

Mid-Peninsula High School

CONNECTIONS

M A G A Z I N E :: S U M M E R 2 0 2 0



Mid-Pen's Excellent Online Adventure, Page 2

RESPECT :: KINDNESS :: ACCEPTANCE :: RESPONSIBILITY



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

I hope this issue of *Connections* finds you and your loved ones well. As I reflect on the second half of the school year, I admit feeling a bit overwhelmed by the amount of upheaval the world faced during these past months. On Monday, March 16, Mid-Pen began its distance learning program and continued it for the rest of the school year as we sheltered in place. Then, with COVID-19 changing life as we've known it, America and many parts of the world saw protests against systemic racism following the tragic and unjust murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25.

These times will appear in history books a century from now.

Despite all of the forces that separated us over the last months of the school year, Mid-Pen kept its community connected. Through the collective efforts of our staff, students, trustees, and parents, Mid-Pen was able not only to survive the year but to thrive. You can read more about our transition to Mid-Pen Online in the pages ahead.

I have to tip my hat to my colleagues in the faculty. Our teachers showed the ability to adapt on the spot as soon as we decided to close the campus. Having to rethink lesson plans, units, and pedagogy as a whole, they continued to carry out our mission in service to our students. That so many teachers taught full days while also parenting their young children at home is a further testament to their dedication.

Throughout the semester, the staff kept its focus on the students. We changed our distance learning schedule and grading policy to address the challenges students experienced as remote learners. We began our final faculty meeting of the year by having a group of students



share their positive and negative experiences with this online format. Their feedback has been essential as we prepare for the upcoming school year. Over the summer, all teachers are undertaking distance learning professional development opportunities to hone their craft further.

Our Parents Association (PA) co-presidents, Kathy Marek and Kris Chiongbian, and the class parent representatives ensured that our parent community stayed strongly connected. In many ways, PA meetings over Zoom allowed newer and deeper relationships to form over the latter part of the year. As I've often said, teachers and parents work the same job in different shifts. My colleagues' work wouldn't be nearly as meaningful without the sincere support of the parent community.

The Class of 2020 deserves our recognition as well. My colleagues and I were so sorry that our senior class could not be on campus for the final part of their year. They lost their last sports seasons, their final Night of the Arts and spring musical, their prom, and the chance to say farewell to one another and their teachers in person. Despite that, we hope that they will always carry Mid-Pen with them. We will not forget the Class of 2020.

Finally, I write this letter knowing that it is my last with Dave Richardson as my colleague at Mid-Pen. The shelter-in-place also took away the community's chance to honor him in person upon his retirement. When it is safe to do so, we will gather to bid farewell to Dave. It's hard to imagine our school in the fall without him, and yet I know that he will always be with us. Keep in touch, Dave! 🐉


Phil Gutierrez

CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS is published twice yearly, in January and July, for the parents, alumni, faculty, and friends of Mid-Peninsula High School.

Charlene Prince Birkeland,
Director of Communications
Henry Trevor,
Director of Development

Design by Lori Susi
Printed by Bay Area Graphics
DragonFest photos by Veronica Riedel P '22.

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

Mid-Peninsula High School
1340 Willow Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
www.mid-pen.org

To submit alumni news and address changes, please contact alums@mid-pen.org



Mid-Pen's Adventure in Distance Learning

Faculty and staff stood in science teacher Meenu Baloda's classroom during their morning break on Thursday, March 12. All-staff meetings in the middle of a school day are rare at Mid-Pen. On this particular day, however, the nervous energy in the room was expected: the World Health Organization had just declared COVID-19—the disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)—a global pandemic. Mid-Pen's team had gathered to discuss the impending closure of the school's campus and a transition to distance learning.

"Earlier this morning, Head of School Phil Gutierrez met with the Board of Trustees to discuss developments with the coronavirus (COVID-19)," said Mid-Pen's announcement to its community. "Beginning tomorrow, Friday, March 13, the Mid-Pen campus will be closed."

Mid-Pen was one of several independent schools on the Peninsula that proactively moved to distance learning. In the days leading up to the school's closure, the faculty and staff developed their plans for distance learning. Students who opted to stay home out of concern about COVID-19 provided an opportunity for teachers to test different online video conferencing tools. In some classrooms, students at home joined lessons via Google Meetings. During her science class, Meenu had her students observe isopod behaviors of roly-polies. Dragons worked in groups to design their experiments. Zia Stef-

fan '21 participated in the class from home as her lab partner, Shan Thipphawong '22, held his phone over the trays of roly-polys so she could note her observations in the experiment.

Three days later, on March 16, the school began its excellent adventure: Mid-Pen Online. The school implemented a synchronous teaching system; virtual classes followed the on-campus schedule, and teachers led classes using Google Meetings. Core classes continued to meet daily. By maintaining the same routine, the transition to virtual classes was seamless, apart from getting used to the delivery format. Science classes conducted labs at home, several clubs continued with online meetings, and the music program composed songs and created a fantastic website that showcases their musicianship and collaboration. (Read more about Mid-Pen's new music website on page 4).

Throughout the semester, students and families were regularly surveyed for feedback. "Distance learning has allowed me to take a step back from the rush of society and really let me focus on my hobbies and collect my thoughts," said a student in one survey. Another student shared that online learning allowed for independence because they could get their work done on their own time.

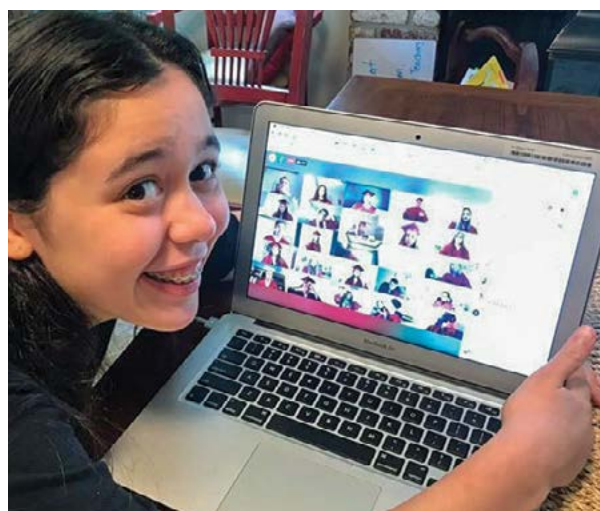
Students also faced challenges, like sharing WiFi bandwidth with family members streaming meetings or class-

es at the same time as Mid-Pen lessons. Other students noted they were more distracted at home. Several students said that while they were satisfied with distance learning, they were “missing that real-life connection and bond with teachers.” A schedule change allowed Mid-Pen faculty to meet with their students on Wednesdays, which were used for virtual office hours.

Mid-Pen’s ongoing efforts to make sure students had a positive distance-learning experience, along with community feedback, allowed the school to nimbly change the school schedule and pivot to a new videoconference tool, Zoom. Not only did Zoom allow for a better connection between teachers and students, it provided a perfect opportunity for Mid-Pen staff to create a parody video of “The Brady Bunch.”

While distance learning could never replace the experience of being on campus, Mid-Pen Online allowed for the community to continue their educational journey for the remainder of the semester. The school hosted grade-level and all-school assemblies, weekly Parents Association and class parent coffees, and even an 80s dance for students. And co-ed tennis and boys volleyball continued their team training online through the end of the semester.

Mid-Pen’s spring online adventure ended with a virtual graduation ceremony for the Class of 2020. Livestreamed over Facebook, the commencement exercises were



Yness Reidel '22 watches on as the Class of 2020 graduates online.

viewed more than 1,500 times. The school took advantage of the format to shed a bright light on each student. Future in-person graduation will incorporate some of the best aspects of our digital ceremony to celebrate our seniors even more.

