

Mid-Peninsula High School

CONNECTIONS

M A G A Z I N E :: S U M M E R 2 0 2 1



Mid-Pen Community Together At Last, Page 2

RESPECT :: KINDNESS :: ACCEPTANCE :: RESPONSIBILITY



Over the past four years, I’ve spent a good amount of time commuting from Marin County to Mid-Pen. While it was a long drive, every morning when I pulled into the parking lot, I had a smile on my face, knowing that I was in for a terrific day at school. As my Mid-Pen journey comes to a close, I find myself alternately looking in the rearview mirror and at the road ahead for both the school and me.

The rear view shows a community’s resilience over a challenging year. Last August, we opened school remotely, with the entire 9th-grade class and transfer students meeting teachers and their classmates over Zoom. We watched COVID-19 numbers spike at different times of the year, and, finally, we re-opened campus in March. Though school life felt a bit precarious at first, life started to feel more normal over the next few weeks. When basketball games resumed in the gym, and our spring play and music concert both happened with live audiences on the field, being back at Mid-Pen felt wonderful. I was also thrilled to have an in-person graduation for the Class of 2021. I entered Mid-Pen in 2017 with this class and was fortunate to conclude my stay at Mid-Pen with them.

While no one has a GPS to help predict what lies on the road ahead of us, the return to school in the fall also means a return to the school’s collective engagement with the Mid-Pen Promise Strategic Plan, a plan meant to chart the school’s path between 2020 and 2025. The plan focuses on the Student Learning Experience, Support for Teachers and Staff, and Access, Equity, and Excellence. Before the pandemic, the faculty and staff made good progress on these different parts of the plan. We had workshops on Cultural Proficiency, instituted Restorative



Practices, examined our curricula and our Core program, and launched our first DragonWeek intersession, which will return in 2022.

The Mid-Pen Promise Strategic Plan has also given birth to a capital campaign to construct a new building behind our current building. I thank the Board for its wisdom, foresight, and courage to launch this plan in the most challenging of years. With good progress already in hand by the end of the 2020-2021 school year, I have every confidence in the campaign’s success.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to pass the leadership baton to Dr. Karen Eshoo. I have known and admired Karen for many years. She is the right leader at the right time for the school. Her compassion for students, her advocacy for equity, and her firm belief in the transformative powers of teachers make her a truly exceptional leader and educator. I know that she will change lives at Mid-Pen.

I’ll close with the following: I think that we have the absolute best mascot in the world. In elementary school, I was a Crusader; in junior high, I was a Coyote. In high school, I became a Friar. My undergraduate years made me a Bear; graduate school made me a Cardinal. At my previous school, I was a Bull. None of those comes even remotely close to the mighty Dragon. I will carry Mid-Pen with me for the rest of my life.

Once a Dragon, always a Dragon. 🐉

Phil Gutierrez
Phil Gutierrez

CONNECTIONS

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Dragons Bring Spring Energy to Campus Reopening



New beginnings of spring arrived early this year at Mid-Pen—March 3, to be exact—when the school opened its campus for in-person learning. Dragons arrived with an excitement and energy that felt like the first day of school.

“Going back to school in person after a year of lockdown felt surreal,” said Tanisha Gundubogula '24, who, like many 9th graders, had to make the transition to high school online. “The teachers, staff, and students were so supportive and made the rest of the school year a blast! I was really surprised how quick and active the school was to make each student feel as if there was no distance learning at all.”

Mid-Pen started the 2020-2021 school year online as California was experiencing a late-summer surge of COVID-19 cases. The school’s COVID-19 Task Force closely monitored state and county data trends, hoping to have students back on campus after winter break. As cases continued to increase, the school worked behind the scenes to prepare the campus for its Dragons, including ensuring that its teachers were vaccinated as soon as the state made doses available to educators.

In February, the stars aligned: COVID-19 cases declined, the county approved Mid-Pen’s hybrid learning plan, and vaccinations were made available to teachers. Finally, after far too long apart, students, faculty, and staff were

together on campus, which looked a bit different. The building was decorated with signs and arrows directing students to walk—socially distanced—in one direction. Desks were covered with plexiglass barriers. The field was home to five open-air classrooms. All learning spaces were outfitted with technology that connected students on campus with teachers or students who were still remote.

For the first few weeks, students were only on campus for morning classes and returned home for lunch and their last class of the day. Mid-Pen quickly extended in-person learning to three days a week. Soon, the campus was buzzing with Dragon energy, and it felt as close to normal as it could, even with everyone still donning masks.

As part of the Mid-Pen’s reopening, weekly COVID-19 testing was required for faculty and staff. The school was fortunate to avoid a single COVID-19 case during spring on campus.

