

Mid-Peninsula High School

# CONNECTIONS

MAGAZINE :: SUMMER 2019



Celebrating the Class of 2019, Page 6

RESPECT :: KINDNESS :: ACCEPTANCE :: RESPONSIBILITY





# LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

On a cool and sunny Sunday in April, I found myself standing outside the ancient Canterbury Cathedral with Alan Cameron and members of his British History class. I was a chaperone on this year's British History trip to England and Wales, and on this day, we had taken a train from London to visit the cathedral, which was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. We were there exactly one week before Easter Sunday, and because services were happening, we couldn't visit the cathedral itself and instead spent time in the crypt and walking the grounds.

As an English major and former English teacher, I've always held Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in my heart. When I was a high school senior, my British Literature teacher had my class memorize the Middle English pronunciation of the first eighteen lines of the prologue, and to this day, I can still recite them, albeit with a 21<sup>st</sup> century California accent. In my first year of teaching in 1994, I had my British Literature students memorize the same lines, and I'm willing to bet that a few people reading this letter can speak Chaucer's verses too.

While I had lived in England as a young boy and have visited the country in the past, I had never made my way to Canterbury until the Mid-Pen trip. For centuries, Canterbury Cathedral has been a destination for pilgrims around Easter. The Mid-Pen trip was by no means a pilgrimage, yet I couldn't help but feel a strong pull toward the cathedral.

At one point during our walk through the cathedral grounds, we heard the voices of the choir in harmony from above us. Though I am not a spiritual person, as the sound of the choir descended upon me and the students, I felt peaceful and content. I was happy to be with the group, and I was happy to share this moment with them.

In many ways, parallels exist between educators and people who go into religious orders. I believe that teachers have answered a "higher calling." Clinical and



*Mid-Pen students and their chaperones felt at home with the Welsh dragon during their visit to Cardiff Castle in Wales.*

organizational psychologist Rob Evans has said that a strongly-held faith in students and their ability to grow because of that faith unites educators and the clergy (not to mention the vow of poverty, as Evans likes to joke).

Evans sees a "savior" mentality in educators, and while not all students need "saving," they all benefit from their teachers' devotion. I see examples of that devotion every day at Mid-Pen. Every time Mid-Pen musicians or actors take the stage, and when our visual artists display their work at Night of the Arts, I think about how many hours of work they did under their teachers' supervision. When students do a debate in class or complete a long-term project, a teacher has done the prep, executed lessons, met with students outside of class, and assessed the effort and work in a supportive way. Mid-Pen teachers don't just do a job; they fulfill a vocation in service of students each and every day.

I wish you and your families a wonderful summer. 🐉

*Phil Gutierrez*  
Phil Gutierrez

## CONNECTIONS

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## Louis XVI Found Guilty of Treason... Again

"Let them eat cake!"

As the story goes, that was Marie Antoinette's imperious response upon being told that the starving peasants under her rule had no bread. And that was the attitude that Sophia Scheid '21 adopted in her portrayal of the queen of France during this year's re-enactment of the Trial of Louis XVI by Alan Cameron's European History class.

Each spring Alan makes history come alive by staging the trial, with students representing major historical figures (not all of whom participated in the actual trial) and serving as lawyers for the defense and prosecution. In historical reality, the epic 1792 trial resulted in the king's execution and end of the monarchy in France, at least temporarily. In Mid-Pen's annual reenactment, Louis stands a chance of surviving.

This year, witnesses for the prosecution included Jean Paul Marat, a well-known scientist, journalist, and critic of the monarchy; Thomas Jefferson, the American ambassador to France at the time; Maximilien Robespierre, the lawyer and politician who was one of the best known figures of the French Revolution; the Marquis de Lafayette, the French aristocrat and hero of the American Revolution who turned against the monarchy; and Napoleon Bonaparte, the military leader who was an early supporter of the republican movement but would later declare himself Emperor of France.

Played by Julia Crouse '21, Jefferson asserted that France should learn from America's experience with the British and that the words he wrote in the Declaration of Independence applied to France as well. "Democracy will help you guys, too," she said.

The first witness for the defense was Marie Antoinette, who, even as she denied she had ever said the famous quote attributed to her, conveyed a demeanor full of disdain for her subjects. Defense attorneys also called to the stand her nephew, Emperor Francis II of Austria; Charlotte Corday, a member of the moderate Girondins who would later assassinate Jean Paul Marat for his radical ideas; and Axel von Ferson, Sweden's Ambassador to France, who testified that Sweden would invade France if the king were harmed.

The jury, composed of teachers and upperclassmen who had taken Alan's European History course in previous

years, appeared to be on the fence until Louis XVI took the stand to testify on his own behalf. Louis's statements in the witness chair, like many of his proclamations from the throne, ranged from stubborn and indignant to evasive and vacillating. Played with royal haughtiness by Aaron Posternack '21, he was completely unapologetic, proudly proclaiming the inviolability of the monarchy and the illegality of the trial.

Echoing the apocryphal words of the Sun King, Louis XIV, who is said to have proclaimed, "L'État, c'est moi," Aaron asserted, "Remember, I *am* France. The whole point of the monarchy is to *be* that country."

"It is a tremendous experience that really puts students in the mindset of the characters they have studied," Alan said of the trial after the jury had returned a guilty verdict. "Unfortunately for Louis XVI, a death sentence was reached. Just like the real king, he was damned by his own testimony." 🐉



Defense attorneys Julia Weaver '21, standing, and Luke Meerkamp '21, advise their client, King Louis XVI, portrayed by Aaron Posternack '21.