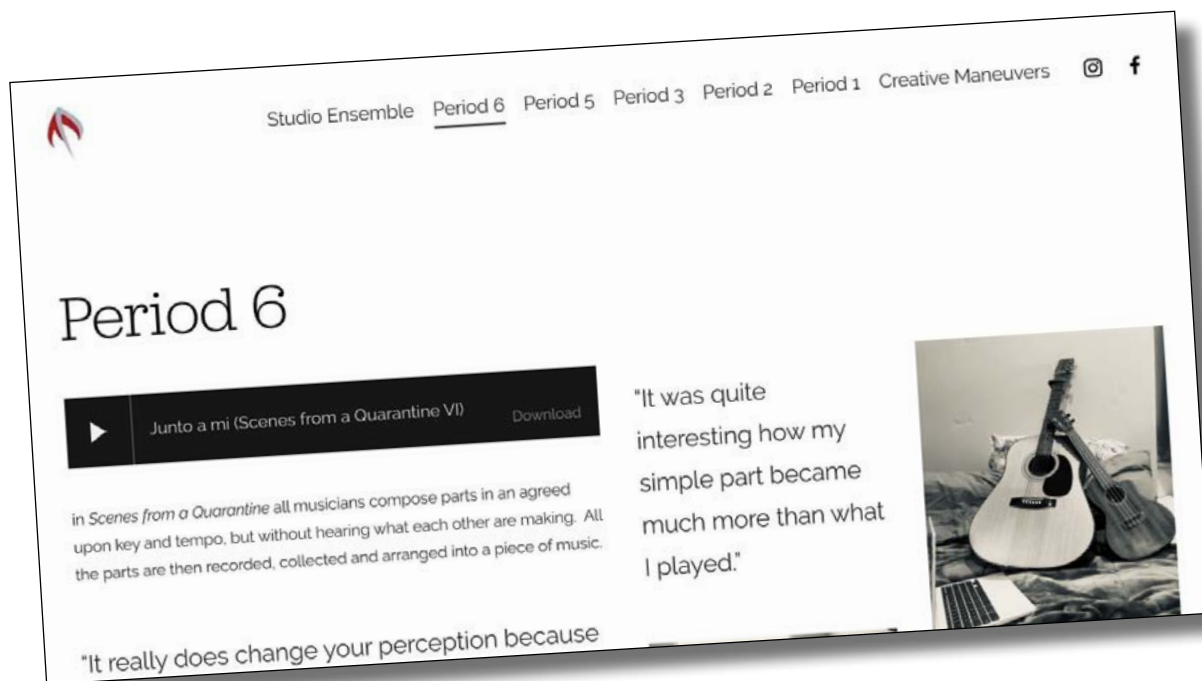
At the time of publication, Mid-Pen is developing its plans for the 2020-2021 academic year. Due to continuing shelter-in-place orders, we are unable to plan in-person fall events at this time. Visit Mid-Pen’s website and follow us on Instagram and Facebook @midpendragons for the most up-to-date information on future events. 🐉



Shan Thippawong '22, holds his phone over the trays of roly-polys so his virtual lab partner, Zia Steffan '21, can make observations.



Many Mid-Pen students used their extra time during the shelter-in-place to learn a new hobby. Julia Oram '23 taught herself how to play the guitar.



Visit Mid-Pen's new music web page to listen to songs students created and recording during the shelter in place.

Dragons Create New Music During Quarantine

For Mid-Pen's music program, the music room is a sacred space. It goes beyond collaboration. It's a vibe. Energy. A place where class is part theory, part creation, and all connection.

When Mid-Pen closed its campus and moved to distance learning, students lost the in-person togetherness that was more than a daily class; it was a favorite part of their day. Zoom meetings couldn't replace it.

To help his students push through the separation and grief of being apart, Music Teacher Jameson Swanagon had them experiment with a different type of creative process—one that challenged them to learn recording technology as well as reflect on methods that worked, and those that didn't. Students compiled a list of what they call Creative Maneuvers, "things to do when you sit down to make music," said Jameson.

Students used the Maneuvers to start the creative process, whether at the beginning of a session, when they ran into the musical equivalent of writer's block, or when they wanted to experiment for fun.

"I think it was a really good way for my band to work together to problem-solve ways to create our pieces," said Bridget Cruz '21, whose vocals are heard in sixth-period music class. "I think it also definitely brought us a

little closer together and made the experience more fun. Just having fun with what you're creating and knowing that it doesn't always have to be perfect was definitely something I took away from the whole thing."

Students in each class then recorded *Scenes from a Quarantine*, where each musician composed their part in an agreed-upon key and tempo, but without hearing what the others were making. They were encouraged to use Creative Maneuvers while discovering and documenting new ones.

One Maneuver asked students to "imagine or hum a melody. Find the notes on your instrument. Repeat melody many times to see if you hear developments or refinements."

All the parts were recorded individually and collected. Jameson then arranged the tracks into a piece of music. The end-result of their work is a new Mid-Pen Music website, where visitors can listen to a compilation of music that each class created while apart. Students also shared photos of their home workspace while they shelter in place and their thoughts about the creative process.

"Sometimes what you create doesn't have to sound like music at all," said Bridget. 🐉

Mid-Pen's Commitment to Antiracism

At the end of May, while seniors were celebrating their graduations in virtual ceremonies around the country, hundreds of thousands of Americans were crowding the streets of towns and cities from California to Maine in protests sparked by the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by police officers.

With Mid-Pen officially out for the summer, Head of School Phil Gutierrez wrote to parents on June 2, speaking to the moment by affirming the school's support for Black Lives Matter and its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

"I recall when, during my junior year at UC Berkeley, Rodney King was brutally beaten by police officers in Los Angeles, and riots broke out," wrote Phil. "Nearly 30 years later, I ask myself: how much has our country changed?"

He noted that Mid-Pen's core values of respect, kindness, acceptance, and responsibility are the heart of the school community: "We believe diversity enriches our school culture, brings different perspectives to conversations, and leads to deeper academic and social connections in our classrooms, on campus, and beyond. We continue to examine our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts, and while we make progress, we know there is always more we can do."

Over the summer the school held a series of online town hall meetings with parents, teachers, and students to begin a conversation about systemic racism in the country and the role the Mid-Pen community can play in fostering change.

Several of the sessions included breakout affinity group meetings, one for BIPOC families (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), led by Phil, and one for White Allies, led by teachers Ethan Weker and Michelle Boire. Combined



Katrina Drury '20 was inspired to create this painting, entitled "They Can't Breathe," in honor of George Floyd.

with full-group meetings, affinity spaces lead to open conversations as attendees have a pre-established connection with others in this space. Conversations are confidential and contained. Even in a shared affinity space, people recognize the diversity of attendees in terms of background and experience. Mid-Pen will continue these conversations throughout the coming school year as the community works to become dedicated antiracists.

Emphasizing that Mid-Pen stands as an ally in the movement for racial justice, Phil concluded his June letter: "My heart is with everyone in our community, especially those of you who are experiencing increased apprehension and concern over the safety of your loved ones. Mid-Pen stands in support of you. We see you. We hear you. We are with you. We are together." 🍷

Look Beyond the Headlines By Nyla Bylers '22

During quarantine, we have been hit with a wave of racism that has made the whole country rage. The deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and many more have caused people to let their voices be heard. Since the protests have been happening, the news has focused on the negative side of the protests; yet there have been positives. I was in Oakland before looting began. My family and I passed through downtown and saw so many beautiful signs and nothing but peace. The media only showed the looting and rioting that happened hours later. In East Palo Alto there were also many peaceful protests put on by community organizations and groups. People are speaking up, educating themselves, and not worried about their rage showing. This is what it will take for our country to change.



