunteer, junior **Anna Victor** manages to maintain balance in spite of her very full schedule.

Victor's love for science first sparked because of her mother, who is a doctor. She elaborated, "In general, bio is what I'm drawn to. I like learning about different biological processes more than any other science and any other subject." Victor is president of the Students Interested in Medical Sciences Club (SIIMS), which hosts guest speakers from the medical industry. The club's goal is to introduce people to different jobs and careers within medicine. Victor described her favorite SIIMS moment:

"When we had two guest speakers come in person a couple of meetings ago, and that was really great, because we had a full classroom of students and everybody was super engaged, asking a lot of questions. It made my day that it worked out." So far, Victor's biggest challenge has been planning everything and sending out countless emails to guest speakers, which can be stressful at times.



Victor's passion for biology also led her to write a research paper which The National High School Journal of Sciences recently published. Her paper focused on various gene-editing methods and their applications to Rett Syndrome — a genetic disorder that primarily affects girls, causing developmental and nervous system problems — including ethical considerations. Rett syndrome is incredibly rare, which is what drew Victor to investigate the disease. It took Victor six months to finish the paper, and surprisingly, the most challenging part was giving credit to her sources: "I had to write the citations at the end by hand, and it was this specific format that really was annoying to do. There's no citation generator to make that, so I had to do it myself."

Victor and her mother also run a nonprofit organization that offers educational resources for children of farm workers. The non-profit began, as Victor explained, because "my mom used to work in Salinas, where there are a lot of farm workers, and she had the idea that we could try to do stuff to support these children." Victor and her mom raised money by sending out links to family members and posting on social media, allowing them to purchase the supplies which they

put in packages to deliver to churches. Victor described the most rewarding moment so far: "We went to a drive, and we brought our school supplies. A bunch of farm worker families would just come in and grab what they wanted. There were so many kids, and they were looking at all the colorful stuff; it was really cute."

Through her busy schedule and rigorous coursework, somehow Victor finds time to give back, enjoy her hobbies, and deepen her love of biology. It is clear that she is thriving in her junior year at LGHS and will leave a lasting impression on her community.



photos courtesy A. Victor

- Schaefer has a strong debut year
- Girls' soccer starts its season

SPORTS

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The new era of pickleball is transforming neighborhoods

by Claudia Casal Montserrat and Nelson Kramer
People Editor and Editor-in-Chief

For years, people have considered pickleball to be an old person's sport, and yet, the outdated script is fading as youth and retirees alike pick up their pickleball paddles. In the Bay Area the pickleball revolution is spreading quickly, and it doesn't look like it will stop anytime soon.

Many college and high school students are adopting the sport as a fun activity with friends on weekends. For the broader community, groups are forming at clubs around the bay to practice on weekends and travel to compete in the tournaments, especially in Los Gatos.

Many Los Gatans are joining the pickleball craze, and long-time resident and mom, Barbara Massa, is all in. From soccer to tennis to pickleball, Massa has been a part of the Los Gatos athletic community for a long time. Her transition to pickleball is a product of many factors, including her appreciation for the dynamic, reflex-based gameplay and strong community. Massa expressed, "You don't have to have a club to play pickleball. Yes, there are memberships, and you can belong to a club, but there are also some public courts that you can go to. It just felt like pickleball was a really inclusive community in my

experience." Massa has competed alongside her husband, Rick Massa, and many friends in tournaments everywhere, ranging from San Diego to Rome. Bringing home medals and qualifying for more challenging tournaments are all part of the fun, "It's just heightened, like the nerves are just a little higher. These are some of the best players in the country, so everybody's bringing their A game."

The rise in pickleball's popularity is not limited to suburban neighborhoods but has taken hold on college campuses nationwide. Heavy investment and interest in pickleball make the newly adopted college sport increasingly widespread and popular. Although it is not yet an official sport in the NCAA Division 1, scholarships and varsity programs are newly available to exemplary players, as seen at Utah Tech, which became 2025's Collegiate World Champions. According to USA Pickleball, there are 212 collegiate pickleball clubs, with the University of Florida including over 400 members in its club as of 2024.