## Gyasi Ross Speaks on the Power of Storytelling

“Storytelling is the most powerful tool in the world.”

That was the message that Blackfeet author, attorney, and storyteller Gyasi Ross delivered to Mid-Pen students at a special assembly sponsored by the Diversity Council this spring. Using examples ranging from the Native American fishing rights protests of the 1960s to the Black Lives Matter struggles of today, Ross told students that the surest path to social change is through storytelling.

A regular contributor to *The Huffington Post*, *Gawker*, and *Indian Country Today*, and the author of two books, Ross has spoken at hundreds of schools and universities and at major race and social justice conferences.

Ross recounted the experience of his uncle, Billy Frank Jr., a Native American environmentalist and treaty rights activist who was arrested more than 50 times in his fight to protect the fishing rights granted by treaties dating to the 1850s.

Ross said that his uncle had his first run-in with game wardens at the age of fourteen. Tensions from the declining fish population had been starting to boil over. Unregulated commercial fishing and the development of hydroelectric dams were taking a toll on the salmon population, but white sportsmen laid the blame on the Native Americans. His uncle had been fishing for salmon, as he had always done, and as he was emptying his net, he was accosted by two wardens who shoved his face into the mud.

At the time, Ross said, Native Americans were regarded as something out of history. “You people are supposed

to be dead; they told my uncle. That got my uncle going. He believed it was his job to tell the story of the native people and that we are very much alive.”

For his uncle, the battle for the salmon was the battle for the future of his people, and it became his life’s work. Fishing rights were not just about sustaining a healthy salmon population, but about maintaining the Native American way of life.

“When you encounter resistance to your story, you have one of two options: to recommit to telling your story with even greater force or to turn tail and run,” Ross said. “My uncle was never one to turn tail and run. By telling our story he changed the law of the land, and for his efforts was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015 by President Obama.”

Ross also told students about Martin Delany, a 19<sup>th</sup> century African-American abolitionist, physician, and writer, who is little remembered today. In 1852 Delany wrote a book that argued that blacks had no future in the United States and suggested they should leave and found a new nation in the West Indies or South America.

“The idea stirred a lot of controversy at the time, as many did not believe that African-Americans were capable of governing themselves,” Ross said. “But if we don’t tell our aspirational stories – the story of Native Americans alive and well today, the story of a free colony of black people, the story of the first woman president – then they will never come true. We have to tell the stories that we aspire to, and we have to believe in these stories, because if we don’t, then they don’t stand a chance of ever coming true.”

Ross ended by reminding students that, because of their education and growing up in the Bay Area, they are in a position of privilege. “It is a privilege to have a platform from which you can speak the truth. Don’t be ashamed of your privilege. Don’t run from it, don’t duck it, don’t hide it. Embrace it, and use it to tell the stories that will help change the world.” 🐉



Gyasi Ross with members of the Diversity Council.





## Puppies on Campus Relieve Student Stress

It was mid-semester, the 2.5 grading period was just around the corner, and students' stress levels were palpable. But for a few hours one morning in late March, everything was chill, as students were greeted on the way into school by several service dogs from Canine Companions for Independence.

Four dogs and their trainers spent the first hour of the day on campus. Smiles spread across students' faces, heart rates declined, and tensions eased as students entered school and cuddled with the dogs before heading off to their first-period classes.

Jana Weaver P '21 connected Mid-Pen to Canine Companions, a non-profit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing highly-trained assistance dogs, but Mid-Pen has been welcoming dogs on campus for at least the past eight years.

"The therapeutic value of pets and animals on school campuses is widely known these days, as more and more institutions are supporting the research that has been done," says school counselor Wendi Wells. Shortly after joining Mid-Pen in 2011, she started bringing Isla, a boxer mix, to school a several times a month as her counseling sidekick.

Since then, the school has had other dogs and animals on campus from time to time, but this year there have

been more than ever before, including the daily presence of Gogo, an easy-going Pekingese belonging to Associate Director of Admissions Jamie Schiessler. Students often stop by the admissions office between classes to give Gogo, who is always happy for the attention, a quick hug. "Spending time with animals clearly reduces anxiety and lifts everyone's mood," observes Wendi. "I say the more the merrier!"

And at exam time, when there are papers due and tests to be taken, it is always good to be reminded that happiness really *can* be a warm puppy. 🐾



*From left, Connor Johnstone '21, Julia Weaver '21, and Chloe Reimer '22 take a break to relax with a canine companion.*

## Awards Ceremony Celebrates Student Achievement

Presented annually at Graduation, this year's **Founders' Awards** were presented to Davey Feng '19 and Ernesto Valencia Arevalo '19. The school's highest honor, the Founders' Award is given to one or more seniors who best exemplify the founding principles of Mid-Peninsula High School, including growth and change, achievement, determination, and character.

Additional awards were presented at an all-school ceremony the week before graduation.

Jack Dyson '19 received the **Douglas C. Thompson Award for Inspired Growth**, given to a senior who has achieved the greatest personal and/or academic growth during his or her time at Mid-Pen.

The **Leonard W. Ely Community Award**, presented to a senior who has made the greatest contribution to the well-being of the school and/or outside community, was given to Alynna Vilchez '19.

The **Harvard Book Award** for excellence in scholarship and high character with achievement in other fields was presented to Rachel Vogel '20.