A doorway memorial in Oakland, as photographed by Elsie Sussman '23.



Students Welcome DragonWeek 2020

Mid-Pen kicked off 2020 by hosting its first DragonWeek, a week-long intersession in January between the first and second semesters. From hiking in Greece to creating spraypaint art in Los Angeles, mountain biking on local trails, writing and recordings songs, exploring nature—and a forensics lab—DragonWeek was enjoyed and appreciated by students and staff. 🐉



Mid-Pen Teachers Learn from Dyslexia Simulation

The tables were turned on Mid-Pen faculty and staff in January when they became “students” in a classroom simulation that illustrated the challenges faced by students with dyslexia and other learning differences. Gail Reimer P’22 brought the simulation to Mid-Pen with the help of learning specialist Ed Stern. One workstation, the “Unfair Hearing Test,” simulated the experience of students with hearing impairments by having participants take a dictated spelling test while trying to block out distracting classroom noises. Adding to the challenge, the “teacher” frequently interrupted the “students” while they worked.

“It is one thing to know a student is dyslexic. It is entirely another to learn what dyslexics face in the classroom. When you participate in the simulation, you really understand that the work is not effort dependent. The simulation does an excellent job of showing how hard kids with learning challenges are working and that, unfortunately, it doesn’t always ‘look’ that way.” - Gail Reimer, P’22

Mid-Pen Science Teacher Meenu Baloda shared that based on the dyslexia simulation, she changed the way she interacts with students. “I actually have stopped interrupting students when they are working on a task,” she said. “I give them instructions and let them focus on their work instead of continuous comments that I used to do. I’ve also started incorporating more group activities, with two to three students, to lower anxiety in students who shut down as soon as they see an assignment that they don’t understand entirely.” 🐉

Student Author Publishes First Book

Mid-Pen sophomore Collette “Coco” Zubizaretta always wanted to become an author. With the publication of her first collection of short stories, *A Little Bit Creative*, she made her dream come true.

Coco first began noodling the idea of writing a book in middle school when she embarked on a project with her friends. After they graduated from eighth grade, the book stalled. As is the tale of many writers, she’d start a story and find herself with writer’s block. That is, until her sophomore year when she landed in Cory Huttenga’s English class.

Cory asks his students to take five minutes of each class to freewrite, which is a writing exercise used to generate ideas without restrictions. Coco took the stories and poems from her freewrites in Cory’s class and continued developing those works at home. Her grandmother, author Alma Flor Ada, asked Coco if she would co-write a book with her. When Coco showed Alma her freewrites, *A Little Bit Creative* was born. Coco’s mom, Hannah Brooks, designed the cover art, which adds to the specialness of this collaborative effort.

With her grandmother’s help, Coco was able to self-publish her book in March. Her grandmother called her with the news: “Congratulations, you are officially a published author. Go check it out on Amazon!”

When Coco found her book listed, she said it felt like a dream. “It didn’t feel real at all. It felt like I was going to wake up and it’d be gone.”

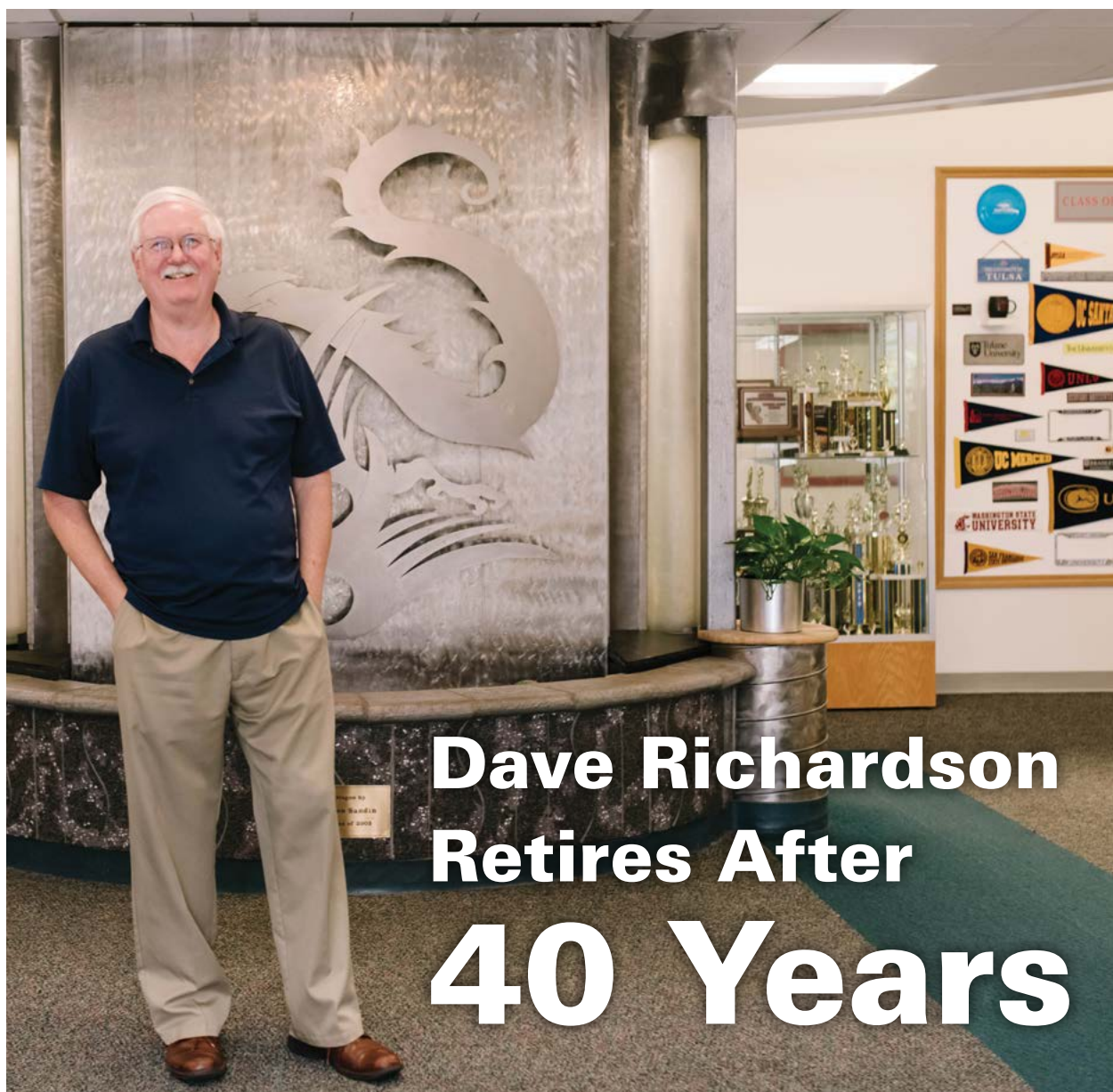
But her book is very real. Her stories in the collection are presented in English and Spanish. The translations, which were done by her grandmother, are lyrical and flow as if they were written specifically for the language.

“I would describe Coco’s writing style as delicate,” said Cory. “Her prose often reads as if she carefully knitted each word onto the page and her simple yet varied sentence structures create a soothing rhythm...Her narrative voice seems to quietly sing to readers—just above a whisper. With her developing ear for dialogue and her rich descriptions, she consistently succeeds in bringing her characters to life.”

Coco is working on a new project with a grade-school friend; the two will use a single pen name when it’s published.

