

Mid-Peninsula High School

CONNECTIONS

MAGAZINE :: WINTER 2017



Soccer Team Makes the Championships, Page 11

RESPECT :: KINDNESS :: ACCEPTANCE :: RESPONSIBILITY



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

A visitor to the school recently remarked to me, “You’re much bigger on the inside than on the outside.”

Despite the Zen-like paradox of that description, I knew exactly what she meant. She was referring to the school building, of course. But being bigger on the inside is an apt description not only of our school, but also of our students. When I show visitors around Mid-Pen, I am always struck by the contrast between the (usually) calm and placid surface and what I know to be going on underneath it. One of our core principles is that high school is not preparation for life, but life being lived—at a level of intensity that would kill a healthy adult, as I like to joke. Yet students manage this with grace and aplomb, only occasionally giving us a glimpse into the complexity of their lives beneath the surface.

As for the building itself, I think that as you peruse these pages you will agree with my visitor that we are much bigger than we first appear.

As a small school, we take pride in the variety of options we offer our students. Nowhere is this more visible than in the athletic program. This year more than 70 athletes have signed up for sports—well over half the current student body! Special kudos are due to the soccer and cross-country teams, both of whom took us to league finals this Fall. On to basketball!

This year’s Thanksgiving Talent Show provided two special treats for me. One group gave us a rousing performance of the Beatles’ “She Loves You,” incidentally giving me the opportunity to point out to history teacher Alan Cameron that I was 13 when the song first came out. He is—how shall I put this?—much younger. And I got to join Nick Hinson ’17 in a tribute to Leonard Cohen,

though I did have to admit that following Nick’s deeply affecting rendition of *Hallelujah* was a daunting proposition.

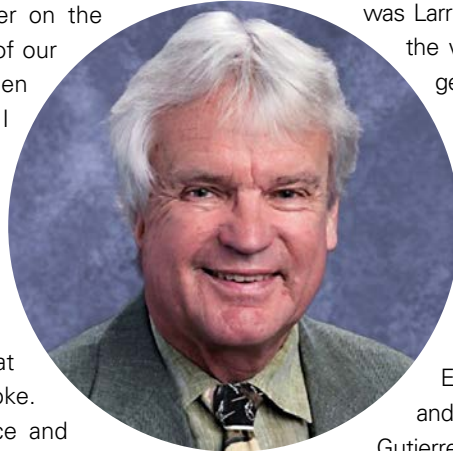
Prior to that concert we gathered out back to honor veteran teacher Larry Johnston, who died in December 2015. It was Larry’s wish that we build a bench around the willow tree behind the school, and he generously provided the funds for us to do just that. Parents, alumni, and alumni parents joined the current community to pay tribute to Larry and to thank him for his extraordinary dedication.

With this issue of *Connections* we introduce an expanded section of Alumni Notes along with features on English teacher Tara Theobald-Anderson and new Head of School designate Philip Gutierrez. I will have more to say about the process of transition in our next issue, but for now I extend a warm welcome to Phil.

I think you will agree that Mid-Pen is a dynamic, multifaceted community. I am always amazed at the variety of talents and interests that make up who we are. These are turbulent times outside our walls as well as inside, and I take great solace from the energy and dedication I see in our students every day. They have their anxieties, but they deal with them with humor, with resilience, and with unflagging support for each other. They inspire me and give me hope.

A colleague of mine likes to joke that the school year is divided into two equal halves: before Thanksgiving and after. By that formula, we are well into the second half. I invite you to join me in celebrating a successful first half of the year, and I look forward eagerly to the energy and excitement that spring will bring. 🍀

Douglas C. Thompson, PhD



CONNECTIONS

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Cover: Morgan Yee ’17 takes on a defender from Jewish Community in the championship game. Photo by Jim Hinson P ’17.

The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.

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A Memorial to the Life's Work of Larry Johnston

Larry Johnston devoted 35 years of service to Mid-Pen as a beloved science teacher, mentor, and generous colleague before his death in December 2015.

Larry kept his generosity alive by donating funds to build, as he put it, "a sturdy, permanent, high quality, circular, wooden bench placed around the weeping willow tree behind the school." Larry's gift means that his presence on campus will extend far beyond his teaching career.

On November 22, trustees, parents, alumni, and alumni parents joined students and teachers to dedicate a beautiful circular redwood bench in Larry's memory.

Having so many alumni on campus gave the event the feel of a reunion, with teachers and alums fondly reminiscing and casually sharing stories about Larry prior to the dedication ceremony.

Head of School Doug Thompson began by pointing out that, in all, Larry had taught for roughly 50 years, which in itself is an incredibly rare feat. But the real feat, Doug said, was that "Larry was always reinventing himself as an educator." Dave Richardson, College Counselor, picked up on this theme when he shared that Larry was a "teacher's teacher," who would "write notes in his plan book about how the class had gone so he could make his lesson better the next time."

Laurie Miller, English and Socratic Seminar teacher, took the podium next to speak warmly about how "Larry lived the life he wanted." She drove this idea home by saying that while another teacher would be excited during summer vacation just to "install new drains on his house," Larry might spend his summer "communing peacefully with gorillas on the Congo."

Larry did indeed live the life he wanted. And much of his rich life was spent working closely with our students, many of whom gathered on campus this day to keep their connection with Larry alive. Even today, Larry continues to connect with Mid-Pen students, as he will with students many years from now. These connections happen in myriad ways: when kids hang out on Larry's bench during breaks, when they learn from teachers who learned from Larry, and when they feel appreciated and understood as individuals.