Connor Johnstone '21 and Julia Weaver '21 received the Kiwanis Club of Palo Alto's **Andy Anderson Award** for the most improved GPA between freshman and sophomore years.

**Grade Level Awards** are given to one or more students in each grade for high achievement in academics. This year winners were Nate Annau '22, Jess Spence '22, Julia Weaver '21, Emma Marek '20, and Andrew Dollente '19.

Two sports awards were also presented. This year's **Student-Athletes** were Ernesto Valencia Arevalo '19 and Alynna Vilchez '19, while Raina Iarocci '21 and Tyler Peery '19 were named **Athletes of the Year**. 🏆



## Peer Leadership: Beyond Student Government

Twenty years ago actress Reese Witherspoon forever changed the image of high school student government with her portrayal of Tracy Flick, the smiling, overachieving, cutthroat, aspiring high school student-body president in the 1999 movie *Election*.

That's *not* the way student government operates at Mid-Pen.

First of all, says school counselor Wendi Wells, there are no elections or tryouts for Mid-Pen's Peer Leadership program, which serves as the school's untraditional version of a student council.

"Any student who wants to join can be a member of Peer Leadership," says Wendi, "so we have students in all grade levels, which gives the group a wide range of opinions and perspectives that are representative of the larger student body. And we call them peer leaders, not class reps, because they model our community values of respect, kindness, acceptance, and responsibility. These values drive everything they do."

As the group's faculty advisor, Wendi meets with the peer leaders every other week. Like student councils everywhere, the group offers suggestions and advice to the school administration and often organizes student activities. The group sponsored a Club Fair at the beginning of the year, for example, so that students could learn about and sign up for a variety of student clubs. In the spring it also helped organize a schoolwide "coin war" and shoe drive, which contributed over \$400

and donated 150 shoes to the Jennifer Memorial Deaf Community School in Zambia.

Peer leaders are often consulted on their opinions by Head of School Phil Gutierrez, whether on matters as mundane as selecting beverages for the Student Center vending machine or as significant as implementing a new restorative practices program.

Peer leaders are always listening to their classmates and bringing new ideas to the group. "We added a winter dance this year because the peer leaders heard that students were hoping to have one," she notes. "The group was heavily involved in planning and decorating for the event, and they were really invested in working together with the school community to create a great event."

The impact of Mid-Pen's Peer Leadership program, however, goes beyond that of a traditional student council. Wendi believes the growth and success of the program (there were 12 students in the program during the 2018-2019 school year) has contributed to an improvement in the overall school culture. Peer leaders feel responsible for helping to foster and maintain a positive school climate, she says. They display ownership in the school, and their positive behavior spreads throughout the campus.

They take particular pride in helping new students feel welcome and let Wendi know if they have any concerns about how a student is integrating into the school. The group's meetings often focus on current issues facing teenagers, such as the growth of vaping among teens, and they help the school bring speakers to campus and facilitate other activities to address areas of need.

"There is so much that the Peer Leadership group contributes to the school," observes Wendi. "They have truly made Mid-Pen a better place." 🌸



*Wendi Wells, in sunglasses, meets with members of the Peer Leadership program on the school patio during nice weather.*



## MID-PEN SAYS FAREWELL TO CLASS OF 2019

Mid-Pen bid farewell to its seniors and welcomed its newest alumni on June 1, when the 24 members of the class of 2019 received their diplomas at the school's 39<sup>th</sup> commencement exercises.

In a long-standing school tradition, any senior who wanted to was invited to speak at Graduation. The five students who spoke this year represented a class that, despite its small size, was as diverse as any graduating class in recent years.

**Jeannessa Lurie '19** reflected on the many individuals—friends, parents, and teachers—who have helped her grow from the middle school student who wanted to attend Mid-Pen because of its dragon mascot to the college-bound senior who has found new confidence as an artist, musician, and athlete.

"I would like to thank all the teachers here for giving 100% to their students," she said. "No matter what you

are struggling with, there is always a teacher available to help you. Mid-Peninsula has built us all up and given us the foundation for our future. In this future, may you all find some place that will inspire you to grow, learn, and do good as much as Mid-Pen has. Now that you've got that foundation, keep building upwards, dragons!"

After being home schooled in middle school, **Rebecca Newman '19** said she learned both independence and self-advocacy in her four years at Mid-Pen, but that wasn't all. "While gaining independence was a key part of my Mid-Pen journey, I gained something equally important: a Mid-Pen family," she observed. "Without such a loving and wonderful community during this transformative time, these four years wouldn't have gone by so quickly. In order to succeed in high school, we all needed both the push towards independence and the community to lift us up. We are now ready to make our next transition, and our marks in this world. ➡





And we that, we take our next steps into life, breathing the unquenchable fire of the dragon.”

7

Dramatically reaching into the folds of his gown and removing a roll of green and a roll of yellow duct tape, **Nathan Cooper '19** drew an analogy between the sticky tape and the important memories made in high school.

“Now the thing with duct tape is that things stick to it... things like our friends, our families, and the accomplishments and memories we’ve made as people and students,” he said. “Unfortunately, no matter how hard we try, duct tape can’t hold onto everything. Duct tape, like us, has only so much strength... I have one

request: when you start your next adventure in life, and start a new piece of duct tape, hang onto your duct tape and all the things and people you’ve stuck to it. In a year or two, look back on this duct tape and see how far you’ve come. Who knows what incredible things this class will do!”

