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Anti-Racism Task Force organizes rally and next events

ENTERTAINMENT 14



The Falcon's Best of 2022 film and music reviews

IN-DEPTH 18-19



Cultural grocery stores provide essentials for Bay residents

THE saratogafalcon

AN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOL PUBLICATION



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Saratoga High School Saratoga, CA

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BY ShreyaRallabandi & ShaanSridhar

A young Sammy Fabelman firmly grips his film camera as he dives into the sand under a beach volleyball net, attempting to capture action footage of his high school's most popular jock spiking a volleyball into the opposing team's court. Fabelman captures the senior ditch day for Grand View High, fashioning a movie with his clips to be unveiled at the senior class prom to cheers of camaraderie and hearty laughs.

This was one of few happy moments in high school for Fabelman, the depiction of famed actor and Class of 1965 alumnus Steven Spielberg — who attended the school for most of his senior year in 1964-1965 — in Spielberg's autobiographical film, "The Fabelmans," released Nov. 11.

In 1985, at the Class of 1965's 20-year reunion, Spielberg — by then having directed award-winning films such as "Jaws" and "Raiders of the Lost Ark" — sent a representative to retrieve the actual film of his high school production. sentiment toward his alma mater he has expressed in interviews.

>> **FABELMANS** on pg. 3

FACING 'THE FABELMANS': SPIELBERG MOVIE SPOTLIGHTS SCHOOL'S PAST

Graphic by STEPHANIE SUN, MINSUI TANG and UNIVERSAL PICTURES

District plans to investigate music department allegations

By TaraNatarajan & ShaanSridhar

The district has retained the services of an outside independent investigator following days of community confusion over widespread concerns that orchestra and band director Michael Boitz and performing arts department chair Jason Shiuan resigned from their positions.

Both Boitz and Shiuan have continued to teach and have not vacated their roles in the performing arts department.

The concerns stemmed from an email sent by David Holt, president of Saratoga Music Boosters (SMB), to parent members and volunteers, accusing the school of treat-

ing Boitz and Shiuan with "abuse and derision" and forcing both teachers to tender their resignations.

In a joint email to parents, superintendent Bill Sanderson and board president Katherine Tseng said that "false and inaccurate statements have been leaked and shared," causing damage to the school and stress to community members.

"I am writing to you today to clear up any miscommunication that may be occurring so that our focus can return to the learning and support of our students," Sanderson and Tseng said in the email.

However, the reality of the situation appears less clear. Both Boitz and Shiuan have continued to teach and have not vacated their roles in the performing arts department. In addition, SMB has continued to send emails asking parents to organize in support of the teachers, including a call to action in Holt's initial email to SMB, sent on Dec. 4.

"We all know how both Mr. Boitz and Mr. Shiuan have given their life's work to

our school, to our students," Holt said in the email. "What can you do as a parent? Contact our [high school] district office — phone calls, email, in-person. Demand justice."

"Every issue is tackled with a student-focused lens for the [success] of our school."

SUPERINTENDENT Bill Sanderson

Sanderson and Tseng wrote that the district is taking the issue seriously and thus made the decision to seek outside counsel. They cautioned that the investigation would take time, but promised to share the investigation's "recommendations for the district," if allowed.

Sanderson and Tseng also wrote that they are working with principal Greg Louie to "set up a time for parents to share their concerns and comments."

They said that the district will be unable to provide any additional information on the investigation, but will take the time to "listen to our valued community." They also said any students expressing concern and stress about the rumors should seek counseling and support through the Wellness Center.

"Investigations can sometimes be uncomfortable and upsetting while we are seeking the true facts of the situation," Sanderson and Tseng wrote. "However, every issue is tackled with a student-focused lens for the long-term success of our schools." ♦

2022-23 Fall Semester Finals Schedule

December 2022				
MONDAY 12/19	TUESDAY 12/20	WEDNESDAY 12/21	THURSDAY 12/22	FRIDAY 12/23
Per 2 Per 4 Per 6 Break Per 1 Per 3 Per 5 Per 7	8:30-8:50 9:00-9:20 9:30-9:50 9:50-9:55 10:05-10:25 10:35-10:55 11:05-11:25 11:35-11:55	Per. 1 8:30-10:30 Break 10:30 -10:35 Passing 10:35 -10:45 Tutorial 10:45 -11:20	Per. 2 8:30-10:30 Break 10:30 -10:35 Passing 10:35 -10:45 Tutorial 10:45 -11:20	Per. 5 8:30-10:30 Break 10:30 -10:35 Passing 10:35 -10:45 Tutorial 10:45 -11:20
Lunch 11:55-12:25				
11:20 -11:50				
Passing 12:25-12:35				
11:50 -12:00				
Per. 7 12:35 -2:35				
12:00 - 2:00				

The schedule will include 20-minute meetups with each class on Monday as well as the period 7 final. Periods 1 and 3 finals are on Tuesday; periods 2 and 4 finals are on Wednesday; and periods 5 and 6 finals are on Thursday, with Friday off. Tuesday to Thursday will include daily 35-minute tutorials and a 30-minute lunch after it.

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newsbriefs

District stops using Twitter accounts after hate on the app increases following Musk's takeover

The district will no longer use Twitter as a platform for communication, superintendent Bill Sanderson announced via email on Nov. 10. He cited the rise in "hate speech used on the platform," which is opposed to the district's values of diversity and inclusivity, and thus a decision was made to dissociate from the platform.

Billionaire Elon Musk took over the company on Oct. 27 and began allowing back users that had been previously banned for violating the company's terms of use.

Sanderson, referencing a Montclair State University article on recent the recent increase in hate speech, said the hate speech on the platform spiked after Musk's acquisition of the platform and his promises to reduce its content restrictions.

While the district has discontinued its use of Twitter, news and celebrations will continue to be posted on other platforms like Facebook, Instagram, ParentSquare and LinkedIn.

"In education, we strive to create inclusivity and acceptance," Sanderson said. "It is important to me that we not only say that we are inclusive but make sure that our actions indicate that we are inclusive." ♦

— Jonathan Si

2 seniors advance in Coca-Cola Scholars program

Every year, 150 students out of a pool of more than 91,000 applicants are selected as Coca-Cola Scholars and receive a \$20,000 academic scholarship. Over the past 34 years, the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation has provided more than \$78 million to over 6,600 scholars.

Seniors Stuti Agarwal and Nidhi Mathihalli are among the 1,557 semifinalists in the U.S. Both Agarwal and Mathihalli first heard about the scholarship after talking to alumni who applied to the Coca-Cola Scholars Program. Class of '22 alumni Vignav Ramesh and Anouk Yeh both advanced to be named 2022 regional finalists. Yeh ended up receiving the \$20,000 academic scholarship.

As semifinalists, both Mathihalli and Agarwal must complete a second application where they answer prompts in a free format essay pertaining to activities that they participated in during their time as high school students. Both students are excited to move on to the next phase of the scholarship application process.

"I am pretty surprised that I was selected as a semifinalist, but I am super grateful and excited for the next phase regardless of the outcome," Agarwal said. ♦

— Nikhil Mathihalli

High attendance rate for Winter Formal

Winter Formal was held at California's Great America Pavilion on Dec. 10 from 7 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. — and the theme was "Met Gala Afterparty." About 674 students attended the dance, more than any formal in recent history.

Until Nov. 11, tickets were \$70 for students with ASB and \$80 for those without. After that, tickets increased by \$10 — those with ASB needed to pay \$80, and those without needed to pay \$90 — until Nov. 21, when ticket sales ended.

At the venue, students had a variety of activities available: rollercoaster rides, a photo booth and a DJ were all included. Students could also purchase ice skating tickets for \$22.

Due to the venue being in Santa Clara, there were no buses. Students took care of their own transportation and could only drive siblings and family members.

According to senior Dance Commission head Jacquelyn Ryu, this year's formal was greatly improved from last year's.

"We didn't have a lot of money to work with last year because last year was the first off-campus formal we've had in a long time," Ryu said. "Overall, I think students had a really fun time. Compared to last year, the theme was a lot more relevant and the venue was a lot more appealing." ♦

— Nikhil Mathihalli



Courtesy of NAOMI HSIEH

Intently focused on the match at hand, First Tech Challenge team Polaris Robotics from Irvington High's drive team attempts to score the most points without racking up penalties against other teams before the time ends.

Robotics teams host first 24 team tournament in three years

BY Beverly Xu

Since 2012, the MSET Robotics team has hosted an annual FTC qualifier at the school, where around 24 teams compete to earn a spot in the NorCal Regionals tournament. This year, the tournament hosted 22 teams, resulting in around 275 to 320 students attending on Dec. 4.

Hosting a competition with so many attendees required planning several weeks in advance by four main organizers: MSET adult mentors Vipin Jain, Sheeba Garg and Keerti Melkote and FIRST liaison Dianne France. Together, they planned the date, organized the venue and arranged for volunteers to perform various jobs at the tournament.

"It fulfilled all my expectations in terms of how smoothly it ran, the participants, volunteers and everything came together very nicely," Melkote said.

"Saratoga is a prestigious event, even though it's a qualifier, people want to come to compete here..."

PARENT Keerti Melkote

Although Melkote wishes that the two no-show teams had attended, the reduced number of competitors had little effect on the tournament, with the competition schedule generated after robot inspection.

However, he said a full slate of 24 teams would have created a bigger crowd with more spectators which would have made the event more fun for participants.

"As a traditionally strong team, people have really high expectations for us, so seeing other robot designs and their competition strategies early on helps lower that pressure, especially since this tournament occurs relatively early in the season," Lu said.

For Melkote, the most difficult volunteer roles to fill were judges, who require expertise to interview teams about their robot and outreach to determine who receives awards. Since judges need to be unaffiliated (no relation to competition participants), do a reasonable job judging and to commit for the full-day competition, identifying viable candidates was hard.

As for the other volunteer roles, a majority of them were open to any students; however, MSET students were given priority so to familiarize themselves with the competition setting, Melkote strived to plan a successful tournament where teams could evaluate their own performance, and compare it with other teams.

"Saratoga is a prestigious event, even though it's a qualifier," Melkote said. "People want to come to compete here because only teams that have accomplished a certain level of robot functionality can participate, so we tend to attract the higher-level teams."

The day before the event, the fields, pits, projectors and other important infrastructure were set up in around two and a half hours so the competition could start off without a hitch. However, as matches started after the opening ceremony, the pace of the tournament rapidly increased, along with the importance of attentive volunteers.

"Now that we are queuing, if any one thing is out

>> falconfigures

300

Students attended the event

22

Teams competed at the event

12

Teams qualified for the elimination round

2

Teams are invited to the California regional tournament

FABELMANS

continued from pg. 1

He told the San Jose Mercury News that his time at the school was "Hell on Earth."

In "The Fabelmans," his first truly auto-biographical film, Spielberg chronicles his childhood, upbringing, family issues and early love for film. The film is technically fictional, but the vast majority of protagonist Fabelman's experiences mirror the life of Spielberg — including his horrible experience at the school.

The school McBride describes is cliqueish, sexist, preppy, cruel and pampered. It was a "sprawling, maze-like complex of cinder block buildings, an oddly grim and graceless design for such an attractive setting" (Spielberg was reportedly influenced by the school in his designs for "E.T." and "Poltergeist"). As is the case now, the school expected high academic standards of their students — so high that Spielberg earned Bs and Cs, even after working considerably harder than he did at his previous high school in Phoenix.

Spielberg shows that although Spielberg didn't subscribe to Judaism completely and found the religion hypocritical — an idea portrayed in "The Fabelmans" as well — Spielberg's Jewish identity was still important to him.

McBride's reporting confirms much of what the movie alleges: Spielberg was repeatedly beaten up and peers would frequently throw pennies at him. As students walked past Spielberg in the halls, they would couch "Jew" into their hands. But McBride said Spielberg would also reference his Jewish identity frequently himself, making Nazi jokes with his friends and roleplaying being a Nazi, a piece of what McBride called Spielberg using Jewish humor as a coping method.

Spielberg's experience was nothing short of miserable, making him feel as "alien as I had ever felt in my life." In an interview with NPR's "Fresh Air," he said he internalized his anger and tried to make himself as small as possible, which he's most ashamed of now. But the experience has left a lasting imprint: "I haven't gotten over it nor have I forgiven any of them," he said.

Despite this, many of Spielberg's classmates — who were interviewed by McBride — have contradicted his recollection of the school. Judith Hamilton, another Jewish student in his class, said her peers were "perplexed and disturbed" when Spielberg first brought up his experience to the Mercury News in 1993: She thought he made the comments just to promote his movie "The Schindler's List."

But the issue extends much further, and much more personally, than Fabelman's interests. In one striking scene, Fabelman is called racial slurs and violently assaulted by jocks. In P.E., Fabelman is brutally pushed to the ground and punched after an argument; the jocks threaten to beat him up and shatter his skull. Fabelman told his new peers he didn't like their treatment, but they didn't care. One of the worst bullies summed up their issue with him: "We don't like Jews."

Much of this — and the entire film — is based on fact: Spielberg and many of his childhood friends and peers worked with film historian Joseph McBride for "Steven Spielberg: A Biography" (published in 1997 and available in the school library), a book confirming much of the film's events, but also adding additional details and contradictions.

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Spielberg shows that although Spielberg didn't subscribe to Judaism completely and found the religion hypocritical — an idea portrayed in "The Fabelmans" as well — Spielberg's Jewish identity was still important to him.

When asked about the antisemitism at the school, senior Eli Tsives — who is Jewish — said that when compared to McBride's depiction of what Spielberg was forced to endure, the school is now "definitely improved."

"What he experienced back then, no one would experience now, at least not in that form," Tsives said. "Antisemitism took form as physical harassment — harassment that nobody will ever find on campus today."

Still, Tsives mentioned that Jewish students are still a minority at the school. He noted many surrounding schools, including Fremont High, Homestead High and Palo Alto High have Jewish Student Unions, commonly known as JSUs — but Saratoga High does not.

Tsives wishes to change the course of Spielberg's narrative about the school. To do so, he plans to reach out to Spielberg and attempt to bring him to SMASH'N, the annual Media Arts Program culmination ceremony.

"I'm dying to do this," he said. "I want to show him that we are better. We are stronger as a community. We want Spielberg to see the new Saratoga and not hold the grudges he still holds to this day. We're not perfect, but we're doing much, much better."

The bully eventually forces Fabelman to promise that he will never tell anyone about what happened that day. Fabelman agrees, but slyly tells him: "unless I make a movie about it." And make a movie he did. ♦

Racism is just one of few things that have changed. In addition, the racial makeup of the school and academic focus is hugely different.

"Antisemitism took form as physical harassment — harassment that nobody will ever find on campus today."

SENIOR Eli Tsives

"It was such a shock to all of us," she told McBride. "Our wonder boy, the boy we were all so proud of, actually hated us."

But not all parts of Spielberg's year at the school were horrible. In particular, he enjoyed working as a sports writer and columnist for The Falcon. Spielberg's sports editor Mike Augustine told McBride that the journalism class opened up to Spielberg and allowed him to connect to the story side of the school, which Spielberg greatly enjoyed. At the end of the school year, Spielberg's class predicted that he would write for The New York Times.

But, in the end, his peers agreed that Spielberg did not enjoy his time at the school.

"It was not a school to be the new kid in," said Kendra Hanson, also a Jewish student in his class, told McBride. "If you stood out, if you were different, it was really tough to get integrated. If you were Jewish, you might have all the more reason for [feeling] different."

The paradoxical change of today

When compared to Spielberg's description, the school is now improved and significantly different in many ways. Most importantly, the antisemitism that Spielberg described is mostly gone.

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Tsives



From left to right, district Director of Curriculum, Climate and Instruction Jamal Splane, senior Taylor Wilson, senior Shreya Rallabandi, sophomore Aneri Shah, senior Samika Agarwal, junior Sarah Thomas, senior Arshi Chawla and guidance counselor Brian Safine.

FALCON // ALLISON TAN

"I've been a part of the task force since my freshman year at SHS, so I definitely don't think it's a very obvious change, but there's some curriculum that's been affected — we helped to bring the ethnic studies course," Chawla said. "These are little steps, but we definitely need to work further together." ♦

The Anti-Racism Task Force rallies to combat racism

BY WillNorwood & AllisonTan

Senior Taylor Wilson stood in the quad during tutorial on Nov. 21 and described his experiences with anti-Black hate and racism. Hundreds of students came out to support the anti-racism rally that Wilson and the rest of the school's Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) had planned in response to a racist incident that occurred the week prior in which an African American doll was found hanging by a noose in the middle of the quad.

"I've come to understand that a lot of people, maybe even you, don't feel the racism here is significant enough and instead decide to sweep it under the rug," Wilson told the listeners. "I'm tired of telling people they can't use the n-word or other slurs, even though they already know. I'm tired of watching people pretend to laugh and sit by idly as someone says something blatantly racist but excuse it as a joke. Stop, and do better."

Moving forward, ARTF plans to further address the noose incident and racism at Redwood, where Wilson determined preventive efforts should be further focused.

"We were thinking of planning a community-wide event to address the incident, which would be in partnership with Redwood Middle and Prospect High," Chawla said.

The task force is also discussing planning a march from Saratoga High to RMS or other community centers in Saratoga to further open the conversation surrounding racism. The team has developed a strong social media presence on Instagram, attracting new members to join. They plan to hang QR codes around the high school where the interest form can be found directly. While change for racism in the community is gradual and takes time, Chawla said there she has seen progress in campus culture and the way that students interact with racism.

Math teacher starts Saturday peer tutoring program

PJ YIM'S AP CALC STUDENTS HELP ALGEBRA 1 STUDENTS

by VictoriaHu
& SarahZhou

When math teacher PJ Yim realized his Algebra 1 students were not receiving enough opportunities to receive support during daily tutorials — due to his AP Calculus BC students often crowding the room — he decided to create Algebra 1 Math Lab, a weekend peer tutoring session where he and AP Calculus BC student volunteers help teach Algebra 1 students.

Algebra 1 Math Lab is hosted every Saturday in his room 301 from 9 to 11 a.m.

AP Calc BC students volunteer to help four to 10 Algebra 1 students. The goal of the program is to target help toward weaker skills and review concepts in preparation for upcoming quizzes and tests. Following each session, Yim also stays at school for another half hour to answer questions from the student tutors.

"The worst thing that could happen is if no one shows up," Yim said. "If that happens, [the student tutors] just sit there and study for two hours and still receive their volunteer hours."

For Yim, helping answer students with their questions has been a long-standing

part of his Saturday routine. He recalls that when his now-adult daughter was a child, his students would often come to his room on Saturdays to ask him questions while he worked.

"I would have my kids there — I'm working on grading papers and stuff on Saturdays," he said. "Everybody knew that I was there, and they would come for an hour and a half and then go home."

This year, he formalized these study sessions and implemented peer tutoring, coining the term "Math Lab" to ensure students are not confused with any tutoring activities that occur during school hours. He has also begun using district-provided Kuta Software to automatically generate worksheets of algebra problems as additional practice for students.

Yim said he has begun analyzing the data between the Unit 2 and

Unit 3 tests and has noted improvement in students who come for help during Math Lab and tutorials. Though he has yet to fully run the numbers, he found that there appears to be "some indication that Math Lab is helping" and plans to continue running it second semester.