As pickleball continues to make headlines, this sport inspires people of all ages to come together and fosters community in unexpected ways, as Massa commented: "it is one of those sports where you cannot judge a book by its cover. You can go out and play someone that's 20-30 years older than you, and they will absolutely

smash the ball back at you and leave you like, 'Wow, I just got my butt kicked.'" From retirement communities to college campuses, this spike in activity and community marks the beginning of a new era for pickleball.



VOLLEY: Pickleball teammates pose after completing an impressive match. (courtesy B. Massa)

Shaefer shines in the NHL

by Tori Schubert
People Editor

Thriving in his first year in the National Hockey League (NHL), rookie Mathew Schaefer recently took on a crucial defensive position for the New York Islanders.

Schaefer has established his role in the NHL, immediately excelling in his first official season after being the first overall pick in the 2025 draft. Schaefer made a mark in his first games of the season, ranked as the top defensive "blueliner" and third overall rookie. At just eighteen years old, he became the youngest defensive player as well as the second youngest blueliner to score a gamewinning goal. Head coach Patrick Roy quickly connected with the new edition of the team, stating after their first game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, "It was very special for me when I started my career, and it's funny because it was in Pittsburgh. My first start of my career was in Pittsburgh, and same thing for him." His sociability and success on the ice led Schaefer to be named NHL's October Rookie of the Month.



SCORE: Cheering fans fill the ice hockey arena with noise.

He began his hockey career at a young age, inspired by his older brother. Schaefer played for the Erie Otters under the Ontario Hockey League prior to joining the NHL. During the International Ice Hockey Federation World Junior Championships, Schaefer fractured his clavicle, leaving him unable to play for three months.

Schaefer's success did not come without additional hardships. In February of 2024, Schaefer

lost his mother, Jennifer Schaefer, due to breast cancer. Schaefer described her as a role model, remembering his mom with "a smile on her face [even] with cancer and everything trying to bring her down, but she wouldn't let it bring her down. She's someone I look up to." From the moment he picked up a hockey stick, Schaefer's mother supported him and his brother in their hockey endeavors. She would often put on hockey gear to help them train and fostered an irreplaceable love for hockey in both children.

Outside of hockey, Schaefer is an active member of the community and loves to help others, specifically kids in need. Schaefer contributes to the nonprofit Smilezone Foundation, hoping to brighten the lives of many children in differing situations. He also aids grieving individuals at the Western New York Compassion Connection, as he explained: "I got to talk to young kids' families who have been impacted by something so scary in their life, maybe losing someone." Schaefer's reliability on the ice shines through his generous nature, where he is always eager to help however he can.

Schaefer has proven himself as an impactful individual on and off the ice. Achieving high athletic standards within his first year, he is prepared to continue his career with the NHL, supporting his team through each win and loss.

(Source: NHL)



ATTACK: Schaefer dribbles the puck while looking to pass. (photos courtesy wikimedia commons)

LG flag football concludes

by Isabella Langner
Center Editor

After a long season of hard work and dedication, the LGHS Girls' Flag Football Team concluded their season with an undefeated record and an impressive run in the Central Coast Section (CCS) playoffs. Their record in the league was 10-0, and their overall record was 22-6.

In the weeks leading up to the playoffs, LGHS played against three teams in their league and won each game: 20-0 versus Mountain View, 39-26 against Santa Clara, and 27-0 over Gunn. These matches secured LGHS first place in their division, sending them to Open Division CCS, the highest level.

On Oct. 27, LGHS faced Carlmont in the CCS quarter finals. The game opened with Carlmont scoring a touchdown in the first quarter, but LGHS quickly retaliated, scoring 13 points in the second quarter and taking the lead. Carlmont returned from halftime to score another touchdown, but could not catch up to LGHS.