We can’t wait! 🌸





Dave Richardson Retires After 40 Years

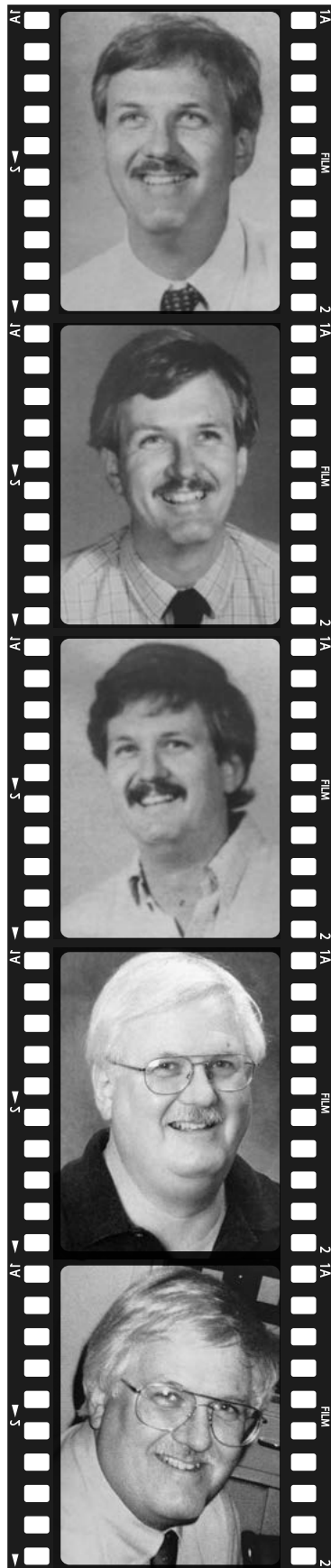
Dave Richardson joined Mid-Pen in the summer of 1980, just one year after its founding, drawn to the opportunity to help create a new school with a unique vision. In June—four decades, four heads of school, and three campuses later—Dave retired as College Advisor, Academic Director, and Government Teacher.

During his 40 years at Mid-Pen, Dave took on almost every role a person can have at a school: teaching history and government classes, coaching teachers, handling business operations, managing school facilities, and advising students on their college applications. He also embraced a myriad of other responsibilities at Mid-Pen,

from Costco runs for school barbecues to planning every last detail of Mid-Pen's traditional senior ceremonies and graduation.

Director of Technology Anne Marie Schar, who worked with Dave for nearly 20 years, recalled that she didn't understand what Dave's role was when she first joined the school. Over the years, she learned the simple truth: "Dave does everything."

As a teacher, Dave was known for his intelligence and storytelling skills. "In class, we could ask him any question about history, and from what I recall, he always knew not just the answer, but the whole story," remembered Emily Wentz '03. "He was so passionate and loved to share his



knowledge, so we liked to try to distract him and get him to tell us fun stories. My favorites were when we got him to go on long diatribes all about Watergate and the Manson family murders. He knew everything! I remember his stories vividly because he told them so accurately and with such enthusiasm."

Not only is Dave a student of U.S. history, but he also has a passion for Mid-Pen history. No one else knows Mid-Pen as well, and his memory is a virtual vault of school trivia and memorabilia.

"I think of him as the school's unofficial archivist," said Director of Development Henry Trevor. "He knows everything and everyone. I can't count the number of times I have asked him about an alum who graduated from the school 20 years ago, and he is always able to instantly recall them. He even remembers their grades, what teams they played on, and what they did after Mid-Pen."

If he can't remember a specific detail, Dave simply grabs one of the many binders or folders he's maintained over the years to document the journey of the school, from newspaper clippings to a spreadsheet of Mid-Pen milestones.

Chloe Kamprath, who served as Head of School in the 1990s and worked with Dave for nearly three decades, said the Mid-Peninsula High School that they joined as young teachers in the 1980s was very different from the school of today. There were many challenges associated with being a new startup amid a sea of established, traditional competitors.

"We created something that continues; our hard work built a school," she reflected. "It is good to know we contributed to the success of so many young people. And Dave was always there 'carrying the torch.' Remembering the little things which needed to be done. Telling good stories. Helping us ask and answer the hard questions. Working when no one else was."

Over the years, Mid-Pen has changed, but it has always remained small. To music teacher Jameson Swanagon, the school's size has allowed Dave to have an outsized impact. "My curriculum is steeped in inspiring figures, with sweeping cultural impacts and, often, corresponding fame," he said. "But for me, in many ways, Dave has been more impactful and more inspiring because he demonstrates, unwaveringly, the beauty of making a huge impact at a very local level. His steadfast loyalty, uber-competence, love of just being in the building, zen-like dedication to doing things better with each repetition—year





after year these have yielded results that, I would argue, have changed many lives, in perhaps unrecognizable ways, for the better.”

Former Head of School Doug Thompson recalled that when he first heard that Dave was retiring, “the idea of Dave not being at Mid-Peninsula High School was unthinkable. I can’t begin to think of Dave leaving Mid-Pen or Mid-Pen without Dave. But then I realized something: he is so much a part of the school, his presence and personality so ingrained in its very nature,

that of course, Dave will never leave. As long as there is a Mid-Peninsula High School, Dave will be there, fully present, big as life itself.”

Although Dave is retiring from his daily role at Mid-Pen, the Mid-Pen community can look forward to his continued involvement as he assists Assistant Head of School Heidi Schielsser as she takes on the role of College Advisor. We will be fortunate to continue to enjoy Dave’s storytelling. 🐉



I got into NYU!”

The quiet in Mid-Pen’s Core classes was interrupted when senior Lola Johnson yelled with surprise.

“I got into NYU! I got into NYU!” she cheered, her voice getting louder as she rushed through the second floor of Mid-Pen’s campus and approached her destination: the office of College Advisor Dave Richardson.

It was empty.

“Congratulations, Lola!” said Director of Communications Charlene Prince Birkeland, who was sitting nearby in the school staff room. “Dave will be right back—I’ll make sure he finds you!”

Lola smiled ear to ear and returned back to her classroom, but not before throwing one more triumphant “I got into NYU!” hurrah into the air.

Moments later, Dave returned to his office. “Lola was looking for you. She wanted to share her big news!” said Charlene.

“I heard!” Dave laughed. “Everyone did!”

As Dave explained, being a college advisor brings a delayed gratification. He works with each student to determine the best college fit and helps each senior through the application process. And then, finally, weeks later, he witnesses their joy—or hears it, as was the case with Lola.

Leaning against the couch in the staff room, he folded his arms and paused for a moment: “I have the best job at the school.



Celebrating the Class of 2020

Mid-Pen's Class of 2020 had already lost out on its last all-school prom. Hopes of an in-person graduation ceremony and experiencing Mid-Pen's senior rites of passage were dashed as California's shelter-in-place order was extended through June and cases of COVID-19 were increasing across the country. During an all-class meeting, seniors were asked to share their ideas about alternatives to an on-campus graduation. The thought seemed impossible. How could an online graduation capture the joy of Mid-Pen's traditional ceremony?

The truth: it couldn't. Instead of trying to recreate the pomp and circumstance of an in-person event, the school embraced the medium of digital technology and hosted the most untraditional, perfectly Mid-Pen event.

On Saturday, May 30, the 31 members of the Class of 2020 were honored in a virtual graduation ceremony that was livestreamed over Facebook. More than 200 members of the Mid-Pen community from near and far gathered online and, for 90 minutes, were connected in spirit as they celebrated these special students.

The story of Mid-Pen's online graduation opened the livestream with the school mascot, Dungee the Dragon, arriving at school in a cap and gown only to find the ceremony had been canceled due to COVID-19.