It was Larry, after all, who helped make Mid-Pen the place where individuality fits in. 🐉



Larry Johnston's travels took him all over the world, including the Matterhorn in Switzerland.

Studio Art Takes on the Pacific Northwest

In November, art teacher Michelle Boire and eleven students explored the art and food cultures of Portland, OR, and Seattle, WA, on a week-long trip to the Pacific Northwest. After touching down in Portland, our travelers started at Sizzle Pie, a pizzeria that commissions local artists to design their pizza boxes, followed by a stop at Powell's Bookstore and foodie-famous VooDoo Donuts. The next day was spent at the Portland Art Museum and strolling along Alberta Street on a tour of the murals that help give the neighborhood its hip, artsy character. The students also learned about majoring in art at the Pacific Northwest College of Art before boarding an Amtrak Cascades train to Seattle.

The train snaked through lush, green forests “dotted with abandoned farmhouses we could see through the raindrops on the windows,” in the words of Mid-Pen senior Cynthia Zamora. Day one in Seattle started at the Seattle Art Museum, which houses an expansive collection spanning from early to modern art, with an afternoon visit to the Museum of Pop Culture, which features interactive exhibits that highlight high art in pop culture. Other stops included the Chihuly Garden and Glass Mu-

seum, the iconic Pike Place Market, lunch at the Armory, and a trip to the top of the Space Needle.

Michelle believes there is enormous value in getting students out of school and exposing them to diverse artistic communities. “Kids learn more in five days travelling than they might in five weeks at school,” she said. “When you get students outside of their bubbles, eating every meal together, and encountering new experiences and art together, they grow exponentially as artists and people.” 🌀



Students take in one of the many murals in Portland's Alberta Street neighborhood.

Mid-Pen Launches New ESL Program

In a continuing effort to cultivate a diverse student body, Mid-Pen has been expanding its international student program over the last three years. To ensure that students get the support they need to thrive, this fall the school established two English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

ESL teacher Cory Huttenga developed the courses based on feedback from teachers who have worked closely with our growing population of Chinese students. The new ESL courses work together to teach the receptive skills of reading and listening, the productive skills of speaking and writing, and the cultural knowledge necessary for social success.

One of Cory's ESL courses, which meets before the start of the regular school day, supports the individual day-to-day needs of the students. This course gives students the opportunity to get clarification on homework directions, initiate general questions about living and studying

in the U.S., and advocate for what they need specifically to succeed at Mid-Pen.

Cory's other ESL course is a discussion-based approach to language acquisition. As Mid-Pen's first dedicated ESL specialist, he employs research-based strategies that have markedly improved the academic performance and community involvement of our international population. Cory often uses pop cultural references to leverage the interests of the students. One day, John Lennon's *Imagine* plays in his room, and the next, photographs of street art are projected on the SMART board—whatever it takes to get the conversations started!

We know that students thrive most in richly diverse communities. The more diverse connections students make, the more they learn in preparation for the larger, more complex world outside of school. By enriching the language skills of our international students, we directly connect our entire community to knowledge and experiences that are no longer a world away. 🌀



Students Study the Election From All Angles

For the nation, the 2016 presidential election was complex and hard fought, but Mid-Pen's mock election was a productive learning experience that focused on thoughtful civic engagement and a broad range of issues at both the federal and local level. Teachers took the opportunity to illustrate how every course at Mid-Pen can shed light on different aspects of our electoral process.

Whether it was math teachers Ethan Weker and Nicola Willits explaining how pollsters make predictions, English teachers Laurie Miller and Tara Theobald-Anderson breaking down the rhetoric of campaign speeches, or art teacher Michelle Boire introducing a unit on political art, our students engaged in the election from multiple angles. On November 8, students were ready to make informed decisions when they registered their votes at electronic polling stations around the school.

After the ballots were cast, students and teachers gathered in the Student Center for election festivities, which included monitoring news from the national election on a big screen, patriotic cupcakes, and a game of pin the "I Voted" sticker on the donkey or elephant. By treating the election as a process of research, engagement, and ultimately celebration, our goal was to model how to prepare for an election and process the results.

The primary lesson of Mid-Pen's mock election was not whether a student's preferred candidate won or lost, but the importance of staying informed and active around vital issues. In that spirit, detailed results won't be revealed here. One result, however, has statistical interest worth sharing: the student vote count for San Francisco's Measure V (the tax on sugary drinks) was a perfect 50/50 split between "yes" and "no" votes. It seems that the race is tightest when personal stakes are highest. 🐉

Winter Concert Showcases Student Musical Talent

A welcome harbinger of winter vacation, the annual Winter Concert once again brought the Mid-Pen community together for an evening of music supplied by our talented students. Student musicians put a lot of effort into picking the right songs, developing creative arrangements, refining individual parts, and coming together as an ensemble—challenging work that paid off under the lights on December 14.

The show opened with Period 7 Ensemble performing a Nancy Sinatra classic, *Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)*. Their ethereally haunting rendition of the song proved a great opener, inviting the audience to settle in and become attuned to the nuance of the piece. Pushing the mood from evocative to dance, Period 7 showed their versatility by playing the 70's hit *December, 1963 (Oh, What a Night)*.

Period 2 Ensemble took the stage next to perform songs more appealing to younger audiences, save for their closer, Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven*. This was the largest ensemble of the night, featuring both electric and standard drums, dueling keyboards, saxophone, bass, and blazing guitar leads from junior Quinn Maloney. Sophomore Hannah Lee turned in an inspirational set on vocals.