Two days later, they headed into the semifinals against Sacred Heart Prep, another team with a similar, almost undefeated record. The game was evenly matched, with neither team scoring a touchdown throughout the four quarters. In the second overtime, sophomore **Helena Younan** threw the football to sophomore **Reilly Cronin**, who scored the winning touchdown and sent the team to the CCS championship.

As they approached the championship match, LGHS prepared intensively in practice. Freshman **Olive Howard** shared, "We worked on some of the scout teams and had some Saturday practices where we worked on and ran through a lot of plays." After perfecting these plays, LGHS entered the championship game ready and motivated.

Their championship match was against Menlo School, a well-regarded team in the area. The first quarter ended in a tie, with both schools scoring seven points. Later, LGHS moved into the lead,



FUMBLE: The flag football team gets ready to make a play, scoring six points in the second quarter. After half-time, Menlo School scored 20 points and went on to win the game. Although LGHS lost the match, they made history as the first team in the school to reach the CCS playoffs and the championship.

During the offseason, LGHS will begin training in the spring and summer to prepare for the 2026 season. They hope to win the league for the third year in a row and once again make it to the CCS Open Division playoffs. Alongside their impressive record, LGHS Girls' Flag Football fostered a community among players, allowing them to make connections with girls they might have never met. Make sure to congratulate these Wildcats on their season and get ready to support their efforts next year!



THIRD DOWN: Makena Wedemeyer advances toward the ball. (photos courtesy A. Agarwal)

LGHS wrestling enters their season with determination

by Chloe Wilson
Culture Editor

As the Los Gatos wrestling team begins its season, the Wildcats will build on last year's strong foundation. Losing key seniors who contributed so much to the team, underclassmen are stepping into leadership roles, looking to carry on the legacies of their former teammates.

One of those rising leaders is sophomore **Trajan Pannell**, who worked his way up to the state championship last year by finishing fourth at 113 pounds. Pannell has been a part of the team for two years and looks forward to the new season. "We are just looking to

leave it all on the mat, show the hard work that everyone has been putting in, and hopefully make it to states."

Head Coach **Greg Valera** aims to keep the momentum alive, with last year's team holding the CCS record for most team points, among other awards, including most placers and most finalists. The program sent ten players to the CIF State Championships last season. Now the program hopes to benefit from the foundation they have built for themselves.

Last season, the team competed in meets such as the Reno Tournament of Champions, the Chukchansi Invitational, and the Doc Buchanan Invitational. To continue their drive from last year, Pannell explained: "All the guys on the team were training all day pretty much during the off-season, finding ways to eat right, and keep doing our work."

Another sophomore, **Wesley Hayden**, was dominant within his weight class and advanced to State last year. Though he made it to State last season, Hayden shared that this season, he is more ambitious: "My goal this year is to place at State and win some big tournaments." Like Pannell, Hayden highlighted his and his teammates' hard work in the off-season: "We just spent a lot of time practicing technique and staying in shape." He and his teammates strive to maintain this motivation throughout these next few months.

Since numerous seniors graduated last year, such as **Dylan Pile**, who currently competes for Stanford University and was previously ranked No. 2 in California at 175 pounds, the team is searching for any opportunity to rebuild and grow. Hayden explained, "We have

had a lot of juniors and seniors leave the team, and it is now made up of a lot of underclassmen." In terms of team chemistry, he added, "We are all good friends. I don't know if there are any specific leaders since we just all work together."

Freshman **Ryan Wend** is enjoying her first year on the wrestling team. As a brand new addition to the team, Wend explained, "I am just looking to get better and bond with the other girls." Building on the team's strong legacy, last year the program sent one girl to State, senior **Kaja McCullough**, who won the CCS girls' 130-pound championship. Wend remarked, "Everyone gives their all at practice, and the older girls are very willing to teach us."

Watch out for the Los Gatos Varsity Wrestling Team as they continue their lasting impact and enter the season determined to win! (Sources: Los Gatos, Los Gatos Athletics)



TAKEDOWN: Two Los Gatos wrestling members attempt to tackle one another.