After an initial bout of disappointment, Dungee had a brilliant idea and arranged a Zoom meeting for his senior classmates. And so began the school's 40th commencement exercises, as students appeared on screen to the sounds of "Pomp and Circumstance."

Head of School Phil Gutierrez welcomed the community while broadcasting live from his home. "This day is truly special because of the seniors we are honoring, the Mid-Peninsula High School Class of 2020," he said. "We



"Mid-Pen taught me that school doesn't have to be something I dread and that learning can be fun and interactive, and that really good teachers who care about you in all aspects of your life really do exist. I am going to continue to look for those kinds of people and communities. Once you have experienced it or seen it, you know in the future what to look for. To my fellow graduates, my wish is that we all find it."

Kiarra Plaza



know that this day isn't at all what you had envisioned at the start of your senior year, and I so wish that we could have real-life pomp and circumstance surrounding all of you. Trust me when I say that the adults viewing our ceremony today have all of that pageantry and more in their hearts for this class. We want this day to be meaningful, joyful, and memorable for the seniors and their families."

Graduates were presented with their diplomas by their Core teachers. Earlier in May, each senior—dressed in their red cap and gown—had a Zoom meeting with their Core teacher, who delivered heartfelt messages of congratulations and thanks to their students. These moments captured the essence of what Core means at Mid-Pen, as the audience could see the close bond between students and the Core teachers who have watched their growth during their years at school.

As each student received their diploma, members of the Mid-Pen community cheered for them by leaving congratulatory comments and emojis on Facebook. More than 800 comments were posted during the ceremony, including messages from family members and friends of students, classmates, alums, alum parents, faculty, and staff.

Whether virtually or in person, a Mid-Pen graduation always includes senior speakers. This year, Emma Marek and Kiarra Plaza shared their speeches in pre-recorded segments during the ceremony. Live segments included the presentation of awards to Mid-Pen seniors. Viewers watched as Core teachers surprised the award winners by calling them on the air to share that they'd won. When Cory

Huttenga called Natalie Nuñez to let her know she received the Douglas C. Thompson Award for Inspired Growth, the sound of her family erupting in cheers was heard as soon as she'd answered the phone.

Mid-Pen's graduation ceremony also usually includes a live performance by the Senior Ensemble. This year, the nine members of the band were showcased in a special music video covering the song "Don't You (Forget About Me)" by Simple Minds. The students recorded their individual tracks at home. Music teacher Jameson Swanagon blended the tracks to create a unified song. The students also recorded videos of themselves, which were used to create a music video that paid homage to the original 1980s video, when the song was featured in the soundtrack to the movie *The Breakfast Club*.

AWARD WINNERS

ELY AWARD
Keri Chu

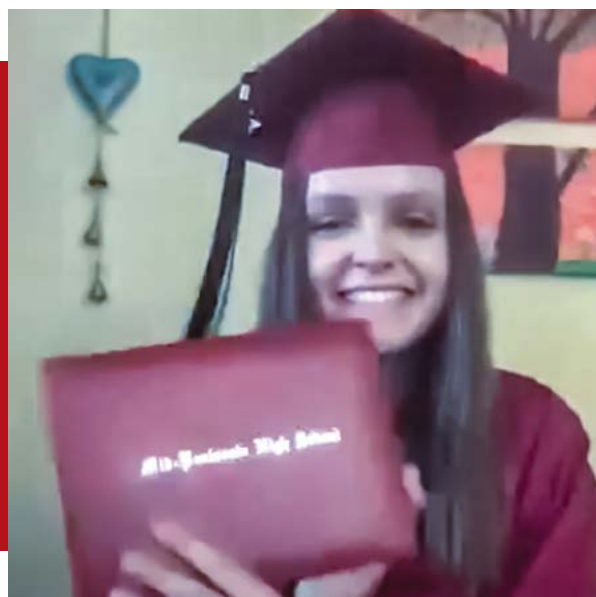
THOMPSON AWARD
Isaac Rodriguez, Natalie Nuñez

SENIOR AWARD
Rachel Vogel

FOUNDERS AWARD
Emma Marek

"My English teacher Laurie taught me to always look up the words I use when I'm writing for her class, so I looked up the word "community." The etymology of the word "community" is fellowship, and I think it's very fitting to Mid-Pen. I feel a fellowship with each and every person who's watching this amazing virtual graduation, and I'm sure I don't even know half of you. But I do know that you are part of our community in some way, and because of that, I feel a fellowship with you. That is the strength of Mid-Pen."

Emma Marek

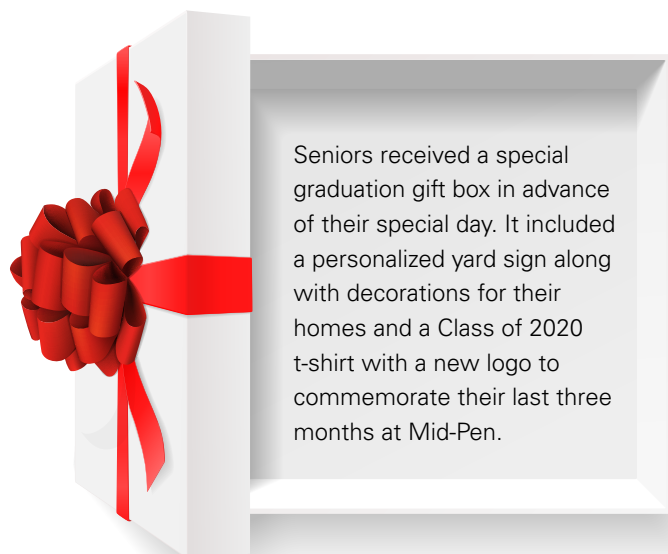


Seniors were intentionally kept in the dark about key parts of the ceremony, including special video appearances by television and movie actor Sean Astin, “Shark Tank” investor and entrepreneur Daymond John, Grammy-Award musician and actor Rick Springfield, Olympian Jonny Moseley, journalist Arthel Nevel, the Golden State Warriors Dance Cam Mom, state and local public officials, and more.

The Class of 2020 was presented to the audience as they switched their tassels from right to left and tossed

their caps into the air. The ceremony ended with a recessional montage of each student waving goodbye as the song “A Thousand Miles” by Vanessa Carlton played in the background.

The words left in a Facebook comment at the end of the graduation ceremony best expressed the feelings of the Mid-Pen community: “Congratulations Mid-Pen Class 2020!!...I've been sooo emotional watching the whole thing!...Onwards and upwards, Dragons!” 🐉



Seniors received a special graduation gift box in advance of their special day. It included a personalized yard sign along with decorations for their homes and a Class of 2020 t-shirt with a new logo to commemorate their last three months at Mid-Pen.



NEXT STEPS FOR THE CLASS OF 2020

Congratulations to the Class of 2020 on their acceptances to the following post-secondary programs. Programs in bold are those that students will be attending in the fall.

