BY EMMA BROWN

Nearly one month after Carmel High School principal Jon Lyons was placed on leave of absence, Carmel Unified School District has hired interim principal Joe Rudnicki out of retirement.

In a Dec. 16 email from CUSD Superintendent Ted Knight, Lyons’ leave was announced to the CUSD community. While no decisions regarding Lyons’s employment at CHS have been announced, he will remain absent from campus for an undetermined period of time.

“Coming back from break, there was a realization that Mr. Lyons’ leave is not going to be over any time soon,” says Knight. “And therefore, we need someone at the helm.”

Hiring an Interim

After reaching out to local administrators through the Association of California School Administrators, the district hired Rudnicki, the former superintendent of the Coalinga-Huron Unified and Sunnyvale School Districts, to fulfill day-to-day principal duties.

Because staffing and the master schedule for the 2023-24 school year would typically be addressed by the CHS principal during February, a small group of district office officials, in addition to assistant principals Debbi Puente and Craig Tuana, will be handling CHS’ long-term plans.

Teacher evaluations, which were meant to be conducted by Lyons at the beginning of the second semester, will be conducted by Puente and Tuana, rather than Rudnicki.

If Lyons is unable to return to campus for the next school year, the process to fill the position will need to begin in March at the latest.

“Let’s say by March a decision is made and we have to find a new principal: You can still find a new, good principal in March,” Knight says. “It’s probably just harder. Obviously, if we need a new principal for next year, we want to get that open as soon as possible.”

PRINCIPAL UPDATE

CONT. 4

ACADEMICS

CHS TEACHERS GRAPPLE WITH POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES ON INSTRUCTION AND CHEATING

BY RILEY PALSHAW

With the emergence of ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence chatbot released Nov. 30 by a San Francisco-based company, Carmel High School’s teachers have had mixed reactions about whether AI is a tool that can be implemented into classrooms to benefit student learning or the cause of a major disruption in education worldwide now that students can eliminate assignments in a matter of seconds.

Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer, commonly known as ChatGPT, is a chatbot that’s been trained by OpenAI to reproduce writing styles off the internet, and although it’s not the first artificial intelligence of its kind, its state-of-the-art proficiency has made quite a splash.

“Everyone was impressed at how much more advanced this one was than previous artificial intelligence we’ve been introduced to,” says Colin Matheson, Carmel Unified School District’s curriculum, assessment and instruction coordinator. “This is a leap forward from what we’ve seen before.”

Say, for instance, you’re seeking to write a 500-word summary of the Korean War. Well, if you simply input “write a 500-word summary of the Korean War” into its chat bar, in a matter of seconds ChatGPT spits out a piece of writing that is wholly original, not plagiarized, not copied from Wikipedia, but a synthesis of information pulled from the internet.

What if you want it to write a sonnet for your sophomore English class? By typing “write a sonnet using iambic pentameter and a Shakespearean rhyme scheme,” ChatGPT will quickly craft a 14-line poem of original work.

ChatGPT is capable of creating and fixing code, writing essays, answering questions, solving math problems, summarizing information, writing emails and press releases and even creating artwork, posing a large threat to education and how things have traditionally operated in the classroom. Already, CHS teachers, specifically those who instruct writing-based courses like English or history, have played around with how well students could complete their writing assignments without ever having to write a sentence themselves.

“It can do everything that I ask my MPC U.S. History students to do in writing at a passable level for sure,” says history instructor Marc Staff.

The essays and short answer responses that it can write are definitely passable, probably even A’s and B’s.

This realization that artificial intelligence can produce acceptable results on class assignments and assessments has rattled some CHS teachers, especially those who believe that students are not only being academically dishonest by using ChatGPT to produce writing, as the work is not their own, but students are also losing valuable skills that they gain through the writing process.

“Being able to communicate one’s own thoughts and ideas clearly in writing not only demonstrates understanding,” expresses history teacher Bruce Dini, “but...
BY RILEY PALSHAW

In the aftermath of a November vote to pass the Stadium Improvement Project by Carmel Unified School District’s Board of Education, a group of Carmel residents under the name “Save Carmel” has filed a lawsuit against the district, claiming that CUSD hasn’t mitigated environmental concerns thoroughly enough under the California Environmental Quality Act.

Although it is still unclear whether Save Carmel intends to file for a restraining order or injunction, which if granted by a judge, would halt the project’s construction, both parties are scheduled to meet in front of a judge May 9 for a case management conference. From there, a judge could simply push for a mediation between the two groups, or, should a restraining order or injunction be filed, a future court date could be arranged to hear the case once more in further depth.

The lawsuit was no shock to the CUSD Board or district administrators, who had been notified by several community members of their intent to sue if the project was passed.

“There was a part of me that was holding out hope that maybe some of these neighbors would not move forward and sue,” Superintendent Ted Knight says, “so I was disappointed, but not surprised.”

The bigger concern for the superintendent is the cost of preparing for this lawsuit. Already, Knight is requesting to increase the district’s legal budget from $400,000 to $600,000 in order to pay for lawyers as they craft their defense, and with his personal prediction that the district could be involved in this lawsuit for a couple of years if a restraining order or injunction is filed, CUSD might be spending up to $1 million on lawyers by the end of the 2022-23 school year and even more as the case develops.

It’s $200,000 where now we’re not giving teachers raises or buying students new textbooks, so it’s going to hurt our district,” Knight explains. “We’re giving law firms hundreds of thousands of dollars because of a small handful of people who live in our community.”

In light of the recent litigation, Knight has also pushed back his late start recommendation for the Board to Feb. 15, giving time to see if Save Carmel pushes for a restraining order in the upcoming weeks.

The superintendent reported in a email blast to the CUSD community Jan. 6 that if the filed litigation stops the stadium light process, he plans on reverting back to the same start times each campus has now instead of pushing for later start times, as he does not feel it is safe for athletes to have later practices without lights on the field. Otherwise, the current projected timeline will not be altered.

Save Carmel representatives could not be reached for comment, and the Save Carmel website contains no information about the individuals involved. The group’s suit will be litigated by attorneys William Parker and Antoinette Ponce Ranit from Wittwer Parkin LLP in Aptos.

A.I. impacts

cont. 1

the process of writing-asking questions, creating an outline, finding sources, writing, rewriting, editing—all are important steps that, with practice, help develop critical thinking and reasoning skills that are valuable well beyond the classroom. Students who use these programs to circumvent the writing process are really cheating themselves in the long run. And in the short run, they risk running afoot of academic integrity standards that could include plagiarism.

CHS teachers note that many students tend to just strive for completion, which is why a program that can quickly complete homework assignments would be appealing to students and a strong temptation to use. But one of the main points teachers stress is that the goal for education isn’t for students to produce work, but rather for students to challenge their minds and gain new capabilities.

“The real question students need to ask is, ‘Do I want an education or do I want to become a skilled cheater without an education?’” says sophomore English teacher Dale DePalatis. “If you don’t use your brain, come up with your own ideas and learn to articulate your viewpoint, you will never develop the kind of skills that will be beneficial to you in life.”

Although this might be many educators’ initial reactions to ChatGPT, other CHS teachers think that artificial intelligence could also be used as a learning tool of sorts.

“While I think that the knee-jerk tendency might be to ban it or try to circumvent it by reverting to paper and pen,” says English teacher Barbara McBride, “I think a healthier approach is to accept the technology and try to leverage it in the classroom.”

Teachers are used to new technology emerging and often have to reevaluate the way they teach to incorporate rising educational methods, so the thought is that the same could be done with ChatGPT.

“Well, what does ChatGPT think of all of this?” asks English teacher Betsy Ferrin.

When asked “how should teachers respond to students who use AI tools in their schoolwork,” its original response was that “teachers should approach students who use AI tools in their schoolwork with an open mind and a willingness to learn about the technology. They should be aware that these tools can be used to enhance the learning experience, but they should also be aware that the use of AI tools may raise some ethical and academic integrity concerns.”

The AI also offered ideas of how teachers could use it, suggesting that teachers could simply ask students to cite ChatGPT like they would any other source or by using it as a teaching aid to help students enhance their understanding of the subject matter.

But even with ChatGPT-crafted advice about how to handle AI in education, it still remains uncertain what the right approach is to such an advanced technological development.

“I keep going back to the movie ‘Wall-E,’” keeping people unhealthy, plugged in, anesthetized by the modern concepts of progress and that particular existence seems lazy, pointless and lacking purpose and value for oneself and for the greater population,” says Marden. “Is ChatGPT just another tool to reconstruct how humans thrive in our society, or is it another tool to create thoughtless human beings who are easily manipulated?”