COUNTDOWN: Wrestling player pressures his opponent to the ground. (photos courtesy G. Nadas)

Los Gatos Girls' Tennis Team finishes a successful season

by Kayla Mitchell
Public Relations Manager

The Los Gatos Girls' Tennis Team ended its season with an impressive run in the CCS Championship. The varsity team entered the final tournament of the year with an undefeated 13-0 record and third-seeded standing. Taking second place in CCS, the LGHS team finished its outstanding season with a solid run.

Since the beginning of the fall tennis season, coach **Justin Stenger** had big goals for the team. The ultimate goal of the season was to qualify for the CCS tournament with a winning record and make it past their quarterfinal run the previous year. The girls' success this season surpassed all expectations, with a near-perfect record and results far exceeding those of recent



SAY CHEESE: LG Girls' Varsity Tennis poses at Swim and Racquet after CCS finals.

years. Reflecting on the team's domination, Stenger commented, "Since the beginning of the year, I told this team to take the season one match at a time until we could achieve our goals of making an impact in the CCS draw. Everyone put in the work, and together as a team, we did it." All the hours the team spent on court throughout the season prepared the girls for their final performance in the CCS tournament.

In the first round of CCS, Los Gatos faced Leigh High School and secured an impressive win 5-2. A strong performance by sophomore **Tuleen Ikkawi** in two singles helped ensure the match for the varsity team.

The team gained a difficult win in quarterfinals against Sacred Heart Preparatory School beating them 5-2. Another tough opponent, Monta Vista High School, holding the number four seed, put up a gritty fight in the semifinal round. With crucial wins from the number three singles line with senior **Valeriya Murincheva**, and the third doubles line with senior **Riya Rama** and sophomore **Syona Rama**, LGHS clinched the victory. In her first singles match of the season, Murincheva defeated a talented player on the Monta Vista team, contributing to the overall 5-2 score. With rain delaying the finals for multiple days, anticipation grew before the final matchup, where Los Gatos faced the reigning CCS champions, Los Altos High School. The LG girls' varsity lost the match 2-5 but competed fiercely and forced the Los Altos team to fight hard to defend their title.



WINNERS: LG Girls' Tennis Team gleams after placing 2nd in the CCS championships.

The girls' achievements in CCS qualified them for the state tournament. The team traveled to Folsom for a chance to compete against top teams throughout California. In their first round, LG faced Mountain House High School, winning the match 5-2. Later that day held a matchup against University High School in which the girls lost a tough battle 1-6. With the completion of CCS and the state championship, the match was the last of the 2025 tennis season. The team surpassed all their goals this year and is ending their time together with a banquet to celebrate all of their accomplishments.

Girls' soccer kicks off strong

by Jordan Park
Website Manager

The start of the LGHS soccer season is here, with finalized rosters, first practices, and early preseason games for both the girls' and boys' teams.

The varsity girls are gearing up for a phenomenal season under a new coaching staff, including head coach **Lisa Mitchell**, and assistant coaches **Tanner Sartwell** and **Craig Surgey**. With a roster full of talent, including multiple Division 1 commits, the team is entering the year with high expectations. "I think we're going to do really well. We have a really good team, and I think the freshmen are gonna be a great addition," said junior and captain **Abby Nelson**. Being a captain for the second year in a row, Nelson shared how meaningful the role is to her, explaining that creating an environment where players genuinely enjoy showing up is one of her biggest priorities. She recalled: "it's very honoring being

a captain, and especially two years in a row. I think one of the most important things for me is just keeping it fun and making sure people enjoy being there. I think that's the biggest thing."

This year in particular, there is an emphasis on bringing the team closer and more connected, given the new faces on the team. Reflecting on this, Nelson stated, "It's difficult building new relationships, but I think over time it happens naturally. I think, especially team bonding, will really help form new friendships and grow them stronger." Junior captain **Avery Edson** also spoke about the three freshmen on the varsity roster: "I think it'll be super exciting for them to get an idea of what we're like as a high school team because I feel like it's more than a team; we're a community and a very close-knit group of people." Edson described her leadership role as balancing guidance with "making sure that everyone has a role and a voice."