Expressing thanks for the full scholarship he received to attend Mid-Pen, **Ernesto Valencia Arevalo '19** recalled how scared, nervous, and excited he was to travel from his native El Salvador to attend school in the United States. It was the kindness his classmates and teachers showed him that immediately convinced him he had a home here.

“The most important advice I have from what I learned on my first day of school is you should never stop being



## NEXT STEPS FOR THE CLASS OF 2019

Congratulations to the Class of 2019 on their acceptances to the following post-secondary programs.  
Programs in bold are those that students will be attending in the fall.

Academy of Art University  
Arizona State University  
Bradley University  
Butler University  
**California College of the Arts**  
California Lutheran University  
Cal Poly University, Pomona  
**Cogswell Polytechnical College**  
**College of the Desert**

**College of San Mateo**  
Colorado State University  
CSU Bakersfield  
CSU Dominguez Hills  
CSU East Bay  
CSU Fresno  
**CSU Monterey Bay**  
**CSU Sacramento**  
CSU Stanislaus

Creighton University  
**De Anza College**  
DePaul University  
**Foothill College**  
High Point University  
Hofstra University  
Humboldt State University  
Loyola University Chicago  
Marquette University





kind," he said. "It doesn't matter how small or big a gesture you do. Being kind, caring, and accepting of others will make a difference in someone's life."

**Chi Hin "Davey" Feng '19** spoke about the challenge of coming from China with what he thought were solid English skills, only to realize how much he still needed to learn. "Instead of being made fun of for my accent and misuses of grammar and words, as I certainly would have if I decided to go to a larger high school, what I received from Mid-Pen was care, support, encouragement, and countless hours of one-on-one writing assistance. Over the span of four years, all of my teachers – or as I would like to call them, my friends – have not only imparted me with the invaluable knowledge needed to go beyond high school into college and what's beyond, but they have also acted as a light in my life, which inspires me step by step."

This year's alumni speaker was **Kenia Miranda '14**, who encouraged students to persevere through even the most difficult times. Kenia recalled being brought to the U.S. as a child by her mother, who was seeking asylum while fleeing the domestic abuse she had experienced in Mexico. (See the full alumni profile on page 13.)

"If there is anything you should take away from my story, it is that your struggles do not define you," she said. "They make you stronger and more persistent on your dreams. They make you resilient to withstand any adversity that you may face. Your struggles have the potential to guide you in the direction of what you are most passionate about." 🌸



Menlo College  
Michigan State University  
**Mills College**  
Montana State University  
**Notre Dame de Namur**  
Oregon State University  
Pace University  
**Penn State University**  
**Pratt Institute**  
**Rochester Institute of Technology**  
Saint Louis University  
San Francisco State University  
San Jose State University  
Sara Lawrence College

School of Visual Arts  
Seattle Pacific University  
Southern Oregon University  
St. John's University  
St. Mary's College  
Seton Hall University  
Stevens Institute of Technology  
Tulane University  
UC Davis  
UC Merced  
UC Santa Barbara  
**UC San Diego**  
University of Alabama  
University of Arizona

University of Evansville  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
University of Mount Union  
University of New Haven  
University of Oregon  
**University of Portland**  
University of Redlands  
University of Tulsa  
Washington State University  
**West Valley College**  
Whittier College  
Willamette University  
Xavier University



*Above, Caitlin Berka with members of her drama class and, at right, with a prop from the spring play.*

**By Patty Winter**

The posters in Caitlin Berka's classroom tell a story. One wall is covered with images of Elizabethan England: William Shakespeare, the Globe Theatre, the queen herself. On the opposite wall, photos of the Rolling Stones and the Who hang above a shrine to David Bowie. It's an appropriate combination for a teacher who values—and wants her students to value—the cultural products of the past as well as the present.

In her five years at Mid-Pen, Caitlin has brought many worlds to her students in freshman and sophomore English and elective drama. She might spend part of the school year on August Wilson's *Fences* and another part on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. When choosing pieces for Mid-Pen's Night of the Arts or twice-yearly stage productions, she shifts easily between 19<sup>th</sup>-century drawing-room comedies and edgy 21<sup>st</sup>-century social commentaries. She also teaches short stories, poetry, and graphic novels.

Caitlin comes by her understanding of theater firsthand, having performed both as a singer and an actress

throughout school and college. With undergrad and graduate degrees in English, focusing on poetry, she hadn't even planned to enter the profession that now brings her so much satisfaction. But toward the end of her undergrad work at Stanford, she spent a summer as a teaching assistant in an ESL program for international grad students.



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"Just being in the classroom, I found my passion," she recalls. "Then when I got my first teaching job (in Virginia), they said, 'We see that you've done a lot of theater. Our drama teacher needs an assistant. Is that something you'd be interested in doing?' So I did that and absolutely fell in love with it."

Caitlin began working at Mid-Pen just after the school had acquired a raft of new theater equipment and wanted to do something with it. Mid-Pen already had a drama class, but no afterschool program or full-scale productions. Caitlin decided to put on a musical, and now produces and directs a play every fall and a musical each spring. She enjoys the intimacy of the Mid-Pen environment when creating those projects. As Caitlin notes, "A lot of high schools have to find parts for 35 people, like doing *The Sound of Music* for the thirteenth time. Here, we get to do smaller, weirder, often more interesting shows. I love it."