According to Saini, Math Lab is structured so that tutors can approach students or students can walk up to tutors for help.



Courtesy of SAARA SAINI

Junior Saara Saini tutors a freshman at Algebra 1 Math Lab in PJ Yim's class on Nov. 12.



Yim

Speech and debate transitions back to an in-person setting

by SkylerMao

Dozens of students gathered at Milpitas High on Sept. 30 for the Stephan Stewart speech and debate tournament, one of the first in-person tournaments the school's team has attended since the pandemic.

Practicing every Tuesday and Thursday from 6-8 p.m., and under the guidance of speech coach Kiana Young and debate coach Steve Clemons, the team was ready to perform in-person for the first time.

During the 2021-22 school year, almost all tournaments were hosted online, leading to a whole new and challenging format to master (not to mention technical problems). However, as pandemic restrictions recede, many tournaments are moving back to an in-person setting.

According to sophomore debater Ashish Goswami, in-person speech and debate tournaments are very different in many aspects, particularly in student engagement, enjoyment and time commitment.

"The biggest difference is how fun it is," he said. "Online debate is great because you don't have to drive anywhere. Still, you miss

out on the experience of going to a debate tournament and meeting people who have the same passion for speech and debate."

In addition, team members are now closer to each other and can more easily help each other improve.

"I feel like the environment is very social now, especially at tournament, and our team has bonded over them."

SOPHOMORE Timothy Leung

"I feel like the environment is very social now, especially at tournaments, and our team has really bonded over them," sophomore speaker Timothy Leung said. "We warm up together at tournaments, check in after rounds, and cheer each other on at awards. During the CFL tournament, we got boba afterward, and just being able to talk to people and look people in the eye

has been really fun."

In addition, feedback and chances for improvement have also increased in the in-person setting. Because coaches and judges are able to physically observe, comment and give feedback on a student's performance, there has been more improvement within the club.

"Online speech practice is a lot more individualized where you're only working with the coach for a one-on-one 15-minute session," Leung said. "But this year with in-person, we're really trying to emphasize team bonding. We're working with each other and giving feedback."

Despite the apparent shift to in-person tournaments, the transition has been somewhat challenging.

Though more fun and engaging, in-person debate is a new experience for many students who joined the program during the pandemic.

Students were less concerned about nonverbal cues, eye contact, projection and other aspects which are not very compatible with online speech and debate.



Goswami

Local Giving Tree supports families in need over the holidays

by AndyZhu

Each year beginning in mid-November, the school participates in the annual Giving Tree drive, displaying a Christmas tree in the office with presents underneath, collected for children in need. This year, a tall Christmas tree stands in the lobby of the office, dazzling in Christmas lights. On it perch wishlists containing presents ranging from Barbie dolls to toy sets to soccer balls. In previous years, the drive has gathered over 300 presents.

Family Giving Tree, a nonprofit organization that started in 1990, aims to "connect those who can give to those in need with educational support, gifts and volunteerism." Every year they run drives during back-to-school and holiday periods, concentrated around the Christmas holidays.

During the holiday season, the presents arrive at regional warehouses in accordance with wishlists from children whose families do not have the financial means to provide gifts.

Activities director Kristen Cunningham

said in addition to the drive, it would be a good idea to take a school field trip to the warehouses to volunteer as a group.

"When I went to deliver all of our presents, they were actually short-staffed, so I think it would be very beneficial to help out," Cunningham said.

Outside in-house volunteering, outside groups are also encouraged to lead a drive. When leading a drive, a group is provided a wishlist with the goal to gather listed presents from their communities. These presents go to the built-in store inside the warehouse for donation to families.

Saratoga has been hosting drives for over six years and noted that gifts come from the whole educational community.

"What I love about this particular event is that we partner with the Saratoga Union School District, so it's kind of nice too because it brings us together as a community," Cunningham said.

In the past, drives were only available to be held in person, but when the pandemic occurred, Family Giving Tree created virtual drives. Virtual Giving Tree is a fundraiser to raise money for the organization



Pre-Covid family giving tree warehouse is filled with presents and Santa's little helpers.

to obtain the gifts on their wish lists.

Cunningham has a goal to grow this drive to become bigger and bigger, perhaps reaching as many as 500 donated gifts.

"I am super impressed with our student

body, not only during this season but all the time because I feel the sentiment of our leadership students and students as a whole," she said. "They just really want to give back."

Tri-M raises money for Hurricane Ian relief

by MitchellChen
& ZachZinnman

Cello in hand, freshman Florence Wei stepped onto the McAfee Center stage for her solo. After introducing the piece she had been practicing for six months, Bach's Prelude from Suite 3, Wei inhaled deeply and began to play.

As she swayed with the melody, audience members hunched forward, mesmerized by the sound of her cello. Seamlessly shifting dynamics from loud to soft, her vibrato resonated throughout McAfee Center.

"I love playing music, and it's really great if what I do benefits others," Wei said.

Wei performed as part of a fundraising concert on Nov. 29. Organized by Tri-M, the school's music performance club and benefited young people displaced by Hurricane Ian, which devastated parts of Florida in late September. Wei has played cello for over six years, and was one of 20 student performers at the concert. The concert raised over \$360.

"We felt the cause was relevant because high schoolers like us have been displaced by Hurricane Ian," said junior Tejas Tirthapura, the club's president.

Tirthapura played the second and third movements of Bartók's Viola Concerto and Scherzo from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" composed by Felix Mendelssohn, accompanied by senior violinist Shannon Ma. Before switching to viola and joining Tri-M in his sophomore year, Tirthapura played violin starting at age 5.

"My favorite part about Tri-M is performing," Tirthapura said. "When we go out and perform, we not only get to represent the orchestra program, but I also get to show my passion for music, and it's always fun to see other people perform."

He said performing for a cause felt different than a usual concert. As Tirthapura practiced, he thought about portraying his music for those affected by Hurricane Ian. Raising money for hurricane relief efforts changed the way he played.

"I wasn't playing for me," Tirthapura said. "I was playing to support others."



JUNIOR Eric Miao and sophomore Jayden Ham play a Mozart duet arrangement.

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Yearbook works to meet deadlines with young staff

by AtreyDesai
& StephanieSun

Following low enrollment in the yearbook in 2021-2022, the Journalism 1 class combined with the yearbook class, leaving the staff of mostly freshmen to experience a steep learning curve of a publication, while learning the basics of journalism.

The same model is at work again this year, but with a bigger staff of 42 students and a new adviser, English teacher Megan Laws.

The yearbook editors-in-chief — seniors Ritisha Byri, Haley Marks, Isabella Marty, Gloria Pan and Eva Ruemmler — along with other returning staffers, have taken on greater mentorship responsibilities.

"The freshmen are integrating into the program and are beginning to understand how the publishing process works," Ruemmler said. "The veterans have been very helpful in integrating staff members into the process."

ginning of the year.

The staff is currently in the process of completing their third cycle and recently sent out information about senior advertisements, which significantly contribute to the Journalism program's funding.

"The veterans have been very helpful in integrating [the new] staff members into the process."

SENIOR Eva Ruemmler

Half pages are priced at \$300 and full pages at \$500 before Dec. 9, with prices increasing to \$350 and \$550, respectively, beginning Dec. 10 to Jan. 13.

During the spring semester, the yearbook will focus on incorporating senior quotes and portraits, which are due by Dec. 12 and 16 respectively, as well as getting references and indexes finished.

In late April, the staff will send the final proofs to the printer and brainstorm the theme for next year.

Despite the current challenges the staff is facing, Ruemmler is feeling optimistic regarding the development of the newer members.

"There is more hand-holding than last year for the spreads, but we have seen improvement from the first cycle," Ruemmler said. "As we move into the third cycle the staff will familiarize themselves with the process and begin to feel more comfortable with the design applications and journalistic style."

Student-directed productions give Drama 4 Honors seniors a golden opportunity to expand their skill set

by DivyaVadlakonda

The lights of the Thermonde Drama Center dimmed as senior Jo Bejar's character Elizabeth and her long-time friend Hattie Dealing, played by sophomore Niraali Garg, took the stage. The rapid-fire conversation continued until a ripple of laughter ran through the crowd and filled the small room as Hattie delivered a signature humorous remark.

"I knew I wanted to do a play that centered the lives of women and gave me the opportunity to do a lot of character work by including really strong, layered characters with lots of dialogue," Gupta said. "Mr. Brotzman said he had this script in his library, so I borrowed it from him, and fell in love with it."

Auditions for both plays began in October and rehearsals started a week after, with the entire process taking about eight weeks leading up to the opening night.

The directors built a rehearsal schedule with the stage managers and worked through stage directions and character work every rehearsal.

"Laundry and Bourbon," directed by senior Ananya Gupta, and "Who Made Robert de Niro the King of America," directed by senior Anastasia Ramirez, were presented by the drama department on Dec. 2 and 3. The 45-minute plays were directed by the seniors as part of a project for Drama 4 Honors. Around 50 people out of the total 90 seats attended opening night, with the next day's turnout being about the same.

Gupta learned to get a great amount of work done in a short span of time, given that the directing slots didn't allow the directors as much time as would be ideal to direct a one-act play.

Gupta also said she felt the experience having a student director like Gupta was considerably different from being directed by drama director Benjamin Brotzman, a result of different perspectives.

"Usually you know [a student director] before it's easier to talk to them compared to an adult director," she said. "The experience is very different as they are also figuring out things at the same time as you are so it's nice to have someone by your side."

"Laundry and Bourbon" is set in Elizabeth's house in Maynard, Texas, where she and Hattie spend their time gossiping about the secrets of their small town while fold-



ing laundry and sipping bourbon. They are joined by Amy Lee, played by sophomore Jing Jing Zhang, whose loose mouth reveals that Elizabeth's husband Roy has been going around town with another woman. The one-act play centers around the banter between the three housewives whose married lives turned out to be less than they hoped for.

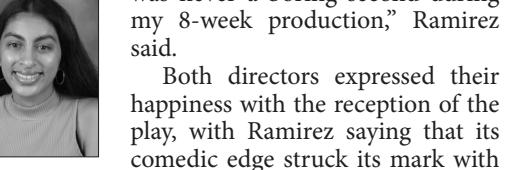
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Maggie's agent Samantha, played by senior Olivia Smith, visits their apartment and brings a great opportunity with her.

"Mr. Brotzman recommended this play to me because it was the first play he directed," Ramirez said.

Both directors expressed their happiness with the reception of the play, with Ramirez saying that its comedic edge struck its mark with the audience.

"I couldn't stop smiling when I was sitting up in the tech booth and the crowd would erupt in laughter," she said. "It felt so good to have my job and hard work transfer over to the audience."



Gupta



by William Norwood
& Maggie Zeng

District employs first public information officer

When superintendent Bill Sanderson joined the district in the summer, he met with the mayors of Saratoga and Los Gatos along with other community partners to discuss their perspectives on the biggest needs of the district. The common answer was the need for better communication — community members often had little knowledge of what was happening within the schools.

As a result, a brand new job position opened over the summer in the district: a public information officer (PIO). The duty of the PIO is to create clear and concise communication between the district's schools and surrounding areas, with a hope to foster stronger community relationships.

Tanya De la Cruz, the district's first PIO, has 12 years of experience in the same role at Moreland School District (MSD). Due to MSD being a K8 school, De la Cruz decided it was time for a change of pace and switched to LGSUHSD to learn more about high schools.

Because of the general unfamiliarity of her new job and recent changes in the district board, her biggest challenge is familiarizing herself with everybody and what they do and getting staff and students to communicate with her about current events.

"My job doesn't exist unless people tell

me what's happening, and they don't know to do that yet," she said.

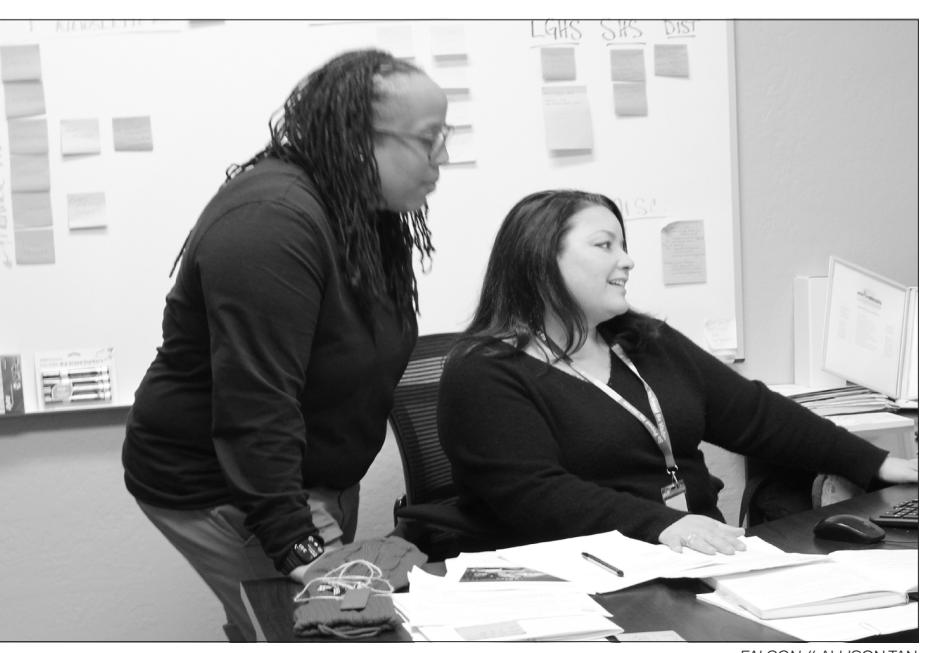
Despite the tough task of leaving her previous job and taking on a new position in a different district, De la Cruz is enthusiastic and anticipating the challenges to come.

"I really like the idea [of a brand new position]; it gave me the opportunity to start from the ground," De la Cruz said.

In her previous district, she received numerous calls from real estate agents inquiring information about the school for people moving into the area. She hopes to be able to do the same for our district, and "shout from the mountaintops" all the stories and accomplishments that are unknown to the community.

De la Cruz's immediate goal for the year is to improve the district's website to make all current information easily accessible and up to date, noting that much is buried, old or not updated in a timely manner. She is hopeful to have a brand-new website that will be launched after February or spring break. Afterward, she plans to work on the individual school websites over the summer.

Additionally, she seeks to increase media coverage of the two schools and has already reached out to various news sources, developing connections with places such as the Saratoga News and Mercury News and continuously feeding them information. Being an avid participant in journalism through-



Recently hired public information officer Tanya De La Cruz (right) talks to Human Resources Assistant Lindsay Harris while sitting at her desk in the district office on Dec. 7.

FALCON // ALLISON TAN

out her academic career, she especially recognizes the importance of press releases.

Keeping to her promise, De la Cruz has been regularly emailing press releases to students and parents about notable happenings at both schools, something the district

has not done regularly in the past.

"I just really want to be able to tell the stories of the amazing things that are happening throughout the district," De la Cruz said. "And I think the community wants to know." ♦

Senior cellist wins 2023 YoungArts finalist award

by Anika Kapasi
& Divya Vadlakonda

In November, senior Joel Kim, principal cellist in the Saratoga Strings orchestra, found out he was named a 2023 YoungArts finalist, an award which "recognizes work that demonstrates exceptional technique and a depth of thinking/performance that far exceeds the level of peers at [their] career stage."

"It felt so unreal, like it wasn't supposed to happen because only one to three cellos in the nation are selected as finalists every year out of all the applicants," Kim said. "When they called me after sixth period, I thought it was a spam call."

Finalists winners are invited to participate in National YoungArts Week, held in Miami from Jan. 8-15. There, Kim will have his playing further evaluated by internationally recognized cellists with the ability to win up to \$10,000. By attending National YoungArts Week, he is considered for nomination to the US Presidential Scholars Program which honors the nation's top graduating seniors.

The journey to this level of success began in fourth grade when he joined Redwood Middle's orchestra program. After realizing he truly enjoyed playing the instrument, he began to take it seriously the year after and started lessons with a private teacher that he works with to this day.

Throughout his early years, Kim said failure helped him realize his true potential, whether it was through competitions, auditions or recordings. His practice and experience eventually paid off, and he found his first notable success in freshman year — when he was accepted to the chamber music festival Music@Menlo.

"Every kind of loss taught me something new because there are just so many aspects



Courtesy of JOEL KIM

Senior Joel Kim performs cello at the Koret Young Performers Concert at the end of his second week playing at Music@Menlo, the chamber music festival, during the summer.

to performing," he said.

Kim has been invited back to the festival every summer since 2020 and he said the institute has "propelled [him] forward" to give him the momentum to find success in all his endeavors.

Due to the pandemic, the festival was originally online for 2020 and 2021. But when it finally opened up to be in person the summer before his senior year, Kim said Music@Menlo gave him a glimpse of what it is like to pursue music as a career, learning from different artists from all around the world who are nationally and internationally recognized.

Structured as a 3-week camp, musicians work and practice during the week with the

goal of performing a movement of their chamber piece at the end of each week in front of an audience.

"I think one of my proudest moments was probably the third week just because I think I was so nervous performing, but at the end of the week, I finally let go and I learned to have fun with [the piece]," he said.

Regardless of his future in music, his passion for it has blossomed in the last nine years, and he has found it to be an effective medium to interact with the audience in a unique way.

Along with his accomplishments at the festival and as YoungArts winner, Kim has won numerous chamber competitions and solo awards, one of the most notable being named as a winner of 2021-2022 Saratoga High School Chamber Ensemble Competition.

Music director Michael Boitz witnessed

Kim grow as a person and musician and had the pleasure of watching him evolve into "someone more remarkable than [he] ever imagined."

Boitz says that Kim had always had a particularly strong connection to every composer that he performs, pointing out that though many students can play technically, only a handful that he has seen have the ability to embody the piece and "bring the composer's intentions to life." Kim is one of those special students.

"He's stood out since he was a ninth grader," Boitz said. "He makes mistakes like anyone else in sight reading, half notes, quarter notes, but the most complex parts are easier for Joel than the more simplistic parts which is the case with a lot of brilliant people."

Though Kim said he would like for music to continue to be a big part of his life after high school, he admitted he is apprehensive about pursuing music exclusively in college.

"It's such a difficult industry to make it in whether you're performing in an orchestra, you're doing a solo or if you want to be a teacher," Kim said. "I'm focusing on applying to colleges that have a strong emphasis on being able to explore different subjects while still being able to pursue music."

Regardless of his future in music, his passion for it has blossomed in the last nine years, and he has found it to be an effective medium to interact with the audience in a unique way.

"Music is like acting because I'm portraying this character of a composer or whatever the piece was intended to be written about or was written for," he said. "It's really inspiring to know that I have made some sort of meaningful impact on another person and that just motivates me to keep pursuing it." ♦

English 11 Honors hosts Shakespeare discussion with professor

by Jonny Luo
& Victoria Hu

English 11 Honors teachers hosted Professor Emeritus Michael Warren on Dec. 8 to help students better understand Shakespeare's message and themes in "Hamlet," the play they are currently reading in class.