Los Gatos will face tough opponents such as Leigh High School and St. Francis High School, matchups that will push the team and reveal just how strong this group really is. Last week, the team played two preseason games against Woodside High School and St. Francis. Woodside proved to be a formidable challenge, ending the match in a 1-1 tie. On Dec. 6, the team took on St. Francis. Despite impressive efforts from the LG offense, including standout plays from Nelson, sophomore **Bella Cain**, and senior **Ale Munnuke**, St. Francis's defense remained difficult to break through. The game ultimately ended in a 3-1 St. Francis victory.

This group of talented players is just getting started, but their unity and drive already reflect something special. With growing chemistry and a roster ready to compete, this season is going to be one worth watching. Come out and support the team at home against Scotts Valley High School on Dec. 15!



HUDDLE: LG Girls' Soccer gets a pep talk before their game.

Cross country dominates CIF

by Quinn Hathaway
Media Production Editor

The LGHS cross country teams officially concluded their respective seasons on Nov. 29. Training for the sport began in July and spanned all the way to California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) states several days after Thanksgiving, and included many achievements, memories, and team joy.

The LGHS Varsity Cross Country Team went to Central Coast Section (CCS) finals on Nov. 15, boasting a total of sixteen runners, with seven boys and seven girls racing along with two alternates. The CCS race took place at Crystal Springs, a course that the entire team had run several times prior during the regular league season. Both the girls and the boys raced in the Division 2 race, facing schools such as Mountain View, Archbishop Mitty, Branham, and Lynbrook. Junior **Peter Malone** placed first out of the LGHS boys with a time of 16:04.0, closely followed by sophomore **Finn Allan** at 16:06.9, and senior **Evan Corral** with 16:16.6. Junior **Piper Pyle** led the LGHS girls team, placing 15th with her time of 18:58.0 and qualifying for CIF. Junior **Elise Greenstreet**, came a close second with a time of 19:49.9.

CIF States occurred in Fresno on Nov. 29, with Pyle representing LGHS. She stated that her main goal for state "was to break 19 minutes at Woodward Park, which is a really good cross country course." Woodward Park is not a course with several very steep hills, nor is it a flat track-like course. It features gradual, rolling hills, a notoriously hard terrain for many runners. Pyle ended with a time of 19:19.7, finishing her first mile in only 5:42.7. Reflecting on the race, Pyle commented: "I had prepared as much as I could and just did it best." Several teammates, including Malone and Allan, made the long drive down to Fresno to support Pyle.

According to several runners, the season flew by. Although each week had five days of practice and usually at least one meet, freshman **Emi Rizvi** felt as though it was not enough, and she wished she had more time with the team. Many athletes agreed that teammates are the best part of cross country, with freshman **Stephanie Zhou** and Pyle agreeing that their favorite memories involved bonding with the team at pasta feeds and simply spending time with their friends. Corral had a different cherished moment, explaining, "My favorite memory from this season was probably going down to Irvine with the boys [team] at the ASICS Woodbridge Cross Country Classic." He spoke highly of the environment, filled with teammates, a nice grass course, and temperate weather.

With the season officially over, Corral gave some advice as he leaves both LGHS and the sport of cross country this year: "You get as much from the sport as you put into it. It's just about showing up and being consistent and just putting your best foot forward every single day. But most importantly, it's about fun." With not only fun, but effort and consistency, the 2025 LGHS cross country season is a wrap!



VICTORY: LG cross country team poses after a successful race.

Los Gatos Varsity Football has an outstanding CCS run

by Megan Saul
Editor-in-Chief

After a long fall season, Los Gatos High School Boys' Varsity Football concluded its play. The team ended as the Peninsula Athletic League (PAL) Bay champions, with a league record of 5-0, and ranked 47th in California, with a total record of 9-4. On Nov. 28, LGHS took second place in the Central Coast Section (CCS) Division 1 tournament after falling short to Junipero Serra High School 21-28.