This is something educators will have to sort out as they experiment with AI in the classroom.
BY GRAYDEN MILLER

Even as Monterey Peninsula’s homeless shelters and outreach organizations offer refuge, the quality of life for homeless people continues to deteriorate while housed citizens face flooding from behind closed doors. According to the 2022 Monterey County census, 66% of more than 2,000 homeless people were unsheltered with over half not using any housing or rehabilitation assistance. And that was before 60 mph winds, mudslides, and almost $80 million in damage.

Yet emergency shelters, such as Community Homeless Solutions, chip away at diminishing storm damages that, without intervention, could be irreversible.

“They are losing everything that is of value to them because they don’t have a lot of possessions, but the possessions they have, like vital documents and birth certificates that they need for housing options, are lost because of water damage,” says Regina Williams, program coordinator of the Salinas homeless shelter Chinatown Navigation Center, adding that the program’s housing navigators and senior shelter monitors have recently worked to reinstall the items of homeless people that were lost in the storm.

Bruno, a homeless man from Monterey County, compares the recent storms to the big torrents of the ‘90s, and adds that he was homeless then, too.

“I’ve been here for 30 years, and conditions are the worst they’ve ever been,” he says.

Although Bruno has had recent luck with an emergency shelter in Monterey, his experience has not been universal.

Marissa Kobylenski, board member and communication worker at Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program, explains that with a recent influx in admissions to the program amid the storm, lines can get longer, beds can get filled up, occupancy can be quickly filled, and families can be torn apart upon admission to gender-segregated shelters that are typically geared up for safety.

“In I-HELP, there are about three times as many men as women admitted, and of the women admitted, more than 50% are above the age of 65, classified as elderly,” adds Kobylenski.

Although there are some shelters accommodating women and families, the numbers are limited, leading to a pressing question: Where can one of the most vulnerable groups of people find safety, especially during severe flood and storm warnings?

Kobylenski explains that I-HELP attempted to expand their night-based program to days during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, but to no avail. During the storm, the shelter worked through power outages to stay open longer, but lacked proper funding and workers, leaving many to try to find shelter in movie theaters, local malls or libraries.

Some found shelter after the holidays at another’s home. Refuge at public facilities is often temporary because of early closing, resulting in some of the peninsula’s homeless population spending the night against the elements, a great risk to being taken on a regular basis.

Marcos Ortiz, a program coordinator at Community Homeless Solutions, explains that the storm is more of a ripple effect, creating problems with domestic issues in addition to the more obvious physical ailments.

“People can believe that we have a homeless problem, but it’s more than that, because you’re talking about real, living people like the rest of us,” says Ortiz, adding that immediate care can be one of the best solutions to local homelessness. “But they’re people who need help, with some recovering from the after-effects of prison, drug addicts, those in need of rehab and victims of domestic violence.”

Services in the Chinatown Navigation Center facility include a kitchen, often the gathering point for onlookers, showers and bathrooms, outdoor camper vans for COVID-19 patients and bunk beds, comparable to college dormitories.

The facility is quite the contrast to living conditions about 500 feet down the road, where many tried to protect their personal items with tarps and protective rain gear. Despite their efforts, flood banks continued to build where temporary homes lined the sides of the Salinas Amtrak tracks, and residents were endangered by close proximity to the train and ensuing storms.

As a result of extenuating circumstances from the storm, Community Human Services, a local nonprofit outreach program for homeless people and shelters, worked to address Monterey’s current problem by distributing rain boots to prevent bad foot health due to flooding and rain boots. According to Shawn Stone, chief operating officer at Community Human Services, the objective is to keep people warm and dry, even if they don’t go to local shelters.

Despite what appears to be a solution-less program, a homeless woman in Monterey and former Catholic nun likes to look on the bright side of things: “The waterbanks and trees have been getting water, but it’s been pretty inconvenient for me.” Along with over half of Monterey Peninsula’s homeless residents, the woman is without care and has made the cold streets her current residence.

Donations to help cases like hers can be made to local organizations, including I-HELP, Community Human Services and Community Homeless Solutions.
Environmental impact of cars fuels students to pursue eco-friendly transportation methods

By Sara Eyjolfsdottir

As the impact of vehicle pollution on the environment and human health becomes more apparent, some at CHS are choosing alternative methods of transportation, often trading comfort or expediency for a greener cause.

Through their production of greenhouse gases and direct contributions to air pollution, motor vehicles pose a great threat to the environment and heavily contribute to the carbon footprint at CHS, explains science teacher Jason Maas-Baldwin.

“It starts even from the manufacturing of each car,” Maas-Baldwin explains. “Most of the cars in our parking lot are powered by fossil fuels, and combustion of gasoline releases a number of air pollutants, which lead to the phenomenon of climate change.”

This school year, 239 parking stickers were issued to CHS student drivers, making it more than 50 percent of upperclassmen who drive to school in their own vehicle every day, not including those driven by others, such as parents or other family members.

“When I see all of the cars that we have in our school parking lot, I wish that especially those that live close by would decide to walk or bike, says senior Andrew Prescott, who chooses to walk to school every day. “Even the congestion at the end of the day in the parking lot means more fumes are emitted.”

While some students use alternate methods of transportation out of necessity, there are quite a few hoping that their decisions will make a difference. According to National Geographic, vehicles are currently America’s biggest air quality compromisers and will only continue growing in their environmental impact.

“I don’t want to drive to school even when I’m older,” says freshman Merielle Flagg, who uses her e-bike to commute to and from school.

For students such as freshman Lila Glazier, who is unable to avoid cars altogether due to her home’s distance from the school, carpooling became the perfect choice to minimize her negative environmental impact.

“Since carpooling is both convenient and helps reduce carbon emissions, it should be used more,” says Glazier, who has carpooled to school as well as after school sports practices with senior Marina Hobson since the beginning of the year.

A number faculty members have also chosen to make their own difference on the environment, including math teacher Andrea Smith who tries to use her electric scooter as her main mode of transportation to school.

“arpoolng is also very important,” says Maas-Baldwin. “It is much better for the environment than driving individually.”

Maas-Baldwin explains how car emissions, beyond their production of greenhouse gases, can also be linked to phenomena such as photochemical smog and acid rain. Increasing schoolwide consciousness about the impact that motor vehicles have on the environment is a shared goal for many.

“It’s necessary to show people that sacrificing a little bit of convenience can go a long way,” says science teacher Don Freitas as he switches out of his biking gear from his daily six-mile bike ride from Monterey.

Many of those choosing alternative transportation hope that improvements will be made in order to allow biking, walking and even scootering to CHS to become more accessible as they may not be practical for many.

“If we got more actual bike paths or were able to fix bumpy sidewalks, we would see fewer drivers,” Smith says. “I don’t even feel safe crossing the highway on my scooter most of the time, and I’m not sure I would want my kids riding their bikes to the high school every day.”

Beyond working to lower individual carbon emissions, there are other ways in which students can promote environmental consideration in Carmel and make these changes attainable for more people.

“In addition to becoming more conscious of your mode of transportation,” Maas-Baldwin says, “students could go and advocate to the City Council for more accessible paths for walking and biking which could make a huge impact for many.”

Principal update

Cont. 1

If CHS does need to hire a permanent replacement for the principal position, CUSD intends to hold student and community meetings to gather input on what qualities people are looking for in a principal.

Campus Response

In light of Lyons’ absence, students express feeling unsettled, primarily because of the lack of information about the cause of the principal’s leave. Knight has noted that CUSD is unable to comment on the cause for Lyons’ absence, and Lyons was unable to be reached for comment.

“The administration seems a bit chaotic,” says CHS senior Peyton Kelly. “They seem as if things are all together in a sense, but like a piece of the puzzle is missing. We need a principal. Daily student life is carrying on, but it is sort of this elephant in the room, especially with turnover within CUSD and the recent amount of turnover within CUSD has been difficult for staff and students.”

Some teachers also express frustration with the change in leadership, noting that the recent turnover within CUSD has been difficult for staff and students.

“It just feels like we’ve had a lot of change,” says CHS French teacher Suzanne Marden. “Since Mr. Lyons has been here, we’ve had three different superintendents. Being part of an organization that has had as much change as we have had in the last six or seven years is exhausting.”

Though questions are still circulating, some students are hopeful that Rudnicki’s presence will help to ease CHS into a transition back to normal.

“I definitely think that having an interim principal has put some ease in students’ minds,” says CHS junior Brynn Byrne. “It just feels good to know that someone is here to look over our school.”