An early Beatles song, *She Loves You*, set the pace for Period 1 Ensemble's upbeat, and at times heavy, set. Senior

Nick Hinson has become a musician to watch for at school performances, especially true this time around, as he premiered his own composition, *Lonely Street*.

Period 5 Ensemble had the honor of closing the show, opening with the driving energy of *Last Nite* by The Strokes. This ensemble played musical chairs throughout, switching instruments and vocal duties from song to song. Senior Harry Sell switched from guitar to vocals to lend his baritone voice to *The Man Who Stole the World*, a David Bowie original. Sophomore Jeannessa Lurie topped off the night with her stellar vocal performance of the Arctic Monkey's classic, *Reckless Serenade*.

As with all musical events, the performers and the audience owe Jameson Swanagon, Mid-Pen's gifted and generous music teacher, an enormous debt of gratitude. Thanks, Jameson! 🐉

From left, Rebecca Newman '19, Nick Hinson '17, Alfredo Moran '20, and Dominic Vogel '20 perform at the Winter Concert.



TARA THEOBALD-ANDERSON

Fostering an Emotional Connection to Her Students and Her Craft

By Randy Johnson

Tara Theobald-Anderson always wanted to be a teacher. Now in her 5th year teaching English at Mid-Pen, she is more focused on the kids she is supervising in the Enrichment Center than she is in our conversation about her early training and teaching methods. As we talk, her eyes constantly move about the room to make sure that none of her students are stuck on a quadratic equation or a hard word in their reading assignment. For Tara, it's all about the kids and the lessons she confidently shares with them.

Tara grew up in a suburb outside of Chicago. She remarks with a smirk that her hometown of Schaumburg is primarily known for having a massive mall. When asked about her early life and why she always wanted to teach, Tara starts talking about high school—a fitting place to start given the central role schools have played in her life.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

She first recalls a teacher, Mary Lopez, who taught US History at her large public school. Mary was the first teacher who really talked to Tara outside of class.

The thoughtful conversations Tara recalls having beside her locker with her history teacher probably weren't the norm in a school with 2,500 kids. "It's pretty powerful to build relationships with adults at that age," Tara notes. "Having teachers that care about you makes you want to work hard." She is on the other side of this equation now, relishing in all the opportunities a school like Mid-Pen gives her to make meaningful connections with her students.

High school was also the place where Tara became a social activist. Her action was, as it is now, propelled by issues she cares deeply about: feminism, politics, and education equity. It's hard not to picture Tara being mature relative to her high school peers, an intuition reinforced by the fact that during a high school summer she "hooked up with a feminist group of women in their 30's and 40's." Before travelling with the group to take part in the March for Women's Lives in Washington DC, she had to convince her mother that the cause was worth her missing some school.

Tara likely didn't miss much school. Otherwise, she wouldn't have been the student of the year in her high school Social Studies department—with nerdy awareness, Tara says, "I was very close to this department." She also made the National Honor Society, participated in the Students against Destructive Decisions campaign to combat drunk driving, and was an outspoken political agent in the aftermath of 9/11. She sees the September 11th attacks during her high school experience as a defining



Tara Theobald-Anderson, right, with her wife, Gabrielle, and son, Ari, during Mid-Pen's Halloween festivities.



moment that still inspires her to speak her mind whenever she feels the stakes are high.

Tara matriculated at the University of Illinois, Chicago, where she pursued a double major in English Education and Gender and Women's Studies. In college, Tara met her future wife, Gabrielle, while working in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies. Gabrielle and Tara went on to serve as co-presidents of Feminist United, a feminist group on campus.

After finishing her undergraduate studies, Tara completed her student teaching at Whitney Young Magnet High School, which consistently ranks among the top public high schools in Illinois. With Tara ready to find her teaching home and Gabrielle at a transition point in her own career in education, they were both interested in moving to a new part of the county. Tara had spent a summer in Berkeley during college, and since Gabrielle had previously lived there, the Bay Area seemed like a familiar landing place for both of them. Before making her way to Mid-Pen, Tara taught English at Palo Alto Prep and in a specialized program for at-risk youth in the Oakland Unified School District.

At Mid-Pen, Tara's classroom is a rich, safe place to delve into the historical, cultural, and formal elements that drive the compelling texts she chooses for her students. Tara's passion for her content draws the kids into her lessons like a magnet. When a teenage boy on the varsity basketball team declares that *The Joy Luck Club* is now his favorite book, you quickly see how masterful Tara is at opening up literary worlds for every student. Tara describes his reaction as "really sweet." Her tendency to talk about teaching in nurturing terms reveals her emotional connection to both her kids and her craft.

Tara is perhaps most proud of introducing her Gender Studies course to Mid-Pen. She beams with delight as she talks about both the details and the broad scope of her classes. Tara says, "English classes teach students how to think. But Gender Studies shows them how to see a new world." She is a teacher in her full stride, helping students identify and articulate ideas they will care about and work with for the rest of their lives.