Teachers Natasha Ritchie and Amy Keys invited Warren to speak, as they have in past years before the pandemic. Ritchie, who took classes from Warren at UC Santa Cruz, hosted the discussion in Room 002 after

6th period. Warren has been coming to the school to discuss Shakespeare for the past decade.

He covered topics such as character motivations and development, differences between versions of the play and language tricks Shakespeare employed.

"I admire immensely what [the teacher and I] do here," Warren said. "The fact that there is a school in which a group of students as large as this will stay for an extra hour of class to talk about Shakespeare is something I'm profoundly grateful for, and

it has given me hope for the future."

Warren has been studying Shakespeare for more than 70 years. Students like junior Riya Jwalanna appreciated the insight they gained from his perspective, which provided more nuanced context on how social factors in Elizabethan England motivated Shakespeare's decisions.

"The way he spoke didn't feel like it was in a classroom, and I felt like I was in a college presentation," Jwalanna said. "He had a lot of great insight past the questions we asked, and I thought it was a great event." ♦

FOURTH PERIOD

STAFF POLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published nine times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in the Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

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The key to fair group work: peer reviews

Group quizzes, group tests, group essays, group projects, group labs and group performances — the list of collaborative assignments goes on and on.

Although group projects theoretically allow a wide range of ideas to flow together into one, supposedly cohesive masterpiece, it usually does not turn out that way — supplementing class with discussions and questions prior to essays is a more effective way for students to gain exposure to various perspectives in their writing.

Even when students have the rare opportunity to select their own groups, they might be in a class where they don't have many friends or might severely underestimate how unproductive their friends are.

This issue has a simple solution. Teachers: Please attach a peer evaluation to every group project — self-selected group or not.

Students don't care that working in teams is a real-world life skill. In the real world, no one really cares about your high school Pre-Calculus grade or English 10 grade; yet, here we are.

While the fairness of group projects can be improved by introducing peer evaluations, group assessments should be eliminated entirely. The entire point of a test or essay is to assess what each student has learned in a class — not what a group of students can do.

After all, AP tests do not encourage you to seek advice from the person next to you on how to solve an integral or how to write your argumentative essay.

So while some group work

every so often can be fun and a nice change of pace, assessment should ultimately be at the individual level.

Although group projects theoretically allow a wide range of ideas to flow together into one, supposedly cohesive masterpiece, it usually does not turn out that way — supplementing class with discussions and questions prior to essays is a more effective way for students to gain exposure to various perspectives in their writing.

While group assessments supposedly alleviate stress on students through collaboration, teachers often hold higher expectations for group assessments than they do for individual assessments.

Furthermore, if group members — usually those who did not do their fair share of work — might exaggerate their contribution on these evaluations, teachers often project — self-selected group or not.

Students don't care that working in teams is a real-world life skill. In the real world, no one really cares about your high school Pre-Calculus grade or English 10 grade; yet, here we are.

Even though having some form of group project allows students to develop effective communication skills and better planning and time management skills, tasks such as group tests, quizzes or essays are way too problematic to produce consistently fair results.

In classes such as AP U.S. History and AP U.S. Government & Politics, students are provided with scoring sheets for themselves and their peers or "self-evaluations" with the intention of informing their teacher

their school and formed the University Park Interfraternity Council (UPIFC), which promises the same "fraternity experience while promoting peer governance." In doing so, they revoked their right to the USC portal, which gives them access to campus regulated clubs, committees and leadership opportunities.

On the other hand, limitations imposed by universities can be ineffective and even exacerbate the issue of hazing. Many Greek life chapters, including all

one solution is to restrict alcohol use to prevent the majority of hazing incidents, most of

hazing, can help reduce these issues: Creating support systems such as an anonymous report line, using educational outreach to spread awareness, pushing efforts to strengthen criminal penalties and providing ethical alternatives for hazing — such as team building activities — is necessary for the reformation of Greek life organizations. By doing so, students who oppose hazing and Greek life traditions would be more willing to speak up and find a compromising solution.

If Greek life traditions remain the same, campus life will progressively worsen; it's time for fraternities and sororities to reflect on their practices and take action to ensure the safety of their members.</



Twitter is hopeless; why are we still trying to protect it?

By TaraNatarajan

On Oct. 28, Elon Musk officially consummated his heavily publicized \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter, a deal which had been in the air for months. Buying Twitter was more than a simple business transaction; it was a decision with significant societal consequences. Backlash against Musk's Twitter takeover has been substantive: He purchased the platform with the intent of deregulation, a move which critics claim will cause a surge of hate speech and harassment.

Criticism against Musk is deserved, considering his unethical workplace expectations for employees, the thousands of layoffs that blindsided Twitter employees on Nov. 3 and his union-busting tendencies. However, much of the criticism is levied on one distinctly untrue assumption that there is a fight to preserve the "soul of Twitter," and that it is a platform whose sanctity needs to be protected from the likes of Musk.

The fact that this acquisition is feared to have larger political consequences on American society is a symptom of the undue influence all of us have allowed Twitter to hold over our sociopolitical landscape.

The reality is that Twitter is terrible beyond repair on so many levels. This takeover is the perfect time to delegitimize the platform and release its grip on America once and for all.

In the 12 hours following confirmation of Musk's acquisition, the use of the n-word in tweets increased 500%, according to the Network Contagion Research Institute. The exponential increase in hate speech and slurs during this time was attributed to Musk's position as a "free speech absolutist," encouraging people to post racial epithets as an expression of their newfound freedom of speech.

Past problems

Although Musk's reason for buying Twitter was to deregulate it, the fact is that Twitter has featured racists since its inception in 2006. The inherent nature of Twitter's platform — the anonymity it provides, the stream of short text-posts with huge viral potential and the ability to amplify others' tweets by quoting and retweeting — means that no complex algorithms or technical development can stem the flow of racial hatred by many of its users. In addition, Twitter offers legitimacy absent in other similar platforms like Tumblr or Reddit because of the presence of politicians, celebrities, news personalities and industry elites who use it.

A prominent example of this was when highly influential conspiracy theorist Alex Jones leveraged the power of the internet to spread lies about everything from antisemitic "New World Order" theories to claiming that patrons of the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, most of whom were Latino and in the queer community, worked to promote pedophilia and child abuse.

Jones' constant "false-flag" conspiracies culminated in Inforward getting banned from major platforms such as Facebook, Apple, YouTube and Spotify — yet, the only company that refrained from banning Jones despite his vehemently bigoted content was Twitter. Jack Dorsey, the CEO at the time, claimed that Jones' content "hasn't violated our rules." Twitter finally banned Jones when a video surfaced of him verbally harassing a journalist with personal insults. At this moment, Twitter's moderation showed us that they would draw the line at personal harassment but could tolerate hate speech targeted at groups of people. ♦



Twitter's entire premise is antithetical to the ideas of democracy. It's often been heralded as a platform that stimulates open political conversation, and consequently, compromise and cooperation. In reality, it is virtually impossible to carry out constructive dialogue and address the nuances of politics that affect real people in 280 characters. Political discourse on Twitter, even between actual politicians, more often takes the form of trash talk and inflammatory rhetoric instead of constructive conversation. How could we ever expect it to be any other way on a platform whose algorithm encourages controversy and whose users are able to disproportionately amplify fringe speech?

A failure since inception

Twitter has been beyond repair since inception, and allowing it to play a part in American politics has caused irreparable problems in the nation's social and political consciousness, whether it be the increase in misinformation and polarization, the amplification of extremist voices or the company's failure to address racial violence.

Instead of protesting about how Musk is destroying Twitter, we must face the reality that he is simply exploiting the inherently harmful nature of the social media platform. A single person can only further destroy a broken system so much, and the only true solution to prevent further harm is to simply let Twitter die out. Regulation has proven largely unsuccessful thus far, so the best course of action is to boycott the platform as both consumers and advertisers, and let Musk drive it to the ground. ♦



Musk's takeover threatens already troubled company

By AnthonyWang

Dorsey told the Atlantic, "[Twitter] creates more understanding, more empathy, for how people wake up and live their day and then go to sleep. And if you have more empathy, that creates less contention, less conflict."

There is nothing understanding and empathetic about a platform that has a history of being mobilized by white supremacists and being used as one of the biggest sources of propaganda and disinformation. Did Twitter succeed in creating "less contention" and "less conflict" when it gave a verified blue checkmark to Jason Kessler, the founder of the infamous Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville (a grotesque celebration of white supremacy)? Or when it refused to acknowledge the fact that its algorithms most efficiently boost fringe political rhetoric?

For many, this represented a welcome change to a social media platform plagued by content moderation issues and financial troubles.

But in reality, Musk's takeover has proved to be nothing more than the conversion of Twitter to a personal toy on which Musk imposes his erratic and immature leadership.

In the end, these decisions fundamentally threaten to alienate both Twitter's customers and their employee base, demonstrating that he should not be in charge of Twitter.

Musk has demonstrated a severe lack of foresight, seemingly incapable of realizing how turning Twitter's old system of verifying high profile accounts into a paid service open to anyone could backfire.

year since its IPO (except for 2018 and 2019, which required ramping up video ads and cutting or selling nonessential services). Unsurprisingly, though, Musk's attempt at increasing the company's profits has done nothing but destabilize its core business.

Musk introduced Twitter Blue, replacing the blue checkmark of verification with a subscription service at a rate of \$8 per month for premium features, which include the coveted, eye-catching symbol.

Twitter Blue quickly became a tool for trolls to impersonate and mock public figures and companies, despite implementation of a secondary verification system. In addition, Twitter Blue is projected to make less than \$10 million a year, making hardly a dent in the nearly \$200 million deficit Twitter had in 2021.

Musk has demonstrated a severe lack of foresight, seemingly incapable of realizing how turning Twitter's old system of verifying high profile accounts into a paid service open to anyone could backfire.

So now that Musk is in charge, what does he plan to fix? Absolutely nothing.

The balance between free speech and content moderation on Twitter has been a hotly debated issue.

After confidently declaring that "comedy is now legal on Twitter," he childishly lashed out at those who mocked him, demanding that they include "parody" in their account name due to confusion over which accounts are real and which accounts are satirical, a problem he created himself.

Musk's impulsive behavior extends to his management of Twitter's employees.

Shortly after his acquisition of the company, Musk began to turn the employee hierarchy into an imitation of his other companies, creating a cult of personality in which only those who support his vision about Twitter's future are allowed to stay.

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The balance between free speech and content moderation on Twitter has been a hotly debated issue.

Calling himself a free speech absolutist, he has made it clear that he wanted less scrutiny to be placed on the messages put out on Twitter, making it a more toxic place. For example, the amount of hate speech on Twitter immediately surged on Oct. 28 — the simple presence of the reckless and unserious Musk allowed racists, anti-Semites, misogynists, transphobes and conspiracy theorists to become louder. They feel safe with him in charge.

When Musk finally acted, they only served to emphasize the rashness of his choices. He lifted the ban on rapper and known anti-Semitic Kanye "Ye" West, only to be forced to ban him again after he posted a picture of a swastika inside a Star of David.

These actions are nothing short of totalitarian; Musk has assumed the role of a dictator purging the ranks of the party to filter for only the most loyal supporters.

It worked out great for Stalin; no doubt Musk will do well too.

With Musk taking over Twitter, there is no longer a case for responsibly using the social media app. Even the district has discontinued Twitter as a communications platform, and steps like this are not without reason. With Musk in charge, Twitter will continue to be an unprofitable platform full of hatred and discrimination. ♦

Ironically, Musk has also tasked himself with fixing profit issues at Twitter, which has continued to lose money every

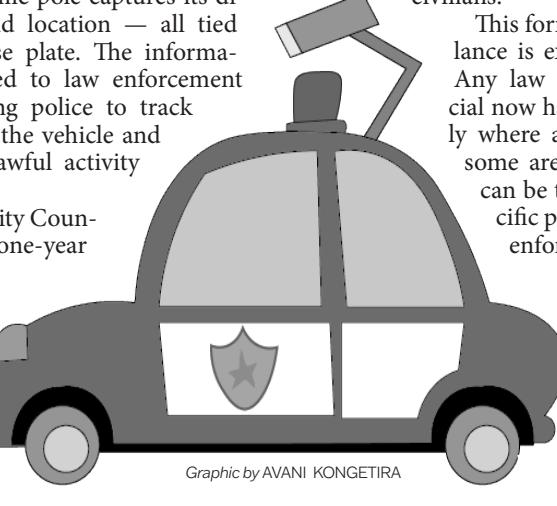
Saratoga's ALPR license plate readers are harmful to all

By SkylerMao

There are several issues with ALPR cameras. Most notably, there are privacy concerns: ALPRs track the movement of millions of cars belonging to normal civilians.

This form of mass surveillance is extremely invasive. Any law enforcement official now has access to exactly where a car has been in some areas. License plates can be tied back to a specific person through law enforcement databases as well.

ALPR cameras breach citizens' privacy in the name of supposed safety. This problem is exemplified by the risk of data breaches on system data and exposing such information to criminals. If someone with bad intent were to get this data, they would be able to track everyone's movements — which



can have dire consequences on the safety of the people.

For example, Boston's entire ALPR system was exposed in 2015, and hundreds of thousands of vehicle records were freely accessible by the public.

If a similar data leak happens in a city like Saratoga, it could lead to potential stalking or other unlawful activities to take place.

In addition to this, ALPRs are expensive to maintain.

For example, the currently used Flock Safety company charges \$2,400 per camera a year with a \$350 installation fee. Cities such as Los Altos Hills, Los Gatos, Morgan Hill and Milpitas have also implemented these systems, draining tens of thousands of dollars from city budgets.

Proponents argue that ALPR has the ability to detect stolen vehicles or criminals coming and going. However, ALPR cameras are disastrously ineffective. A study conducted by the Independent Institute in the city of Piedmont, California, found that less



than 0.3% of ALPR "hits" actually become investigative leads, according to 16 years of statistical evidence.

Furthermore, there was no correlation between ALPRs and stolen vehicle recoveries during that time.

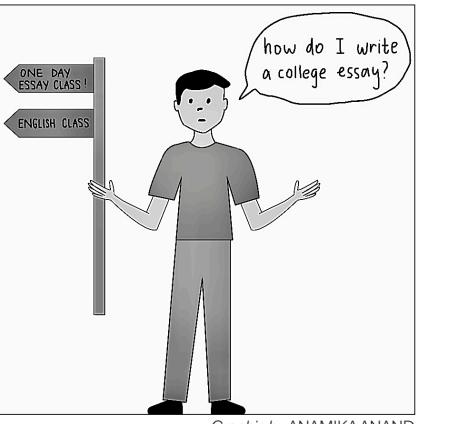
Despite such studies, ALPRs have proliferated across the country, contributing barely anything to safety while taking away from civilians' privacy and money.

Saratoga should work to discontinue its recently implemented ALPR programs and spend money on more worthwhile things like social services or city infrastructure instead. ♦

falconcharts

Locations of ALPR cameras in Saratoga

- Saratoga Ave & Kosich Dr
- Quito Rd & Pollard Rd
- Saratoga Avenue & State Route 85 (southwest)
- Saratoga Avenue & State Route 85 (northeast)
- Saratoga Sunnyvale Rd & Big Basin Way
- Saratoga Sunnyvale Rd & Prospect Rd



League one and a homework assignment giving a week to write at least 650 words for college essays, whether it's through a Common Application essay, UC essays or other supplemental essays.

There should be nothing beyond that to avoid redundancies and leave time for the rest of the curriculum. Reading and taking notes on a few example essays is all that is necessary since there is not much to lecture about without potentially restricting students' creative range.

While students' guidance needs vary, all senior English classes should roughly match in the help they provide. Students choose between the different English classes based on their academic preferences and the rigor or level they want — levels of college essay guidance should not change. ♦

Senior English classes should align with college essay guidance

By HowardShu

Seniors for essay help, I was one of the initially skeptical seniors, but I was proven wrong.

As an AP Lit student, the college essay guidance genuinely helped me write and revise my own essays, but everything I found applicable came from just one classwork assignment: taking notes on what was effective in Ivy League-accepted essays. This activity opened my mind to various different introduction methods and taught me how to better balance imagery and reflection.

The improvement in essay writing I drew was distinct from what one would get from individual help at the CCC and with guidance counselors: While individual meetings generally help polish essay structure and refine existing ideas, the activity enhanced my ability to brainstorm ideas, both in terms of introduction methods and taught me to a satisfactory level before having to submit my work.

College essay help should not differ based upon English class, especially when the difference in instruction is not planned beforehand.

I suggest striking a balance between one extreme of offering multiple sessions of essay guidance and the other of no guidance at all: In my view, all senior English classes should have one class period and one homework assignment on college essays.

Many current seniors think college essay guidance is not necessary and there is no viable way to teach such open-ended writing without restricting creativity. Additionally, the school already provides the College and Career Center (CCC) and guidance coun-

selors for essay help. I was one of the initially skeptical seniors, but I was proven wrong.

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College essay help should not differ based upon English class, especially when the difference in instruction is not planned beforehand.

I suggest striking a balance between one extreme of offering multiple sessions of essay guidance and the other of no guidance at all: In my view, all senior English classes should have one class period and one homework assignment on college essays.

Many current seniors think college essay guidance is not necessary and there is no viable way to teach such open-ended writing without restricting creativity. Additionally, the school already provides the College and Career Center (CCC) and guidance coun-

selors for essay help. I was one of the initially skeptical seniors, but I was proven wrong.

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The Common Application and its annoying em dash dilemma

By ShaanSridhar

Yet when you enter the em dash into the Common Application with a space on each side, it counts it as a full word.

Why?

Because apparently any characters with spaces on both sides are counted as words in the Common Application (whoever programmed this has a lot of explaining to do, especially when other word counters don't make this basic mistake).

But lo and behold: This leads to a clever hack. If you remove the space (for example, "beginning—phrase—end"), the three words connected by the em dash only count for one word. WHAT?

My natural tendency is to use the punctuation mark the way the Falcon uses it: with a space on either side of the dash.

I've had lengthy discussions about what constitutes a word — if you're in AP English Language & Composition, you know what I'm talking about — but I think it's safe to say that the em dash isn't a word.

They're clearly two words, but the Common Application lacks the ability to make this distinction. So, as any try-hard student would, I removed the spaces around my em dashes throughout all my essays, saving a whopping 14 words on my personal statement.

America needs to speak out against the ongoing violence directed toward many women in power

by William Norwood & Sarah Thomas

On Oct. 28, a deranged right wing extremist attacked House speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband, Paul Pelosi, in their San Francisco home, striking him with a hammer and reportedly asking, "Where's Nancy?" Mr. Pelosi was left with a skull fracture, and treated at Stanford Health Trauma Center.

Although attacks on government officials have become more frequent as polarization grips the country, an assassination on an elected official has not occurred since 2015 when former South Carolina state Representative and Senator Clementa C. Pinckney was assassinated — although Pinckney wasn't explicitly targeted, contrasting the attack on Pelosi's husband. There was scarce coverage, even though the suspected motive was white supremacy.

The attack on Nancy Pelosi was shocking and did not get the media attention it deserved.