Moving Forward

Because of confidentiality requirements surrounding personnel issues, CUSD has declined to comment on whether an investigation into Lyons is pending, or if he will return to campus this year. During Lyons’ hiatus, Rudnicki will continue fulfilling his duties for the next several months.
Monterey County sees more diversity in local politics

BY BRIANNA SCIUTO

Throughout the past 15 years, the United States has seen several political firsts, from the first Black president of the United States to the first female vice president. Monterey County is following this trend on the local level, having recently experienced a diversification with mayors Tyller Williamson of Monterey, Mary Ann Carbone of Sand City and Anna Velasquez of Soledad fronting the progression.

Historically, Monterey County’s governments have consisted of a homogenous group, but the benefits of this mayoral diversification are starting to reveal themselves.

“Diversity of thought, experience and background in politics is what’s going to give us the best solutions for our community,” notes Williamson, who was elected in 2017, Sand City’s first Black, as well as the first openly gay mayor.

But Williamson is not the Monterey Peninsula’s only mayoral first in the past few years. In 2017, Sand City elected Mary Ann Carbone, its first Indigenous and female mayor, and in 2020, Anna Velasquez, Soledad’s first female mayor in almost a century, took office.

The American ideal for government is one that is for the people and by the people, and Monterey County is further progressing towards that with a government no longer confined one type of person.

If we don’t have that full representation of what our community looks like, it can be really dangerous in regards to our democracy,” Williamson says. “We don’t truly have a democracy unless we are getting a wider perspective.”

Carbone demonstrated this idea when, before taking office as mayor of Sand City, she proposed that Sand City celebrate Indigenous People’s Day in place of Columbus Day, as she says Columbus Day is harmful to her Indigenous community. Her endeavors were to no avail, but when elected mayor, her first action was to display the newfound voice of Indigenous people in politics by making that change. This inspired cities across the county to do the same.

“I serve as a reminder that not all Native people have passed,” Carbone says.

A key component of politics is a leader’s empathy for their community, an aspect facilitated by diversity. Historically, white men have dominated the peninsula’s politics, and any homogenous group of people is not always able to empathize with the experience of everyone on the peninsula.

Williamson recognizes that this barrier could potentially render them less equipped to address certain issues, so he emphasizes a balance in representation. Having experienced homelessness, Williamson is able to empathize with the experiences of those struggling with housing. His mayoral focus is housing in Monterey, and he believes he is able to adequately address the main issues people face regarding that because of his own background. On top of that, his personal experience in the LGBTQ community allowed him to improve their experiences by co-founding the Monterey Pride Parade.

Mary Ann Carbone has made a nationwide impact that supports Williamson’s emphasis on empathy. During a visit to the White House, she initiated a federal committee focusing on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. She brought to light the disproportional sex-trafficking problem within the Native American community, reinforcing the idea that diverse, individual experiences within government can improve individual quality of life.

Velazquez also acknowledges this phenomenon, citing her own experience as a leader.

“As a female and as a mom, my perspective is a little different because you really see those impediments in the community,” she says. “I’ve noticed some of the cultural and systemic barriers, and dealing with those two aspects really impacted my decision-making.”

Another advantage of diversity the mayors all note is the potential to inspire youth. Each grew up lacking politicians they could identify with, and they strive to be that person whose journey people can identify with.

“I am able to share with some of our residents that I come from Soledad, and I’m just like them,” says Velazquez, who grew up in Soledad as a first generation Mexican immigrant. “They can imagine that they can be in these roles. Growing up in Soledad, I didn’t see a role model who looked like me.”

Carbone, who currently serves as a “culture bearer” for her Chumash community alongside serving as mayor, hopes that her political presence and her public demonstration of her heritage will inspire more Indigenous Americans to advocate for their political rights.

Williamson was inspired initially by his mom’s service to her country as a member of the Navy and later by Obama, whose success confirmed that he could advance in politics as a Black man. He aspires to personally influence the people of Monterey in the same way.
BY AVERY PALSHAW

While other kids my age were being taught by their parents to ride a bike or tie their shoelaces, I was being taught the importance of prepositional phrases and dependent clauses. My dad is an English teacher at Carmel High School, and I was frequently in my dad’s classroom growing up, either running through rows of desks or using his whiteboard as my own coloring book. Now I spend even more time in that classroom because I have my dad as my teacher for Newspaper.

Whether constantly running into their parent’s former students in public or taking advantage of their classroom’s mini fridge as a place to store snacks, many teachers’ kids can agree that there are both advantages and disadvantages to having a parent at CHS.

An advantage for many is that the transition from middle school to high school is considerably easier. Junior Hudson Silva, whose father Brent Silva teaches history, believes that teachers’ kids have a better understanding of the school system because of their parents, not only due to spending a lot of time at CHS while growing up, but also knowing what to expect from certain classes and teachers.

“When I was younger, my siblings and I spent a bunch of time at the high school riding around campus on scooters,” says senior Sarah Schmidt, daughter of English teacher Hans Schmidt. “so I felt like I already had a strong sense of the place.”

Those who have a parent as a teacher admit that not only is it beneficial to have accessible help at home, but having a parent so passionate about a subject can be eye-opening. Many teachers’ kids are in agreement that being taught subjects from an early age has led them to excel at or gain an interest in a particular subject.

“Because I’m in my mom’s class and have been in all four years of high school, I’ve developed a really deep connection to the dance program at Carmel High School,” explains senior Sage Melton, daughter of CHS dance instructor Kristine Tarozzi.

While being taught by a parent can be motivating at times, it can also be filled with embarrassing moments. Senior Sonja Buran had her dad Kevin Buran as her Honors Biology teacher as a freshman and says that it was a slightly awkward dynamic during her first week of having him as a teacher.

“I had to deal with him showing my baby photos to people, making fun of me and my friends in front of the whole class and some uncomfortable questions and comments from my peers,” recalls Sonja in a joking manner.

Based on my own personal experience and that of other teachers’ kids, we are often held to a higher standard than most students, not only by our parents but by other teachers on campus. There is a lot of pressure from others to succeed, and to fail feels like a poor reflection on one’s teacher parent.

“If [High school] feels harder because it sets expectations and teachers already know me, so I can’t slip up,” says freshman Jackson, Brent Silva’s younger son.

For many, the simple benefits of being the child of a teacher outweigh the negatives. A classroom may be a place of learning for most students on campus, but for teachers’ kids, a classroom is a personal room to store food and sports equipment, while being a “safe space” to go whenever necessary.

“I would make up silly games using [my mom’s] yoga equipment with my friends, such as a different version of dodgeball or wall ball,” says freshman Bodhi Melton, Tarozzi’s younger child.

Out of the 14 teachers’ kids currently at CHS, most acknowledge that while there can be downsides to going to school with Mom or Dad on a daily basis, they are grateful to have their parents on campus.

COMMUNITY

Annual CHS winter dance indoors for first time in years

BY MAGGIE JOHNSTON

With a Mardi Gras theme, leous and flamboyant styles are encouraged for Carmel High’s annual formal Feb. 11 at Monterey County Fairgrounds in the Monterey Room, a venue that CHS has not used for years.

Planning the first indoor Winter Formal since the 2019-20 school year, seniors Ava Valdez and Mya Schnader, ASB commissioners of social events, hope to host an event that embodies an inclusive environment for all types of students after a lack of indoor dances during the COVID-19 quarantine.

“We are working to get games and other activities that aren’t just about dancing,” Schnader explains. “Dancing is not everyone’s thing, and having those other activities will hopefully bring more people in.”

Unlike the Homecoming Dance, this dance occurs off campus each year, which requires budgeting and more intense planning by the social events team under the faculty advisory of activities director Audrey Powers.

“A challenge we face when hosting the winter formal on the peninsula is finding a place that is willing to take us and is within our budget,” Powers emphasizes. “For example, to have an event at a hotel, they require a food and beverage package which, in our case, significantly takes us out of our budget.”

Tickets to the annual formal will be sold for $25 each during the week of Feb. 6. Mardi on!
CHS Class of 2022 experiencing positivity as college freshman, despite stress around transitioning

BY FLINT NACHBAR

There can be a lot of nerves when it comes to graduating high school and going off to pursue a four-year degree, as the transition of leaving Carmel behind comes with new academic and social challenges, but graduates from the Class of 2022, now college freshmen, say that the changes are new and exciting.

Moving out of state is tough on its own, but moving halfway across the country is an even harder thing to do. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill freshman Hannah Filly did exactly that, and although she was nervous to start, once she finally got adjusted to the distance from home, she did not regret her decision to attend.