“It’s a testament to the commitment of our community, all of whom partnered with us to help keep our students, teachers, and families healthy,” said Jorge Rodriguez, a COVID-19 Task Force member and Mid-Pen’s Director of Teaching, Learning, and Equity. “We all faced many challenges this year; seeing it through together, I think, has made us stronger.” 🐉



Mid-Pen’s Newest Dragon:
Interim Head of School
Karen Eshoo

For Interim Head of School Karen Eshoo, joining Mid-Pen is a homecoming. She’s a native San Franciscan and recently moved back to the Bay Area from Stamford, Conn., where she led King School. While being at Mid-Pen brings Karen closer to her family and friends, it’s family and friends who brought Karen to Mid-Pen in an unexpected way.

“It just feels really personal for me,” said Karen. “I have friends who went to Mid-Pen when I was in high school, including my partner, Campbell Barbee. Whenever he talks about his experiences at the school, he talks about it with so much warmth.”

We caught up with Karen as she prepared to step into her new role as Mid-Pen’s lead Dragon.

What excites you about joining Mid-Pen?

Both the mission and practice of this school compel people to get involved, and then they stay involved because there’s so much great work to continue to do together. This is a school that gets so much right. This is a school that doesn’t just talk about putting students at the center. We do it in so many ways.

What will you be doing as an Interim Head of School?

I’m here to listen and learn more about what community members love about the school, and what needs to be preserved in order to really maintain its soul. As I share back with everyone what I’m hearing them say, it will be a great way for the Mid-Pen community to reflect on their past and their future. As the school searches for a permanent Head of School, hopefully people will have a clearer sense of who we are as a school and community, and therefore who we hope to attract to lead Mid-Pen for the longer term.

What are you looking forward to at Mid-Pen?

Some of my favorite work is getting to know students and really being in relationship with them as much as possible. This is another reason I’m excited about Mid-



Pen: with 138 students, I can actually get to know them by name and face pretty quickly. That’s really going to be a gift. I’m also thrilled to come to a school where the students are going to call me Karen.

“I have so many friends who went to Mid-Pen when I was in high school. And my partner, Campbell Barbee, went to Mid-Pen. Whenever he talks about his experiences at the school, he talks about it with so much warmth.”

You have a master’s degree in medieval history and studied demons, witches, and dragons. Tell us what you love about dragons!

My favorite thing about dragons is that they can fly and spew fire at the same time... which is to say they are fierce and rightfully terrifying in most situations. As we know from *Game of Thrones* and *Harry Potter*, dragons also are capable of deep relationships with each other and with humans who seek to understand them. Those who try to control them for their own purposes will always fail; those who learn to love them as they need and want to be loved will always get loyalty in return. 🐉

Learn more about Karen in her first letter to the Mid-Pen community.



In the role of a spirit, Tonantzi Nava '24 performs a monologue on Mid-Pen's outdoor stage.

Mid-Pen Music, Drama Bring Community Together

In January, at the height of the pandemic, Mid-Pen’s music and drama teachers were wondering if students would ever be able to perform in front of a live audience before school let out for summer. The state was still grappling with COVID-19 cases and the campus wasn’t open yet for in-person learning.

In March, the uncertainty lifted. Students returned to campus for morning classes. Soon after, San Mateo County issued new guidelines for outdoor performances. Plans were hatched and under blue skies during the first few weekends in May, Dragons produced the school’s first live shows since March 2020.

“I’m just so blown away by all of the hard work students put in to make this live performance a reality,” said drama teacher Caitlin Berka of the cast and crew as she introduced the show, *Spoon River Anthology*, on opening night. Audience members sat masked on Mid-Pen blankets inside spray-painted squares on the field, with each household separated by six feet.

Spoon River Anthology is a collection of poems by Edgar Lee Masters. All scenes take place in a graveyard among the spirits of the dead. Mid-Pen students acted as the spirits and delivered monologues about losses and missed opportunities in their lives.

The play was divided into separate scenes by theme, Caitlin explained, and each song served as a capstone to a scene. “I chose songs that fit thematically. Since this was an original adaptation, I was also able to tailor the songs

to fit the voices and personalities of our amazing singers.”

A few weeks after the spring musical, the school’s student music ensembles hosted a spring concert. Families and students gathered on the field to enjoy a beautiful afternoon of music and community, which go hand in hand at Mid-Pen.

With the school’s soundproof rehearsal studio too tight to accommodate social distancing in the weeks before the concert, the Student Center became a makeshift music room. When students returned to campus in March, they used a workaround to avoid disturbing other classes in the building during the school day: headphones. Musicians could hear each other, but the rest of the school couldn’t hear the music.

“The pandemic was a challenging lesson to the substance of music—and for what music means to Mid-Pen students,” said music teacher Jameson Swanagon. With the concert, hearing our instruments out loud for the first time, and seeing and feeling the audience in front of us, I think we all realized that music is really about sharing and that as we come together to support each other taking risks and being open and vulnerable, we create community in the deepest possible sense of the word.” 🎵

Scan the QR code to hear Mid-Pen's Student Music Ensembles' new album, "Daydreams."