After the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, female politicians like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Pelosi have felt threatened not only by violence from outsiders but by their colleagues as well. Ocasio-Cortez listed some examples of unacceptable behavior toward her from other politicians like Reps. Paul Gosar, Ted Yoho and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who shared videos of violence against

Ocasio-Cortez, called her expletives and mocked her for fearing for her life.

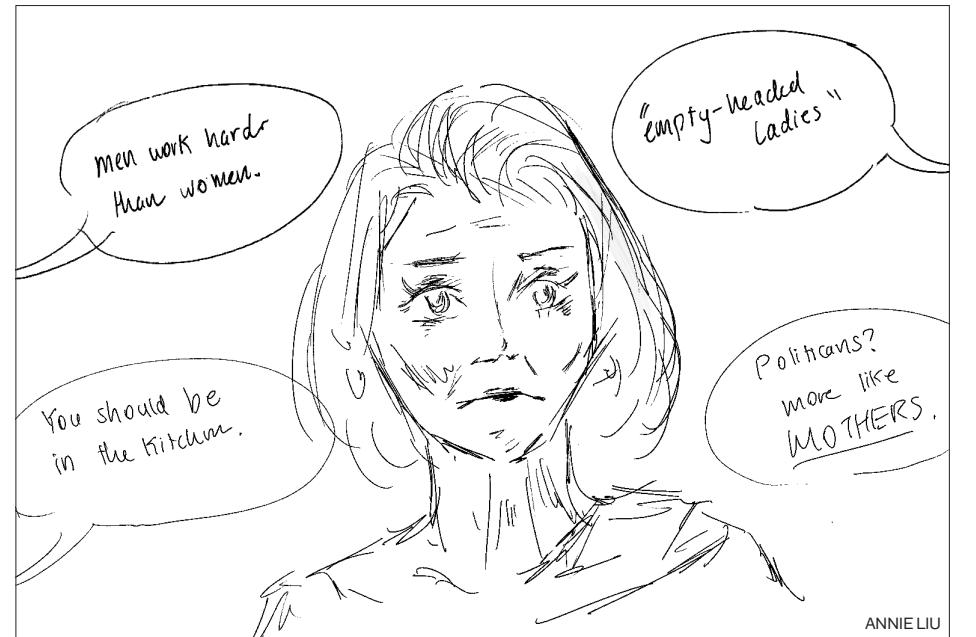
Following the Jan. 6 insurrection, and the attack on Paul Pelosi, the level of media coverage surrounding politically motivated violence was lower than the attention received by similar events in other countries. For example, when Sir David Amess — a British conservative party member — was murdered, it was covered extensively on various British news sources and discussed at length in the national discourse.

The insurrection on Jan. 6 was a horrific event and a threat to American democracy. Every now and again a news story about the House investigation pops up, but only because it will affect the political future of Donald Trump.

America has a unique problem with desensitization to violence in general because of the incredible amount of gun violence that occurs. The number of mass shootings in America far exceeds what occurs in other developed countries. Although some mass shootings receive coverage nationally, almost 600 shootings have occurred so far in the year, compared to the 40 shootings that have happened over the past three decades in Canada.

The American public is uniquely numb to these events, with shootings often receiving minimal media attention. This phenomenon is indicative of the environment that thrives on websites like Twitter and Reddit result in these events and create unproductive and unsafe environments for female politicians.

The attack on Nancy Pelosi's husband did not get the media attention it deserved. While at the time midterms were prioritized in the media, the attack still deserved more coverage than it received — it is an attempt



ANNIE LIU

ed attack on the most influential democratic politician in Congress, and the third in line of succession for the presidency.

Events like the attack on Pelosi's husband and insurrection are not one-off, shocking events: The unique political climate of America and violent extremist language that

thrives on websites like Twitter and Reddit result in these events and create unproductive and unsafe environments for female politicians.

We need to go further than just holding the perpetrators of physical violence accountable.

It's time to make a change to the American political landscape and truly take a stand against violence in any form through stronger protesting, activism and voting into office those who respect democracy and civility as core values. We must hold our government accountable, and go out and apply pressure to have our voices to be heard for real change. ♦

Americans should not be so complacent when it comes to violence against female politicians, whether it is physical or verbal.

If America truly wants to be a champion of democracy and political equality, and the

best way to deal with this is to combat violence within the U.S. The U.S. must talk about the unbearable amount of violence and bring attention to our desensitization.

But soon, we ran into our first issue: Although she claimed to have brown sugar, all-purpose flour and chocolate chips, Minsui had none of them.

So, we all scurried into Nidhi's

Tesla with 34 miles — a fact she didn't fail to remind Stephanie and Minsui every 30 seconds — and completed the journey to Safeway.

After arguing whether milk chocolate or dark chocolate chips were better, we decided to waste more money and get both of them, alongside other necessary ingredients, and drove back to Minsui's house (with 25 miles left on Nidhi's Tesla).

After deciding that Stephanie most likely had a higher IQ than Minsui and Nidhi combined (which isn't true at all), we split



>> falconfigures

8% of Democrats in 2017 said violence is justified to advance political goals

8% of Republicans in 2017 said violence is justified to advance political goals

33% of Democrats in 2020 said violence is justified to advance political goals

36% of Republicans in 2020 said violence is justified to advance political goals

Not so crazy — 16-year-olds should have the right to vote

by Zach Zinman

hind

our respective predictions. This tradition is less about accuracy and more about methods. In elementary school, I relied on gut feeling; now, I rely on polls from FiveThirtyEight, candidate debates and election updates in the news.

Politics has always been a key part of my household. My father and I frequently share articles regarding the president's approval ratings, inflation and the war in Ukraine while "Meet the Press" plays every Sunday morning on the TV.

For over 10 years, right before elections, we traditionally print out U.S. maps and color states and districts in red or blue, representing the candidate we predict will win. After making our predictions separately, we sit down to discuss the thought process be-

forehand vote long before I turned 18. Most public high schools offer U.S. History and Government courses, which prepare teenagers to make an informed decision about their representation in government.

Moreover, evidence shows 16-year-olds are actually more likely to vote than 18- to 24-year-olds. According to the New York Times, in countries like Argentina, Austria, Brazil and Nicaragua — which all have a voting age of 16 for either nation, state or local elections — 16- and 17-year-olds have had a "significantly higher" turnout than other older age groups.

According to a study conducted by Yale University's Institution for Social and Policy Studies, past voting "substantially increases" the chance of voting in the future. If more citizens begin voting at an earlier age, they are more likely to vote habitually in future elections, increasing voter turnout for years to come — which should be a goal for all elected government officials (though, these days, it clearly isn't).

Many doubt the decision making abilities and maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds. To make a judgment on whether 16-year-olds are able to vote, it's important to understand the idea of cold cognition.

In calm situations, which allow for prolonged deliberation with logical reasoning, people rely on cold cognition to make informed decisions. Voting falls into the tasks of cold cognition. By 16, cold cognition is secure and mature. High schoolers are ready to sift through complex issues and vote.

If the voting age is lowered to 16, many high schools would become political hotbeds, in which students can have a real influence on the democratic process. With more influence from young people, our

government will have a more well-rounded representation of its citizens.

With the increase of school shootings in recent years, many young people want to have a say in gun legislation that directly affects them. Lowering the voting age would allow young people to vote for government officials who they believe will pass gun violence legislation to keep schools safe. Many teenagers also want to have a say in environmental issues they will face the consequences of.

Lowering the voting age to 16 will increase voter turnout, regular voting habits and political participation.

On top of the safety aspect, there's a fundamental American argument for lowering voting age: taxation without representation.

Slightly more than 55% of those 16 to 24 were employed in the U.S. in July 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Since some 16- and 17-year-olds have jobs and earn over \$12,950 yearly, they have to pay income taxes. These teenagers should have a say about what their earnings are paying for in the government, especially on the local level.

Lowering the voting age to 16 will increase voter turnout, regular voting habits, and political participation. Politicians and citizens should always look for ways to bolster the representative democratic process of the U.S. Giving 16 and 17-year-olds voting rights will do just that. ♦



Graphic by ANNIE LIU

lifestyles

WE ARE ON THE FUN, SLIGHTLY CHAOTIC JOURNEY TO BECOMING GORDON RAMSAY'S FAVORITE LITTLE BAKERS

by Nidhi Mathihalli, Stephanie Sun & Minsui Tang

Nothing beats baking knockoff Crumbl cookies the night after a mentally exhausting Thanksgiving dinner with 10 different families who you don't even know.

But, on Nov. 25, what started as an innocent, wholesome holiday baking endeavor among three peace-loving friends soon devolved into a disastrous series of events in which we ALMOST burned down Minsui's house.

Wanting to be a good samaritan, Nidhi decided to help Stephanie combine the ingredients.

However, Stephanie took offense to this, believing that Nidhi wanted to sabotage her, and refused to follow Nidhi's advice of burning down Minsui's house.

When we first arrived, we were enthusiastic and excited to work together to successfully mimic the famous cookies, a luxury we three have yet to experience.

But soon, we ran into our first issue: Although she claimed to have brown sugar, all-purpose flour and chocolate chips, Minsui had none of them.

So, we all scurried into Nidhi's

dry ingredients into the wet ingredients in batches. However, after insisting that she was correct, Nidhi took over, and finished the job within seconds.

Meanwhile, being the true peacekeeper she is, Minsui decided to stray away from the biggest argument of the century about which of the bowls — the one used for dry ingredients or the one used to wet ingredients — to use to mix the cookie dough. Instead, she chose to take a short 10-minute break.

In order to appease Minsui's incorrect opinion on milk chocolate being better than dark, we decided to add half a bag of milk chocolate chips and half a bag of dark chocolate chips.

Instead, she continued to follow her flawed and unverified "scientific" method — Stephanie maintains "it was not flawed" — of folding the

the

dry ingredients into the wet ingredients in batches. However, after insisting that she was correct, Nidhi took over, and finished the job within seconds.

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high school seniors we are, we did NOT panic, even when we noticed that the air appeared a little foggy than usual. In fact, we didn't do anything until we realized the smoke was emerging from the oven.

Immediately, we realized that something was wrong and rushed into the oven.

When we pulled the two bottom trays out, we found out that tilting them led to the parchment paper catching on fire, which in turn completely burnt the bottom of all the cookies on the sheets.

But rather than waste the cookies, Nidhi and Minsui decided to eat the tops of the cookies (which were baked enough, contrary to Stephanie's overly skeptical opinions), while Stephanie stared in disgust.

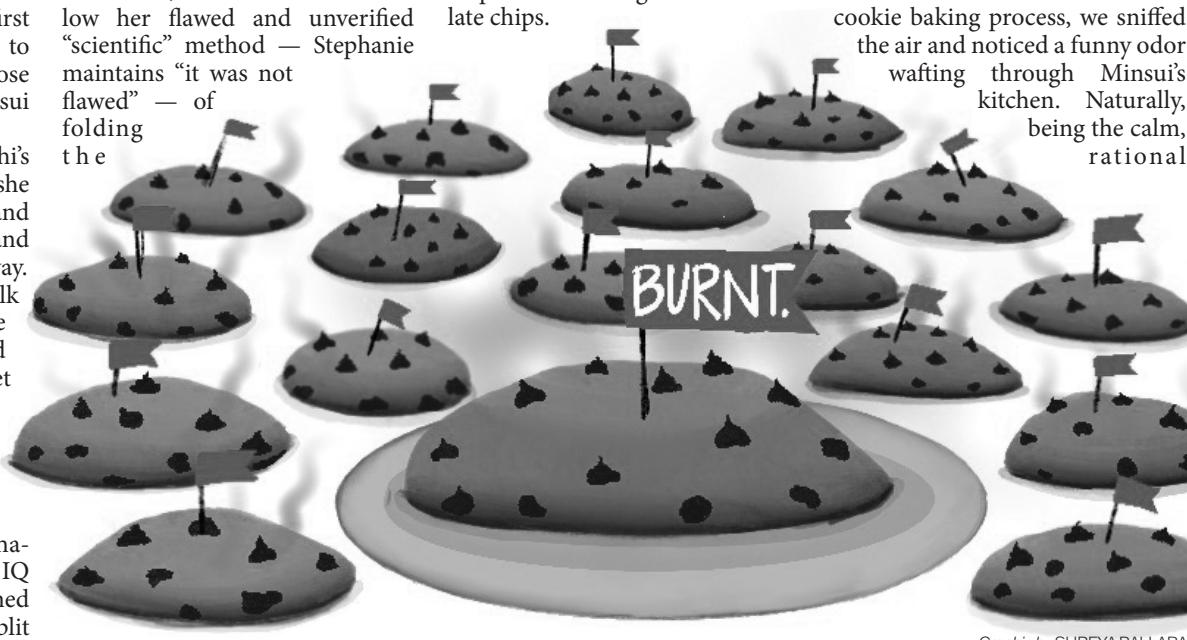
Thankfully, nine of the 22 cookies were edible — but apparently, Stephanie was not satisfied.

Regardless, we enjoyed our fresh-out-of-the-oven cookies with a glass of milk.

Minsui's dog whined and begged for some, although we couldn't give him any.

Instead, we ate our cookies while spilling ALL of the tea (*wink-wink*) — to which the dumb little dog responded by ferally attacking Minsui for the rest of the night.

Overall rating (in cookies):
Stephanie's rating: -9/22
Nidhi's rating: 12697245/10
Minsui's rating: 10/10 ♦



Graphic by SHREYA RALLABANDI

The best after-school snack choices from connoisseurs

by Divya Vadilakonda & Kevin Yang

to school that just enhances the flavor, the texture and the overall experience.

Cocoa Puffs in particular always hits the spot, maybe even passing as an easy dessert if you squint hard enough. Its chocolatey flavor and crunchy texture are delicious — it's safe to say that "Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs" isn't far off from the truth.

And while we are naming underrated gems: King's Hawaiian Rolls. Without sounding too much like an advertisement, we could eat these soft, chewy, sweet buns forever.

Undoubtedly, this situation is a familiar one for many students.

For us, there are a few things more motivating at the end of the day than coming home and curling into bed with our favorite after-school snacks.

Whether it be a comfort food that incites nostalgic memories or just a guilty pleasure that you can't get enough of, we all have go-to snacks that always hit the spot.

There are some snacks where you can never go wrong with: the highly addictive Skinny Pop popcorn, a classic Z-bar (the best flavor is iced oatmeal cookie) and the unmatched Cheez-It — to name a few.

Let's even go one step further: Cheese is a very acceptable after-school snack to sink your teeth in, whether it is in the form of simple cheese sticks or the superior Tillamook Medium Cheddar Cheese.

To the end of the day, no one can define a good snack for you. We all have our own taste, background, and lifestyles — after all, you are what you eat. Your after school snack experience is entirely subjective, a beautiful and flavorful journey tailored to you. ♦

They are light and addictive bites, posing the dangerous prospect of consuming an industrial sized Costco pack of them. Would that really be so bad though? Bottom line: We are shocked at how underrated they are.

Even so, one should not hesitate to go back to the basics with an apple or an orange.

Fruits are the best of all snacks: healthy, almost always stocked in the kitchen and rarely failing in the taste department. The most versatile of all snacks, they can be eaten fresh, thrown into a blender to make a smoothie, eaten with yogurt, and more.

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FALCON // KAVYA PATEL

What a 6-year-old does in Mexico during Winter Break

by Kavya Patel

When I was 6, my family and I traveled to Cancun, Mexico, for vacation.

This trip, however, soon took a turn — I had no idea that this would be the most embarrassing



NEAL & NIKHIL'S WINTER TRAVEL GUIDE

By Neal Malhotra
& Nikhil Mathihalli

With just a short 3-hour drive down south Highway 101, you can arrive at the perfect winter wonderland — Cambria, a small and cozy coastal town near the famous Hearst Castle with just under 6,000 residents. You might ask, why would we even recommend a place that is probably colder than the Bay Area, but that doesn't snow?

For starters, it's extremely relaxing. During the December-yearning time of November — when you have just about had enough with school, extracurricular activities or the other million things high schoolers have going on in their life — you just can't help but get more anxious for finals season that we all dread.

So, having a place where you can destress to get away and do nothing is nothing less than perfect. The AirBNBs near Fiscalini Ranch in Cambria are always extremely cozy, with almost every home being stocked with warm fuzzy blankets. To top it off, they also have amazing views of the ocean, board games and other little tidbits to keep you entertained. Just imagine staying in your bedroom, blankets around you and a cup of hot chocolate in your hand as you watch the waves hit the beach with a never ending passion.

What could be better than that? San Simeon is just 15 minutes up the road from Cambria.

Hearst San Simeon State Park has a beautiful pier and beach worth checking out, but San Simeon is primarily known for Hearst Castle, a luxury estate built by newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst between 1919 and 1947.

Hearst Castle features a private airfield, two giant swimming pools, a movie theater, tennis courts, over 100 acres of gardens, two greenhouses and the world's largest private zoo. The property was once open only by invitation to A-list celebrities and politicians, such as Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, Charlie Chaplin, and Winston Churchill, but is now open to the public for visitation. It is one of the best day trips to visit when in Cambria.

Additionally, the beaches are a must in Cambria. Apart from San Simeon, there are various beaches that capture the beauty of the nature in Cambria. The cold and windy 50-degree December weather is the perfect condition to drive unnecessary guests away, leaving you able to walk along the shores as you enjoy the calmly crisp sounds of waves. Don't worry about the chilly weather — the serene feeling of your toes tingling in the sand is enough to warm your heart for the entire season.

For example, Moonstone Beach is a perfect place to take a trot. It is clean and has lots of open space to either play football or run around and play fetch with your dog (or friends). The best part is finding random pieces of pale white wood scattered around the beach to take home with you.

In addition to walking on the beaches, there are many hiking trails around like Fiscalini Ranch. As you walk along the trail, not only

will you encounter multiple landmarks such as handmade benches and informative signs about the area, you will also have the crystal blue ocean to your right and beautiful blooming flowers to your left. However, in our opinion, the best part is going off the beaten path and making your way down to the rocky beach down below, where you will see all kinds of sea life like sea urchins and starfish.

As avid food lovers, we know all the best places to eat in Cambria. In addition to being close to San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay, it has an excellent, ever-hopping downtown that is littered with gems for you to discover, with our favorite being the Black Cat Bistro. There are so many other food options like Indigo Moon or the French Corner Bakery that offer top-notch food. Black Cat Bistro offers a seasonal menu, so everytime we go it's a different experience, but they manage to amaze us each and every single time.

A visit to Cambria is extremely easy to plan with friends and family — all it takes is a joyful roadtrip south from Saratoga and a well-planned two to three days of sightseeing. It may not be the most adventurous place, but it certainly has a lot to offer with a plethora of bakeries, beaches and hiking trails.