The school held the team's senior night on Nov. 6, during their game against Palo Alto High School. Before the game, seniors and their families walked across the field to commemorate their time as an LGHS athlete. The festivities didn't distract the team, though, as they came out and scored two touchdowns in the first quarter alone. The team continued to dominate



GO WILDCATS: Senior **Bryce Novinsky** gets ready for his next great play.

the game, leading 35-0 at halftime. Several Wildcats contributed to the final score of 51-7, notably seniors **Beau Musser**, **Grayson Doslak**, **Max Thomas**, and **Jack Harrington**. This game concluded the team's regular season and ensured they would play the first playoff game at Helm Field the following week.

On Nov. 14, LGHS faced Saint Francis High School in the quarterfinals. Following a scoreless first quarter, a pass from senior quarterback **Callum Schweitzer** to Musser put the first points up on the board, with senior kicker **Efe Acar** quickly adding another one. Although the Lancers scored a touchdown in the third quarter, Schweitzer responded by delivering a 13-yard pass to junior **Shane Harmer**. This play brought the score to 14-7, the final score that granted LGHS another week of play. The semifinals took place on Nov. 21, again at home, against Palma High School. In a high-scoring game, LGHS came out on top, winning 45-21. The game sent the varsity team into Thanksgiving break with daily morning practices to prepare for the final.

The LGHS Varsity Football Team competed in the CCS final, a neck-and-neck game against Serra at San Jose City College. The first quarter ended in a tie, 7-7. The Wildcats continued battling throughout the game. In the end, LGHS narrowly lost, taking home the CCS second-place trophy, still a highly commendable feat.

Despite the defeat, players recognized their continuous hard work and improvement throughout the season. Novinsky commented, "We battled all the way to the end and left everything on the field. Really proud of the fight we put up, but unfortunately came up a little bit short in the end." He continued, "The team after was obviously really emotional, but we also took a lot of pride in our season overall. Most of us grew up playing sports

together, and for a lot of us, that will be the last time we ever do. Lots of love for my guys and can't wait for what the future holds."

Reminiscing on the season, senior **Hayden Benjamin** stated, "My favorite part of the season was either having fun with my teammates during camp or going on our long CCS run." Looking ahead to next season, the team is confident it will have another standout year and hopefully reclaim first place in CCS Division 1 after a two-year hiatus.



TAKEDOWN: LG football team tackles Serra lineman from all sides.



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POM: Antonio Rodriguez moves to ASU for wrestling

by Megan Saul
Editor-in-Chief

Having spent his whole life on the mat, senior **Antonio Rodriguez** is continuing his wrestling career next year as a Sun Devil at Arizona State University (ASU). After three outstanding years on the Los Gatos High School wrestling team, he has certainly made his mark on the program.

Rodriguez loves wrestling for both its individual and team aspects. He shared, "The team is like a family. We get to know each other better, and we try to hang out with each other as much as we can. And the individual aspect, it's more just on me, so I'd rather it be on me than the whole team." While Rodriguez enjoys the sport, he mentioned the difficulties involved, particularly in cutting weight: "Having to make weight sucks, especially when we are cutting weight. I just need to work out a ton, running, and just a lot of practicing."

Rodriguez began wrestling at a young age, following in the footsteps of his father, who played the sport in high school. He elaborated, "When I was little, we made our own team. It was called Impact Wrestling. It was our own little team that my dad created. A group of five of us trained in my garage in Brentwood." Rodriguez later moved to Los Gatos to further improve his athletic skills and education. Los Gatos's coach, **Greg Varela**, has played a significant role in

Rodriguez's development over the course of eight years. During practices, Rodriguez focuses on his technique and the fine details, perfecting his form and moves.

When visiting schools, Rodriguez decided he wanted to avoid the East Coast because of the cold and to attend a school with a strong program in finance, his intended major. ASU immediately drew him in. As he pointed out, "I liked the team over there because it felt like a family, and it fit my vibe a little bit more than the other schools I was looking at. I just liked it." He is looking forward to studying within the W. P. Carey School of Business, their highly ranked business school.