Arizona State University
Boston University
Cañada College
Capilano University
College of San Mateo
College of the Siskiyous
Columbia College Chicago
CSU, Chico
CSU, East Bay

CSU, Monterey Bay
De Anza College
DePauw University
Drexel University
Duquesne University
Foothill College
Fordham University
Franklin & Marshall College
Hawaii Pacific University

Lake Forest College
Lawrence University
Lewis & Clark College
Linfield College
Louisiana State University
Michigan State University
Mills College
Naropa University
New York University



Ohio State University
Ohlone College
Oregon State University
Pacific University
Penn State University
Purdue University
Reed College
Rutgers University
Saint Martin University
San Francisco State University
San Jose City College
San Jose State University
Scripps College
Seattle University

Skidmore College
Sonoma State University
St. Mary's College
Syracuse University
The New School/Parsons School of Design
University of Arizona
University of California, Irvine
University of California, Merced
University of California, Riverside
University of California, Santa Cruz
University of Denver
University of Hawaii
University of Illinois, Chicago
University of Kansas

University of Massachusetts, Amherst
University of Minnesota
University of Montana Western
University of Oregon
University of Pittsburgh
University of Portland
University of Puget Sound
University of Redlands
University of San Francisco
Wheaton College
Willamette University
Xavier University

The Shortest Season

By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

Mid-Pen's spring sports season was cut short by the pandemic. Before Mid-Pen transitioned to distance learning, the co-ed tennis team won their season opener. It would turn out to be their only match of spring. Track and field were well into their practices, and scrimmages were scheduled for the newly formed co-ed badminton and boys volleyball teams.

BOYS VARSITY BASKETBALL

Coaches: Erin Whittaker '93 and Kurt Lange

While we missed our spring sports season, we opened 2020 and the second semester of the school year in the midst of an exciting basketball season for the Boys Varsity team. After a tough 2018-2019 season, they were determined to turn things around. And did they ever, winning their first five non-league games. The Dragons stayed strong in January and February, finishing 8-4 for third place in our division, and qualifying for the Central Coast Section Playoffs. They played with hustle and heart, but they were knocked out of the playoffs in a tight game versus the Nueva Mavericks. Andries Castellano '21 was voted to the All-League First Team, Sebi Strachan '21 was voted to the All-League Second Team, and Noah Takatsuno '22 received an Honorable Mention. It was an impressive season thanks to the grit and determination of the team.



JV BOYS BASKETBALL

Coaches: Erin Whittaker '93 and Kurt Lange

For the Boys JV squad, it was a season of beginnings. Despite not getting a win through the season, these Dragons showed tremendous tenacity and growth on the court and over the season. From ball-handling to shooting, to team offense and defense, they remained strong, and the learning curve was steep. Plan on seeing these players progress a lot next year, with a few even making an appearance on the varsity team.



GIRLS VARSITY BASKETBALL

Coaches: Erin Whittaker '93 and Kurt Lange

Although wins were hard to come by, Mid-Pen's Girls Varsity team improved their level of play with every game of the season. The Dragons were more competitive on the court, and narrowly missed wins by a few points during several games. They also doubled their total number of points scored when compared to their 2018-19 last season. Senior Valerie Rendon was voted to the All-League Second Team. With nine players returning next year, keep an eye on this group as they take another leap forward. 🐉



NISHA HUSAIN '10 Leaving Her Mark at Mid-Pen

When Nisha Husain '10 was in her senior year, she knew she wanted to leave her mark on campus through her art. If you spend time walking around the campus, you'll spot her contributions not on the walls, but in the air and on the floor.

We caught up with Nisha just before Mid-Pen closed its campus as part of global measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. We conducted our interview with Nisha via email during her spring break from the Academy of Art University (AAU) in San Francisco.

What are you studying, and how did Mid-Pen influence your college path?

I loved photography, film, and graphic design the most, and trying to pick one was hard! But it was easier after a few years had passed of discovering more of what I want. Photography is one of my strongest passions, and I have always wanted my own photo business one day. I am currently working towards my Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree (BFA) at the Academy of Art and will be graduating in May 2021!

You are clearly a talented artist. Tell us about what art meant to you at Mid-Pen.

Art was a way I was able to express myself. If I was feeling a certain way, I could channel that through art. Whether that be painting, sketching, taking photos, or even playing instruments. I am also a musician as well and play the piano, guitar, ukulele, and any instrument by ear. Mid-Pen made me feel safe to create anything in all of my artistic strengths. I felt so much support and love to create that my imagination was endless.

You designed the artwork for a podium at Mid-Pen and it's still in use. How did that project come about?

The podium brings back good memories of sanding and painting that awkward piece. During my junior year at Mid-Pen, I was approached by my Algebra 2 teacher, Jody. She wanted to purchase some art pieces I had created called Rock Star Eclipse and Music. I declined her offer because I do not sell originals, but I said I would create something else for her if she provided the materials. She showed me the podium that she would use every day during class, and stated how this podium was as old as



Mid-Pen. It was there when Mid-Pen was founded. Jody went on and on and ON, about how UGLY this podium was and that I should paint on it. She wanted me to copy Rock Star Eclipse and Music on the podium. I agreed this would be a fantastic idea! I worked on this all summer of 2009 and continued until it was finished in 2010 for the Art Show. I even displayed the originals behind the podium during the show.

Tell us about the guitar project.

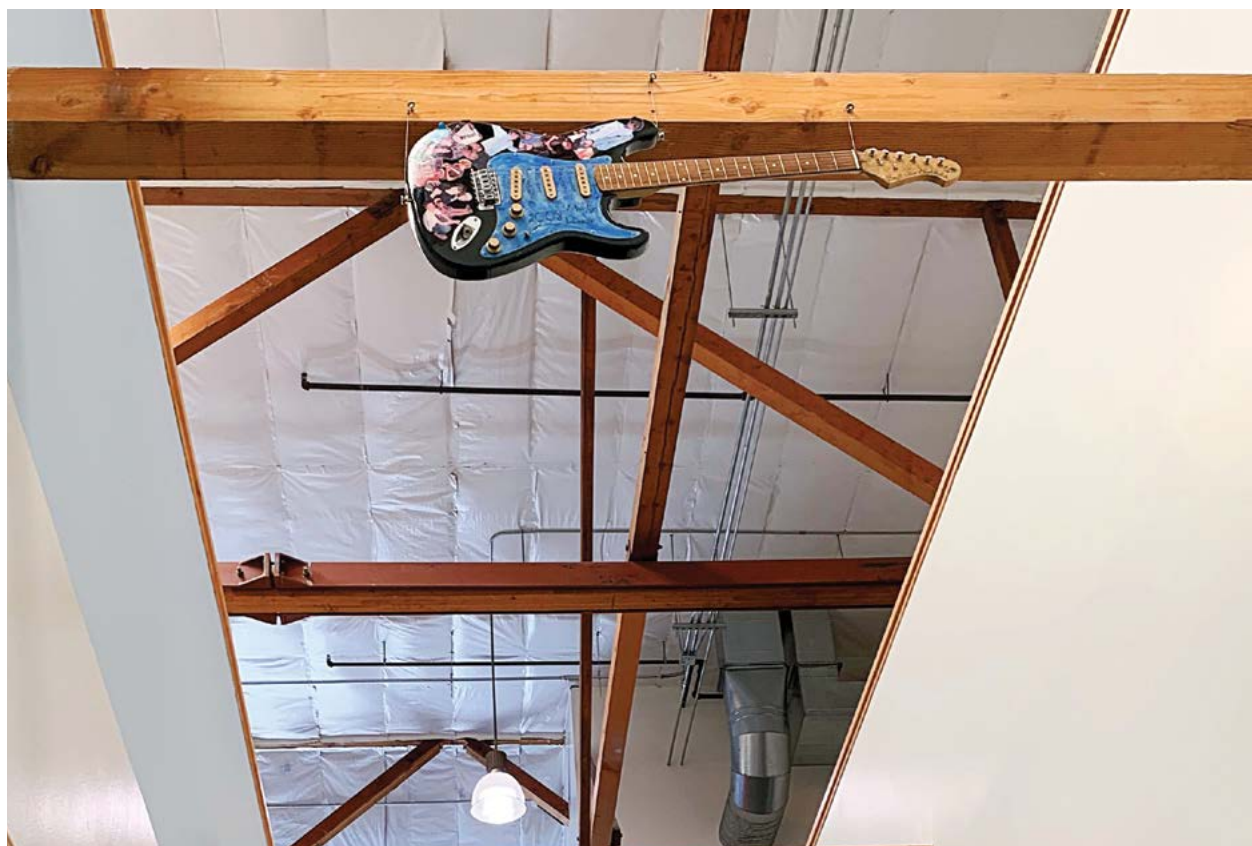
The guitar project was inspired by a heart-breaking event that happened. A fellow student, Brett Studebaker, had passed away tragically my senior year, and I saw how it affected many teachers and other students who really knew him. He was in my music classes before he graduated and was incredibly talented. Any instrument he held, he was able to create music that was exceptional. He was a true inspiration to follow your passions. Because it was my senior year, I was making my mark so I could be remembered by current and future classes. But, I was afraid anyone who attended would eventually forget who Brett was, and I didn't want that. I recently had gotten a new electric cherry red SG Epiphone guitar because my Fender knock-off had run its course. This knock-off Fender was my very first guitar and incredibly special to me. This is why I decided to create a memorial art piece out of it for Brett, so current and future students would