Many impactful memories reside there, whether it be making our concoctions (a mix of every condiment and the leftovers of all our drinks) or sitting outside and enjoying the food. And we hope, with the help of this travel guide, that you will make memories of your own in Cambria, too. ♦

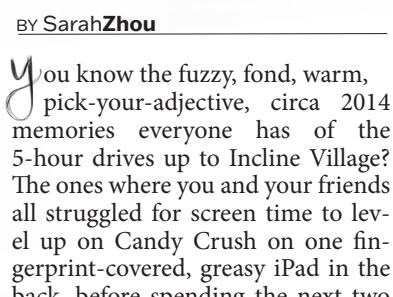
MUST-DOS IN CAMBRIA

- GO TO HEARST CASTLE
- GO TO SAN SIMEON BEACH
- ALSO GO TO MOONSTONE BEACH
- WATCH THE SUNSET W/ FRIENDS
- GO TO BLACK CAT BISTRO
- EAT THEIR FRESHLY CAUGHT SALMON
- PICK FLOWERS ON THE TRAILS



NOT EGG-CITED FOR LAKE TAHOE

From: SARAH XOXO



BY Sarah Zhou

You know the fuzzy, fond, warm, pick-your-adjective, circa 2014 memories everyone has of the 5-hour drives up to Incline Village? The ones where you and your friends all struggled for screen time to level up on Candy Crush on one fingerprint-covered, greasy iPad in the back, before spending the next two weeks in bliss snowboarding down Comstock (or, if you were feeling like a mogul daredevil, Backside) for the entire day? And also the ones when you went to some cabin to pretend Santa was real (even if you knew who the "real" Santa was after staying up all night as a 6 year-old and having an existential crisis)?

In an ideal universe, I could have had all that, except in reality I was a year younger than all the other kids my family went with, and I was a very pessimistic child (for a good reason). To the four kids of my dad's college best friends, being merely one year

older than someone else meant they were all 10x more emotionally mature than the younger one, so I was excluded from all their "big kid activities."

I was banned from playing Egyptian War with them because, being only 6 as opposed to 7 meant a world of a difference in one's ability to participate in card games.

Also, they had all developed some type of weird elitist ego from living in their city while the weird little 6-year-old lived in Saratoga (ironic because they were living in a city with a 30-something crime rate index while I was out here with a 7.66% rate), so I was also on the outside geographically. Even though I don't speak to any of them, I would have loved to rub it in their faces that half of them ended up moving to Saratoga! Some of them go to this school actually! I have classes with them!

To the four kids of my dad's college best friends, being merely one year

from that torturous 10-year period when I went to Tahoe every weekend from November through February was when I became friends with another girl who wasn't part of the original little cult. I didn't have to suffer alone anymore. After a few years, people outside of the original vacation group were invited to the Tahoe trips, and when I finally had a friend my age, we spent every waking minute together (not necessarily by choice, keep in mind we were both outsiders) doing socially and emotionally appropriate activities in the cabin.

Before meeting her, I had to

spend hours on the slopes suffering through the hells of black diamond

and snooty arrogant little ski team brats who pushed me whenever possible and taunted me for crying after getting lost (it really was not that funny).

But now, I had someone to build snowmen and play Hay Day with.

The only good memory I have

from that torturous 10-year period

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The only good memory I have

her, no one tried bullying us anymore because she had an older brother who was not 6, not 7, but 17 and was one of the original permied Kevin Nguyen's, so none of the beefy second graders were willing to mess with him.

This girl could make herself slow-cooked braised pork, while I still struggled to understand microwave instructions. Every morning, she yelled at me for an hour about my inability to fry an egg, which was incredibly effective, because by the end of the two weeks I was flipping perfect sunny-side-up eggs like I had been doing it since I was born. Of course, we didn't share any of these creations with anyone else in the cabin, because why give unpoisoned things to people you despise?

Anyway, the only thing that came out of my journey to Tahoe every winter is my ability to facilitate the chemical change of an egg. This story is really that simple — and sad. ♦



BY Sarah Zhou

We wish you a merry birthday. We wish you a merry birthday, happy birthday Beverly!" the music from your local grocery shop goes during this special time of the year.

On Dec. 26 at 9 a.m., I wake

up and frantically scramble out of bed only to realize that there is no school. Every year, I'm so grateful that the district decides to give students an entire two weeks of break just to mark my momentous coming-of-age. Unbelievable, right?

On my birthday, people feast

on Christmas foods that have been

specially fermented in the fridge

for over 24 hours, light the first

of seven Kwanzaa candles for an

additional week of festivities and

those in Commonwealth countries

eat leftovers. Oftentimes, people

around the world travel to visit

family and reunite, so that they

may better honor the birth of a

saint; the saint being none

other than me, of course.

However, I must admit that my birthday isn't always all sunshine and rainbows. And no, not just because it's winter. For example, people always seem to travel away from me to go winter vacationing, and the ones who stay often give rather odd gifts. One year I received cookie cutters — which, dear mother, I'd like you to know that I've never been particularly proficient at baking cookies. There were also socks, a camera tripod and, oh lord, bras for someone (me) who's flatter than the cookies I can't make.

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BY Beverly Xu



BY Beverly Xu

Let's be real: My birthday is the

most celebrated holiday of the

year. On Christmas, better known

as Beverly's Birthday Eve — it's

even an (almost) alliteration — 309

million people in the U.S. gather

around to give each other gifts,

build spiced cookie houses, fill

the streets with festive music and

best of all, clump snow into cute,

humanoid figures: all in prepara-

tion for the next day, my

birthday.

"We wish you a

merry birthday.

We wish you a merry birthday. We wish you a merry birthday, happy birthday Beverly!" the music from your local grocery shop goes during this special time of the year.

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Merry Birthday To Me

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Unveiling my Oscar movie nominations for this year

BY TaraNatarajan

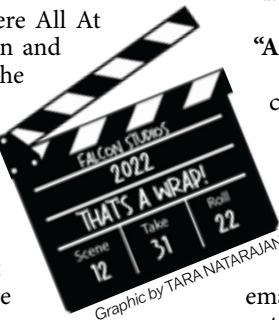
If you know me, you know I am a major movie buff. A film bro. A cinema connoisseur. If I have free time, you'll find me in front of a screen.

Movies were my biggest pastime in 2022, which is why I feel qualified to make a year-end list with a few of what were in my opinion, the best movies released this year (in no particular order): "Everything Everywhere All At Once," "Aftersun" and "Fire of Love."

"Everything Everywhere All At Once" (Rated R)

A24's "Everything Everywhere All At Once," directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert (known as the Daniels), is the crown jewel of film this year. This weirdly absurdist yet deeply emotional movie explores the concepts of isolation, nihilism and existentialism through a working-class Asian immigrant family that ends up in the middle of a multiversal conflict, with particularly outstanding performances by Michelle Yeoh as the frazzled matriarch Evelyn and Stephanie Hsu as her unhappy daughter Joy.

Yeoh's fantastic action sequences — a homage to her "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" days — add an element of thrill while her poignant performance during key emotional moments perfectly encompasses the stoic yet fiercely loving nature common of immigrant parents. Despite the humor, moments of warmth and intense nothingness hit the viewer like a truck, with family



Graphic by TARA NATARAJAN

"Aftersun" (Rated R)

Starring Paul Mescal and newcomer Frankie Corio, "Aftersun" is a touching yet devastating coming-of-age movie following a father and his young daughter during a single summer vacation to Turkey.

Through a warm, buttery cinematic palette and the gorgeous natural chemistry between the father-daughter pair, director Charlotte Wells' patient, probing approach to memory pays off with a visually stunning and emotionally intuitive film. "Aftersun" is aesthetically reminiscent of a faded photograph, examining the reconciliation of our rosy memories of loved ones and our understanding of who they really are as people.

It follows in the footsteps of movies like "The Florida Project" told through the eyes of an adolescent protagonist teetering between childhood innocence and a darker unknown. Although the storyline itself

"Everything Everywhere All At Once" is no less than essential and has potential to become an American classic.

Rating: 5 out of 5 Falcons

"Aftersun" is not an easy movie to watch. Despite (or perhaps, because of) its depiction of carefree youth, it is a film that requires a great deal of patience to process. But the ultimate purpose of any film is to explore the human psyche, and it's only possible to do so if you absorb the full range of heavy emotions and profound questions about the nature of parenthood, childhood and memory that this gorgeous movie brings to the surface.

Rating: 5 out of 5 Falcons

"Fire of Love" (Rated PG)

I've never been an avid viewer of documentary films. However, the Natural Geography feature "Fire of Love" was a true standout this year because it presents a rare combination of history, science, and a love story for the romantic in all of us.

Rating: 4.5 out of 5 Falcons ♦



Our top album of the year: JID's 'The Forever Story'

BY HowardShu & ArnavSwamy

When the Grammy nominations for best rap album of 2022 came out on Nov. 15, many hip-hop enthusiasts — the two of us included — were immediately enraged at major snubs from the list. With messy and generic records like DJ Khaled's "God Did" and Jack Harlow's "Come Home the Kids Miss You" nominated, the selection of albums seemed to be based on mainstream success rather than actual influence on hip-hop and quality of art. In fact, our favorite rap album of the year, "The Forever Story" by Atlanta rapper Destin Route, better known as JID, was left off the list entirely.

JID's resolute conclusion rests on self-awareness and meditation on struggles, goals and relationships.

The album, released on Aug. 26, was the rapper's first album since jumping into the limelight in the last two years, with features with high-profile artists J. Cole and Kid Cudi. Expectations were high with more people tuning in, but needless to say, JID effortlessly surpassed them, fusing a vast variety of themes into a masterfully cohesive record from front to back.

Though each song presents its own unique story, together they conjoin beautifully into JID's overarching musing about being Black in America. He seeks glimpses of comfort and meditation with his people amidst his rage at the institutions which have held him down.

As such, JID sprints headlong into "Ray-

dar," where he viciously rattles off about the limp position of contemporary Black voices. Over a blistering beat, he establishes how his fellow African Americans are constantly warring with the system and each other.

Just before midway into the album, JID drops another personal song accentuating this idea: "Kody Blu 31." This pivotal track serves as a tribute to friend's son with footfall No. 31 who had passed away young. JID's wistful singing over soft drums and background vocalists ruminate over the fragility of a Black life and generations of trauma riddling his community. The chorus, however, injects a beautiful modicum of hope. Everyone repeats, "swang on," or a reminder to Kody's family and the Black race to continue enduring their pain and pushing for change.

Though his fury may sound maniacal and spontaneous, it ebbs and flows throughout the album, with each recurrence detailing a different facet of his anger. On "Can't Punk Me," JID and Atlanta duo EARTH-GANG soar through an inferno of snappy bars, violently spitting in the chorus that the system "can't punk" them, or they will not again fall victim to the Atlanta hood lifestyle that darkened their outlooks.

He furthers his anger on "Lauder Too," where he questions what more to give in order for African Americans to gain validity in America. Though JID has given his "heart, his art, [and] his artery," he and featured artist Rayna Lenae croon that African Americans will forever remain lesser than others in this nation. Together, they resort to simply "feeling[the love]" as a constant respite from these issues, brewing a realistic but sad notion of JID's feelings.

Despite his frustration over the poverty in some urban areas and the difficult lives led by many African Americans, JID provides a layered vision on how to uplift his people. A key segue into this dimension of the album is "Dance Now," immediately succeeding "Raydar." Atlanta rapper Kid Cudi's gruff vocals contrast with JID's staccato flow as they contemplate the evil

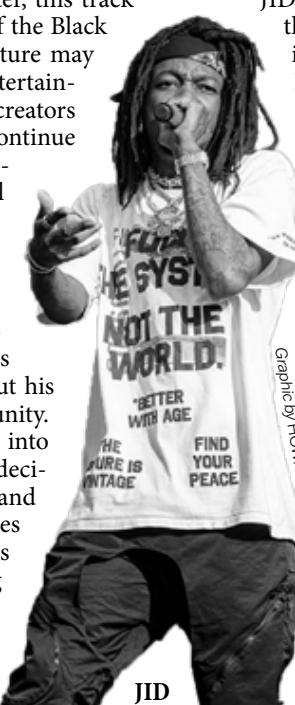
realities of gang culture in Atlanta. Behind a playful, catchy "bum bum ba dum" sample defining the beat, they reflect that life is worth dancing to instead of antagonizing.

Just before midway into the album, JID drops another personal song accentuating this idea: "Kody Blu 31." This pivotal track serves as a tribute to friend's son with footfall No. 31 who had passed away young.

His conversational and seemingly objective tone in recounting past reckless aspirations to become a rockstar and a false theft accusation tearing apart his life indicates peace with his past sufferings. He calmly references his experiences to strengthen his passion on why he "grinds" to advance his music. In short segments at the end of the song, JID's father and J. Cole express approval of JID's resolution to chase his goals.

The meticulous, thoughtful artistry of JID's "The Forever Story" makes it the king of 2022. In similar fashion to "good kid m.A.A.d city" by Kendrick Lamar, one of the most critically acclaimed rap albums of all time, JID's resolute conclusion rests on self-awareness and meditation on struggles, goals and relationships, realities that his contemporaries do not typically address anymore.

To us, "The Forever Story" establishes the importance JID places on unadulterated artistry, earning JID his place as one of the most genius rappers of our time. While this album crystallizes JID's incredible ability at visualizing and executing a myriad of cultural and emotional themes, this is only the start of his dominance of rap; we're extremely excited to see how he proceeds to blossom the humanity that defined this album in his future storytelling. ♦



Graphic by HOWARD SHU

JID capstones his commitment to conscious art and uplifting his community with a final reflection on his life and career in the closing track "2007." With the song essentially centered around himself, it concretizes the everyday mindset he strives for, along with his purpose.

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Winter percussion practices commence after the marching band season finishes

BY NikhilMathihalli

bbers will get up to speed in the A class.

With the marching band's season having ended with a fourth-place finish at the Sacramento regional championships on Nov. 5, winter percussion is now among the music groups that have begun practicing for spring-semester competitions.

Told entirely through archival footage of the intrepid couple and their recordings of various eruptions around the world, the documentary focuses not only on their scientific achievements, but the intense relationship between the two. Between Katia's fearlessness and Maurice's quiet intellect, the pair were a phenomenon in the field of volcanology during their careers. They often ventured to the very edge of an active volcano to capture never-before-seen footage, risking their lives on every occasion.

The footage the Krafts recorded was spectacular and explosive, but so was the nature of their love. The documentary's chronology doesn't progress according to their geological exploits; rather, it defines their lives by the timeline of their love story. Katia and Maurice, the indomitable explorers, could not have existed without Katia and Maurice, the incandescent lovers.

The greatest gift the Krafts left to the world was their hundreds of hours of vivid video and thousands of photographs, which "Fire of Love" turns into a colossal tribute to their legacy. Director Sara Doss takes their life's work and creates a masterpiece of primordial intensity: The neverending cycle of the earth's fiery self-destruction is but a backdrop for the eternal tango of two volcanic lovers.

This year's performance is called "Stuck in Loops." The theme revolves around how life gets mundane at times and the winter percussion group attempts to showcase the idea that humans need to take stark action to live in the moment instead of dwelling on the past or concentrating on the future through their music.

Due to the increase in interest in winter percussion, there are two groups of students who will train for the upcoming performances — the A class and the open class.

Vaidya, who has been in winter percussion for three years now, along with other experienced members of percussion will train in the open class, while less experienced mem-

bers will get up to speed in the A class.

Members of the open class practice harder music pieces and harder visuals, whereas members of the A class build good foundations so that they can eventually be a part of the open class later.

"COVID-19 really derailed many students who didn't have a lot of experience with percussion," Vaidya said. "We haven't split into groups like this before, but I think it is a good way to get many students up to speed."

These two groups will train for a few days during winter break and throughout the second semester for an upcoming show preview on Feb. 4 at the school.

Their first show will be on Feb. 11, the location of which is yet to be determined. Apart from the rig-

or that is involved in preparing for their up-coming shows, Vaidya enjoys the experience of spending time with his fellow classmates to perform a piece that they worked so hard on together. He said he enjoys the connections he makes with other students in per-

ussion and feels like he is a part of a family.

Vaidya's positive experience with winter

percussion leads him to encourage students to join winter percussion in the future to expand the program and make it as successful as other parts of the school's music program.

"Really, it's just working with people that I care about," he said. "I enjoy spending time with those people to create something that is pretty cool. We're telling a story and we're putting [Saratoga] on the map while doing so."

like "persevering" through the first few levels to get to the fun part of the game, so I didn't bother to level up on my new account until around five years later when the pandemic struck.

But, I still thought I was a little too cool to be playing a game that is an age 4+ rating on the App Store, so it's taken me four years to reach level 34. Recently, however, I've become more active on the app because as we all know, juniors have so much free time on their hands and I make (very) excellent life decisions. While Hay Day is fun for keeping yourself occupied, a lot of the game makes no sense and infuriates me to think about.

I literally downloaded Reddit just to figure out "how to get coins FAST" and while reading the comments on post, I found a thread of in-game suggestions from Reddit users that the Hay Day Developers have failed to implement after years, which include data-backed arguments (excel spreadsheet and everything) about how the game is poorly designed and how apparently players need "baby-farms" (alternate accounts) to actually effectively play the game.

When I started playing it in elementary school, Hay Day was all the buzz. It was trendy to be harvesting wheat on the daily, with classmates spending real money on the app to level up faster. In the first grade, one of my friends spent around \$100 (you can imagine how jealous I was) to purchase unlimited diamonds for his Christmas present and I thought he was a huge idiot for that.

My personal grievances include how one gold bar sells less for 10 blackberries, how the neighborhoods where people are supposed to trade and help each other include the world's most selfish ******, how badly the boat and truck orders rip players off and how atrocious some of the graphics in the game are. Still, because of my generous personality, I am able to overlook the flaws in this app — nothing keeps me from collecting bacon and harvesting strawberries at 8 a.m. ♦

Looking back at the inflationary prices Hay Day set for 100 diamonds, his investment was basically the equivalent of buying shares of Apple for \$5 in 2008. Unlike 4-year-old me, 9-year-old me didn't feel



Courtesy of RISHI VAIDYA

Winter percussion members warm up at a location outside the performance venue during the Northern California Percussion Alliance Championships at American Canyon High.



Courtesy of RISHI VAIDYA

The "snares" — percussion members who play the snare drums — play their instrument.

I love the game Hay Day and I'm not ashamed of it

BY SarahZhou

Since the first time I got my hands on an iPad in 2010 (no I wasn't an iPad kid), I've downloaded hundreds of mobile games — ranging from Sunnyville Baby Pet Salon to Call of Duty: Mobile — but throughout my iPad's lifetime, only one has remained: Hay Day.

Hay Day is a simulation app where users build their own community around a farm, and throughout the process, unlock features to help them continue, such as a fishing boat, jeweler and animal sanctuaries by earning XP (experience).

I've been living the farm life since Hay Day came out in 2012 and, while all my attempts to make it the next Animal Crossing within my friend group have died, it is still a game I frequently play in my free time.

When I started playing it in elementary school, Hay Day was all the buzz. It was trendy to be harvesting wheat on the daily, with classmates spending real money on the app to level up faster. In the first grade, one of my friends spent around \$100 (you can imagine how jealous I was) to purchase unlimited diamonds for his Christmas present and I thought he was a huge idiot for that.

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At the same time, the renowned Sherlock Holmes (Enola's brother) — played by Henry Cavill — is stuck on his latest case involving money disappearing and reappearing in bank accounts all over London. As Enola dives deeper investigating this puzzling case, she finds her path crossing with her brother and is thrown into an unfamiliar world of wicked factories and music halls filled with deadly conspiracy involving Moriarty. The numerous components of the case within the overbusy plot, reminded me of playing a kids Clue game. It feels like the movie undercut the social commentary regarding the issues it tried to address, like the labor movement,

'Enola Holmes 2': An underwhelming sequel

BY AnikaKapasi

the health crisis in the 1900s and the attack on major corporations and government.