After spending time at ASU this summer, Rodriguez realized that he didn't want to wait another year to join the team in Arizona. As a result, Rodriguez is graduating high school early and moving to ASU on Dec. 18. He exclaimed, "I can't wait to go out there, go early, and train with the guys." Although sad to leave his friends, he is excited to start more competitive training sooner. In addition to the ASU team, he plans to train with wrestlers from Valiant Wrestling, a competitive program in the area.

As a Sun Devil, Rodriguez hopes to compete at the US Open for freestyle wrestling, make the world team, and eventually win the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) wrestling championship. Recently, he even launched his own merchandise with the

brand MyPlayer. His collection, featuring shirts and hoodies with his name and action shots, is available until Jan. 2. Although the wrestling community will certainly notice Rodriguez's absence from the LGHS team for the remainder of the season, he is looking forward to attending college tournaments and is ready to take down his new competitors as a Sun Devil.



WATCH OUT: Rodriguez performs a great wrestling move to tackle his opponent.

LG field hockey ends dominant season with CCS title

by Tanya Chang
Sports Editor

The Los Gatos High School field hockey team wrapped up its most remarkable season yet, finishing third in the state and claiming first place in Central Coast Section (CCS) Division 1 championship.



DRIBBLE: LG plays strong defense to prevent the opponent from scoring.

This year ended on an extraordinary note, not just because of the many wins, but because of the team's resilience from the very beginning.

After last year's painful quarterfinals, the Wildcats came back determined. Their momentum was strong, but this first loss came under unusual circumstances. In the postseason league placement game against St. Ignatius College Preparatory, Los Gatos controlled most of the match, keeping the ball in their attacking half. But in the final quarter, St. Ignatius managed to score twice, turning a 2-1 Los Gatos lead into a tough 3-2 loss. In the quarterfinals, Los Gatos faced Christopher High School in a high-pressure match. Despite the intensity, the Wildcats stayed composed and secured a clean 2-0 win, proving that their postseason goals were within reach. Next came the semifinal against Archbishop Mitty High School, a top competitor and challenge for the Wildcats. But Los Gatos came in confident; they had already beaten them twice this season. With disciplined defense and smooth passing, the Wildcats shut them out 2-0 for a third time, punching their ticket to the finals.

The CCS championship game against Saint Francis High School was the ultimate test. In the first half, officials awarded a stroke after an illegal trip brings down a Los Gatos player. Senior captain **Kendall Sutherland** buried the shot, remembering, "It was the biggest feeling of relief and happiness as I ran to my teammates,"

giving Los Gatos its first goal. Later in the second quarter, senior **Zoe Shyba** scored the second goal, giving a stronger lead to the Los Gatos Wildcats. As the quarter edged into overtime due to a short corner, senior captain **Leaya Cleary** fired in the third goal, sending the Wildcats into halftime with momentum. She commented, "I saw the space, and with the support and movement of my teammates was able to run through and get the shot off." This sealed a commanding victory, crowning Los Gatos the CCS Division 1 Champions.

Off the field, this season was built on bonding, trust, and chemistry. Junior **Stiene Bastien** reflected, "We truly put in so many hours of hard work every day so when we won it finally felt like all of that hard work paid off." From perfecting corners in practice to celebrating small wins during drills, the team grew closer through the sport itself. Their connection showed in every sequence, defensive stop, and moment. Sophomore **Jihyung Hong**, who moved up to Varsity this season, shared her favorite ritual: "Belly talks the day before game days because they reminded us that together as a team we're stronger."

As the team celebrated their championship win, it was clear that this season meant more than a title; it marked the growth of a team that learned to play for each other. The ending serves as a beginning and a foundation for the Wildcats to build on as they fight for their next CCS title.

Basketball strongly begins

by Kloe Adams
Games Creator

Falling leaves and frigid days only mean one thing: Los Gatos High School's basketball season is back. Last season, both Boys' and Girls' Varsity Basketball Teams demonstrated strong performances.