A perceptive teacher, Caitlin realizes that the benefits of performing are not reserved for students with a specific interest in acting. "I think that drama—even sometimes more than English—is such an important subject to be teaching to kids," she says. "I've seen amazing transformations from it. So many students have come through my drama program who were really struggling with traditional academic subjects, who felt not good about school, and then found their voice on stage and blossomed. The way it instills confidence in them is magical."

A couple of years ago, Caitlin exchanged emails with a former student during his first two years in college. He had taken both her English and drama classes, and enjoyed performing so much that he decided to join the university choir. He was also trying to decide between majoring in history or business.

The young man told her, "I realized in taking your classes that I love the humanities. I love thinking about how people behave." That's the kind of response that makes Caitlin's day. She states with conviction, "We don't teach drama because we think that every kid is going to become a professional actor, but because it teaches so many other skills, like being able to see the world in a different way."

When she isn't doing classwork or preparing students for a stage production, Caitlin keeps up on her singing. She recently joined a '90s-inspired mostly female rock band. "It's been interesting for me to get an education in an era of music I didn't know a ton about before," she explains, "using my voice differently from when I'm doing musical theater or opera."

Other than the rock band and occasional recitals, Caitlin doesn't do a lot of on-stage performing these days, preferring to put her creative energies into directing and teaching for now. Which makes perfect sense, given how rewarding it's been for her to see the fruits of that work. "One of the greatest lessons I've learned from teaching is that if you expect a lot from your students, they'll give it to you." 🐉



By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

## Tough Breaks Result in a Frustrating Basketball Season

Led by sophomore Matt Ward, the boys JV basketball team got off to a great start in the pre-season, posting wins against Waldorf School of the Peninsula, Fremont Christian, and Kehillah. Averaging over 25 points in each of the team's first three games, Matt moved up to the varsity team in early January. From then on, the JV team struggled to score points. Even though they were not able to win another game, they hung together, played hard, and showed a lot of individual improvement. Players included sophomores Alex Cai, Aaron Posternack, and Taylor Young. We also had three freshmen: Shan Thipphawong, Nathan Yarkin, and Stefan Minkowski. Rounding out the team was senior Davey Feng, a newcomer to the game of basketball.

The boys varsity basketball team ended up playing a very tough pre-season schedule this year. We lost our first three games to much improved Pacific Collegiate/ Santa Cruz, Crystal Springs Uplands, and Fremont Christian. We then split with Apostle Lutheran, losing at home by six points but beating them by two points a week later on their own court. We finished out our pre-season by losing to two more very strong teams in Saint Francis/Watsonville and Pinewood.

The team started off the regular season winning two of its first five games, with one of those losses a 51-49 heartbreaker to rival Summit Prep. We ended up winning only two of the remaining nine games, narrowly losing out to Summit again, 71-67, and to Kehillah in a closely fought contest, 52-46. With just a few breaks here and there, the team might have had a solid 7-7 record instead

of finishing the league season a disappointing 4-10.

We bid a farewell to seniors Ben Chen, Tyler Peery, and Ernesto Valencia. We're fortunate to welcome back starters Andries Castellano '21, Dawson Kinnamon '20, Josh King '21, and Sebi Strachan '21. Taylor Young '21 will definitely move up from JV to varsity next year as well.

After not fielding a team last year for lack of interest (always a possibility at a small school), girls basketball returned in full force this year, with 12 enthusiastic, if young and inexperienced, players. The team included five freshmen, two sophomores, four juniors, and one senior, only three of whom had ever played high school basketball before.

We had to spend most of our practice time teaching basic fundamentals in order for the girls to have any realistic chance to compete at the varsity level. As we struggled early on, my biggest worry was that the team would get discouraged, lose interest, and not want to finish the season. I couldn't have been more wrong about that one. These girls continued to practice and play hard, despite getting beaten in games by sometimes very large margins.

This team consisted of freshmen Simone Dawkins, Mayan Dolev, Olivia Rodriguez, Jennifer Sanchez, and Karina Sanchez; sophomores Sophia Scheid and Mia Lucas; juniors Val Rendon, Cherise Sun, Sanaye Ryder, and Audrey Harris; and senior Alynna Vilchez. Unfortunately, Sanaye Ryder, a promising post player, left mid-season

to attend a school near her home in Stockton to avoid the long commute to Menlo Park.

This season taught me a valuable lesson on how the actual process of teaching and coaching can far outweigh the importance of winning games. Mark Dawkins, my super assistant coach this season, agreed that the group was really enjoyable to work with, and we are both excited about the future of girls basketball at Mid-Pen. 🐉

*The boys varsity basketball team and their coaches.*







*Twin sisters Jennifer '22, left, and Karina Sanchez '22 during doubles practice.*

## Tennis Continues to Go Strong

This year marked the fourth year of the Mid-Pen tennis program. We had another strong turnout this year, totaling 15 players. They included freshmen Nyla Byers, Yness Riedel, Olivia Rodriguez, Jennifer Sanchez, and Karina Sanchez; sophomores Aidan Briggs, Alex Cai, Emis Chen, Sebi Strachan, and Taylor Young; juniors Ryan Shee and Cherise Sun; and seniors Dequan Cai, Naomi Orta, and Ernesto Valencia.

We expanded the schedule from six matches last year to 11 matches, and we were able to mix in two public schools, San Mateo H.S. and Mills H.S. We also scheduled two matches each against Pinewood, Woodside Priory,

Jewish Community S.F., and Kehillah, plus one match against Crystal Springs Uplands.