Students Explore Solutions Journalism, Report on California Wildfires

In the final weeks of Mid-Pen's English Fundamentals class, Literacy Advancement teacher Kit Waffle invited students to participate in a hopeful project that would give each student a voice, choice, and the understanding that they could impact change. Students would explore the role of solutions journalism to explore and document what works in the world instead of what's broken.

While the end-product would be a written news piece, students would take a deep dive into a complicated social issue to understand the problem, its impact, and potential solutions.

"The learning takes place in the process," said Kit. "It's not about the product. It's about the wrestling through it."

Students worked through a consensus process where they each pitched a challenging world problem to investigate and write about together. They settled on California wildfires, with each student exploring the subject through an angle that intrigued them, such as climate change, drought, or the legislative budget process. Along the way, the class learned about statistics, different forms of media, and how to evaluate sources for credibility and bias.

Working as an editorial team, they conducted initial research, developed questions, interviewed sources, and drafted their respective sections. The project encompassed a variety of cross-disciplinary skills, with students pulling from their knowledge in science, math, reading, writing, and geography.

Students decided to present their work as a digital booklet; together, they worked on the layout and added a social media component. The six-page leaflet includes a case study about recent wildfires, news reporting on Pacific Gas & Electric's role in wildfires, informational interviews, and helpful tips to protect homes from future fires.

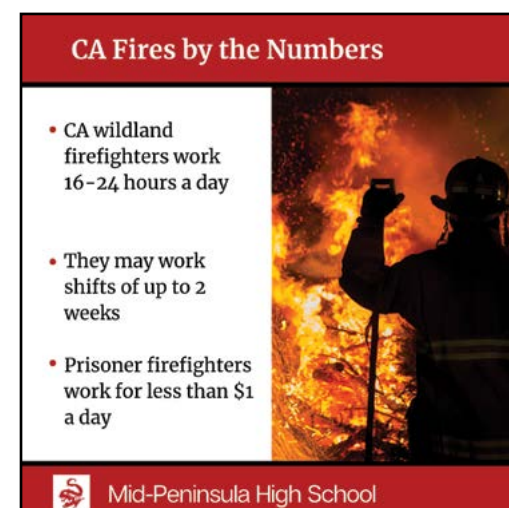
"There were some cool things that we came across that we initially wanted to include, and we didn't have space or editorial staffing," said Kit. The class was impressed

by what they learned along the way—and what they had to cut from the final project. "We got into real-life issues that will impact them for the rest of their lives. We learned to say, 'That is cool information, and we'll set it aside and leave it for another day.'"

Woven through the entire lesson, Kit noted, was Mid-Pen's mission to teach students how to make an impact in a complex world. The class took a complicated issue, identified the different components, understood them separately, saw how they were related, and then asked "How do we impact this? How can we do better?"

"Ultimately, that's what we want for our students," said Kit. "The world is messy, and they need to be able to see those parts. I love the way they were empowered to feel things out along the way, make choices about focus, what [content] would be cut and kept, and how they collaborated." 🐉

Scan the QR code to read "Solutions for Fire Threats," a booklet created by Kit Waffle's English Fundamentals class.



An infographic created by students in Kit Waffle's English Fundamentals class.



Seniors gather in the moments before their graduation ceremony.

Celebrating the Class of 2021

With an artfully arranged seating plan to accommodate social distancing, the athletic field behind the school was the site of Mid-Pen's first outdoor graduation in more than 20 years. On May 29, under sunny skies and with a stiff breeze blowing from the west, the 36 members of the Class of 2021 joined their immediate families and Mid-Pen faculty and staff to commemorate their achievements and celebrate being together.

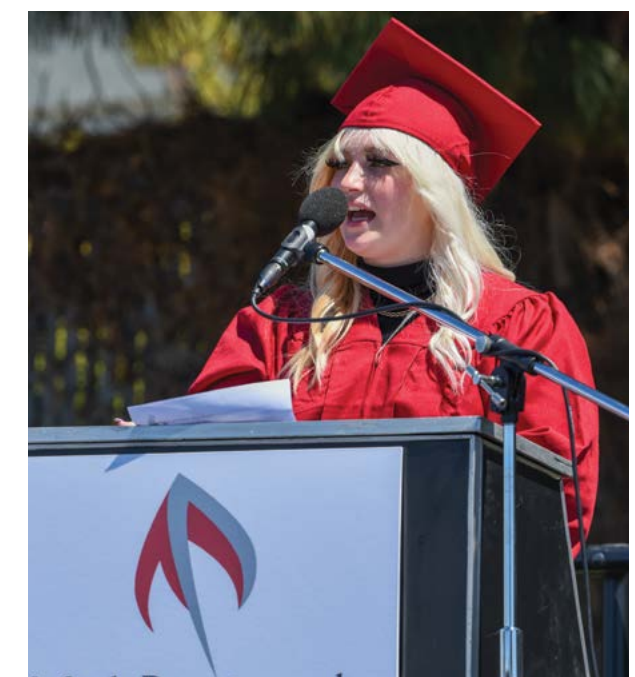
"I am thrilled to be with all of you on campus," said Head of School Phil Gutierrez in his welcome to graduates' parents, guardians, and siblings, many who had not been on campus in more than a year. "As recently as two months ago, we were not sure whether we would be able to have an on-campus celebration, and I am grateful to the medical professionals who have developed and delivered the vaccines that most of us have received so that we can be here today."