Gabrielle and Tara became new parents on April 13, when their beautiful baby boy, Ari, was born into a life of seemingly non-stop gummy smiles (at least, non-stop from an outside perspective). The couple live in their recently purchased house in Oakland, spending their time focusing on Ari and working on their home. 🐉

FACULTY NOTES & NEWS

Math teacher **Ethan Weker** presented to fellow northern California math teachers at the California Mathematics Council conference in Pacific Grove in early December. The topic was bringing student debates into the high school math classroom, a technique that Ethan uses often in his own classes. Past debate topics have included what is the value of $0/0$? Is there a better order for Order of Operations? Is math invented or discovered? Ethan says that "embracing these questions leads to new and better understanding of mathematical concepts." He will be giving a similar presentation in April at the National Council of Mathematics Teachers conference in San Antonio, TX.

In addition to Tara's new baby boy, Ari, Mid-Pen celebrated the births of three more faculty children in the past year.

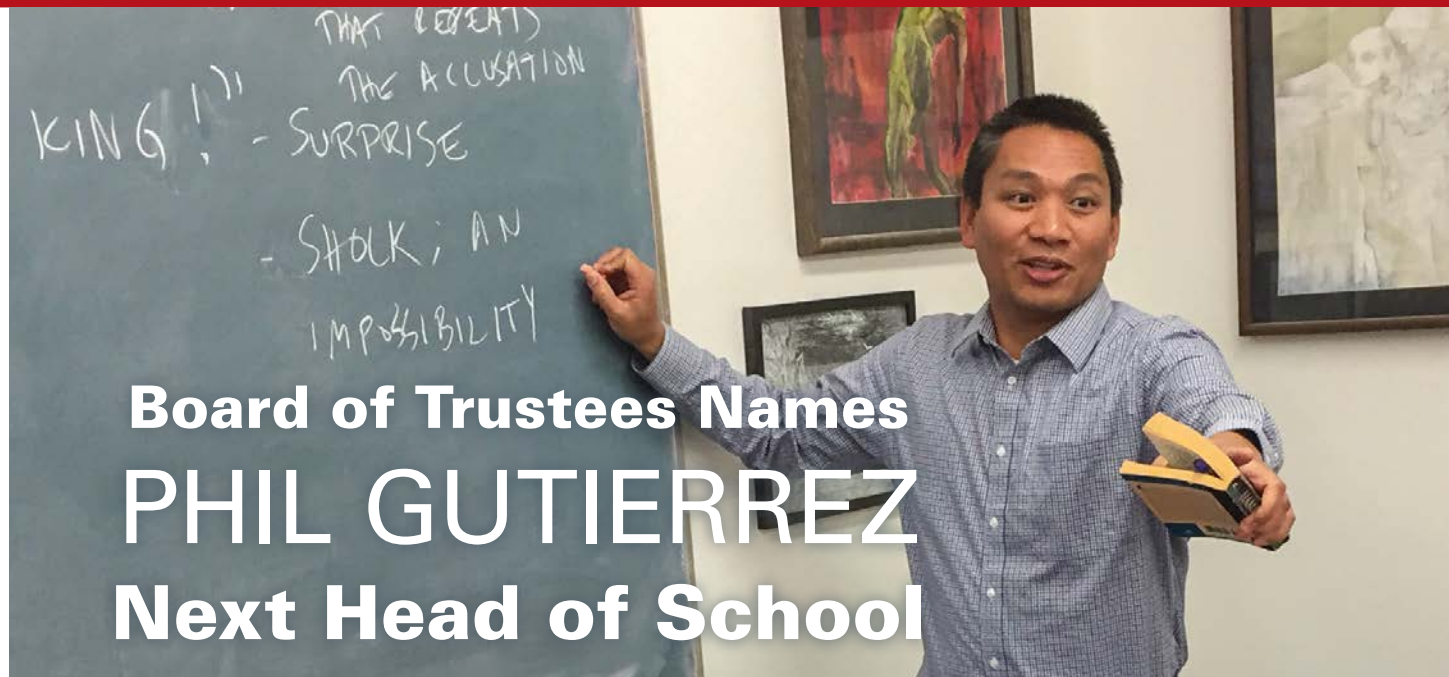
Janel Coughran (ASL, Transitions, and Human Relations) and her husband Ryan welcomed Philip Earl Coughran into their family on August 8, 2016. Philip is a big boy, currently in the 90th percentile for weight. He's an awesome, joyful fellow, who you'll want to meet very soon.



Malcolm Leonard Swanagon was born into the Danae and **Jameson Swanagon** family on March 9, 2016. Weighing in at 8 pounds and 8 ounces, Malcolm came into the world with a glorious head of hair and a taste for rough-and-tumble play. Malcolm's middle name is a tribute from his music teacher father to Leonard Cohen.

Science teacher and activities coordinator **Julia Longnecker** gave birth to Joseph Patrick Longnecker on May 2, 2016. Joseph now has two very sharp teeth and is expert at crawling backwards (still working on forward). Baby Joseph is adored by big sister, Ella, and dad, Matt.





Board of Trustees Names PHIL GUTIERREZ Next Head of School

In October, the Board of Trustees announced the appointment of Phil Gutierrez as head of school to succeed Dr. Douglas C. Thompson, who will retire at the end of this school year. The nearly yearlong national search for Doug's successor culminated in a unanimous recommendation from the Search Committee to the Board of Trustees in support of Phil, who will become the fourth head of school in Mid-Peninsula High School's 38-year history when he starts on July 1.

Phil will bring more than 22 years of independent school education experience to Mid-Pen. He is currently the Assistant Head for Advancement at The Branson School, a private high school in Ross, CA, where he has been on the leadership team since 2007. At Branson, his work has touched all areas of school life, including in the classroom, curriculum development, enrollment, advancement, communications, and professional development for faculty.