The team posted two wins against Jewish Community and one against Kehillah. (Unfortunately, Kehillah had to cancel the second match.) Despite losing the other matches, the team was very competitive in all but one of its losses, as the players stepped up and won several individual and doubles matches against some very strong competition from significantly larger schools. Congratulations on a great season to all the players, as well as to head coach Bryan Jeong '06 and assistant coach Raul Salazar. 🐉

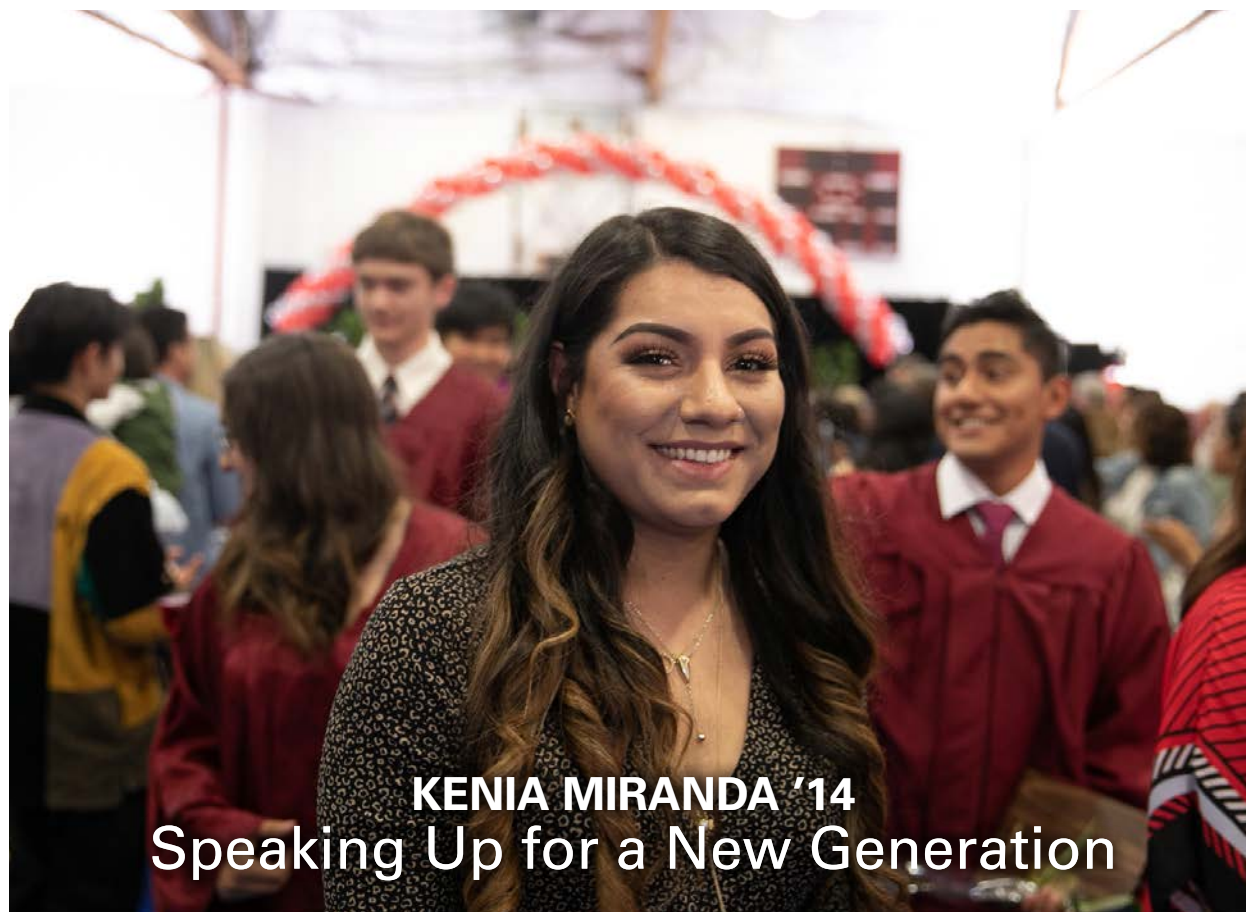
## Track and Field Returns to Mid-Pen

Our league having decided to experiment with it as an official "league sport," track and field returned to Mid-Pen this spring for the first time in several years. History teacher and cross country coach Alan Cameron enthusiastically offered to coach the team, which was a huge plus. We were able to field a team of nine, including freshman Simone Dawkins (shot put); sophomores Jack Compton (long jump and sprints) and Raina Iarocci (800- and 1,600-meters); juniors Anouk Butler (shot put), Owen DeCardy (400- and 800-meters), Audrey Harris (long jump), Dawson Kinnamon (400- and 800-meters), and

Alfredo Moran (shot put); and senior Jack Dyson (long jump).

We competed in two huge invitational meets hosted by the league. All the students competed well, particularly Anouk, who won the shot put in the first meet, and Raina, who placed second in the 800- and 1,600-meters in both meets.

We look forward to continuing the program next year; with eight returning athletes, I think the odds are in our favor! 🐉



## KENIA MIRANDA '14 Speaking Up for a New Generation

By Patty Winter

At the age of just 23, **Kenia Miranda '14** is already paying it forward. Born in a poor town in Mexico, then brought to the U.S. when she was only nine, this young alum, who was the alumni speaker at Mid-Pen's 2019 Commencement, is now leading social justice campaigns to make life better for others.