BOX OUT: Los Gatos players prepare to rebound the ball.

games. So far, the varsity boys have played two scrimmages against San Mateo and Fremont and competed in the Santa Cruz Dad's Club tournament which began Dec. 4. Their performance at both scrimmages and their impressive first place win at the tournament revealed how, despite their loss of seniors, they are on their way to a thriving season. Senior **Will Campbell** skillfully led the team through the tournament earning him MVP. Also presenting confident signs for the coming months, varsity girls played adeptly in their games against Saratoga and Branham, earning them two wins for their non-league record.

Continuing their annual tradition, the basketball program is hosting its annual Poinsettia Fundraiser. Each year, families can buy locally grown poinsettias just in time for the holiday season; all the profits made go directly back to the LGHS basketball programs. The new scoreboards in the Helm Gymnasium and the girls' new jerseys are the result of donations from these fundraisers. In addition to receiving support from the community, the girls' basketball program is hosting its fifth annual Cold Weather Kits fundraiser, which works to support unsheltered Los Gatos community members through St. Luke's Pantry. Using the proceeds, the girls' team builds kits with warm essentials to help neighbors through the winter. They successfully reached their goal of 740 dollars.

The best way to start the new year is by attending the first league games of the season with the Boys' and Girls' Varsity Teams playing Mountain View on Jan. 3. If their preseason performances suggest anything about the upcoming season, it is going to be one you do not want to miss. (Source: MaxPreps)

Girls' volleyball concludes

by Britt Melinauskas
National Editor

The Girls' Varsity Volleyball Team has officially ended their season, reaching several milestones and accomplishing various goals. Head coach **Nicole Ciari**, along with assistant coaches **Josh Lyngar** and **Morgan Iverson**, admitted early on that this season would be dedicated to rebuilding. With multiple new players joining the roster, the team had to adapt quickly while adjusting to the speed and intensity of the league's toughest opponents. Due to their dominance on JV, sophomores **Lydia Liu** and **Emma Jin** as well as freshman **Lulu Farwell** earned well-deserved spots on varsity for post-season play.

Following the end of league play and placing fourth, the team received four Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) All-League Awards for the De Anza Division. The recipients included Senior **Portia Zeidler**, junior **Sadie Bins**, and sophomore **Kate Langner**, earning First All-League Team, as well as **Annette Bassani** claiming All-League Honorable Mention. In addition to earning First All-League Team, Langner also received the Outstanding Sophomore award.

The varsity team entered the post-season ranked fourth in Central Coast Section (CCS) play and opened their run with a 3-0 sweep over Carlmont High School in the quarterfinals, securing their spot in the semifinals. However, the Wildcats lost in the Division I CCS semifinals to Menlo-Atherton High School, falling 0-3. Due to their high seeding and consistently powerful performance throughout the Bay Area, the Wildcats earned a spot in the Division III California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) tournament, their final opportunity to win a NorCal title and a chance at state championships.



GAME TIME: Langner strikes the ball to the other side.

Entering tournament play ranked fifth in CIF, Los Gatos opened against Pleasant Valley and achieved a decisive 3-0 victory. Their momentum continued into the next match against Lowell High School, where they once again swept 3-0. In the semifinals of the NorCal Championships, the Wildcats faced Sequoia Ravens High School, a familiar opponent who had beaten them earlier in the season at the Menlo High School Tournament. Despite a decisive battle in the final set, the Wildcats came up short, falling 2-3 with a heartbreaking 14-16 finish in the fifth set. Although the match was equal in talent, it ultimately ended the Girls' Varsity Volleyball Team's season.

Overall, the Girls' Varsity Volleyball Team met high expectations set throughout the season, including finishing 16-14 overall and 6-6 in league. The Wildcats hosted CCS and CIF play, an honor due to home court advantage, despite roster changes, position alterations, and, most devastatingly, multiple injuries. Even in the toughest matches, the Wildcats demonstrated grit, determination, and unwavering competitiveness. Make sure to congratulate the Wildcats on their outstanding season and thank the graduating Los Gatos varsity seniors! (Source: MaxPreps)