An instance where Enola breaks the fourth wall and completely ruins the moment is her dance scene with her love interest Tewksbury — played by Louis Partridge. The tension that builds between every step they take together is infuriatingly torn down when she stares straight into the camera.

No matter how charming or witty Enola is, that moment is the absolute worst time to break the fourth wall.

Nevertheless, the development of Enola and Tewksbury's relationship is satisfying, giving the audience closure toward the end when she FINALLY kisses him during the carriage ride.

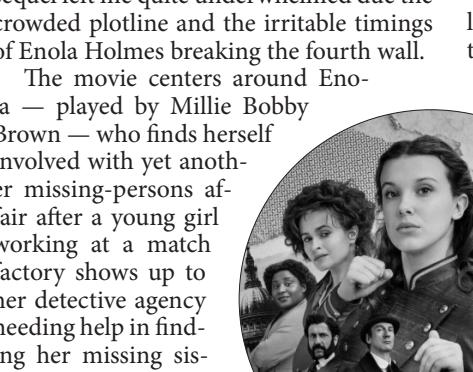
The movie contrasts Sherlock and Enola's detective capabilities as Sherlock makes most of his deductions in silence using logic and Enola uses her social capabilities and emotions to come to the same conclusions of the wrongdoings at the match factory.

Her vulnerability proves that a good sleuth doesn't need to be emotionless.

The sequel does an excellent job in addressing women's suffrage as it does in the original, as Millie Bobby Brown remarkably portrays Enola as a fiery feminist and reinforces the empowering message of individuality, independence and equality.

Still, the sequel is disappointing in its failure to capture the charm of the original movie, especially because of the social commentary lost within the overcrowded plot.

While I still would recommend watching the sequel, it definitely isn't worth it to watch the movie more than once. ♦



Courtesy of WARNER BROS

Robotics team hosts tech speakers on Cuttlecast

BY Beverly Xu

Over the past few months, the MSET Cuttlefish — a First Tech Challenge (FTC) team within the MSET robotics program — has hosted a series of guest speakers: Manisha Gambhir, a distinguished engineer and senior technical director at Marvell on Oct. 8; Anthony Ingelido, a hardware engineering manager at OhmniLabs on Sept. 19; and Jeff Huang, the senior director of engineering at Instagram on Sept. 9. All of these have been part of its online speaker series called Cuttlecast.

"It can help to motivate and inspire people to see all the opportunities to pursue in STEM."

JUNIOR Maithreyi Bharathi

This year's Cuttlecast is the culmination of nearly four years of trial and error with speaker series within the robotics program. Focused on bringing unique industry perspectives to attendees, the team works to reach as many students as possible with a presentation-interview format that encourages comfort, curiosity and new ideas for both speakers and participants.

In 2018, the MSET Cuttlefish hosted their first speaker series in-person. Sessions were well attended, attracting around 20 robotics members each time.

However, according to senior Cuttle-

fish management lead Apoorva Talwalkar, once the pandemic forced the series online, speakers began to prefer a one-on-one interview format rather than presenting prepared speeches. After this, the team decided to try a new format to accommodate them.

Talwalkar, FTC Co-president senior Trevor Leung and class of '22 alumnus Andy Chen ran an interview podcast, dubbed "The CephaloPOD" where members of the team interviewed STEM professionals about their experiences in their industry.

Talwalkar found that reaching out to people for an online recording was a difficult process. Because each person's audio was recorded separately, editing an entire 40-minute episode was tedious and time-consuming.

"I had to line [all the separate recordings] up and then whenever I cut something out, I had to cut it out for each person," said Talwalkar. It became overwhelming.

The team only uploaded one episode of the podcast on March 27, 2021, before realizing that they needed to find an alternative, as maintaining CephaloPOD was unsustainable.

Their solution was to combine the interview and speaker series format into its current form: Cuttlecast, a recurring series where a speaker presents on topics such as digital simulations and their personal experiences job hunting, and then answers the Cuttlefish interviewer's questions in a Q&A session.

So far, all their speakers have opted for online sessions via Zoom, but the team welcomes in-person presentations as well. Since the summer of 2022, junior Maithreyi Bharathi, a management and outreach



A slide from Freedom Robotics engineer Achille Verheyen's Mar. 12 Cuttlecast presentation.

member, has been working to find speakers for Cuttlecast. She targets STEM professionals working in both management and technical positions, so that attendees can preview a wide variety of occupations.

Typically, she reaches out to employees at Meta, Apple, Amazon, Netflix and Alphabet or robotics companies.

Outside of Silicon Valley tech giants, the team also hosts speakers from companies that work in more niche markets, such as OhmniLabs, which is a company specializing in telepresence (robots that operate remotely) and disinfecting robots.

For the upcoming speaker series, Bharathi hopes to expand the reach of the series beyond just MSET. Until recently, the team had been sending out short emails advertising the event to only students in MSET, but for their speaker series with Huang, they advertised the event in principal Greg Louie's Friday Letter.

"[Cuttlecast] helps expose students to people who come from different careers within STEM and to all the cool applications of what we learn in robotics," Bharathi said. "It can help to motivate and inspire people to see all the opportunities to pursue in STEM." ♦

Talwalkar



Digital Animation provides an artistic outlet for students

BY Divya Vadlakonda

When Alex Hemmerich began to teach Intro to Digital Animation four years ago, he saw his waning interest in animation become reinvigorated and it sparked his own creative passion. He was inspired by his students' immense enthusiasm and surreal designs. Teaching the class even led him to create his first original character in almost a decade.

"Whether it's a small assignment or a massive collaboration, I'm continually impressed with the ideas [the students] conjure," Hemmerich said.

The course, which Hemmerich has taught for four years, introduces students to the complex process of creating an animation from start to finish. Students learn the 12 fundamental principles of animation and visual composition and implement them by using Wacom tablets to design visually appealing characters in dynamic animations.

Senior Angelina Hong heard about the class through her cousin, Class of '22 alumnus Andrew Hong, who took it his freshman year. He knew she liked to draw, and recommended the class to her because of its emphasis on artistic concepts.

"I've always been interested in learning animation from a young age," she said. "Animation videos blew up on YouTube, like TheOdd1sOut, and I just really admired their work. Watching those videos every day made me realize that I wanted to learn how to do it too."

SENIOR Angelina Hong

Hemmerich's aim through teaching the course is for students to better understand and appreciate the creative process. Though learning animation skills is demanding and time-consuming, he feels that it can help instill a growth mindset.

O'Brien hopes that by implementing club events, members will be more engaged with photography and become more confident with their photos.

"With a teacher to help me and actually teach me how to use programs, it really helps my development," Angelina said. "This is a very STEM-focused school, but in this class it's very stress-free. I can let loose and focus on my artistic side." ♦

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Cultural grocery stores offer a taste of home

Ethnic supermarkets entice immigrant population

BY Victoria Hu
& Beverly Xu

Osaka Marketplace, a Japanese grocery store with a food court, a cafe and to-go or sushi in Fremont, was started less than a year ago by Kazuhiro Takeda.

Takeda wanted to bring quality Japanese food to the East Bay Area, and spread knowledge about its culture throughout the community. Office manager Mina Wada, who joined Osaka in January of 2021, has seen the number of customers increasing, many of whom compliment the store on its hard-to-find grocery items, like fresh eel, pink pineapples and fresh wasabi.

"We hear a lot of customers say 'wow, [it's] like you are in Japan!'" Wada said.

For many local residents, the large number of cultural grocery stores nearby provide the same sense of comfort and connection to culture through food that is otherwise absent in regular American stores. And it's an increasingly successful business model in a quickly diversifying area.

For Wada, the biggest challenge so far has been finding motivated, collaborative and independent employees.

By educating their staff members in Japanese quality customer service, she hopes to differentiate from other American and Asian grocery stores, bring in more regular customers and share knowledge about Japanese food to grow with their community.

In Saratoga, buying from ethnic grocery stores is the norm rather than an exception. Especially for the city's large Asian population comprising 49.6% of the total population, many go to 99 Ranch Market, India Cash and Carry or HMart more often than to Safeway or Trader Joe's.

According to a study by LoyaltyOne,

63% of U.S. ethnic customers feel that the conventional grocery store they visit doesn't provide sufficient ethnic foods — with 59% making visits to at least three other cultural grocery stores to find their desired products.

Another study by Acosta found that ethnic consumers tend to visit a greater average number of stores: Hispanic, Asian-American and African-American customers visited 3.84, 3.53 and 3.33 stores respectively, compared to 3.26 for Caucasian buyers. Grocery shopping habits have over time become linked with ethnicity, as people tend to buy food from their heritage.

As shoppers nationwide found themselves scouring their local supermarket's aisles for their favorite kimchi or Chinese salted plums, grocery stores in the U.S. met this need by catering to diverse populations.

The country's ethnic supermarket industry now has a market size of \$49.5 billion in 2022, after growing on average 2.1% annually in the last 5 years.

Saratoga, and the greater Bay Area, fall in line with this trend. With an increasing immigrant population in part fueled by Silicon Valley's tech boom, demand for cultural food has rapidly grown: Alongside the sea of flourishing restaurants like Din Tai Fung and Zeni Ethiopian Restaurant, ethnic supermarkets ranging from Las Palmas Mercado Y Carniceria to Slavic Shop have sprung up to feed people in the South Bay.

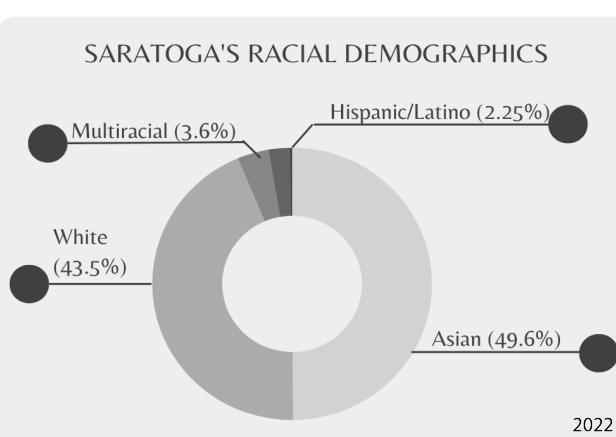
High demand through the last few decades has also allowed immigrant-founded stores like Rose Market to expand to multiple locations in Mountain View, Cupertino and Saratoga since its founding in 1988.

Stores across the region and the country continue to be where not only authentic ingredients, but conversations with an ethnically familiar community, can be found. ♦

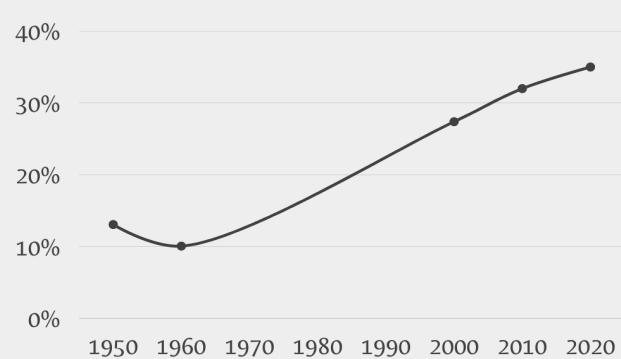
IMMIGRATION & THE RISE OF THE ETHNIC SUPERMARKET



SARATOGA'S RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS



GROWTH OF IMMIGRANT POP. IN THE BAY AREA



\$49.5b



46%
ASIAN BUYERS

49%
HISPANIC BUYERS

41%
BLACK BUYERS

PURCHASED THEIR GROCERIES AT ETHNIC SUPERMARKETS SPECIALIZED FOR THEIR DEMOGRAPHICS

Data from CENSUS.GOV and IBIS WORLD

Junior indulges in Persian cuisine fostered by local markets

Walking into Rose Market in downtown Saratoga on a late Saturday afternoon, customers are greeted by cashier Ali Meshkat.

To the right, cooks roast kebabs on a lively, flickering fire for pick up and walk-in orders. The store is filled with multi-colored jars, boxes and bags — there are pickled vegetables, a spice wall, fresh fruit, yogurt and sangals (a thin, Iranian flatbread). Menu items are displayed above the selection of rice, kebabs and other dishes prepared daily by the Rose Market staff.

Junior Shayda Oliaei, who is of Iranian descent, frequently visits Rose Market with her family for the rare traditional ingredients found in few other stores, ranging from nabat

(saffron sugar crystals served with tea) to nan ghandi (a type of sugar loaf bread).

"If we didn't have these stores, we probably wouldn't be able to cook most Persian foods at all."

JUNIOR Shayda Oliaei

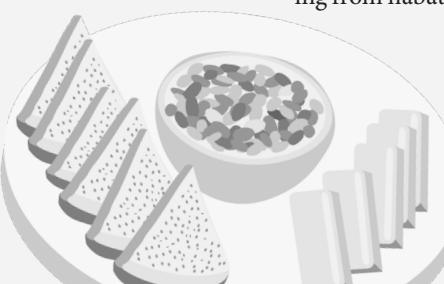
authentic dishes at least once a day, usually for dinner. In her family, Americanized food is a rare last resort reserved for busy weeknights.

Her family rarely eats out, instead preferring to make traditional dishes, usually consisting of rice, stew and meat, from scratch. One of her favorite foods is khoresht-e gheymeh sabzi (a beef and herb stew widely regarded as the national dish of Iran), which is often served alongside tahdig (a scorched rice dish).

Growing up, Oliaei celebrated birthdays and Iranian festivities such as Nowruz — the Iranian New Year — with her family.

Oliaei fondly recalls eating some of her favorite stews and dishes, such as khoresht-e fesenjan (a walnut and pomegranate stew) served on Shabe Yalda (the Winter Solstice), accompanied by an array of fruits such as pomegranates and watermelon, as well as other cultural dishes.

Oliaei and her family also enjoyed Persian desserts like nane molkhodchi (butterfly-shaped cookies made from chickpea flour and flavored with rosewater), pistachio and cardamom during the holidays.



Her family often shops at Kandoo Café, located in downtown Saratoga, for Persian sweets during these celebrations.

"We always buy traditional Iranian sweets, like raisin cookies, nan nokhodchi and masgheh," Oliaei explained. "We like to display them on the New Year's altar, Sofreh-e Haft sin, with other traditionally used items such as flowers, candles, coins and painted eggs."

Outside of special occasions, Oliaei's family shops at Rose Market every couple of weeks.

Though they can go to Trader Joes and Safeway for their bread, pasta and potato chips, Rose Market provides foods such as Iranian tea, rob-e anar (pomegranate molasses), nan ghandi and higher quality rice, which are culturally significant to Oliaei.

"Having cultural grocery stores so close by definitely makes me feel more connected to my culture," she said. "Traditional Persian cooking uses a lot of somewhat obscure ingredients that aren't widely available, so if we didn't have these stores, we probably wouldn't be able to cook most Persian foods at all." ♦



a taste of home



Japanese and Chinese stores are culinary havens for many

Mitsuwa Marketplace in San Jose, a Japanese chain supermarket formerly known as YAOHAN, was opened in February 1998 and offers popular Japanese culinary essentials like rice and Napa cabbage, beauty products, Japanese confectionary shops and a food court.

In 2007, Mitsuwa continued to expand throughout California to areas with a large Japanese population, said San Jose store manager Yasuaki Kishimoto.

He was initially hired at Mitsuwa's Torrance branch, a city in the Los Angeles metropolitan area in 2007, but later moved to the San Jose store in 2016 and has been working there since.

During the [holiday] season, we sell specialty sweets from all over Japan,"

Kishimoto said. "In front of the demo kitchen located at the entrance of the store, there are display tables [with those specialty sweets]."

Because of the time-intensive work required to bring each kind of product from wholesale to storefront, the store is separated into departments, such as the fish department.

As the store's manager, Kishimoto and his team have been able to form relationships with their customers, despite restricted occupancy during the pandemic.

Kishimoto has found that as a Japanese grocery store, Mitsuwa is able to provide high quality Japanese products, seafood and customer service that sets them apart from American supermarkets like Safeway and Costco.

The store offers regular Japanese grocery items such as assortments of rice,

vegetables and snacks, but also a wide variety of fresh fish and American wagyu beef (a type of heavily-marbled meat from

like Safeway and Costco). ♦

Junior Minh Do, who enjoys baking and cooking in his free time, always finds inspiration from ingredients at Asian grocery stores like Mitsuwa and HMart.

"I go [to Mitsuwa] if I have a big event like my parents' recent anniversary, so I

can bake for them," Do said. "They have lots of really classy sweets and niche products like sakura mochi, which you would never find anywhere else, even in some other Japanese grocery stores."

For Do, cultural grocery stores not only provide higher quality products, but also a large assortment of ingredients that typically are not present in American supermarkets.

"I feel like American supermarkets are repetitive — they have 50 brands of tortilla chips, but they wouldn't necessarily have Turtle Chips or honey butter chips, which is an HMart staple," Do said.

Despite being of Chinese and Vietnamese heritage, Do often falls back on Japanese and Korean cuisine for quick meals.

At Mitsuwa and HMart, he buys instant foods like tofu beancurd and frozen noodles that are not only quick to prepare in the absence of time, but are also very filling and comforting.

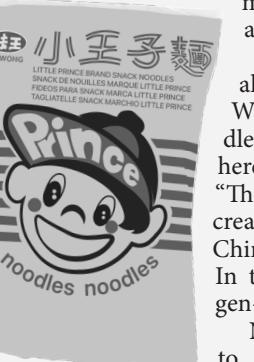
Junior Minh Do, who enjoys baking and cooking in his free time, always finds inspiration from ingredients at Asian grocery stores like Mitsuwa and HMart.

"These stores are definitely integral to my life, because they really make me happy," he said. "I always look forward to

like Din Tai Fung and 85 Degrees Bakery, which she says cannot be found in the "weird-tasting Costco dumplings."

"It's nice that these grocery stores have exactly what Chinese ones did, so that I don't have to eat burgers and fries everyday," she said. ♦

Wang



have the opportunity to visit, food is an important way to stay in touch with her culture.

Her father's side of the family comes from Bangalore in South India, so Murthy's family also cooks and eats Indian cuisine once to twice a week, including foods with mango pickle and chili chicken.

Murthy's family often shops at India Cash and Carry for high quality and cheap produce, she said. She said her father often picks up vegetables such as okra, green chilies and eggplant, which are commonly used in Indian sabzis, or mixed vegetables and curries.

Murthy finds that cultural grocery stores — those of her own culture, as well as others — are critical in helping people of different minority groups maintain their cultural identity.

"When people go into [cultural grocery stores], they feel at home, because they're surrounded by the food that is part of their heritage and part of their culture," Murthy said. "That unites people more." ♦



History teacher Bismah Siddiqi grew up relying on cultural grocery stores for ingredients used in authentic meals.

Growing up in Davis, she would come home from school to find her mother cooking Desi dishes heaped with lentils, fried fish and spinach. Siddiqi, who is Pakistani, recalls watching her mother measure ingredients through a finely honed sense of pinches or splashes rather than tablespoons or cups.