“My dad went to UNC so I decided to give it a shot,” Filly says. “I visited it and absolutely fell in love with the campus. I’ve never met an unkind soul here. Ever since my first week I’ve had a blast.”

Sometimes it’s good to take a risk and experience a new place, as Filly mentions how welcoming and open to new friendships all her fellow classmates are.

Leaving the bubble of Carmel can be scary for CHS students, and even students who attend college in-state, only a four-hour drive from home, feel homesick. Jack Cassady, who started at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the fall of 2022, talks about how he dealt with homesickness.

“The first few weeks were tough,” Cassady says. “But calling my family is huge. I call them about once a day. It’s nice to hear them and hear what’s going on back home. I can’t even imagine what it’s like being in another state.”

For some, the transition into the academic setting of college was difficult. Tristan Staehle, a freshman at the UCSB, notes that college is more like the real world, and there are no life-lines.

Ali Jarvis, a freshman at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, has had to deal with a different kind of transition, the transition from high school football to playing for the university.

“We are starting the spring season for football,” Jarvis says. “I am finding a lot of new challenges waking up at 5 a.m. to go practice, on top of having new classes.”

Jarvis says that he has had to learn to organize his time on his own, without professors’ help, and figure out how to balance his school work along with his four-hour football practices that take place from 5 a.m to 9 a.m.

“There’s a lot of responsibility, there’s a lot of dedication, and it’s a lot of grinding,” Jarvis says.

Elle Bohlman, a first-year student at University of Notre Dame also found a place at her university by participating on Notre Dame’s club basketball and golf teams. She joined a recreational league for broomball, a sport similar to ice hockey that consists of skating on ice with tennis shoes and using a dodgeball instead of a puck.

“I’ve been able to meet a lot of upperclassmen through these leagues,” Bohlman says, “which is great because they all give great advice.”

As current high school seniors get ready to start their college journey, there can be a lot of pressure from peers, parents and teachers to go to schools based on prestige or the school’s name, but these CHS graduates say the same thing: Prestige really doesn’t matter.

“Don’t go somewhere for prestige or because all your friends are going there,” says Olivia Hansen, a student at the University of Oregon. “Go somewhere that is the best fit for you, or else you’re going to hate it.”

The transition to college is an important step in many students’ lives, as they transition from being a teen, dependent on their parents, to having more independence and being accountable for themselves, which can often be scary. But by adapting to this new lifestyle and finding the right people to surround themselves with, Carmel High School’s graduates are able to ease into this transition.
Ethics bowl makes CHS history with team debating to 2nd place at regional tournament

By Ella Gaily

One of two ethics bowl teams, participants in a competition where members debate issues of ethics and morality, became the first CHS team to advance past quarterfinals Jan. 14 despite an interfering power outage and 30 other schools seeking to earn high scores on their prepared argument.

“The regional we participate in is likely the biggest in the country,” says Carmel coach Marc Stafford, “so for us to make it to the final round is a big deal.”

Prior to the tournament, the CHS Ethics Bowl club of 13 receives 15 real-world situations to discuss. They then draft a response detailing their opinion and offering other perspectives, which is scored along with their ability to answer follow-up questions from the opposing team and judges.

“Discussing the ethics of many different scenarios, ranging from punching a Nazi to whether Russia should be allowed to compete in the Olympics, is interesting because there’s no right answer,” says senior Simona Matiyevsky. “It’s how you justify your position that makes it interesting.”

Yet as they prepared their cases, the power went out at CHS and the surrounding area, preventing them from competing by Zoom.

“The power outage happened 10 minutes before the opening, so we had 20 minutes to find a new location and set up,” senior Jack Lyon says. “We competed at a student’s house for the first three rounds and then moved to the district office for the next three.”

While the team entered the meeting late because of this, the Carmel 1 team of Greta Beesley, Callum Jeffers, Lillian Mendez, Cole Dahlia Prekoski, Minna Trokel and Magnolia Woodruff-Lyons still earned a near-perfect score in the preliminaries before losing in the quarterfinals.

Carmel 2 members Lily Bunch, Jenna Crawford, Charlie Felsing, Lyon, Riley Mabry, Matiyevsky and Grayden Miller advanced to the finals to win second place in the whole tournament.

“After beginning the day worrying we might not even be able to compete and ending it with one of our teams placing second, it felt surreal,” reflects senior Beesley.

Because this is their solo tournament each year, they’ll spend the remainder of the year practicing for the 2024 tournament.

Get Philosophized

Is it ethical to overthrow the government?

By Emma Brown

After Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office Jan. 1, supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro stormed the government buildings a week later to protest what the mob falsely claimed to be a rigged election. The mass attack occurred two years after the American insurrection on Jan. 6, 2021, during which supporters of former President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol building to rally against the same conspiracy theory.

To those who believe in the myth of widespread election fraud, the actions of the protestors were not only ethical, but also were warranted, raising questions about if and when it is moral to overthrow the government.

The right to resist is often the defense for coups or revolutionary action, with insurrectionists claiming that they have an inherent right to fight against tyranny or injustice. On its face, the natural law certainly seems to validate that sort of behavior; however, nuances to the right limit circumstances in which it can be invoked. Citizens are justified in rebellion only when injustice rises to a high level, making life intolerable. Oxford University’s Regius Professor of Civil Law Tony Honoré claimed that there were only three circumstances in which the right to resist could be used: when an oppressed group wants a change in government, when the people want to resist a change in government or when the people seek to secure independence.

Most importantly, the right to resist seeks to restore legal order and enforce constitutional standards rather than restructuring an entire political landscape. By invoking the doctrine, other essential rights must become more secure.

Had the Brazilian and American elections truly been rigged by a government entity, with that action resulting in widespread injustice, rioters would have been morally justified in their actions. Yet the foundation for their actions were baseless conspiracy theories, making their efforts to seize political power disruptive, illegal and pointless. Perceived injustice does not legitimize extreme, violent action.

British philosopher Thomas Hobbes believed that societies functioned because of a social contract, an unspoken set of agreements among citizens to give up freedoms for the purpose of safety. Without it, society would crumble. And without society, humans would revert to a state of nature where they would act on base instincts.

According to Hobbes, the sovereign or ruler of a particular civiliza-
tion needs to have ultimate authority to keep citizens in line, thus giving the people no right to resist the government’s authority. When experiencing injustice, the only moral course of action would be to abandon the social contract and return to a state of nature, though the prospect is unappealing at best.

As such, the Brazilian and American protestors would have no grounds for their violent actions, and if widespread injustice had truly been present, the groups should have instead sought to dissolve their respective societies entirely.

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Mock trial team returns to in-person county competition after 2 years

BY MINNA TROKEL

After two years of Zoom-based county competitions, the CHS mock trial team finally headed to the Monterey Courthouse this Tuesday to defend their eight-year streak of winning the county title.

The nationally recognized club, advised by social studies teacher and former federal prosecutor Bill Schrier, has been attending the county-wide competition, consisting of four trials against multiple local teams (currently standing at nine), since the club’s founding in 2004. Schrier, who has coached the team since its beginning, says that despite past experience and success with county competitions, no students on the current team have participated in an in-person one, as the most recent in-person county competition was in 2020, right before the state competition was shut down for the pandemic.

The team’s first in-person competition since then was the invitational Empire Chicago competition in October.

“A part of all of us are nervous because in-person mock trial is a totally different game,” senior witness Maggie Johnston says. “It’s more exciting and you feel it more when it’s in person versus when it’s on screen. The competition is more real.”

The in-person aspect, while appreciated, is felt by many as an added challenge to an already challenging situation, Johnston says. The self-imposed pressure to win felt by many members participating in the yearly county-wide competition stems from the team’s winning streak and the importance of the county competition, which leads to state and then national competitions.

“We do some other tournaments throughout the year that all ultimately culminate in the county competition,” says club vice president Shalya Dutta.

According to club president Sophia Cho and attorney Emma Brown, both seniors, despite the challenge the team faced of readjusting to online trials, they are well-prepared from both in-person scrimmages across the state and attending the international Empire Competition in October.

The CHS mock trial tradition of passing down knowledge and method through the team as a style of teaching newer students how to compete posed a challenge earlier in the school year when many realized that they themselves didn’t remember in-person trial etiquette.

“When we first started doing in-person trials this year, I realized that there was basically no corporate knowledge left,” Schrier says. “And I started to wonder if I even remembered.”

Each member of the team, regardless of grade, showed an excitement and willingness to make the transition from Zoom to in-person trials.

“There was definitely a learning curve, but many people were excited to go back in person, even with all that comes with it,” says Cho, who acts as a trial attorney.