Phil earned his Bachelor's Degree from UC Berkeley, with a major in English and a minor in Spanish. After his time at Berkeley, he went on to get his Master's Degree in English at Stanford University. Phil, however, makes it a point to note that his most vital development in college was meeting his future wife, Robbie, in a senior seminar English course. Phil resides in San Rafael, California with Robbie and their two children, Katherine (14), who attends Branson, and Max (12), who is a 6th grader at Mark Day School.

Like Phil, Robbie works in the independent school world, serving in the Development Office at Marin Academy, a progressive high school in San Rafael. Robbie also volunteers her time by chairing the Family Sunshine Committee at Mark Day School, which helps families in need with meals, carpools, and playdates.

Phil's daughter's driving passion outside of school is ballet, which means she commits to practicing several days a week. When she isn't dancing or doing homework, Katherine is reading. Phil's son, Max, plays soccer in the fall, basketball in the winter, and competes for the swim team in the spring. He is also on the school chess team and spends his free time perfecting magic tricks.



**THE STUDENTS WERE
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THE CLASSROOM"**



His daughter's ballet life has even pulled Phil onto the stage. Early in December, Phil joined his daughter to perform in her company's production of *The Nutcracker*. Phil's role was to play a parent at a party scene, a part that required him to contribute to what he calls "two very brief dance numbers." Phil says, "I honestly do very little that resembles dance, but I enjoyed being at the rehearsals and learning about how much work goes into such a production."

Phil will have many opportunities to visit Mid-Pen before he takes the helm in July. In fact, Phil has already come to campus for the school's annual Thanksgiving Feast and Talent Show and its December Admissions Open House. Phil immediately fell in love with the Talent Show, praising how Mid-Pen kids rise to the occasion to share their talents with a community that embraces their efforts. Phil says, "I loved the Thanksgiving Talent Show. It takes courage to perform in front of one's peers, so I always admire people who are willing to play in front of a crowd. The musicianship was great, and I appreciated the tributes to Leonard Cohen. The audience had a great time too, and I can't wait to see another performance in the future." Phil said that in addition to taking in the talent, he was also "able to spend some time with the faculty and some adorable babies. The community seems like a family."

When asked how his family celebrated when they learned he would be the new head at Mid-Pen, Phil responded by saying that they went to dinner at one of his favorite restaurants. "But really," Phil says, "I don't know if we've stopped celebrating. We're excited for this new chapter, and the kids are eager to visit the school to see where I'll be working."

Phil says he feels a personal connection with the "spirit of community at Mid-Pen," which "resonates with me and is something that is very palpable when you walk onto campus. The students were at the center of everything that I saw, and I was in awe of the faculty's work in and out of the classroom. I'd be hard pressed to find a group of educators so committed to challenging and nurturing their students. Mid-Pen is clearly a special place, and I am deeply honored and humbled to be part of the community."

Phil Gutierrez still remains active as an English teacher, above left, and enjoys biking around the Bay Area with his family.

Throughout all of his leadership roles, Phil has remained in the classroom as an English teacher. His classroom work has served as a touchstone that informs the choices he makes as an administrator. Phil's inclination to maintain close working relationships with students as an administrator meshes well with a community already accustomed to Doug, a school head who takes the time to know all of his students as individuals.

Tim Reichert, Search Committee Chair and former trustee, reports that "Phil comes to us with impeccable references. Everyone who has worked with Phil loves him and cannot say enough good things about him." We welcome Phil to Mid-Pen and look forward to discovering firsthand why everyone loves working with him. 🐉





Helping Every Student Learn – AND MAYBE EVEN LOVE – MATH

By Randy Johnston

When your math department consists of two teachers working closely together, easy collaboration quickly leads to novel ways to make math more interesting and accessible to every student. Whether it's introducing new technology or holding math debates to illustrate how math can be as language based and argumentative as an English course, Mid-Pen's math teachers work in harmony to make math engaging, personal, and maybe even fun.

Nicola Willits (Intro to Algebra, Algebra II, and Calculus) says, "We have a diverse population of students with different strengths and different areas that challenge them, so I structure class with different modalities so that my lessons are accessible to everyone."

After gesturing at a drawing on her board of pirates distributing newly found treasure among themselves, she says, "I use that drawing to talk about the distributive property." She continues, "For me, the numbers just make sense. But some students need the visual component for the concepts to make sense to them."

Continuing on the theme of visual learners, Nicola recalls a former student who was an absolute whiz at math and video production. The student, who was also dyslexic, took it upon himself to make instructional math videos for his peers while serving as a TA for Nicola because he saw that many of his peers were, like him, strong auditory and visual learners. Nicola says, "He was an inspiration to me! He was able to find the sources he needed to pursue his very advanced interests. On top of that, he left behind a legacy of instructional math videos that I continue to use."

A student leaving a legacy of instructional videos doesn't happen without Nicola's investment in multiple learning modalities, her commitment to helping students find their own learning strengths, and her openness to empowering students to play a significant role in the education of their peers. Nicola also strives to design her courses so each lesson builds logically to the next. As junior Grant Meyers puts it, "In Nicola's class, everything builds on what you just learned, so nothing ever feels exactly new—it feels more like you're always just honing what you already know."