Outside of special occasions, Oliaei's family shops at Rose Market every couple of weeks.

Though they can go to Trader Joes and Safeway for their bread, pasta and potato chips, Rose Market provides foods such as Iranian tea, rob-e anar (pomegranate molasses), nan ghandi and higher quality rice, which are culturally significant to Oliaei.

Since Siddiqi is Muslim, she also partook in Ramadan and the specific foods associated with it. She often ate dates, samosas and fruit salad when she broke her fasts and drank beverages such as Rooh Afza, a concentrated rose syrup often mixed with cold milk to combat the sweltering summer winds in the northern Indian peninsula.

"Food was definitely a large part of our culture," said Siddiqi. "One of my goals

remembers there was only one cultural store, dubbed the "International Food Market," which encompassed foods from many different cultures.

"I think for some grocery stores, like Safeway, they have an 'international aisle' and that's just everything they can consider not white, or slightly exotic in their eyes," she said. "So there's not as many options if I'm looking for a specific cuisine, so I prefer going to other places."

Murthy finds that this tradition reminds her of extended family on her mother's side in Finland. Since she does not often

know how to cook Desi food from scratch, she finds it helpful that the mixes come in packets with instructions. Her Desi grocery store runs are not as frequent as her weekly trips to Sprouts, Safeway and Costco for staples such as rice and pasta, Siddiqi said. She tends to buy more items that don't spoil easily by stocking up on a few months' worth of Shan mixes at a time.

Growing up in Davis, Siddiqi remembers there was only one cultural store, dubbed the "International Food Market," which encompassed foods from many different cultures.

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Senior pitcher commits to Pomona-Pitzer

BY Shreya Rallabandi

In late September 2021, beneath the scrutinizing eyes of college baseball recruiters, senior Lucas Dennis stood on the pitcher's mound of the Peoria Sports Complex Stadium in Arizona. He felt pressure to showcase his best stuff at the Arizona Junior Fall Classic, while at the same time tending to overanalyze his performance during the game.

He called it a "nerve wracking experience," but it turned out better than he could have hoped for.

At the Arizona Junior Fall Classic, Dennis was selected for the Arizona Fall Classic Junior-All Academic Game. The game ended up being his ticket to playing Division III baseball at the Pomona-Pitzer Colleges. The recruiting coordinator sent him an email last February letting him know they were considering him for recruitment. After Dennis got to know the school and they exchanged further information, he was offered a spot on the team in mid-June. Dennis officially committed the early decision process at Pomona College on Sept. 9.

Dennis said he felt reassured after a lot of uncertainty, especially given how the pandemic made it more difficult to be recruited — limited roster spots for high schoolers and new transfer rules contributed to an overall "changing college baseball landscape," he said. Specifically, the stress amounting up to and during his junior year was extremely intense; for athletes, that period of time is essential for both recruiters and themselves.

Other institutions had reached out to Dennis as well, including Brown University, Columbia University and Yale University. Dennis is happy he committed to Pomona-Pitzer due to its academic reputation, its beautiful campus — including a new athletic facility — and its proximity to beaches and downtown Los Angeles. In addition, he feels

at ease because he will not have to declare a major until his sophomore year, allowing for some time for him to understand what he wants to pursue academically.

Dennis' baseball career has seen notable achievements, both for club and school teams. As a junior, he threw two consecutive no-hitters during the spring season, earning him second place for the Bay Area News Group Athlete of the Week and then first place the following week. In addition, he won Cal-Hi NorCal Baseball Player of the Week and was voted the second MVP for the league.

With his club team, the Zoots Baseball Club — the top club team in Northern California and ranked top 5 in the state — Dennis was selected for the 2022 NorCal World Series at the University of the Pacific and won third out of a hundred teams at the 2022 U.S. Baseball National Team Championships in Arizona.

At 6-4 and weighing 165 pounds, Dennis has a body type coaches often like to see in pitchers, and he has the ability to add strength in the years ahead.

As a pitcher, Dennis describes himself as "similar to a boxer." He is "intense, confident and even a little arrogant," a mentality that makes him feel like the best player on the field, he mentioned. He usually throws around 87 mph, maxing out at 88 mph, and estimates that he should be throwing 91 mph by the spring season. He mainly pitches fastballs, sliders and change-ups.

"Pitching and hitting are both very one of one part of the sport," he said. "It's you or the other guy, and as the pitcher, you're the aggressor — you choose what you throw."

Above all, Dennis is grateful to know that he will continue to play baseball in college. "As relieved as I am to have prolonged my baseball career for another four years, there's a long way to go before I even come close to meeting my next goal," he said.

Dennis said he knew he wanted to "play



Courtesy of GLORIA PAN

Senior Lucas Dennis pitches on the March 2022 game against Del Mar, where they won.

baseball, get paid for it and be on TV" after going to his first San Francisco Giants game. In middle school, he created a tangible plan to help him achieve his goal: first, becoming a four-year starter on the varsity baseball team, then playing college baseball and finally being drafted into the major league upon graduation.

His love for baseball started young. He often went to see Giants play at then-AT&T Park with his father, and he first started playing little league baseball at age 6. Dennis quickly grew to love Giants shortstop Brandon Crawford, who became his role model and favorite player.

"I used to want to be him," Dennis said. "He made his big league debut and started playing with the Giants right when I started

watching baseball. He's kind of at the end of his career now, and I'm about to leave high school."

His talent and passion for baseball developing early led to his drive to continue the sport. Dennis spent high school summers playing baseball in tournaments across California and Arizona, waking up early in the morning to play before the afternoon's intense heat. This past summer before his senior year was spent entirely on tryouts and college camps. He said that during the school year, he plays between seven and 18 hours of baseball a week, depending on whether he is playing for school teams.

"This has been my dream since I went to my first Giants game," Dennis said. "I'm so happy it's finally starting to materialize." ♦

Students find irreplaceable escape playing ice hockey

JENNY CAMPBELL AND MATTHEW ZHANG REFLECT ON HOW PLAYING ON THE RINK HAS IMPACTED THEIR LIVES

BY Divya Vadlakonda

When junior Matthew Zhang was 5, he watched his first NHL game between the Detroit Red Wings and the San Jose Sharks. The speed and intensity of the game inspired him to want to play it himself.

For her part, senior Jenny Campbell's ice hockey journey also began early — age 7 — and has continued through high school. Both hope to continue playing the sport in college.

Zhang's first experience playing ice hockey was at the Solar4America ice rink in downtown San Jose. Later, he joined teams such as the California Cougars, San Jose Jr. Sharks and now plays on the Golden State Elite.

The ample experience he gained while playing on these teams prompted a change in mindset about what skills he prioritized. Specifically, Zhang improved at skating as well as gaining a better handle to elevate his shooting accuracy.

"I really depended on being a fast skater to play well," he said. "I'd like to think that I have evolved into more of a skill player."

The sport helped him build solid relationships with his teammates and taught him the importance of leadership, teamwork and discipline.

As for his future endeavors, Zhang hopes to continue playing in college, either in an ACHA team (American Collegiate Hockey Association) or an NCAA Division III team, depending on the school he ends up attending.

Similarly, Campbell's fascination for ice hockey began after going to a public ice rink and seeing a hockey practice. Even so, she

right-wing. With her gradual progress came a better grasp of the mechanics of the sport itself. Campbell's understanding of the sport in terms of skating, puck handling and shooting developed not long after playing on a team with other girls, sparking friendships that she says are beneficial on the rink.

"I loved the freedom and team-intensive mindset that hockey had."

SENIOR Jenny Campbell



Courtesy of MATTHEW ZHANG

Junior Matthew Zhang, Golden State Elite player, runs shooting drills during practice.

I loved the freedom and team-intensive mindset that hockey had more than other sports."

Campbell plays for the San Jose Junior Sharks on their 19 and under team as a right-wing after playing on their 16 and under team last year.

"It's hard to put into words, but I suspect it's the excitement and spontaneous nature of hockey and the camaraderie, from the locker room to the ice, that allows me to enjoy it so much," Campbell said. ♦

"Almost all of the plays we make go something awry, so usually my linemates and I are going off of pure intuition that comes from our bond off the ice," Campbell said.

Though she does plan to continue playing club in college, she does not want to play at the NCAA level because of the time commitment of her intended major.

Even so, the sport has provided a vital escape for her in a way that other sports, like basketball, could not.

She finds the sport to have its own level of enjoyable rigor that she continues to experience on and off the ice.

"It's hard to put into words, but I suspect it's the excitement and spontaneous nature of hockey and the camaraderie, from the locker room to the ice, that allows me to enjoy it so much," Campbell said. ♦

Athletic Recruitment vs. College Applications

BY Anika Kapasi & Neal Malhotra

Every year, about three million high school seniors write essays and fill out applications for universities across the nation. At the school, seniors tend to apply to a high number of schools, creating a highly stressful and competitive environment as they scramble to get their essays in before hard deadlines. But one path that much fewer students take is athletic recruitment.

Such students have the opportunity to verbally commit to colleges as early as the summer before their junior year under athletic recruitment, though college teams' roster spots are often highly competitive.

At the school, around seven to 10 athletes commit to various sports such as soccer, track and field, cross country, golf and badminton every year. The Falcon interviewed alumni who went through the college recruitment process in recent years.

Michelle Lim (Class of '21): DIII Wellesley soccer player

Class of '21 alumna Michelle Lim applied for early decision to Wellesley, a liberal arts college in Massachusetts, in December of her senior year.

While many athletes start their recruiting process in sophomore year, Lim's process started before her freshman year with Invitation (ID) soccer camps, attended by aspiring players who hope to get noticed by colleges they potentially want to attend. Such opportunities were a result of her play with her club team.

In most sports, school teams are usually a secondary priority for athletes. Playing on a club team allows athletes to expose their talents to college coaches who do not show up for school games. Club teams also let players play against higher caliber competition, coming from a pool of the entire U.S. Some athletes do not even play for the school team to have their training be more focused and competitive.

As a freshman, she emailed around 20 different college coaches and invited them to watch her play during college showcases.

"Going through the recruitment process is definitely harder."

ALUMNA Michelle Lim

She added that it takes a lot of time and effort to facilitate relationships with coaches, as she often woke up at 5 a.m. to call soccer programs in the East Coast.

Even though Wellesley coaches were interested and in communication with her, Lim says that she didn't get an "easier senior year," a common misconception for recruited athletes. She took four AP classes and worked hard to keep her grades up.

Along with school work, she practiced five days a week for 4 to 6 hours a day and had one to two games every weekend that often required her to travel almost every weekend.

"There's no secret to finesse your way into a position on the team," Sze said. "If you're

es. She had a few specific schools in mind, including various Ivy League, New England Small College Athletic Conference (NESCAC) and New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference (NEWMAC) schools.

"My first priority when I was looking at schools was a good academic institution," Lim said. "I knew from the beginning of my recruiting process that I didn't want to settle in terms of academics just so I could play DI."

For Lim, one of the biggest challenges was having to narrow down a list of possible schools. This had to be done significantly before most students and was made harder as she had to find a school that suited her academic pursuits alongside having a strong soccer program.

Kevin Sze (Class of '20): DI Harvard golf player

Class of '20 alumnus Kevin Sze was recruited later than most athletes, between his junior and senior year. He competed for one of the three open spots on the 7-man team at Harvard University.

Sze began playing golf at 7 and ultimately decided to get serious about the sport during his sophomore year, starting his recruitment process while ramping up his already hyper-competitive training schedule.

"I think the [application and recruitment process] are very different," Sze said. "The application process was obviously a lot easier, but I was on that grind [for golf] since I was seven, which is obviously a pretty big time commitment."

Because he really enjoyed playing the sport, it was an easier route to navigate through because he didn't have to focus on what he didn't enjoy. But in terms of effort, he says that it takes a lot of time to get to where he is today.

Since Ivy League universities boast a sub-10% acceptance rate, having a secured spot on an athletic team came as a big relief.

Sze adds that he chose Harvard because the "academics were too good to let go." Although Ivy League colleges do not offer athletic scholarships, he still found Harvard to be a great fit since it allowed him to play golf and perfectly suited the academic rigor he desired. Some of the other colleges he was in communication with would have made him pursue professional golf very intensely without much focus on academics — something he was not particularly looking for.

"There's no secret to finesse your way into a position on the team," Sze said. "If you're

good at what you do and you're ranked high, colleges are going to be interested."

Anjali Nuggehalli (Class of '22): DIII Pomona-Pitzer soccer player

Class of '22 alumna Anjali Nuggehalli, who attends Pomona University, verbally committed to DIII women's soccer at Pomona-Pitzer during the summer before her senior year. She described her recruitment process as "incredibly difficult" because she was trying to find a school that suited her academic goals along with a strong athletics program.

"I wouldn't say that [recruitment] is harder than [college apps] but I think it's a really common misconception that athletes who commit earlier than regular students have it easier because they have spots allotted to them," Nuggehalli said.

She emphasized that athletes have to be able to get into these schools on their own merit while navigating through a lot of different options all at the same time. Athletes from all over the U.S. are working to get one of the around six spots that are open in a typical team, she said.

"I wouldn't say recruitment is an easy process at all, and it's not for the faint of heart," Nuggehalli said. "But I think both processes teach you a lot about yourself."

She urged athletes to be their own biggest advocate and to not wait for opportunities to present themselves. Nuggehalli said athletes have to be vulnerable to put themselves out there even if it might be scary, whether it is reaching out to coaches or sending highlight videos.

"It's really easy to get caught up in what other people want or what other people's goals are," she said. "But at the end of the day, the size of the school does matter. The location does matter. The departments do matter."

She added: "It's important to do your research and make sure that you can see yourself being happy about school even if you didn't have sports because sports can be taken away at any point and your experience should not be affected by whether you can play a sport or not." ♦

Junior quarterback's enhanced mindset sparks breakout season

BY Anamika Anand

When junior Shane Timmons started playing on the JV football team roughly three years ago, he wasn't sure he would be any good. He just joined in hopes of immersing himself in the team spirit and overall fun of the sport. In fact, his parents even opposed him joining the team, thinking it was too dangerous. Nonetheless, during quarantine they let him try it out as a way to spend time outside.

He found football to be harder than it looked and was surprised by the amount of time he had to invest and the range of skills he had to learn. Fully committing meant spending 10 to 12 hours a week practicing.

Still, he was willing to make the commitment and the sport eventually led him to build better eating habits and lift weights for increased strength.

"When I was a freshman everyone was bigger and faster than me," Timmons said. "But once I noticed that I had to step up, I got a lot better."

"I threw it up to [senior wide receiver Seth Hulme] and I got hit really hard," he said. "But after I got up I noticed that we scored, and I was really happy."

In his first year, Timmons had immediate success. He played in only a few games on the JV team

before getting pulled up to varsity, although remaining on the bench for the rest of the season as a backup. But that experience was enough to make him want to continue playing. His dedication paid off — in sophomore year, he became the team's starting quarterback.

Head football coach Steve Matos has known Shane since he became a coach for the school last year and said, "He had to catch up with the speed, mechanics and timing, and working on the weekends with teammates and watching film, Shane was able to progress really well."

Timmons initially felt a lot of pressure to do well on varsity, but has since gained confidence in knowing he is better than most of the players he faces from other schools. Timmons proudly remembered a key moment from a game against Lynbrook, his first touchdown on varsity in sophomore year.

"We just want to know what it feels like to win again," he said.

There were moments in games when Timmons felt at fault for mistakes, but he tried to forget about them instead of letting them affect his mindset. He described it as resetting his memory in order

to get back on track, a mindset that his teammates helped him build up.

"It's tough being the man of the team, but Shane's a great teammate," Matos said.

The team's goal this season was to make the playoffs, but losses for three consecutive weeks put that goal out of reach; a bigger goal is rebuilding a program that has fallen on hard times.

"We just want to know what it feels like to win again," he said.

There were moments in games when Timmons felt at fault for mistakes, but he tried to forget about them instead of letting them affect his mindset. He described it as resetting his memory in order

he wouldn't be as close with his friends if it weren't for the sport. He has even created strong friendships outside of school due to football.

"My teammates keep me motivated to keep getting better," Timmons said. "No matter how good or bad I do during the week, they just keep motivating me to keep my head up and keep going." ♦

All graphics by HOWARD SHU



Courtesy

How does SHS stack up against LG sports?

by AnikaKapasi
& BeverlyXu

It's no mystery that Saratoga High and Los Gatos High are flip sides of the same coin in the same district — SHS is focused heavily on academics while LGHS is more focused on sports.

As a major example, SHS had 28 National Merit finalists in its senior class this year while LGHS had nine.

The football team once had a fierce rivalry with Los Gatos in the 1960s through 1990s, but in the last 30 years, SHS beat LG only once, in a miraculous 2010 matchup. These days the teams are so unevenly matched that they don't play anymore. But besides football, looking across numerous fall, winter and spring sports, SHS in fact has its strengths when it comes to the primary sports rivalry.

Soccer's kicking the competition

Last year, the girls' soccer had one of their most successful seasons, winning the El Camino league and advancing to the semifinals in CCS. This season, they have been moved up to the De Anza league while LGHS got relegated to the El Camino League after a winless season.

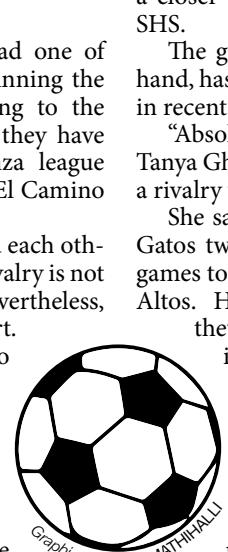
The two schools haven't played each other in a long time, so the current rivalry is not as prominent as it used to be. Nevertheless, SHS is holding its own in the sport.

Boys' soccer at LGHS has also moved down to the El Camino League where they will play SHS during the season. According to senior captain Dylan Sinton, who plays right back, because the two teams are now playing in the same league, they will have quite an active rivalry this year.

The strong number of talented juniors and seniors on varsity gives the boys' soccer team a strong shot at winning the league this year, as they kick off their first league game against LG on Dec. 15.

"LG has kind of kicked our butt in the last couple of years, but I think it will definitely be a good game," Sinton said. "Hopefully we will win, but I think unlike previous years the rivalry will absolutely be a real thing this year."

"As a team they did better, but that's be-

**Boys' (and girls') basketballers be ballin'**

SHS hoopsters view the Wildcats as their main hardwood rivals. Last season, the varsity team played Los Gatos three times (once during preseason and twice in league) and won two of three.

"There's definitely a different atmosphere when it comes to facing them," said senior captain Niveydh Pai, who plays shooting guard and small forward. "Everyone gets a lot more competitive and we always mark [the date] on our calendar."

This year, LGHS has a strong squad and Pai is uncertain whether they will be successful playing them, but knows that their game on Jan. 18 will be exciting to watch. Historically, the Los Gatos and Saratoga boys' basketball teams have gone back and forth and have a closer rivalry than any other sport in SHS.

The girls' basketball team, on the other hand, has not fared well against the Wildcats in recent years. "Absolutely not," senior team captain Tanya Ghai said. "We absolutely do not have a rivalry with LG."