One of the many lessons competitors had to learn or relearn was how to physically present themselves to the court, a vital aspect of mock trial previously limited by Zoom.

“The biggest difference is the etiquette,” Cho explains. “In-person trials come with a lot of formalities that you wouldn’t see in Zoom. When to sit, where to stand, where to speak or stand when speaking to the court, are all in consideration, but in Zoom trials, you are turning on and off your camera.”

The fact that students are once again able to maximize the meaning of their movements in the courtroom adds another element of excitement for many participants, who are excited to see how far they can go.

“Ultimately, mock trials should be fun,” Schrier says. “I believe that if you have fun and do your best, then it doesn’t matter how it turns out.”

The county competition ends Feb. 11, and the state competition will be in-person in Los Angeles from March 17-19.

Sophomore Brianna Sciueto testifies at the October Empire competition.

CHS hires chemistry teacher, doubling as water polo coach

BY NICOLE MIRSKI

Previously employed as a biology teacher at Seaside High School, Kevin Hurley has joined the science department at Carmel High School as of the beginning of the second semester after coaching the CHS boys’ junior varsity water polo team in the fall.

“Teaching is the best way, I can think of, to help the most people,” says Hurley.

Hurley was born and raised in Orange County where he got his bachelor’s degree in biology at Golden West. He moved to teach biology at Seaside for two years and worked as a substitute over the following eight years.

Hurley’s teaching assignment will include four classes of Chemistry in the Earth System and one Honors Chemistry class in Room 1. In addition to teaching science, Hurley coaches water polo with nine years of experience from playing varsity water polo throughout his high school and college career.

The CHS chemistry position opened up after Shannon Marvel’s departure at the end of the first semester.

“I’m going to do a blend of my style and Marvel’s,” Hurley says. “I’m not going to throw out everything she did because I’m sure it worked and the students already went down that road.”
Getting the call:
The rise of verbal commitments in student-athletes’ recruitments

BY SAGE MELTON

For student-athletes, the recruitment process has always led up to the moment of signing the dotted line in an official college commitment, yet now through verbal commitments this opportunity can come much earlier for some. Non-binding agreements made by student-athletes with colleges before the official signing period, verbal commitments act as a large part of the recruitment process for many athletes, allowing them to develop a close connection with the school’s coaches and team and make a formal contract with their desired college, although there is still a degree of uncertainty that comes with them.

1993 CHS graduate Mark Williams was given offers to go straight into the minor leagues, yet chose to take the college path, attending Stanford for baseball. “In my experience with verbal commitments, they are exciting for high school athletes to receive,” explains Mike Kelly, Carmel High School varsity baseball coach. “But the athlete needs to understand a whole lot can happen between the time they commit to a school and the time they actually sign their scholarship paperwork.”

Although these verbal commitments allow student-athletes a glimpse at the future of their athletic career, there is also the possibility their offer could be rescinded. Freshman Matthew Maxon recently received multiple offers for baseball and in the fall, announced his verbal commitment to Stanford University, whose team currently ranks third in NCAA Division-I baseball. “I have to maintain my skill level for baseball and continue to improve,” Maxon explains. Coaches say if the student-athlete endures a lasting injury or does not continue to play at an expected level, or if there is a change in the prospective college’s coaching staff, the whole agreement may fall apart. If the verbal commitment does not hold, players have to reopen their recruitment and consider other offers.

“When I was coming out of high school, there were no verbal commitments as a freshman—you couldn’t talk to anybody until after your junior year,” says former pitcher Mark Williams, who graduated from CHS in 1995 and went on to play baseball for Stanford on a 96% scholarship. “It’s a very different world now, I think a much more stressful world.” On top of staying healthy and keeping up his pitching statistics, Maxon will also have to hold over a 3.7 unweighted GPA and take nine AP classes, emphasizing that athletic talent does not serve as the sole basis for such offers as coaches will look at a variety of other aspects.

“What kind of teammate are they? Are they coachable? Can they handle criticism?” CHS varsity football coach Golden Anderson asks when discussing the main factors college coaches look at. Class of 2021 CHS graduate J.T. Byrne, who now plays baseball for UC Berkeley after playing two seasons for Oregon State University, went through a similar recruitment process as Maxon’s. Byrne verbally committed to Oregon State University during the summer of 2020 and officially signed soon after the end of 2020 during an early-signing period.

“Oregon State was the first school to send me an offer,” Byrne says. “Once you get an offer out there, other schools start noticing you too.”

Verbal commitments often lead to a more competitive recruitment for the student-athlete. Although many student-athletes will commit with the intention of still looking for other places, for Byrne, once he committed to Oregon, he decided to shut down his recruitment.

Other athletes, such as CHS junior volleyball player Sebastian Daste, have decided to not verbally commit to any school, as they want to keep their options open. Daste has most recently been recruited by schools including U.C. San Diego, Ohio State University and Princeton University, which he attributes to the large visibility of his club team, Bay Volleyball Club, which ranks first in the nation for his age level.

“You have to be on the right team, which is about pure luck,” Daste notes. Maxon’s club team, Alpha Prime Baseball, has played a large role in his recruitment as well, helping him deal with offers and his verbal commitment as a lot of his communication with schools is done through his coaches.

Sometimes the recruitment process is initiated by the student themselves if they feel they have the statistics needed to join a team.

“I would email the head coach, include my statistics and transcript, and explain why I was interested in the university beyond simply athletics,” says Lauren Pritchard, Class of 2021, now attends UCSD for track and field. “I turned down going into the minor leagues as a first-round draft pick and decided to go to college,” Williams explains. Although Williams could have gone professional, he has no regrets about his choice, and after he blew out his knee, he was able to use his degree from Stanford to transition into the field of finance and real estate.

The path to college athletics can be different for many, but verbal commitments allow student-athletes a glimpse into their future, potentially providing them with motivation and goals throughout their high school career.
Soccer team co-captains bond over years of playing together and pressure to succeed

BY NICOLE MIRSKI

Despite constant pressure to one-up each other, seniors Nikki Benak and Maddie Gallagher have played soccer together for nearly a decade and are still best friends and co-captains of the Carmel High School girls’ varsity team.

The dynamic duo met on their club Monterey Surf soccer team when Gallagher joined in fourth grade, and the two have been friends ever since. After nine years of club and school seasons, the athletes have learned the other’s playing style to a tee and pressure to succeed. No matter what Benak or Gallagher do, the other will always be on the same page. Last year we didn’t really have that,” Gallagher says.

Both Benak and Gallagher cite competition both on and off the field as a big source of tension,” Gallagher says. “It got toxic really fast because we were always competing.”

“Now that we’re no longer pitted against each other, our relationship has evolved into something awesome, and we’ll probably be friends forever,” Benak explains. “I think of her as my sister.”

In addition to being co-captains of the Carmel soccer team and playing for Monterey Surf, last year Benak was named The Monterey Herald’s Offensive Player of the Year and was on the First Team in the Mission Division, and Gallagher was on the Second Team. 

Boys’ basketball makes playoffs after two years of struggle

By AINSLEY HENDERSON

Currently ranked second in the Gabilan Division with a 5-2 record (14-5 overall), the CHS boys’ varsity basketball team, coached by Kurt Grahl, is headed to the February playoffs after obtaining a 500-point record during the preseason.

This winter, the head coach attributes the majority of the team’s success to the strong foundation that the players have been honing over the years, even through the disruption of the pandemic and the 2021 shift to the Gabilan Division, which forced players to compete against larger, stronger schools.

“For us to be able to compete at a high level, it’s really important for us to be able to build a sound base,” Grahl mentions. “Many of the guys that went through all of the tough times last year in the more competitive league had to battle every single game. That fire they got put through, those lessons, is really paying off this year.”

During the height of COVID-19, which damaged the team’s ability to build fundamental skills and bond with each other, varsity basketball had an overall record of 1-7. Forced to then use the 2021-22 season as time to rebuild and grow, the Padres had an overall record of 6-18 and a league record of 2-9.

“We were kind of punched by a lot of the league,” says senior Jim Moreau, who has been a varsity starter since his sophomore year. “We’ve been pushed around, but a lot of the teams have lost a lot of their seniors this year, while we have nine seniors on the team. All of that veteran leadership and experience has really come in handy.”

The Padres’ struggles have paid off, and the team, strengthened by the addition of several sophomores, including Simeon Brown (15.3 points per game through Jan. 28), Jackson Lloyd (10 ppg) and Warren But, has successfully rebounded. Their reward? A guaranteed spot in the February playoffs.

Grahl believes that the team will make it far in the playoffs as long as they continue to work well with each other.