Helping kids learn challenging concepts without feeling the jar and strain often associated with math is a goal shared by Ethan Weker (Algebra I, Geometry, and Pre-Calculus with Trig). Like Nicola, Ethan uses research-based methods that enable students to approach math from multiple angles. For example, Nicola and Ethan both use Desmos, an online service that provides a host of customizable math tools that “help every student learn math and love learning math.” The flexibility of Desmos allows Ethan and Nicola to tailor math activities for each of their classes, making their curriculum more targeted and personalized.

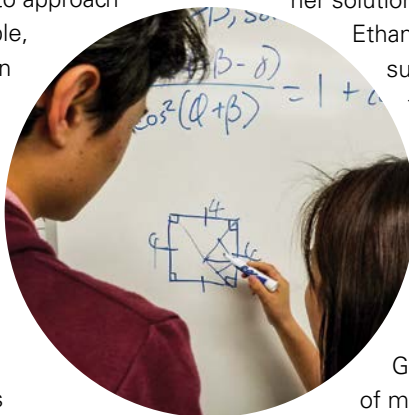
Technology that adapts math activities to every class, and even every student, is a powerful teaching tool. And yet, generating personal investment in each student is the real key to making math approachable. To this purpose, Ethan will sometimes flip traditional math pedagogy on its head. For instance, Ethan often asks his students to generate their own math problems. He gives them two guidelines as they begin designing their own homework problems: first, make the problem easy to explain and, second, make it challenging to solve.

This year, a student came up with a problem that fit those requirements perfectly: Is it possible to take a square piece of paper and cut it into isosceles triangles

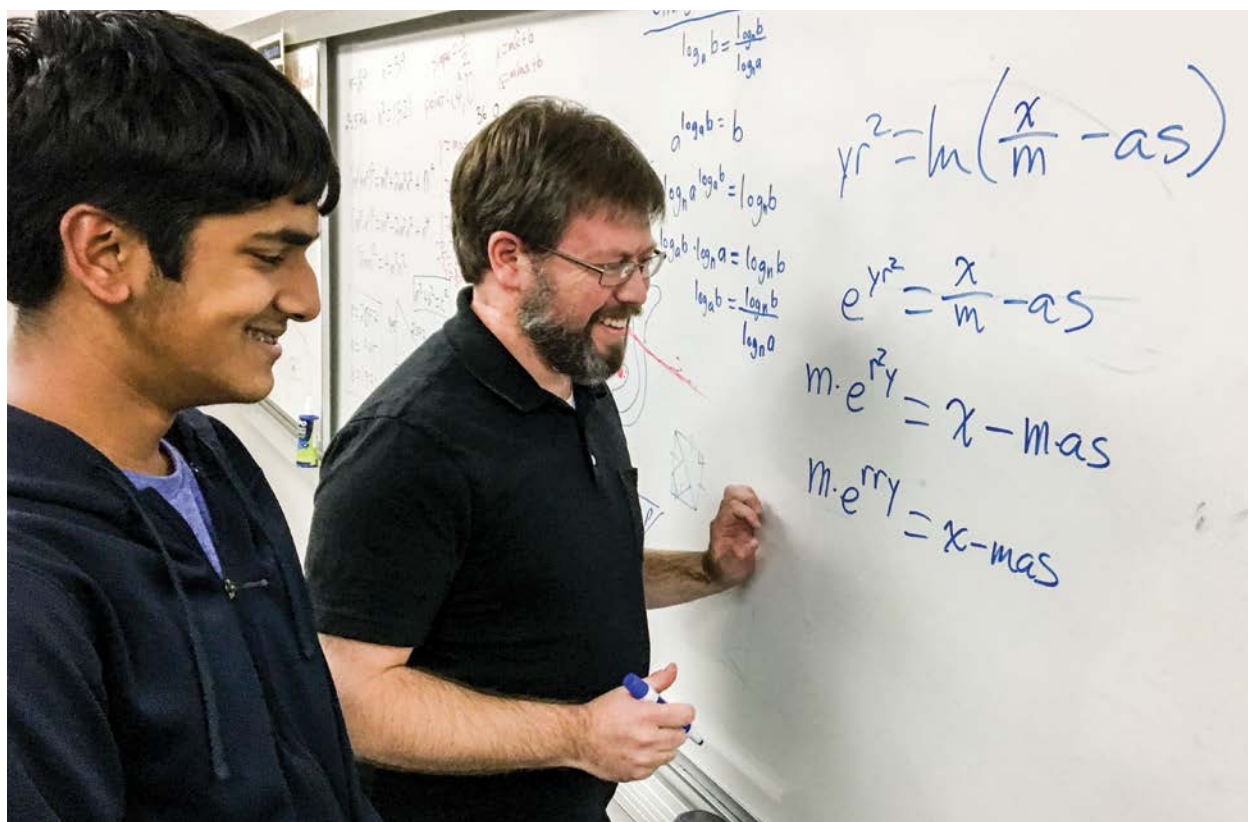
that aren’t congruent? The problem was refined through collaboration to require a finite number of non-isosceles triangles (e.g. make just 6 triangles). The next morning, before school, one of his students rushed in to show off her solution, which was quite similar to the solution

Ethan had worked out overnight. When he suggested that they find more solutions, the kids flooded him with answers. So far, they have generated six solutions. “The best part,” Ethan says, “is that I have students talking about this before and after school, at lunch, outside my classroom, totally invested in a problem that they made on their own.”