Referring to Mid-Pen's mission to "empower students with the knowledge and purpose to impact a complex world," he noted that the events of the past year and a half have been particularly complex. "No clear timeline exists in which humanity will solve the world's complexities," he said, "but this class has shown me what resilience, optimism, and connection look like. They showed kindness to one another remotely and in person. These seniors led the way with hard work, grace, and determination. When these seniors go out

into the world, I know that they will make positive changes wherever they go."

Seniors Shaun and Skylar Chacon shared deeply personal remembrances of their time at Mid-Pen.

"I wouldn't have made it to this point if it were not for



Shaun Crabb delivers a heart-felt tribute to her classmates and teachers.



Mid-Pen and its teaching style, which is slightly different from other schools," said Shaun. "Mid-Pen provided me and countless others with an opportunity most high school students aren't given: a chance for a less stressful learning environment."

Looking at her classmates seated on either side of her, she told the audience, "They all had their share of struggles and stress, but they have all worked impossibly hard to reach this point, and not one person here has given up this fight. The friends we've grown to love, the ones we choose to keep forever, and ones we'll never forget are here before you all with pride."

The theme of Skylar's speech was "100 Bad Days," a song by the alt-pop band AJR about how bad experiences make for good stories. Skylar spoke about their own 100 Bay Days, which included the challenge of transitioning to Mid-Pen halfway through junior year—just a few weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic hit—while struggling with gender identity, the death of a grandparent, and depression.

"I was and am rather afraid of my own mind, and I wish that on nobody," said Skylar of the suicidal thoughts that were a side effect of their medication. "I thank every god that's ever existed for my friends, who quickly caught on to my thoughts and would link arms with me while we waited for the train. After changing antidepressants, they watched out for me as I started getting better. Now I try to do the same for everyone else. My friends helped save my life, and now I am trying to extend the same to others."

One of the lessons of the past year, Skylar said, is how adaptable the Class of 2021 is. "Teachers have commented to me over and over about how focused

and attentive we all were, even with Zoom and sitting at home on our computers all day every day... We adapted, we stayed strong and engaged, and most importantly, we worked together to make this year as fun as it could be."

Concluding on an upbeat note, Skylar said, "Everyone will have their '100 Bad Days,' but the bad days will pass, and with the help of friends and faculty like the ones here at Mid-Pen, we don't have to just survive it, we can thrive because of it. My '100 Bad Days' story has finished, but it's only one chapter in my life. We will all have more stories, hopefully as many good day stories as bad day stories, with laughter and tears. Our next story is really just beginning, and I hope we get to share them someday in the future."

This year's alumni speaker was Jared Van '10, who graduated from University of the Pacific. "My story is different from most students, much like yours probably," he told the seniors. "I was diagnosed with a learning disability in middle school, and I hated school because it was hard for me. I had to work twice as hard for half as much." For the past seven years, Jared has been working as a behavior therapist. This fall, he will attend Penn State University as a doctoral student in special education.



Bridget Cruz shares a fist bump with her Core teacher, Jon Austin, after he spoke about her contributions to Mid-Pen.

Jared encouraged students to persevere through challenges and to reach out to others. "Believe in yourself and advocate when you need help or when you want help," he said. "Asking for help is not a weakness; it is a strength. It is the strength that brought the first humans together to create cultures and societies then cities and countries." 🐉



Sebi Strachan and his family celebrate after the ceremony.



Lanier Poland poses with Core teacher Alan Cameron (left) and Head of School Phil Gutierrez after receiving the Senior Award.

Scan to view the Class of 2021 web page for tributes to our graduates from faculty and staff, shout-outs from families and friends, and a look at a new Mid-Pen tradition: the Senior Parking Lot Mural.