remember him. By leaving this piece behind, I also left a part of me too.

What advice do you have for current Mid-Pen students?

My advice for future students would be to go at your own pace. Life is not a race to see who can graduate, get a career, be successful, buy a house, find a partner, get married, have kids, first. These things that are expected from us by society does not mean they have to be done in that order or a certain time frame. Discovering who you

are and what you want in life should be the top priority. If you have a passion that is apparent right now, act on it and pursue it. Make your dream a reality. Keep in mind as time passes, we grow and mature, and new passions arise. If you are still questioning what your passions are, that doesn't mean you are less than others that know. It just means you have to try more new things until something fits like a puzzle. Do not compare yourself to others' lives because everyone is doing their own thing. Keep adventuring on your own path and leveling up in life. 🍀



David Abbott '86 responded to our 40th Anniversary Alumni Survey with the following update: "There's been lots of ups and downs in life: from geographic relocations from Arizona, Nevada, California, to really working on myself and ending up with the life and job I never would've dreamed of. I'm responsible for Amazon Web Services' (AWS) data centers in the Americas. I get to travel extensively for work and get to experience many different cultures and lifestyles. Mid Pen was a big part of how and why I got to where I am today. Grateful for the help the staff provided me during some very trying times."

The coach of the Mid-Pen tennis team since its first season in 2016, **Bryan Jeong '06** was disappointed that this year's

season was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He is also the Women's Head Tennis Coach at Cañada College, as well as the Girls' Head Tennis Coach at San Mateo High School.

Congratulations to **Campbell Winslow '10**, who graduated from Cogswell College in 2019. After Mid-Pen, he writes, "I floundered a bit at Chico State, figuring out what I want to do. But I'm proud to say after graduating with a BA in Digital Arts last year, I've just started my career as a 3-D modeler at a tech company in San Jose. The college I graduated from reminded me a lot of Mid-Pen, and I know my high school experience helped prepare me as a person for troubles I faced later on."



Young Alums Discuss "Alternative Paths" After Mid-Pen

Parents and students joined six young alumni at a virtual roundtable in April to hear about their experience in the work world, taking a gap year, and attending community college before transferring to four-year institutions.

Our alums truly impressed with their thoughtful stories, insight, and sense of humor. Read more about these alums on our Alumni Spotlight web pages at mid-pen.org.

"No matter what you do, do it well. Trust that no matter what, you know what you're going to be able to do."
– Emmett Rodriguez '16

Emmet is dancing his way through life as a full-time teacher for the First-Step program and a member of the New Ballet San Jose.



"The world was not made for me, so how am I going to set it up for myself?"
– Charlotte Rayfield '16

Charlotte attends the University of Nevada, Reno, where she studies anthropology.



"I had a leap of faith on my own and I struggled for a long time, and I made it work. I'm thankful and lucky for everyone I had around me."
– Maya Mulleneaux '17

Maya lives in Billings, Montana, and is building a new business fueled by her passion for horse wrangling.



"I made choices that were sort of unexpected and I found my path by making random choices that happened to work out."
– Casey Schaefer '16

Casey will begin her final year at William & Mary where she is earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology.



"My plan was built in reverse. I knew I was going to go to college, I just didn't know when."
– Nick Hinson '17

Nick completed his second year studying political science at the University of Portland.



"If you are passionate enough about it you should pursue it."
– Elina Smith-Leitch '15

Elina graduated from the University of San Francisco this spring with a degree in performing arts.



Ryan Ramakrishnan '14 is attending Lesley University in Boston, where he is pursuing a degree in digital film making.

Congratulations to **Victor Steele '16**, who received his bachelor of science degree in business administration from Southern New Hampshire University this spring. After completing his freshman year at Sonoma State University, he transferred to SNHU for the remainder of his college career. He graduated Summa Cum Laude (with highest honors), maintaining at GPA of 3.9 throughout his entire course of studies. "In today's world, my main hope is to be gainfully employed for many years to come," he writes.

Julia Gold '17 is studying psychology at Sonoma State and has been recently hired at a Behavior Interventionist with Burnett Therapeutic Services in Napa. "I work with children on the autism spectrum and currently have four clients for whom I provide ABA home therapy," she writes. "I am currently studying to become a Board Certified Autism Technician (BCAT) through the Board Intervention Certification Council (BICC)."

Andrew Dollente '19 was named to Dean's List for Fall 2019 semester at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Reflections on a Remarkable Year

We began in October with a celebration of Mid-Pen's 40th anniversary, gathered for a recording-breaking DragonFest in February, learned the art of Zoom meetings in March, and honored our graduates in the school's first-ever online graduation ceremony in May. Who had even heard of a "virtual graduation" just a few months ago?

Through it all, the Mid-Pen community has shown phenomenal resilience. COVID-19 has changed our daily lives, but the school's commitment to ensuring the richness of our student's classroom experience, whether online or in person, has remained steadfast. We are grateful to our teachers and administrators, who have demonstrated all their creativity in making the shift to online learning; to our students for their hard work in making a difficult transition; and to our parents, alumni, alumni parents, and friends for all their support.

Despite the uncertainty of the past few months, Mid-Pen is thriving. The school's financial health is strong, and we are well-positioned to weather any future headwinds. A significant increase in enrollment over the past three years has generated robust tuition revenue, which has been matched by a steady increase in philanthropic giving, allowing the school to finish recent fiscal years above expectations. Combined with a thoughtful budgeting process led by the Finance Committee, these factors have allowed the Board of Trustees to build healthy reserves for the school.

Additionally, the admission picture for the fall is very promising. Thanks to the work of the admissions office, the faculty and staff, and our many student and parent ambassadors, we will welcome approximately 40 new students in August. The fact that so many new families are sending their children to us in the midst of this crisis is a testament to the school's collective strength.

In countless ways, your contributions make a real difference to Mid-Peninsula High School. Your gifts are tangible evidence of your commitment to the school, and your generosity ensures an exceptional environment for teaching and learning, allowing our students to explore, discover, and grow.

The cornerstone of the school's fundraising efforts, the **Mid-Pen DragonFund** raised \$340,237 with the participation of 100 percent of our faculty and trustees and approximately 80 percent of our parent body, plus many alumni, alumni parents, former trustees, and

friends. The DragonFund touches daily life at Mid-Pen by supporting everything from drama productions and class trips to financial aid and professional development for our outstanding faculty—priorities that have only become even more important during these uncertain times. Many thanks to DragonFund chair Lynn Poland P'21 and the half dozen parents who volunteered during our fall and spring phonathons.