Getting the students to take ownership of math ideas is what drives both Nicola and Ethan to continue collaborating on new approaches. Their shared goal is to do away with those questions of “When am I going to use this?” or “How does this apply in the real world?” When they create lessons that naturally show the usefulness of math and design ways to make the math, by itself, just fun, those questions simply go away. 🐉



Above left, Nicola Willits demonstrates mathematical modeling to Mira Sears '17. Below, Ethan Weker solves a holiday-related equation with Sunjay Dasu '17.





WE HAD OUR SHARE OF EXCITING MOMENTS IN SPORTS AT MID-PEN THIS FALL SEASON."

—KURT LANGE, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Soccer Reaches the Championship

In his fourth season as the head coach of Mid-Pen's Soccer Team, Raul Salazar brought his team back to the championship game once again. And although we failed to bring home the banner, the determination and grit shown by this year's group was amazing.

The team started the season out strong by beating eventual champion Jewish Community. We then proceeded to lose three out of the next four games, making our playoff hopes look pretty slim. But the Dragons rebounded, winning the final three matches, with the big win coming against Kehillah, the team we needed to overtake in order to play for the league championship. Both teams finished

with identical 5-3 records, but the tie-breaker went to the Dragons by virtue of winning the second round of play.

We are pleased to announce that eight of our players received all-league honors. Sophomore Miguel Najjar, junior Nate Smith, and senior Nick Hinson made first-team. Freshman Alfredo Moran, juniors Ryan Burton and Alexis Garcia, and senior Julia Gold made second-team. Senior Alex "Hammer" Koeppen received honorable mention.

Along with Nick, Julia, and Alex, we bid a sad farewell to seniors Cooper Loundy, Morgan Yee, and Nico Linton. Thanks for all the great play and wonderful memories! 🍷

Below, Coach Raul Salazar takes it easy with his team after winning a place in the league championship game. Right, the varsity volleyball team and the Mid-Pen mascot.





Volleyball Players Show Grit

If winning were the only criteria for success, one might say our girls volleyball program had an unsuccessful season in 2016. Although wins were very hard to come by, there were many positive moments during the season.

First off, we started our summer practices with 17 players and finished near the end of October with 16. Attendance at practices and games remained high throughout the season. Our JV team showed an amazing ability to come from behind in several matches. One game that comes to mind was against Jewish Community in San Francisco, where we ended up winning 26-24, despite being down at one point 7-21!

At the beginning of the season, our varsity team struggled mightily but stayed the course and showed huge improvement by season's end. The team fought a particularly close match with Summit Prep, winning the second game and losing the final two games by 5

points each. We can all be proud of the way this group hung together through the frustration of losing some tough matches.

Senior captain Rachel Kirkwood once again garnered second-team all-league honors and senior Maya Mulle-neaux made honorable mention. A huge thank you goes to seniors Giuliana Peccolo, Sweden Smith, Faye Bandet, Hana Dvorak, Shontelle Watkins, Stephanie Sacor, Cynthia Zamora, and Tarrah Taylor for all of their hard work and contributions to the program! 🐉



Cross Country Wraps Up Best Season

Coached by our own incomparable History teacher, Alan Cameron, our boys varsity cross country team finished the season with the best cross country record in the history of Dragon sports.

Hopes were high in August and practices were well attended as we headed into our first league meet in mid-September. Because we begin school at least two weeks later than the other schools in our league, we usually start out a little slower than the rest. This season was no exception, as we placed seventh in our first league meet. In the next meet, the team finished

one position better and then moved up to fifth place by meet three.

The stage was set for the league championship meet, where the top five teams go on to the Central Coast Section Championships (CCS). Although we have had several individual runners qualify over the years, we have never had a complete team of five compete at CCS. But this year, there was no obstacle our runners couldn't overcome. Led by the team's top five finishers (respectively junior Sky Vandbergen, freshman Dawson Kinnamon, junior Aidan Lloyd-Tucker, senior Cian Sheahan, and senior Alex Koeppen), the Dragons finished fourth in the league championship meet, earning a berth for the team at CCS. Senior Harry Sell and sophomore Jack Dyson also ran strong at this meet.

Although none of our runners advanced to the state championships, Mid-Pen students once again ran well at the CCS meet. Special mention has to go to Cian, Harry, and Alex, who competed in both soccer and cross country during the same season. Thanks also to senior Lizbeth Magana who was a regular at practice all year and a strong supporter of the program. Junior varsity runners include freshmen Greg Prieto, Connor Leal, and Christian Hamilton. We look forward to seeing you compete next year. 🐉



Christopher McPhillips '85, who has made a career in the U.S. Marines after graduating from San Jose State with a B.S. in Aeronautics, was recently promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. He is currently serving as Assistant Wing Commander – effectively second in command – of the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing in Okanawa, Japan. Prior to moving to Okinawa, he served as a military fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

In 2000 he deployed to the Persian Gulf, where he saw action as a combat pilot during operations Southern Watch and Iraqi Freedom. He later served in Japan as a pilot and weapons and tactics instructor.

With one Master's Degree in Military Operational Science from the USAF Air Command and Staff College and another in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College, General McPhillips served in various roles in the Pentagon from 2009 to 2013. He then took over command of Marine Aircraft Group Thirteen in Yuma, Arizona. The Air Group was comprised of AV-8B Harrier, F-35B Joint Strike Fighter, logistics, and support squadrons that supported combat operations and deployments around the globe.

According to Wendy McPhillips, Chris's sister, who emailed us last spring with an update on his accomplishments since graduating from Mid-Pen, "My brother was NOT a good student all through school and did what teenage kids do...drove my parents nuts. And then he found his passion: flying and flying fast! His story is one that might give encouragement to other students who have struggled finding their place."