SENIOR AWARDS

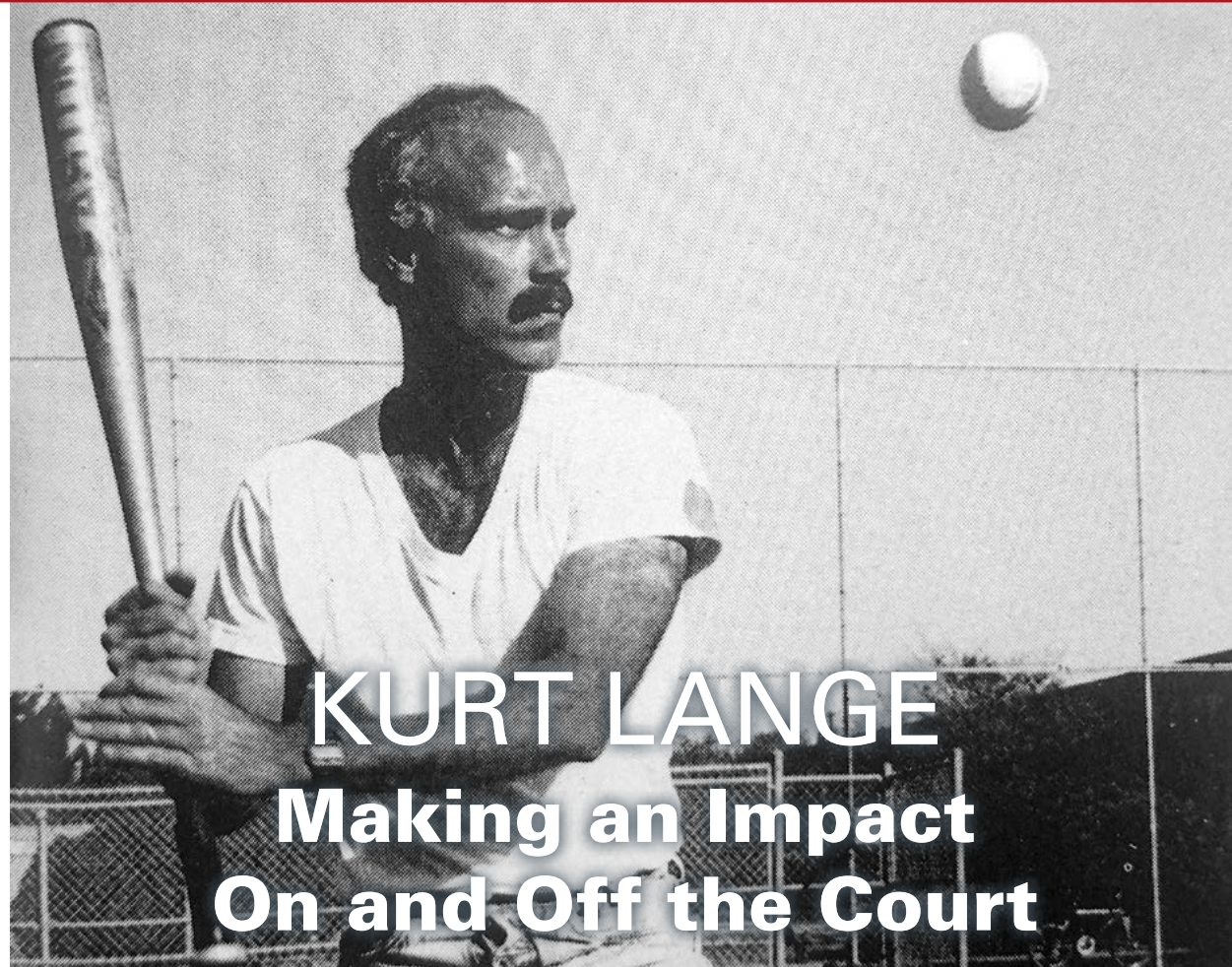
This year's Founder's Award was presented to **ANDRIES CASTELLANO** (above). The school's highest honor, the Founder's Award is given to the senior who best exemplifies the founding principles of Mid-Peninsula High School, including growth and change, achievement, determination, and character.

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

The Leonard W. Ely Community Award, presented to one or more seniors who have made the greatest contribution to the well-being of the school and/or outside community, was given to **BRIDGET CRUZ** and **TAYLOR YOUNG**.

LANIER POLAND and **JULIA WEAVER** received the Senior Award, given to one or more students in each grade for high academic achievement.





Athletic Director Kurt Lange runs practice drills for Mid-Pen's first baseball team in 1990.

Kurt Lange can teach you how to land a perfect layup, toss a football, or pass a hockey puck. As Mid-Pen's Athletic Director for more than twenty years, he is well known for the encouragement and straightforward instruction he provides to his PE students and players on his teams. What he enjoys most, though, are the spontaneous moments during the school day, like when a group of students is shooting hoops during a break, when he can offer a student a quick pointer.

"They are the most rewarding moments and often the most successful," said Kurt. While he might not know it at the time, the sage advice he offers to Dragons during athletic activities sticks with them off the court.

"Kurt has taught me to be more calm and collected and think about what my actions will be before I do them," said Taylor Young '21, who played on Mid-Pen's soccer, basketball, and tennis teams. "He always tells us to look up and keep our eyes up, always looking around, always moving."