Kenia was born in the Mexican state of Michoacán. Her parents separated when she was only six or seven after domestic violence that escalated so far that her father pointed a gun at her mother. At first, Kenia, her little brother (**Miguel Najar NG '19**), and her mother moved to her aunt's house nearby. But when her father continued to threaten the family, her mother made the hard decision to leave Mexico entirely. As Kenia recalls, "I think at that point I knew what was happening, but I didn't fully comprehend it."

After a few attempts to cross the border into the U.S., Kenia's mother applied for asylum. "We got put into a detention facility," Kenia remembers, "which is interesting now seeing what's happening at the border."

The family was able to pay a bond and get released to an uncle—a U.S. citizen—with a mandate to return to court every year.

They came to the Peninsula, where Kenia's mother has several relatives. Kenia entered fifth grade knowing no English. While her mother cleaned houses to support the family, Kenia took it upon herself to excel in school, learning English quickly and eventually graduating as salutatorian of her eighth-grade class.

She credits her teachers at Belle Haven School for setting her on the path to academic success. "My teachers at the time were very supportive," Kenia says gratefully. "If it wasn't for them, I don't think I'd be here. One of them even bought me a laptop computer. And they pushed me to apply to a private high school so I could get a better education and more individualized help."

After starting at Mid-Pen, Kenia doubled down on her work ethic, taking a part-time job and playing competitive soccer on two teams. The job was at Youth United for





Community Action (YUCA) in East Palo Alto, and it provided Kenia's first exposure to activism. "YUCA was where I became very political," she notes. "I learned a lot about social justice and environmental justice. I was at city council meetings speaking to elected officials, getting involved with the San Mateo County Youth Commission—all while doing sports and going to school and writing college essays and helping to raise my brother."

After Mid-Pen, Kenia attended UC Santa Cruz because of its combination of a solid academic program and proximity to the Peninsula so she could continue to help her family. Initially entering as a political science major, she later switched to sociology, then picked up a second major in Latin American and Latino studies, graduating with honors in both subjects last year. As she noted in her recent Mid-Pen commencement speech, "There were many difficulties that kids like myself had to endure, which made envisioning a college career path pretty far-fetched." Defying the odds, Kenia represents the first generation in her family to attend college.

Cynthia Klein, mother of **Jennifer Klein '06**, writes that Jennifer graduated from Cal Poly with a degree in business, is working in the tech industry, and is getting married this year. "I deeply thank you for being the support my daughter needed during her challenging years."

**Eros Miron '10** writes: "Graduated high school in 2010 (Woooo! LOL) then graduated in 2014 with my bachelor's in criminal justice with a concentration in corrections. I just recently got hired for the state after two years and passing the Correctional Officer Academy in February. I have been a CO now for a month and a half. Before this I worked at Whole Foods for seven years. I was the assistant store manager and also worked as a teacher with 7th and 8th graders in the Redwood City school district before moving to Lathrop, where I bought my house. I feel like I've been all over the place but it's been fun. I stay in touch with a few Mid-Pen alums. **Evangelina Calderon-Arteaga '11** is one, along with **Daisy Magaña '11**, **Leticia Cardiel '08**, and **Michaela Johnson '08**.

From **Sarah Foad '12**: "I was only at Mid-Pen for one semester so I'm not sure if this counts, but I did graduate! Since graduating in 2012, I received my Bachelor's in Psychology from the University of Puget Sound in Washington State. During college I spent three consecutive summers volunteering with children in Ecuador, and returned to the Bay Area after graduating in 2016 when I started my career at Stanford Health Care in the Patient Experience Department. I am currently the Interim Manager of Volunteer Resources in addition to my role as a patient experience improvement coach within the hospital. In my

Still committed to helping her family, Kenia moved back to Menlo Park right after her college graduation and began looking for a job. She didn't have to look far; as luck would have it, YUCA reached out to her. Her initial mandate was leading a campaign to improve the reliability of East Palo Alto's water supply, but only a couple of months later, she was promoted to program director, overseeing multiple campaigns (water, housing, and education) as well as YUCA's youth development program.

Kenia's story has many chapters yet to be told. Her family is still going through the asylum process, leaving them somewhat in limbo but at least able to work in the U.S. Kenia herself is planning to attend graduate school, although she hasn't decided when or in what subject. But there's little doubt that this Mid-Pen grad will be a force to be reckoned with whatever path she chooses. And she'll no doubt continue to use her life story to encourage others who are facing challenges. "I really hope that stories like mine impact the youth of today," she reflects. "I know it's a different generation and they've struggled with different issues, but I hope they can take some strength from my life to push through theirs."

spare time, I have volunteered with homeless children, facilitating an art group every Monday in San Jose for three years now, and am also currently on the Board of Directors for an organization called Women Health Care Executives. I'm in the process of completing my application to attend an accelerated Master's program at UCSF and can attribute much of my confidence in and love of learning to my successes at Mid-Pen."

**Averi Westbrook NG '17**, below left, and **Cynthia Zamora '17**, right, visited the school this spring. Averi attended Menlo Atherton High School after Mid-Pen and is now a dance and cheer team coach with Silicon Valley Elite in San Mateo. After graduation, Cynthia attended St. Mary's College and is currently taking time off from college.