Sen. John McCain bids farewell to (then Colonel) Chris McPhillips, right, following a 2014 visit to the Marine Aircraft Group 13.

Michelle Behling '89 stopped by the school in early December to see "Larry's bench," the circular redwood bench that was placed under the willow tree behind the school in memory of science teacher Larry Johnston, who passed away last year. Michelle said that she was unable to attend the dedication ceremony in November but had wanted to see the bench "because there were so many teachers who really helped me during my time at Mid-Pen and Larry was one of them." After graduating from Mid-Pen, Michelle studied at Mission College and West Valley College, and for the past 17 years has been employed with Safeway supermarkets.



Ornette Chrisman '93 recently moved from the Bay Area to St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where he is hoping to establish himself as an artist and jewelry designer. He says he came to the art world after more than 20 years designing and manufacturing industrial prototypes for Expedite Precision Works in San Jose, which serves the semiconductor, pharmaceutical, aerospace, and defense industries. Having worked with a wide variety of materials, from plastics and aluminum to wood and leather, it seemed natural that he should apply his skills to art. Before his move, Ornette donated a few of his larger works to Mid-Pen, in hopes that they might either be sold to benefit the school or displayed to inspire students artists.



Graham Pruss '94 is the co-founder and Executive Director of WeCount, a Seattle nonprofit that offers an online tool for connecting the homeless with needed resources provided by public donors. Graham and co-founder Jonathan Sposato, a tech entrepreneur, were presented with an award for Innovation and Equity by Seattle mayor Ed Murray.

At the heart of WeCount is a mobile-friendly website that matches people looking to donate with requests from those in need. WeCount.org has 200 different request options, including emergency gear, shelter gear, and electronics. Donors take their donations to a third-party drop-off site, and the requester is then notified that their item is ready to be picked up.

"We try to make WeCount so that it's a value proposition for both groups," Graham told the Seattle Times. "We turned this into something that is fun and engaging for people, that is easy to use, and really can appeal to the masses so that we're suddenly turning on everybody to be an agent of change within the community. People can get involved with something so simple. It can be a revolutionary catalyst for change."

For the homeless, without easy access to laundry, something as simple as clean, dry socks can be a critical comfort. They can also be the difference between sickness and health.



This fall, WeCount quietly distributed “sock boxes” in several Seattle neighborhoods, alongside groups of existing newspaper boxes, which they resemble. Instead of being filled with auto trader or real estate flyers, however, they were stocked with clean socks, donated by local residents. “Some of the organizations we work with call clean socks ‘white gold,’” Graham says.

Graham sees small acts like buying a pack of socks to donate to the homeless man down the street has dry feet as part of the greater cause of “building political will.” He hopes as WeCount grows it can provide items like alarm clocks and clothing for job interviews, which can help people as they exit homelessness – or maybe even help people from becoming homeless at all.

Among the many alums who returned to campus for the ceremony in November celebrating Larry Johnston’s life and career at Mid-Pen were **Mike Barkoff ’04, Greg Hinman ’07, Grant Van Den Bosch ’09, Thomas Brannan ’10, Josh Braun ’10, Brian Shifrin ’13, and Nick Lovotti ’14.** Remarking on the stability of Larry’s career, Brian spoke for all who remember Larry’s classroom: “It’s amazing for someone who lived and traveled to so many places to spend 35 years in one place. He put pictures of all his travels on the walls of his classroom so that we could travel with him.”

Students, teachers, and alums toss balls into the air in enthusiastic appreciation of Larry Johnston following the dedication of a bench in his memory.



Alex Stahl ’96 returned to campus last month to talk to students considering a career in the tech industry as part of Mid-Pen’s alumni mentoring program. Over a lunch of pizza and salad, Alex told a group of a dozen students how, after graduating from Mid-Pen and attending Humboldt State College, where he planned to major in theater, he had little sense of career direction until he took some time off from college and, on a lark, worked as a help-desk tech assistant for nine months.

“Then I went to a Van Halen concert and got home so late that I slept til four in the afternoon, and forgot to call into work,” he recalled. “I got fired, but I learned what I wanted to do with my life.”

Though he switched his major to Computer Information Systems when he returned to college, Alex left before graduation following the dot-com market collapse of 2001. From there, he worked odd jobs around the Peninsula, including “selling really expensive pens and margaritas at Stanford Shopping Center,” before landing a contract position as a video game tester for Sony’s burgeoning PlayStation platform.

Since then, he has worked at or consulted for over twenty companies of all sizes, in roles covering all manner of technical expertise, including software development and testing, systems administration, solutions architecture, and automation.

Reflecting back on his time at Mid-Pen, which he attended for just his senior year (“Mid-Pen was my fourth high school, and my 12th school in seven towns in four states since elementary school”), Alex credits the school with changing his life.

“I was angry and confused and unsure of myself,” he recalls. “But starting at Mid-Pen, I began to understand how I learn best – by breaking things. As a game tester at Sony, I was paid to break things, to make things fail, so that I could see how to make them better. Before I came to Mid-Pen, I now realize, I had been trying to learn in my natural way – which wasn’t something that exactly pleased either my parents or my teachers.”

In the fall, Alex contacted the school to see how he might give back to Mid-Pen. Following up on his lunch with students, Alex will be advising a new Mid-Pen student computer club starting in January, tentatively named “Hack the Dragon.”



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