Taylor was channeling Kurt's advice during the last game of the 2021 basketball season. In the final minutes, senior Aaron Poternack was sent onto the court, and the team's goal was clear: get the ball to Aaron so he could shoot a basket. "We always like looking for Aaron when he's on the court," said Taylor of his good friend, who didn't have much playing time this season.

With just seconds left in the game, Aaron missed a shot. Taylor quickly got the rebound, and although he was in the perfect position for a clean layup, he passed the ball to Aaron and blocked him from the opponent's reach. Aaron landed the final shot of the season while his team and a small gathering of parent spectators jumped to their feet and cheered. It was a storybook ending for Aaron, Taylor, and the entire team.

Kurt's positive impact on students mirrors the lasting imprint he's made daily at Mid-Pen since he first joined the faculty in 1989. Hired to teach PE, Algebra, and Core, he also ended up being the de facto coach of the school's only team: boys soccer. Students, however,

were more interested in starting a boys baseball team.

"Kids kept coming to me saying, 'Can we have a baseball team, please? We've got this field, and we have all these guys that want to play.' So we made the pitch to [then Head of School] Phil Bliss, and he said, 'If you get ten games, we'll let you try it. We'll get the uniforms and all that.' So I did. We had our first ever baseball team that spring, and we played against a lot of the small schools in the area that we play now [in other sports]."

The baseball team's success gave Kurt an opportunity to help Mid-Pen join the area's high school sports league for small private schools. In short order, Mid-Pen's athletics program was born and included girls volleyball, boys soccer, boys and girls basketball, baseball, and girls softball.

"I coached every team, both seasons," recalled Kurt with a chuckle. "Sometimes, I was pretty busy."

Mid-Pen's no-cut policy is rare for high school sports and also a reason why so many students are willing to participate. "That's why I always try to have a JV team," said Kurt. "JV is a stepping stone into varsity, and helps players develop skills and realize they are better than they think. With a JV team, players get experience, and they get to play often. The wins and losses don't say anything about the team or experience."

Kurt's PE classes also serve as a stepping stone for life. Through sports like badminton, indoor baseball, archery, and ultimate frisbee, he teaches individual skills that help students get a feel for spatial awareness and help them learn how to use their bodies. The underlying message, though, is all about play.

"Fun is the deal in PE," said Kurt. "I want them to have fun. A lot of students don't know how to play games. They've been in front of a computer



Kurt (far left) stands with Mid-Pen's first baseball team in 1990.

screen or don't get together with other kids in the neighborhood and just play."



Kurt's Life Before Mid-Pen

- *Played varsity basketball while an undergrad at Occidental College in Los Angeles*
- *Drove a tour bus in Denali National Park in Alaska*
- *Interned as a cardiac technician/exercise leader at a cardiac rehab program in Chicago*
- *Played semi-pro baseball for a team in Menlo Park*
- *Started his own painting business in the San Francisco Bay Area*
- *Taught PE to K-8 students at a small Catholic school in San Francisco*
- *Moved to Oregon in 1995 and later rejoined Mid-Pen in 2005*

Kurt emphasizes creativity in sports and helps students develop their own ideas for games or different ways to use skills they've learned. If a group of students doesn't have enough players for a game or to field two teams, he challenges them to look for alternative options to still play.

"You can have your own games and your own rules," explained Kurt. "That's what I did as a kid. For some kids, it's complicated. It takes them a while, but like any class, when it clicks, it clicks, and it's very cool to watch."

Physical and emotional safety is always a priority, too. It's not uncommon for students to arrive at Mid-Pen with negative PE experiences from middle school or other high schools. Aside from learning how to avoid injuries, Kurt makes sure all his students feel welcome to explore sports at their own pace, in their own space.

"I'm not recruiting you to play sports. I'm meeting you where you are at now, and I'm trying to help you get better." 🐉



Dragons Return with a Mighty Roar

By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

With only a few months remaining in the school year, the Central Coast Section (CCS) combined winter and spring sports seasons. For Mid-Pen, this meant we could play basketball, tennis, and possibly track and field.

GIRLS VARSITY BASKETBALL

Coach: Kurt Lange

When they first met over Zoom, the girls varsity basketball team only had four players, and it looked like we wouldn't be able to field a team. A fifth student joined, and this lean team, with no substitute players, went on to complete a seven-game season. All five girls played every minute of every game—a first in Mid-Pen history. While we didn't win any games this season, our league losses were by 15 points or less. Julia Oram '23 was voted to the All-League First Team, and Karina Sanchez '22 was voted to the All-League Second Team. I look forward to having all five players back next year and, hopefully, another five or six players to help us with depth.