Pictured on the following pages, February's **DragonFest** was equally successful, netting nearly \$157,000, including \$96,700 in Fund-a-Need donations to underwrite the renovations of several classrooms. Held just one month before shelter-in-place restrictions banned large gatherings, the event brought together 185 guests representing all segments of the school community for a trip back to 1979-80, when Mid-Pen opened its doors to its first students 40 years ago. Co-Chairs Jill Andre P '20 and Jana Weaver P '21 once again truly did an exceptional job.

Additionally, over the past year the school received \$95,707 in support of financial aid, as well as \$39,668 in restricted gifts, including \$7,228 donated by parents (and one graduating senior!) to refresh and redecorate the second-floor staff room in appreciation of the exceptional work of faculty and staff this year.

Thank you again for your support of Mid-Peninsula High School. As we work together to adjust to the "new normal," with love and compassion for our communities, the well-being of the Mid-Pen community—students, teachers, parents, and alumni—continues to be foremost in our minds.

We couldn't do it without you.

Tim Biglow P'13 and Debbie Vielbaum
Co-Chairs, Board of Trustees





DRAGONFUND GIFTS

INDIVIDUALS

Anonymous (2)
 Phil Abrahamson & Dana Shelley
 Antonio & Anne Abreu
 Bernardo Acuna & Ofelia Acuna
 Kaci Anderson & Francis Phiri
 Bart Andre
 Jill Andre
 Thomas Annau & Kelly Lawrence
 Mark Anson & Mary Hayes 10
 Jon Austin
 Meenu Baloda
 Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton
 Gregory Bellomy & Karen Bloom
 Daniel Beringer
 Caitlin Berka 5
 Jason & Gaylene Biggs
 Tim & Carolyn Biglow 5
 Jeff Birkeland &
 Charlene Prince Birkeland
 Michelle Boire 5
 Steve & Gabriella Bowling 10
 Lisa & Detlef Braun 10
 Susan Briggs
 Jennifer & Ken Burton
 Amy Cai
 Alan Cameron 5
 Erik & Lisa Carlson
 Armando Castellano &
 Andrea de Wit
 Gilberto Ceja & Alma Hernandez
 Gerald & Paula Chacon
 Clifford Chang & Laura Medanich
 Yu-Tse & Jui-Ping Chen
 Kris Chiongbian & Justin Strachan
 Gillian & C. Wesley Christensen 5
 Dean & Wilma Chu
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 Christopher & Deborah Crouse
 Joe De Primo 5
 Jim & Susanne Dern 10
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 Thomas & Maureen Dollente 5
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 Michael & Ruth Fletcher
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 Andrew & Patricia Galligan 10
 Quin Garcia '99
 Jeffrey & Kari Garratt
 Levi & Gisele Garraway
 Ted Geballe
 Ernesto Godinez & Fedra Romero
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 Amy Harber
 Merrilee Harris 5
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 Earl Jackson
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 Alfred & Maureen Lane
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 Henry Leinhos
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 Aidan Lloyd-Tucker '18
 Raymond & Mia Locsin
 Efen & Susan Lopez
 Keith & Lisa Lucas
 Alejandro Magaña &
 Araceli Marcial
 Lizbeth Magaña '17
 Alexander & Diane Main
 Anthony Marek
 Kathleen Marek
 Georgios Margaritis &
 Annette Odello
 Cynthia McKinley
 Kevin McKinley
 Anna Meklin
 Stephanie Messina 5
 Laurie Miller & Van Whitis 10
 Mark & Diana Minkowski
 Elizabeth Moore 10
 Ryan Moriguchi '91 10

Gary Mulleneaux &
 Amy Christen 5
 Glayde Myers & Stacy Fox-Myers 5
 Robert Nelsen & Ellyn Hennecke
 J.D. Northway 10
 John Northway & Lisa Grote
 David Oliver 5
 Aryana Ong-Beith '19
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 Joy & C. Larry O'Rourke 10
 Paul Pitlick & Janet St. Peter 5
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Yuqing Wu '19
Harriett & Cleveland Wycoff

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Donna Young
Kirstin & Linton Young
Daniel Zimond & Dina Ramm
Gabriel Zubizarreta &
Hannah Brooks

CORPORATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, AND MATCHING GIFTS

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DESIGNATED GIFTS

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

Music Program

Anthony Marek

Theatre Program

Anonymous
Robert Johnstone
Anthony Marek

RESTRICTED GIFTS

The following donors made gifts restricted for specific purposes.

Class Trips

Lisa & Detlef Braun 10

The Douglas C. Thompson Fund for Class Trips

Laurie Miller & Van Whitis 10
Kirstin & Linton Young

Financial Aid

Kendall Anderson '12 5
The Eucalyptus Foundation
The Hurlbut-Johnson Charitable
Trusts 10
Kenneth & Anne Lawler
The Mid-Pen Parents Association
Krish & Padma Ramakrishnan 5

The Mid-Pen Promise Campaign

Jason & Lisa Peery
The Peery Foundation

Music Program

Juliana Sonneveld &
Kevin Salvadori

Staff Room Renovations

In appreciations of the Mid-Pen's dedicated teachers, administrators, and staff.

Jacqueline Anderson &
Frank Meerkamp
Thomas Annau & Kelly Lawrence
Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton
Gregory Bellomy & Karen Bloom
Daniel Beringer
Susan Briggs
Amy Cai
Armando Castellano &
Andrea de Wit

Gilberto Ceja & Alma Hernandez
Yu-Tse & Jui-Ping Chen

Kris Chiongbian &
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Gabriele & Stephen Scheid

Steven & Renna Shee
John Slafsky & Amy Rosenberg





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 Jing Wang & Hongjun Zhu
 Jana & Phil Weaver
 Lester & Ava Wollman
 Amy Wright
 Hsi-Jung Wu & Emily Chow
 Krishna & Annapurna Yarlagadda
 Kirstin & Linton Young
 Donna Young
 Gabriel Zubizarreta &
 Hannah Brooks

SUNSHINE FUND

Established in 2019, the Sunshine Fund assists Mid-Pen families in need, whether due to a medical emergency, a temporary financial setback, or some other unexpected crisis. This past spring, the Fund received \$12,866 in gifts from the following donors. We distributed nearly \$10,000 in gift cards, equipment to assist students with distance learning, and direct grants to Mid-Pen families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mark Anson & Mary Hayes 10
 Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton
 Michael & Ruth Fletcher
 Michael Gordon & Loren Gordon
 Kim Hix

Alan Kondo & Yuka Ono
 Kurt Lange 10
 Keith & Lisa Lucas
 Daniel Ogburn & Kim Rosenberg
 Paul Rosenblum &
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 Ethan Weker 5

HONOR AND MEMORIAL GIFTS

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 Jamie Schiessler

Maya Mulleneaux '17
 Gary Mulleneaux &
 Amy Christen 5

John Northway & Lisa Grote
 J.D. Northway 10

Nick Stankovich '05
 Christina Stankovich

Jack & Maggy Prost
 Michelle Boire 5

Clevoria Wycoff
 Harriett & Cleveland Wycoff

GIFTS IN KIND

Douglas C. Thompson &
 Barbara Demartinis 10

5 5 or more years consecutive annual giving
 10 10 or more years consecutive annual giving

The list of donors includes gifts received between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of this report. We sincerely apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions. Please email henry@mid-pen.org 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

Matthew James '87

Lawrence P. Johnston †

Merrilee Harris

Dolly Patterson

Anne Marie Sachar

† deceased



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High School

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