“Our team has a lot of chemistry this year,” senior John Phillips-Sullivan says. “We’ve been playing with each other since we were young, so we tend to always be on the same page. Last year we didn’t really have that.”

The team’s offense, led by Phillips-Sullivan (12.9 ppg) and supported by Brown and Lloyd, is particularly strong, and their defense, headed by seniors Moreau and Adam Carley, is not to be trifled with.

“As a starter,” Brown says, “my job is just to continue to make everybody around me better. We have a pretty good team, and I think we can make a playoff run. If we keep working hard, we can’t be stopped.”

Even though nine members of the 14-man team are graduating in 2023, Grahl is not worried about the team’s future after they’re gone. He emphasizes that although the seniors may be more consistent players and more experienced, the sophomores and juniors are talented too.

“It’s not all on [the younger guys] shoulders for us to have success this year,” Grahl says. “The seniors are able to play hard and take a lot of that load off, so they have a chance to learn and grow without having the weight of success under their shoulders. Next year, when it’s their turn to take over, I think those guys will be ready.”

During the playoffs, the Padres will be in competition with several large Bay Area schools, including King’s Academy.

“B for us, it was like the only thing we were thinking about,” Brown says. “As a partner-ship that was even more strong than before by talk- ing through it and realizing that they would be stronger working together. ”

“Now that we’re no longer pitted against each other, our relationship has evolved into something awesome, and we’ll probably be friends forever,” Benak explains. “I think of her as my sister.”

In addition to being co-captains of the Carmel soccer team and playing for Monterey Surf, last year Benak was named The Monterey Herald’s Offensive Player of the Year and was on the First Team in the Mission Division, and Gallagher was on the Second Team.

Nikki Benak (left) and Maddie Gallagher (right) have been playing soccer together as friends since they were young.

“Nikki and I understand each other so well on the field just from playing together for so long,” Gallagher says. “I know exactly what she’s going to do, when she’s going to do it, what passes she will and won’t make. We have an unreal connection both on and off the field.”

This connection is proven by their statistics for this season with CHS. As of Jan. 23, Benak has seven goals and four assists, while Gallagher has three goals and five assists.

Although Gallagher and Benak have remained friends throughout the nine years, they have both experienced pressure to try to be the best by various coaches. As they grew to become some of the best players in middle school, coaches wanted to know who was going to be the future captain.

“We were told one of us had to be the best, but it was up to us to decide.” Benak explains. “So although we were best friends, it got toxic really fast because we were always competing.”

Gallagher adds it was the main source of animosity between them.

“For us, it was like the only thing we would ever fight about, and it was always a big source of tension,” Gallagher says. “It wasn’t because we didn’t love each other, but because everyone pitted us against each other.”

Benak and Gallagher were able to overcome the pressure and come back as a partner-ship that was even stronger than before by talk- ing through it and realizing that they would be stronger working together.

By AINSLEY HENDERSON
Professional sports broadcaster remains connected to where his success began at CHS

BY ELLA GAILY

The man in the San Francisco ‘49ers broadcasting booth has 20 years of experience at sports radio station KNBR and is also decorated with the titles of San Jose Sharks primary press box announcer, San Jose Giants official scorer and ‘49ers radio broadcast executive producer. But he once was just Mike Hohler, a sports-enthused student at Carmel High School with enough determination to fill the stadium he now watches from above.

Quitting baseball by eighth grade, Mike Hohler had an unconventional story within the sports industry. “I played one football game my freshman year,” reflects the class of ’95 alum. “I recovered a fumble on defense, but the next day I called it quits!”

Far from disheartened, he listened to the radio religiously not only to hear Giants games, but to score them. From falling asleep to the game on school nights to scoring games in the back row of Salinas’ stadium, his passion quickly became apparent to himself and those around him.

“Science teacher Pat Stadille was a diehard Giants fan,” says Hohler, also noting former CHS English teacher Tom Clifford and once Carmel Middle School principal Karl Pallastrini as encouragers. “He brought out my passion and made me feel like it was okay to be a crazy Giants fan!”

Sophomore year Hohler applied for the position of the official scorer for the CHS varsity baseball team, a position he held through his junior year.

“It was my senior year when I got the nerve to ask the athletic director, Lisa Fraser, to announce the basketball games.”

When Hohler received college acceptances soon after, many wouldn’t have pictured his success beginning with five years at home, but announcing the CHS basketball and football games post-graduation before leaving for Baltimore in 2000 was the best step for him.

“I had this thought of not doing four-year college and instead doing broadcasting school. I wanted to learn about what I could do as a career instead of doing more science and math.”

The Broadcasting Institute of Maryland is a rigorous six-month program where Hohler’s skills landed him two internships a month in. The second internship, at a sports radio station called WJFK in Washington, D.C., hired him soon after, and he remained there for a year and a half, even serving as the assistant producer for the Baltimore Ravens before returning to Carmel Valley in June 2002.

Hohler was hired by KNBR that September, and in 2005 became the full-time producer of two radio shows, shows for which he’d previously taken overnight shifts, answered phones and booked guests.

“When I was 10 years old, on a summer day, I’d sit on the couch and watch a baseball game on KNBR, and I’d get ready for school listening to the morning show. Getting to do this every day is a dream come true.”

After years of hard work, it paid off for the alum as he made his way up the ranks at KNBR, gaining experience as he went.

“I got promoted in Nov. 2021 to director of content, which held more responsibility,” Hohler recalls. “In October 2022, the program director promoted me to assistant program director.”

Though enjoying filling in to do play-by-play for the San Jose Giants when needed from about 2009-2016, Hohler realized his true passion was within official scoring and announcing with the ability to travel, all of which were able to come to fruition throughout the various positions he holds today.

Hohler has also spent almost every winter break announcing the local varsity basketball tournament at CHS from 2002 until the pandemic. While he had ‘49ers commitments in 2021, his absence in winter 2022 was because he wasn’t asked to return.

“I’ve never been one to overstay my welcome. If there’s a senior who wants to do it, please do the games! Because if there’s a kid like me, I wouldn’t want to take their spot, but I’d absolutely come back if I was asked. It’s so much fun and really is returning to my roots.”

BY ELLA GAILY

CHS alum Mike Hohler working a 49ers event at Levi Stadium.

courtesy of MIKE HOHLER
‘Doing what is precious’: Special education teacher provides student support, advocacy  

BY TERESA FRAHM

Entering their second year teaching at Carmel High School, Keira “Beni” Benidettino serves as a cornerstone of the special education program as a math and academic study hall teacher and a pillar of support for the campus LGBTQ community.

Benidittino, who uses they/them pronouns and asks to be addressed as Beni, fills a role on campus centered on LGBTQ advocacy, support and education. As one of few members of CUSD staff with a gender diverse identity, they are able to provide a unique perspective within the school and with the Be Yourself Club, Carmel’s gender-sexuality alliance, of which they are the club adviser.

“Beni is such a great advocate for LGBTQ issues, and they do a lot for this school,” CHS librarian Philip Crawford says.

“They’re always positive and optimistic and always right on point.”

Due to their identity and activism, Beni reports misunderstanding and discomfort among some members of the Carmel community about their role at the school.

“There’s definitely voices in this local culture that are driven by fear and not understanding and who will feel uncomfortable with ideas about gender identity that they didn’t grow up with,” Beni says. “It’s important to have dialogue and to be able to provide context so we aren’t confronting people across a chasm but are actually understanding and connecting with each other.”

Beni helps create a valuable safe environment for students and staff within the LGBTQ community, both within their classroom and through their work with the Be Yourself Club.

“They provide a safe space for people,” says senior Teagan Puryear, a member of the Be Yourself Club.

“A lot of students on campus don’t have that.”

Fostering a culture of support and acceptance is a part of their work that Beni sees as vital.

“It’s really important for me to help create and be part of a safe community that celebrates uniqueness and diversity and provides not only a place of community and safety, but the opportunity to explore the wider world,” Beni says.

Special education in particular has been the primary focus of Beni’s teaching career.

“There really is a crying need for special education teachers,” Beni says. “Special education spends a lot of time thinking about how people think and how they learn. I think that’s the kind of meta awareness of education that appeals to me.”

Before devoting their time to educating others, Beni’s own schooling took an unusual path. An alumnus of several alma maters, they graduated with a bachelor’s degree from UC Santa Cruz, a Master of Business Administration from Santa Clara University and later a Master of Education from Northern Illinois University.

Despite their lifelong love of learning and teaching, Beni’s career began in business before a life-threatening medical event allowed them to reconsider.