BOYS VARSITY BASKETBALL

Coaches: Erin Whittaker '93 and Kurt Lange

After a very successful 2019-20 season, our boys varsity team was excited to have the opportunity to play again. We ended up winning our division with a record of 5-1 and 7-4 overall, giving us an automatic bid to the postseason CCS Tournament. We lost in the first round of the tournament to the much larger Crystal Springs Uplands School, ending our season. Sebi Strachan '21 was voted Most Valuable Player in our division and made the All-League First Team. For the second consecutive year, Andries Castellano '21 made the All-League First Team. Noah Takatsuno '22 was voted to the All-League Second Team, and both Taylor Young '21 and Mason Ackerman '23 received honorable mentions. Mid-Pen alum Erin Whittaker '93 was voted Honor Coach of the

Year by the Private School Athletic League (PSAL). (Read more about Erin on page 13.)



TENNIS

Coaches: Bryan Jeong '06 and Assistant Coach Raul Salazar

We were also able to have a short but sweet tennis season this spring. We were only able to schedule one match this season against Pinewood School, and we came out victorious with a score of 3-1. Due to COVID-19, many of the schools we usually compete against in tennis opted not to play this season. Next year promises to be stronger with four returning players and several newcomers who have already committed for next year.



TRACK AND FIELD

Coach: Alan Cameron

Unfortunately, the PSAL opted out of track and field this spring because the league was unable to secure a facility for our league meets. Even without a season, Logan Shaw '24 and Marshall Estes '24 could be spotted on campus throwing their shot puts during break and lunch. We look forward to seeing them and other Dragons participate in track and field next year. 🐉

Doron Rudin '88 writes, "After being a Co-Captain on Mid Peninsula's very first athletic team, I went on to play volleyball at Foothill Junior College. Not being sure what I wanted to do in life, I joined the US Navy. I served over 10 years as a Search and Rescue Swimmer, based mostly out of North Island Naval Air Station in San Diego. I had the luxury of jumping out of helicopters. I served on three tours to the Persian Gulf. I now reside in Washington State. I have an 8-year-old daughter (the very best thing to ever happen to me). I am engaged to be married (December of this year) to the love of my life."

Kate Smith '91 is a journalist and founder of the website In Rock We Trust (www.inrockwetrust.org), which is "written for fans by one of the biggest rock, metal, horror and cult fans out there." The goal of the site is to "bring the 70s and 80s back, the fun times with all the great movies and music we enjoyed!"

The Class of 2021 graduation brought **Jared Van '10** back to Mid-Pen as this year's alumni graduation speaker. After graduating from Mid-Pen himself, Jared attended the University of the Pacific, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2014. For the past seven years he has been working in behavior therapy with a diverse group of clients. This summer he will receive his Masters of Science in behavior analysis from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology and will attend Penn State as a doctoral candidate in Special Education.



Alum Jared Van '10 addresses Mid-Pen's Class of 2021 during their graduation ceremony.

"I typically work with clients with autism, emotional disturbance, ADHD, and other developmental differences," says Jared. "Since I am a big guy, I typically get aggressive students and now have a bevy of experience with aggressive clients. It is my favorite when students who were once aggressive are able to walk the halls greeted with genuine kindness and acceptance because they have learned how to ask for what they need and keep their body to themselves. I have worked with clients from ages 3 to 26, and in homes and at schools from preschool to high school."

Jared says his goal is to change the nature of teaching so that students become more successful in class and actually enjoy school. "We have a saying in my field of Precision Teaching that the learner is always right," he notes. "If they don't understand something that you taught, you need to teach it differently. My big dream is to be Secretary of Education and make systemic change to help change our education system so learners can be more successful and fluent."

Matthew Davidson '18 stopped by the school in June to pick up a transcript for his enlistment application for the US Navy. After graduating from Mid-Pen, he attended the Dynamy Internship Year program in Worchester, Mass., before returning to the Bay Area, where he has worked at the YMCA and Amazon for the past three years.



ERIN WHITTAKER '93 Still Learning Lessons at Mid-Pen



Erin Whittaker '93 and Ethan Slafsky '21 share the court on Senior Night, above, and Erin's 9th grade yearbook photo from 1990, right.

"There are more freshmen on the basketball team today than there were in my freshman class," said Erin Whittaker '93 with a laugh.

In June, having just coached the boys varsity basketball team to the Central Coast Section (CCS) Division V Championship Tournament for the third time in five years, Erin reflected on how much Mid-Pen has changed since he was a student nearly 30 years ago.

"Mid-Pen wasn't the school it is today," recalled Erin, who started high school at Menlo-Atherton High School (M-A) in Menlo Park before transferring to Mid-Pen in the fall of his freshman year. "We didn't get kids who started at Mid-Pen as freshmen; like me, they were always transfers. When I arrived, I was the only freshman in the school for a good month until another girl transferred in. Then there were two of us."

By comparison, Mid-Pen will welcome 37 members of the Class of 2025, who will begin the school year in August as 9th graders.

In the early 90s, Mid-Pen had a reputation for welcoming students who struggled or were excluded from other schools. "I was the typical Mid-Pen kid back then," he remembered. "I just wanted to play sports, and I didn't get into trouble. But a lot of kids I went to school with had gotten into trouble, and Mid-Pen was the last stop for them. For them, Mid-Pen was really their salvation."