This past year was one of incredible achievement, made possible only because of the collective hard work, dedication, and support of the entire Mid-Pen community. Here are just a few of the many accomplishments of which we are proud this year:

- > This spring's ambitious production of *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play* told the story of a group of survivors of a post-apocalyptic society trying to hold onto its past by reconstructing the plot of a Simpsons episode – not your typical high school musical!
- > Our Strategic Planning Task Force finished the bulk of its heavy lifting and drafted a final plan for Board approval in June. Over the course of the year, the team interviewed dozens of educators, parents, students, and alumni, focusing on four areas of importance: Curriculum; School Location; The Future of Learning; and Identity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We look forward to sharing the plan with you in the fall.
- > As a part of a school-wide effort to reduce the school's carbon footprint, the school has installed compost bins, energy-efficient lighting, water bottle filling stations, and a new vegetable garden, overseen by the student Environmental Club, which was recognized by the San Mateo Office of Education for its efforts to foster a culture of sustainability in school.

The most important achievement, however, has been our students' growth—academic, social, and emotional. As this year's student speakers remarked at graduation, Mid-Pen seniors have experienced what it means to enjoy school, have developed greater self-confidence, and have learned that, with their talent, skills, and hard work, they can continue to make a real contribution to their communities long after graduation.

This is what Mid-Pen does so well: provide students the security and space to develop a sense of confidence with which to approach future goals, whether personal or academic. And our community appreciates what a special place Mid-Pen is. Thanks to the generosity of the Mid-Pen community, we once again had a stellar

fundraising year, raising a total of more than \$688,086 in restricted and unrestricted gifts from over 250 donors.

The school's newly named **Mid-Pen DragonFund** brought in a record \$348,179. The cornerstone of the school's fundraising efforts, the DragonFund, formerly known simply as the Annual Fund, touches every student and teacher at Mid-Pen by supporting everything from faculty professional development to financial aid from music and drama productions to class trips. This year we received contributions from more than 80% of current Mid-Pen families, plus each and every trustee, teacher, administrator, and staff member. Many thanks to this year's DragonFund co-chairs, Lynn Poland P '21 and Gail Reimer P '22, and the half dozen parents who volunteered during our fall and spring phonathons.

And who didn't have fun at **The Speakeasy**, this year's Prohibition-themed DragonFest? The pictures on the following pages provide a glimpse of the fun and excitement of the event, held in February at Devil's Canyon Brewing Company in San Carlos. The event netted nearly \$130,000, but just as important was the great time had by the 160 guests who turned out in support of Mid-Pen's students and teachers. Co-Chairs Jill Andre P '20 and Jana Weaver P '21 truly did an exceptional job.

Additionally, we raised a record \$148,500 in support of financial aid and received contributions totaling nearly \$60,000 for the Douglas C. Thompson Fund, which provides financial assistance for students to participate on class trips, such as this year's British History trip to England and Wales.

In countless ways, your contributions have made a real difference to Mid-Peninsula High School. Your gifts are tangible evidence of your commitment to Mid-Peninsula High School, and your generosity ensures an exceptional environment for teaching and learning, allowing our students to explore, discover, and grow. On behalf of the Board of Trustees and all the Mid-Pen students, faculty, and staff, thank you.

Tim Biglow P '13 and Shelley Willig P '17  
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees





## DRAGONFUND GIFTS

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The following donors requested  
that a portion of their gifts be  
designated for specific purposes.

## Faculty Room Supplies

The Board of Trustees

## Music Program

Anonymous  
Malcolm Willig '17

## Theatre Program

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Keith & Lisa Lucas  
Anthony Marek  
Cynthia McKinley

## RESTRICTED GIFTS

The following donors requested  
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## Class Trips

Lisa & Detlef Braun

## The Douglas C. Thompson Fund for Class Trips

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## Soccer Program

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## GIFTS IN KIND

Mark Anson & Mary Hayes

Paul & Jeanne Freiburger

The list of donors includes gifts received between July 1, 2018, and June 30, 2019. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of this report. We sincerely apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions. Please contact the Development Office at 650-321-1991 with any corrections.



## THE JOHNSTON SOCIETY

A beloved teacher, colleague, friend, and mentor, Larry Johnston dedicated more than 35 years to assisting in Mid-Pen's growth and development, teaching almost right up until his death in 2015. Over the years, he inspired hundreds of Mid-Pen students, who often imitated his distinctive style, especially the way he rocked back and forth when teaching, often holding an empty pipe.



Larry loved his Mid-Pen students and he loved to travel. He visited every country in Europe and traveled throughout Africa, South and Central America, and the United States. He took his time and never rushed, often traveling by train, sometimes by foot, always stopping to spend time with local people. When he died, he left a bequest to help ensure that all students, regardless of financial need, are able to participate in the Mid-Pen travel program, which takes students to places as far afield as Ecuador to learn Spanish or Great Britain to study British history.

At the time, Larry's was the first bequest that Mid-Pen had ever received. In his memory the school established the Larry Johnston Society to recognize those donors who make provisions for Mid-Pen in their estate plans.

Membership in the Johnston Society involves no dues, obligations, or solicitations, but allows us to thank donors for the plans they have made and to recognize them publicly. Benefits include invitations to special school events and activities, but the most important benefit of joining the Johnston Society is the satisfaction derived from making a lasting contribution to Mid-Peninsula High School's long-term prosperity.

### Johnston Society Members

Lawrence P. Johnston ♦

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♦ deceased





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## IT'S MID-PEN'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY!

We're Having a Party and Need Your Help. See the Alumni Survey Inside.