“It was a new plan,” they say. “I realized I’d been given another life, a second chance. I wanted to have precious things in my life every day, and there’s nothing more precious in life than teaching. So I started doing what is precious.”

This commitment is well received by students, among many of whom they have a sterling reputation.

“They’re one of the few people on campus that I feel completely safe around,” says sophomore Be Yourself Club member Orla Cook. “You can tell they genuinely care.”

Ultimately, Beni’s role at CHS centers on: genuinely caring for the students, the school and the staff.

“There’s something about being around people at a stage of their life,” Beni says. “It fills me with hope and connects me to the future.”

CAS Tip of the Month:  

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War and werewolves highlight CHS alum’s first novel

BY SHAYLA DUTTA

“In the darkness of the Life-realm, one werewolf shall herald the light.”

This is the “Lighborn” saga in its simplest form: a fantasy trilogy about war, diplomacy, magic, legends and, of course, werewolves.

Zac Buzza, who graduated from Carmel High School in 2017 and later attended both Monterey Peninsula College and California State University, Fullerton, recently began fundraising efforts to publish the first book in this series, an endeavor he could not have even conceived of when he stepped into CHS teacher Mike Palshaw’s English IV class seven years earlier.

“That was where I was first like, ‘Okay, I could see myself doing this as a career,’” says Buzza, referring to his realization that his previous pursuit of computer programming wasn’t what he had been looking for.

After reading a short story the senior had submitted for an assignment, Palshaw encouraged Buzza to publish it online. Only 17 pages, “Scapegoat” set the stage for Buzza’s continued exploration of writing through a Studio Art major at CSU Fullerton and associate degrees in writing and animation from MPC.

When COVID-19 initially struck, the writer was grappling with severe back issues as an Army Cadet at Fullerton. When presented with an unexpected break, he jumped at the opportunity to write a novel.

“Originally when I sat down to write it, I wasn’t sure what I wanted,” Buzza explains. “‘Lighborn’ actually started as a prequel to another story that I wrote during my time at MPC.”

The writer did know, however, that he had from April until September to work before school resumed in-person, so through countless all-nighters and disciplined work, he completed the first draft in less than five months. Now, Buzza has the approximately 400- to 500-page novel ready to publish in addition to more tentative drafts of the following books, along with cover and concept art the author created himself.

“It’s amazing the things that happen when you find something you’re passionate about and just go for it,” he reflects.

The idea for “Lighborn” itself resulted from an exploration of a character that had appeared at the end of another of Buzza’s stories: Isengrim, the protagonist of the new series.

“The ‘Lighborn’ is a legendary, mythical figure among the werewolves that’s supposed to bring the whole world together,” Buzza explains. “Although the process of doing so is not quite as peaceful as he would hope that it was. So it’s the story of him becoming, instead of a leader in the political sphere, a leader through combat and diplomacy.”

If his current project on Kickstarter, set to end Feb. 6, does not meet the fundraising goal, Buzza intends to launch another one 30 days afterward. The project can be found on kickstarter.com under “Lighborn Saga: Book 1.”

In the meantime, the author continues writing and working an interim job to support himself with the hopes of eventually transitioning to being a full-time author and artist.

CHS alum Zac Buzza is on his way to publishing his first novel in a process set in motion by English teachers Mike Palshaw and the late Whitney Grummon.
Student musicians host annual jazz cafe, showcasing talent in intimate setting

BY MAGGIE JOHNSTON

As they do each year at this time, the CHS Jazz Ensemble and Jazz Workshop class will come together February 14 to put on a candle-lit, intimate, jazzy event for anyone to enjoy.

Under the baton of CHS music teacher Brian Handley, Jazz Ensemble is a group of roughly 20 motivated students, some of whom are also in the jazz course, who hone their jazzing skills after school every Monday night.

“We set aside time to allow kids from multiple classes to be able to participate,” Handley says. “We have musicians from the Workshop class, Concert Band and even two from Orchestra.”

These groups have embraced jazz and all that it represents by bringing in people who have mastered multiple instruments and styles of music to aid in forming a full, powerful voice. Junior Abigail Kim, for instance, plays both the rich-sounding tenor saxophone and the higher-voiced clarinet with the jazz ensemble, on top of also being in the CHS concert band.

“It’s a unique program because everyone has a good attitude and is passionate about making music together,” Kim explains.

Jazz Workshop contains roughly 10 CHS students who have mastered a variety of instruments from the rhythm section of a jazz group, including the piano, drums and bass guitar. This course is focused on small group or combo playing and developing necessary jazz skills like soloing and improvisation.

“Teaching jazz is fun for me,” Handley says. “It’s a constantly evolving art form to this day and has many sub-genres and sub-styles, so it’s not limiting at all.”

Senior pianist Grace Wang, who plays in both jazz combo and ensemble, is participating in her second Jazz Cafe this Valentine’s Day.

“For jazz combo, we will be drawing from songs that we have been working on for the whole year,” Wang explains. “It’s important to feel comfortable with a song and to know it well so that solos come easier.”

The CHS jazz program encourages students to dive deeper into music outside of school, providing more time for practicing, as well as focusing on self and group improvement.

Wang and senior Robert Gomez, who is also in the ensemble, will take their passion for jazz one step further by playing in the Monterey Jazz Festival Next Generation Exhibition in the fall.

“All these students take time out of their day to come together and practice to make something that they are proud of,” Kim emphasizes. “It’s really cool to see and to be a part of.”

These young jazz enthusiasts are devoted to their art and to learning about the art in all forms.

Music fans can see this jazz showcase 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 14, in the CHS cafeteria. Admission is free.
That romantic time of year is just around the corner, and as everyone knows, the quality of your relationship depends on the quality of your Valentine’s Day gift. It is a high-stakes holiday, but love is in the air! We just want to keep it there, instead of six feet under.

Here’s some of our advice on the do’s and don’ts of your typical Valentine’s Day gifts:

**Stuffed Animals**
Although you could just be using this gift to make up for your lack of physical affection towards your partner, it’s pretty sweet. A quick warning: They will bond more with that teddy bear than with you.

**Handmade Cards**
If you spent more than 30 minutes on a heartfelt, handmade card, you scare us. We don’t know if your card should be framed and worshiped or if we should file a restraining order. Sorry, we associate your poetic romance with unhealthy obsession. Creep or not, kudos to you for being a dedicated romantic.

**Flowers**
Flowers are a classic (real flowers—your valentine doesn’t live in a retirement home), but they are only worth consideration if they smell good and last beyond the time it takes for your valentine to question their romantic commitments. Next time get more creative. Maybe try a cactus. Who knows?

**Personalized Coupons**
Just own up to the fact that you forgot about Valentine’s Day (and romance in general), instead of giving your partner pre-broken promises of breakfast in bed in the form of a sad piece of paper they will lose in five minutes. The only reaction this gift will get you is a forced smile.

**Store-Bought Cards**
You can whine as much as you want, but we have no sympathy for the romantically deprived leeches who just run to Safeway and scour the card aisle for whatever they can find. While the graphics can be cute, writing “love you babe” just doesn’t hold the emotional weight you think it does.

**Chocolate Boxes**
This is the perfect present to stuff your face with after you get dumped for how lame and cliche you are. You should be concerned about how these gift boxes look nicer than your relationship will ever be. But then again, it’s already clear that you believe it’s what’s on the outside that counts because those chocolates will never get eaten regardless.

**Matching Jewelry**
Don’t expect to be spending next Valentine’s Day with your partner if you don’t stop right now and take a long, hard look at the embarrassing insincerity of your gifts. Put that magnetic heart necklace back where it belongs: on the elementary school playground.

We guarantee you, if your partner is worth your time, they will act like you proposed when you get them a giant teddy bear.
After a vicious guerilla marketing campaign, which involved M3GAN-inspired dancers descending on New York City’s streets, NFL fields and “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon,” alongside a spew of social media content, Blumhouse Productions’ “M3GAN” appeared appalling, but on screen it comes across as more of a mildly absurd, disconcerting comedy with a little bit of gore thrown in.

The movie begins with 8-year-old Cady (Violalet McGraw) and her parents, who neglected to put chains on their car’s tires, traveling in the snow. After being forced to stop in the middle of the road, the family car is hit by a snow plowing vehicle, orphaning Cady. Subsequently, she is placed in her aunt Gemma’s (Allison Williams) care.

Prior to Cady’s arrival, Gemma, a brilliant roboticist, had been charged with designing line after line of Furby-like robots, for Funki, a toy company. Pushed to a deadline for more robot pets by her boss, Gemma makes the choice to finish a Model 3 Generative Android-M3GAN for short-prototype instead, and give it to Cady.