She said that even though they play Los Gatos twice in league, it is not one of the games to watch out for like Palo Alto or Los Altos. However, Ghai still thinks this year they have a good chance of performing better against LG in their game on Jan. 17, as the LG's team's best player graduated.

Youth leads girls' golf

The SHS girls' golf team competed in the SCVAL finals, players sophomore Sarah Lim and freshman Millie Wang made it to the Northern California Golf Championship (NorCal) and Lim went to an out-of-state tournament while Wang qualified to the State Championships after placing fourth at NorCal, where she ended 40th.

LGHs plays in the same league as SHS and managed to compete and placed 13th at CCS as a team. On average, however, their individual players ranked much lower at CCS than SHS's.

"As a team they did better, but that's be-

cause they dropped a division, whereas we stayed in the same division so it was a harder competition for us as individuals," Lim said. "[However, Wang] and I definitely do better than individuals in Los Gatos."

Because the two teams will be playing in the same league next year, an active rivalry is present between the two schools, and SHS's standings will be further tested in next year's golf season.

"Our coach (David Gragnola) sees them as our biggest rival just because they're Los Gatos," said Lim. "They won their league this year, so for next year they're gonna be in our league again."

Jumping over hurdles

For track and field, the rivalry between LGHS and SHS is present but described as "friendly competition," due to the fact that they are in different divisions and LGHS tends to perform better.

Historically, the LGHS running program has been dominant, while SHS has had a few strong individuals such as alumni Harrison Dance and Krishna Murthy.

"At the end of the day, whoever's faster is faster so there's no hard feelings or resentment from either side," senior Elizabeth Stoiber said. "I think both schools use the competition to get better."

Stoiber is unsure about the upcoming track season in the spring, but knows that some athletes, such as senior Jalyen Harrigan (who runs the 300m hurdles), the 4x400 team (seniors Harrigan, Stoiber, Isha Goswami and Lisa Fung) and senior Mika Tippets (who throws discus and shot put) has a solid shot at making it to CCS and potentially States.

Girls' water polo fights to stay afloat

Instead of a rivalry, the SHS and LGHS girls' water polo teams have more of a friendship because a lot of the girls on the SHS and LGHS play for the same local club team at West Valley.

When they play them during the pre-season and in scrimmages, they are already familiar with a lot of players and get to talk to them after games. The LGHS team, which placed second in the De Anza League, while SHS placed fifth in the El Camino League — showing the Wildcats' strength.

"We don't play them in our league because they're a whole lot better than us," sophomore hole set and right flat Cassidy Coghlan said. "They advanced to states this year."

For his part, athletics director Rick Ellis believes that Los Gatos's sports program is stronger by a narrow margin. He says this advantage to the difference in school population — LG has 800 more students and therefore a greater pool of players to choose from.

This reality shows up in team rosters. Saratoga's football program has only 45 athletes while LG has 40 on just their freshman team; they cut 30 girls from their girls' soccer team, while Saratoga doesn't even have 30 players.

"They don't sweep us, but they definitely edge us out," Ellis said. ♦



Both Saratoga High and Los Gatos High compete against each other in many sports.

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BOYS' SOCCER

Seniors excited for upcoming season

by NilayMishra
& BeverlyXu

to overcome is junior striker Yul Hong, their prospective No. 1 player.

"We're looking forward to playing Los Gatos but don't know how good they are yet," senior center back Luke Wheeler said.

Wheeler said that above all, he wants to enjoy this season to the fullest, and despite having to lead the defense and distribute the ball

to the midfield, he hopes to have the opportunity to score and play as a striker. Although he has played club soccer all his life, this is his first year of playing high school soccer. He believes it allows him to be more social because it is not as "intense or serious as club soccer."

With a 22-person roster consisting of mainly seniors, the team looks to make the most of their final year playing together.

"A lot of us, especially the seniors, have played with each other for a while, so just enjoying one final season together and ultimately winning would be our biggest goal," Sinton said.

One key loss they will have

GIRLS' SOCCER

New formation beefs up defense

by AnikaKapasi
& KavyaPatel

As the girls' soccer team walked onto Benny Pierce field under the pouring rain for their first preseason game on Dec. 3 to face Westmont, feelings of excitement and nervousness flooded throughout the players as they warmed up waiting for the starting whistle.

This season, head coach Ben Maxwell and assistant coach Andrew McRobbie introduced the team to a new style of play in an effort to strengthen their defense, a strategy necessary for tougher teams they will face after moving up to the more competitive De Anza league.

The team kicked off their pre-

season with a 2-1 loss against Westmont on Dec. 3, a 3-1 win against Wilcox on Dec. 6 and a 3-3 tie against Los Gatos on Dec. 8.

During practices, the Falcons have started to adjust their style of play and flexibility within two different formations after moving up leagues this year following their first-place El Camino league finish last year.

Last year, the team played only in a 4-3-3 formation with four de-

fensive players, three midfielders and three offensive players. This allowed for a focus on attacking during games when the team did not have to worry so much about their defense.

Due to the difference in level between the two leagues; however, the team has started to practice in a 5-3-2 formation, consisting of five defensive players, three midfielders and two offensive players.

McRobbie believes the team will benefit from the greater defensive support in this formation during tougher games that require a higher level of play — especially against Mountain View and Los Altos.

"We are going to play different kinds of opponents and we need to be tactically flexible so we can adjust and problem solve within games," McRobbie said.

He added that when the opposition is better at keeping the ball this season, the team will benefit from a 5-3-2 as it allows them to be more disciplined in the back, giving better coverage to senior goalkeeper Angelina Hong. During games where Falcons dominate the ball, having flexibility within



Oberhauser

formations would allow the team to play with four in the defensive line, and help move higher up the field with greater numbers.

Even with a small roster of 21 players, an extremely strong defense this year — senior captains mid-fielder Gabi Golko and wing Alek Verga, junior mid-fielder and striker Kate Oberhauser and

two particularly skilled freshmen, striker Keatyn Spendlove and winger Sahaana Potti — has put the team in a position to find success as they build chemistry.

"I feel that we have a lot of really good attacking players which will help us win games," Oberhauser said.

However, the loss of key defensive players Emma Foley and Casey Gilligan to graduation along with an injury to junior center back Laurel Sun has left the defensive line short-handed. This year, the team features more offensive specialists than defensive ones.

Even with these concerns, the team has shown promise with preseason success. Their final pre-season game will be against Lynbrook on Dec. 22 before they start their De Anza play in January. ♦

English teacher rocking at rock climbing

by GeorgeHuang

Out of the three main kinds of indoor climbing — bouldering, top-rope and lead climbing — Wu doesn't go to the typical Fitness 19 or Planet Fitness centers for a workout.

Rather, she takes a 34-minute drive from campus to a Santa Cruz gym called Pacific Edge. There she meets up with her partner and puts on a harness to begin her favorite exercise: indoor rock climbing.

Six years ago, Wu was in search of a new hobby when she stumbled upon a coupon to try Sender One, a rock climbing gym in Orange County where she lived.

"It was like a 10-time climbing pass," Wu said. "I made a friend from an intro class and then we just went from there and became partners."

Since then, Wu has been climbing weekly, including when she moved to New Zealand for a year during a leave from teaching in the 2021-2022 school year. Wu is currently working on 5.10b's

and c's.

As a member of Pacific Edge, Wu goes to work out with her partner once or twice a week. Out of the gyms she's experimented with, she likes Pacific Edge the most because of the quality of its courses.

A feature of indoor climbing gyms is that they rotate their routes, so Wu often goes back to the gym after a few weeks only to discover that everything has been changed. Wu said this is frustrating because that means if she has a goal to finish a course, she has to complete it within a week before it's gone forever, leading to unsatisfying results at times.

"One time in New Zealand, my partner and I wanted to try a course that had an overhang," Wu said. "And we just kept falling and failing and falling. It was so frustrating that both of us couldn't get it. We left it and then when we came back, it was rerouted."

Still, Wu said she enjoys the challenge as it pushes her to work harder to complete a course in one go. Wu thinks that her next step is to climb higher and discover climbing: climbing while being roped to the wall below her instead of an anchor above.

"Someday I want to try lead



Courtesy of EMILY WU

climbing to challenge myself and not be anchored to something and tie in as I go," Wu said. "That's what I enjoy about climbing. I'm constantly climbing to greater heights not only physically but also metaphorically as I continuously challenge myself." ♦

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Team adjusts to new head coach's game strategy

by NealMalhotra
& AndyZhu

In practice, the team has been working on boxing out and rebounding. Wang, the leading scorer, believes that the team is getting killed on second chance points.

"We are not the biggest team, so we need to help each other out," Wang said.

The Falcons beat North Monterey County 62-23 for their one victory, but have dropped games to Leigh, Monterey, Christopher and Branham.

Another change this year is that two sophomores have made the varsity roster; Caleb Yu and Jadali. One main challenge Yu faces as an underclassman is having to play in a league with physically bigger players.

"A limitation for me is my age," Yu said. "Especially being a point guard, you need to be the leader, but it's hard to lead a group of

seniors when you're a sophomore."

With new players on the team, there are always growing pains that need to be worked out. According to Davey, the new addition of younger players on the roster means the team needs to put in more effort to build chemistry, especially with the seniors needing to take the underclassmen under their wing and teach them to work as one.

Chemistry will be a challenge for this team as many upperclassmen are playing with sophomores for the first time. To address this, the team has been spending time trying to strengthen their bonds on and off the court.

"I think we're getting a lot better," Yu said. "We're learning really quickly and adapting to our new play style." ♦

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Falcons persist despite less than expected enrollment

by AnnieLiu
& VictoriaHu

"We're more comfortable with each other and with our coaching and we trust each other, so I think that chemistry between us is already built," Ghai said. "Now it's just really about basketball."

However, following the loss of other star players such as senior shooting guard Jenny Campbell, senior forward Mika Tippets and senior center Lily Guzman in November, the team is now severely short-staffed. Out of the eight remaining players, Ghai is the only senior. The other starters are juniors Zineera Ahmed and Priyanka Chopra and sophomores Urvi Iyer and Riley Adler.

Campbell said that she, Tippets and Guzman made the difficult decision to prioritize their other sports commitments — ice hockey for Campbell, color guard for Tippets and softball for Guzman. Campbell found it necessary to allow her body to recover between back-to-back mid-November tournaments in Pennsylvania and San Diego, as she recalls feeling exhausted and lightheaded.

Additionally, practices and games during the basketball season conflict with 10 of her hockey games. Ghai attributes the team's early wins to their increased motivation following last year's defeats and the players' adjustment to the coaching style of coach Josh Rivera. Though they lost against Valley Christian in last year's season opener, they emerged victorious even as the underdogs this season.

"All I needed to do was rest and I couldn't do that if I played basketball because I'd be missing a lot," she said. "I would miss our entire hockey league season, and it just wouldn't have been worth it."

With only three bench players behind the five starters, players will need to play

snapshots



NBC Bay Area interviews Anti Racism Task Force member and senior Shreya Rallabandi on Nov. 21.

Seniors Mateusz Palusinski, Julian Berkowitz-Sklar, Lucas Dennis, Niveydh Pai, junior Kali Duvvuri and sophomore Steven Ng practice during the pre-season.

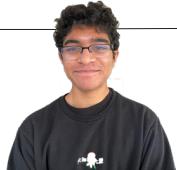
Senior class officers set up for the Night Rally on Dec. 9.

Sophomore JingJing Zhang, senior Jo Bejar and sophomore Niraali Garg act in "Laundry & Bourbon," directed by senior Ananya Gupta on Dec. 2 and 3.

Junior Kate Oberhauser dribbles the ball between two Wilcox players on Dec. 6.

La Cueva: the unrivaled best spot to eat lunch off campus

Neal Malho-taco



Neal Malhotra

The most important decisions of my school days occur exactly right around noon — the time when I decide where I am going to beg my friends to take me for lunch. The thrill of trying to make it back to school before the tardy bell rings is always exhilarating — especially when coming from La Cueva.

While the obvious off-campus lunch choice is Safeway — it's close, there's almost everything and it's not too expensive — I feel the need to spice it up some days.

As someone who has little regard for nutrition, I am fully content with eating fast food every day: McDonalds, Taco Bell or Chipotle are always viable options. But because of their popularity, there is always a swarm of people rushing to get their lunch,

leading to 5 to 10 minutes of precious lunch time being wasted while waiting to order.

Eventually, all of the nearby food places get bland and repetitive.

Despite only having gone off campus during lunch for three months, the adrenaline rush slowly disappears as the food tastes the same every time.

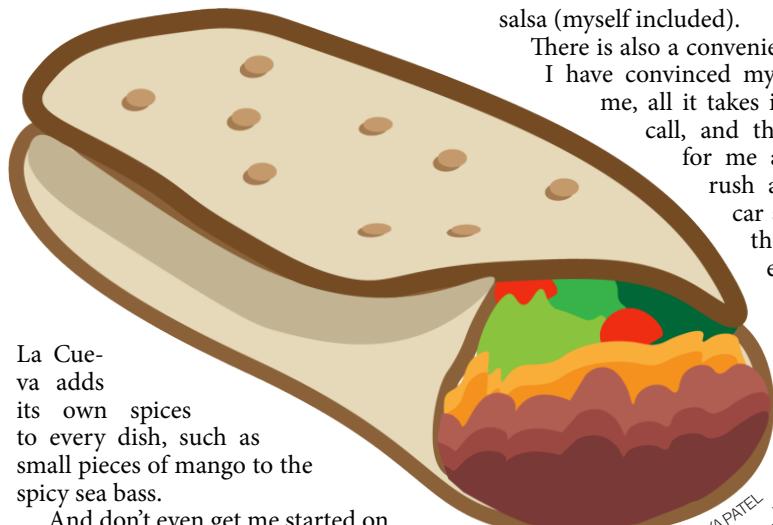
For these reasons, I've learned to love La Cueva because it is one of the best small local businesses and it is just 10 minutes away. It offers, in my opinion, the best Mexican food in the Bay Area.

The immaculate flavors blow my mind every time.

While most Mexican restaurants have a small menu, with just a couple variations of rice, beans and tortillas, La Cueva's extensive menu boasts a variety of California-Mexican dishes that break the mold of standard Mexican cuisine.

For those who always stick with standard burritos or tacos, they do those dishes amazingly as well.

The fish tacos come out to just under \$5 and the burritos are all around \$11, varying on what type of protein you choose.



salsa (myself included).

There is also a convenience factor. Once I have convinced my friends to take me, all it takes is a quick phone call, and the food is ready for me after my friends rush all pile into one car and rush over to the store. With the extremely limited lunch time we have, short wait times are essential.

If you are like me, and have teachers that mark you late, even if it's just a minute or two after the bell, La Cueva is a

surprisingly great option.

Everyone has different tastes but, if you haven't, I highly encourage you to go and try La Cueva.

Oh, and who knows, I might even see you there! ♦

Santa Claus is real: Don't believe your friends

Santa Ani-klaus



Anika Kapasi

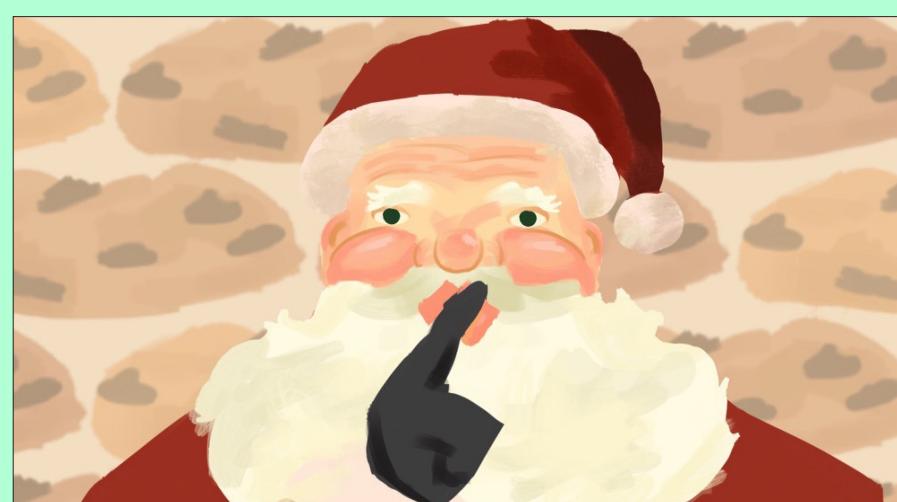
On Christmas Eve, Santa Claus zips through the cold, wintry night on his sleigh pulled by his eight reindeer, distributing presents and toys to kids all around the world just in time for Christmas morning.

As children grow older, most stop believing in the round jolly man — but there are many concrete reasons proving the famous icon is real.

To start off, Santa's beard is too silky and smooth to be fake. He has to be making regular trips to Ulta Beauty to pick up hair care products to keep up with that 10-step beard regimen.

When he tumbles down the chimney and lands with a small thud, brushing the dust off his snazzy, red suit, he double checks his naughty and nice list. Santa knows that red is always in style during the holidays because of all the fashion magazines he reads.

As he makes his way to lay the presents under the bright Christmas tree, he makes a pit stop to gobble up the treats laid out



for him. Santa is an avid milk consumer as he gulps down a large, warm glass of milk with his cookies. I am sad to say, but milk drinkers are real.

When you see his picture, Santa Claus is a chubby human. Sorry Mr. Claus, the camera doesn't add 10 pounds, but the cookies definitely did. Since many Americans are obese, he fits right in.

After he rubs his stomach in content, he puts the last of the toys in the stocking hanging above the fire before shoving himself back up the chimney and onto the next house.

The reason for which he doesn't just

enter and exit through the door baffles me — honestly, an attention seeker.

During the holiday season, Santa is found everywhere: in the mall, in offices or hospitals. The real one has to be hiding within the numerous red suits and beards.

And we can't forget, Santa has his own tracker (NORAD) that follows his movement as he makes gifts and flies all over the world, an email address (santa@officialsantamail.com) and a mailing address at 123 Elf Road, North Pole.

So the case is closed: Santa is in fact real — a very credible human with impeccable skin care and fashion sense. ♦

topten

THINGS THAT HAPPENED WHEN SANTA CAME DOWN THE CHIMNEY

10 Seeing my name on the "Good" List. While my friends can brag how much coal they got this year, I will be swimming in all my presents!

9 Getting every present I wanted. This year, Santa gave me all 200 items I wished for, like Curry's mouthguard.

8 Eating cookies. I ate Santa's magic cookies. Mrs. Claus is indeed a very good baker.

7 Hugs! Warm hugs from Santa are always the best.

6 Petting reindeer. Petting Rudolph was a lifelong dream of mine.

5 Getting extra whipped cream in my hot cocoa. Santa was super excited to meet me, so he put extra whipped cream in my hot cocoa.

4 Jingle bells on my Christmas Tree. Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way... I finally got the special bell no one else can hear but me.

3 Parents going into shock. I stayed up drinking chocolate syrup, lighting fireworks and building snowmen.

2 Santa not sticking the landing. Mrs. Claus has definitely been feeding Santa a bit too much lately. He could barely fit in my chimney.

1 Kidnapping an elf. Quickly shoving Winky the Elf into my closet, I now have my own personal toy maker. Maybe next year I'll take another one and start my own toy factory.

>> Mitchell Chen