The M3GAN doll is beautiful, incredibly lifelike, and designed to play the role of a child’s playmate and teacher. She is a perfect example of the uncanny valley theory, which contributes to the majority of the film’s horror factor. Voiced by Jenna Davis and portrayed on screen by Amie Donald, M3GAN spends the majority of the movie being a helpful, albeit a little unsettling, force.

Unlike most horror movies, “M3GAN” is kind of funny. Too funny. Even the artificially intelligent robot, the antagonist, has a few bits, including performing a robotic rendition of David Guetta’s “Titanium (feat. Sia)” to a drowsy Cady. The random humor is atypical for a horror movie, and while unexpected, it makes “M3GAN” a little more interesting.

Up until the climax, humor and occasional jumpscare rules the film. No spoilers, but the last few scenes, save for M3GAN’s murderous dance, are incredibly predictable. It’s exactly how the majority of horror movies end. Yawn.

Even though the plot is not incredible, 12-year-old Amie Donald’s portrayal of the murderous AI is intriguing. The breakout star does all her own stunts, including running across a forest on all fours. Albeit mildly creepy, that’s a pretty cool ability.

Star Allison Williams acts well, and Ronny Chieng, who plays Gemma’s boss David, is hilarious; he plays the part of a greedy, anxious corporate man well.

Essentially, “M3GAN” is a disconcerting twist on any old horror movie. It’s comparable to “Frankenstein” or “Child’s Play,” and hopefully the rumored sequel proves to be more original.

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REVIEW

‘Avatar: The Way of Water’ has much going on, but still missing something

BY FLINT NACHBAR

After the release of the first “Avatar” in 2009, fans were left hungry to return to Pandora, director James Cameron’s fictional planet that works as the home planet for the Na’vi, 10-foot-tall humanoid creatures that populate the planet, and 13 years later, Avatar fans flocked to theaters to experience “Avatar: The Way of Water,” a three-hour, visually stunning, yet somewhat lackluster film.

Cameron has built a reputation for crafting compelling and complex films such as “The Terminator” (1984) and “Aliens” (1986), and the original “Avatar” held up to the reputation that Cameron has built for himself as a director: a fresh story with breathtaking 3D technology that seamlessly blends live action and CGI imagery in a way that had never been seen before, along with acting performances that are just as stunning as the visual effects.

“Avatar: The Way of Water” is a beautiful cinematic experience and does not lack any of the alluring visuals that the first movie has, but where the second installment in the Avatar series falls short is in the writing and storytelling. The film sees the return of Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang), the trigger-happy commander, who returns to Pandora to kill Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), a former U.S. Marine who has joined the Omatikaya clan, one of Pandora’s many native clans made up of Na’vi. This time Quaritch dawns the human/Na’vi hybrid look as an avatar.

There is a strange lack of an appearance for a main antagonist in the promotion for “The Way of Water.” This stirred curiosity in who the mystery foe to the Na’vi would be, so to see Quaritch return onto the big screen instead of a new, interesting character is a disappointment, and it ultimately causes the plot to play out the same as the original film, with only a few minor changes, such as a new location and the fact that Sully has a family. This causes the movie to feel unoriginal and lazy, as it falls back into tired cliches and overused plot twists that can’t be redeemed by its visual beauty.

“The Way of Water” is a showcase for how far CGI technology has come, and it does not reach any further past that, lacking depth and creativity, because of its simple story.

“Avatar: The Way of Water” is the second film out of a five-film series, and if this is the best they have to offer, expectations should stay low for the next three films. “Avatar” never felt like a film that needed a sequel, let alone a five-film series, making it clear that this is just a cash-grab.

BY FLINT NACHBAR

The second installment of Avatar fails to live up to expectations.

4/10
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Songs to listen to in the rain

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"San Luis" by Gregory Alan Isakov
"Tell It Like It Is" by Aaron Neville
"Laramee" by Richy Mitch and The Coal Miners
"From Eden" by Hozier
"Ceilings" by Lizzie McAlpine
"Would That I" by Hozier

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Horoscopes

Aries
Green isn’t a very good color on you, Aries. You’ve lived with jealousy for far too long–it might be time to try to loosen those ivy vines and break free from the outlines of envy. We bet you’ll blossom even more without all that contempt stewing inside you.

Taurus
Taurus, tiny, tiny Taurus, it’s time for you to speak up and let your voice be heard. For too long, you have kept your thoughts to yourself. Now, we all want to hear your barbaric yawp!

Gemini
It’s okay to be Type A, but don’t let it get in the way of you having fun! It’s good that you’re meticulous, so long as you aren’t too overbearing. Right now, you’re sucking all the fun out of the second semester with your incessant planning.

Cancer
Everyone loves a New Year’s resolution. Especially you, Cancer. This time, try to make some goals you can stick to. Reading a book during 2022 was evidently unachievable. Let’s keep things realistic in 2023.

Leo
Lumbering Leo, your brazen actions are hurting those around you! The stars advise you to be more careful in the new year. Watch where you walk.

Virgo
It’s as if you have your own personal Cupid that perches on your shoulders, shooting arrows directed at anyone who makes eye contact with you. Virgo, your perfection is just that infectious!

Libra
Libras, you had a chance and you blew it. Now you’re back on the naughty list. What a shame. You had a shot at redemption and look where you are now. For next month, you might want to remember to mind your tongue.

Scorpio
Oh, sweet Scorpio, you little monarch butterfly. You’re beautiful to look at, but if anyone gets close, you become poisonous! Not everyone is trying to take a bite out of your wings. Sometimes it’s okay to have your guard down.

Sagittarius
Sagittarius, you’re a hot-headed spitfire, and we all love you for it, but your temper has a habit of getting out of hand. In 2023, work on reeling it in and dousing the flames of any burning bridges.

Capricorn
Advocate of the Year: Capricorn. You sea goats always stick up for yourselves and say what’s best for you. Keep it up!

Aquarius
It’s easy to see the season of love ahead of you and get excited about a potential romance in your future. Don’t get your hopes up, Aquarius. In fact, lower your expectations. And then lower them a little more.

Pisces
Pisces, you’re keeping it real during the second semester. You know what you’re about and you’re riding the wave of your success to the finish line. See you at graduation!

Valentine’s Day Advice

Q: I have been with my partner for about a year and half. I love them so much and enjoy spending time with them. Lately, with lots of school, sports and other activities, it’s been difficult staying connected and keeping our relationship exciting and fun. Any tips, Sandpiper? Thanks!

Dear Busy Bec,

Thanks for asking for advice. It sounds like you and your partner are both very busy and involved individuals. Remember, that is a good thing! In any relationship it is important to keep pursuing your interests, even when you just want to spend all your time with that one person. However, with so many activities, it can mean that hanging out with each other might need more of a plan and less spontaneity.

Something you can do to keep your relationship flowing is to plan out date nights! There are so many cute places to go out to eat or activities to do together, and making time for a specific romantic night out is a perfect way to be able to prioritize your relationship.

Q: With college looming in the all-too-near horizon, it feels like crushes and companionship are pointless. Even so, my heart has gotten away from me. Even if the feeling is mutual, I don’t want a heartbreak at the end of summer! Should I let go or go for it?

Dear Enemy-of-the-Clock,

This is certainly tricky, and I understand that feeling. Even if you do embark on this relationship, there will always feel like there is a timer on you, and in five months, your time will be up. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Are you set on being single in college? Can you see yourself being with this individual long term if these feelings turn into love? Do you even know them well enough to tell? The answers to these questions are vital in determining if this possible romantic relationship is worth it. Personally, I am a hopeless romantic and believe that every relationship is a learning experience. If you think that this person could make the next five months of your high school experience better, I say go for it. Then you’ll have no regrets and know what to look for as you move throughout life. Better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all!

Q: What do I do when my boyfriend is constantly on his phone when we hangout? I’ve told him that I think he’s a “screenager” when he does that, but he doesn’t listen and just does it to make me angry at this point. Please, love experts, I need advice.

Dear Anti-Screenager,

It seems like your boyfriend is kind of immature. I feel like he is not taking your thoughts seriously about how this makes you feel, and if that is the case, it may be time to try and talk about this issue in a separate setting. Instead of bringing it up in the moment and letting him know how you feel, bring the issue up later when there are no distractions and you have his full attention. This way he is unable to manipulate the situation, and he will hopefully grasp your true feelings about the situation. Don’t feel like you are high maintenance for wanting your boyfriend’s undivided attention–you deserve it and shouldn’t have to compete with a screen!

XOXO, the love expert