When Erin arrived, Mid-Pen only had one interscholastic team: soccer. Athletic Director Kurt Lange had been hired only a few months before and, at the time, was the PE teacher. By the spring of 1990, however, Erin had joined the school's first baseball team. The following year, he played on three teams. "We had a very good baseball team," he said, "but we were awful as a basketball team. I don't think we won a game—but we won the league in baseball my junior year."

Erin appreciated that Mid-Pen let him play sports throughout high school, something he might not have been able to do at a larger school. He recalled going out for football his freshman year at M-A and being cut from the team. He also played basketball and baseball but doubts he would have made the starting lineup in either sport had he stayed at M-A, which was exceptionally strong in basketball at the time. "Maybe in my senior year I would have been able to play baseball," he mused. "But I might not have ever gotten there because I might not have been allowed to play."

Mid-Pen also allowed Erin to learn in his own way. Diagnosed with ADHD in his 30s, Erin said he now realizes that many of his classmates were probably also struggling with undiagnosed learning disabilities. "Back then, schools didn't understand learning difficulties as much. I appreciate that Mid-Pen allowed me to learn the way I needed to learn. Mid-Pen just let me be me and figure stuff out."

After graduating from Mid-Pen, Erin attended San Jose State. "I had a similar reaction to San Jose State as to M-A," he said, "and felt I needed a smaller school." He

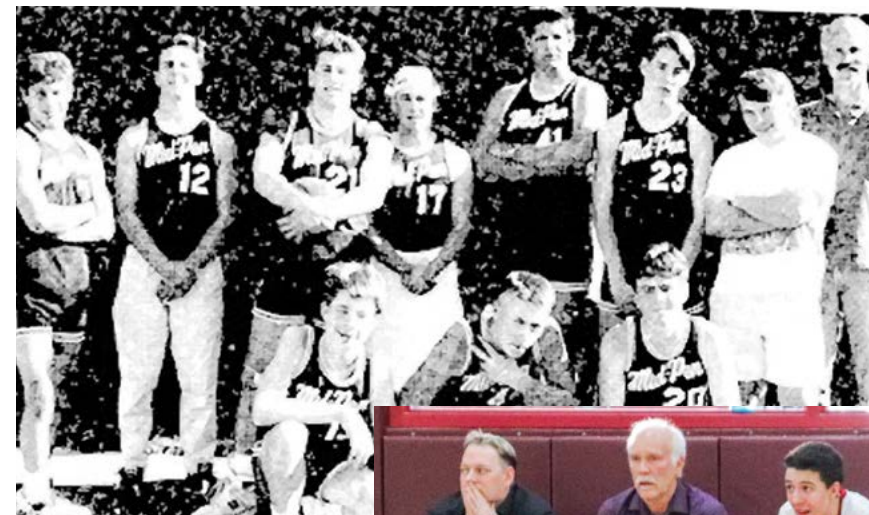


enrolled in De Anza College, eventually returning to San Jose State, where he received his degree in Radio/TV/Film with a minor in Drama Directing.

Erin had always dreamed of a career in sports broadcasting. The month after his high school graduation, he began an internship at KRON4 in San Francisco. He worked all through college and eventually became a producer for "Sports Final," the station's weekly Sunday night sports roundup.

He left the network in 2005 to start his own production company, focusing on reality-based sports, travel, and food shows, including a pilot for the NFL network. He now lives in Monte Sereno, Calif., with his wife, Shannen, and their two children, Emma, 4, and Noah, 6 months. "Now I am just back to trying to figure out what to do next," he said. "That's what gave me the time to coach basketball."

Erin credits Kurt with giving him both the opportunity to play sports as a student and to coach basketball as an adult. He was browsing the school's website five years ago and noticed that Kurt was the coach for nearly every sport. He sent an email asking if Kurt needed help. "I just walked in and said hi to him," Erin said, "and he immediately asked if I wanted to be his assistant basketball coach. It took no more than two seconds."



Erin (No. 23) on Mid-Pen's first boys varsity basketball team in 1991, left, and as the boys varsity coach in 2018 alongside Athletic Director Kurt Lange, below.



Soon, Erin took over as head coach. This year, he was named Honor Coach of the Year by the Private School Athletic League.

"Erin has a deep love for basketball and a strong tie to Mid-Pen," said Kurt. "He is well respected by our student-athletes and has shown much growth during his time at Mid-Pen. He is not afraid to take risks with strategies or using different combinations of players in games."

Kurt said Erin does not give up on his players; if he sees someone struggling, he will often take him out of the game, provide advice, and put him back in after he has had a chance to settle down. "This system has built trust between Erin and his players."

Despite the team's success, Erin says that he is still learning how to coach and relies on Kurt for advice. Mid-Pen's no-cut policy and low-key approach to athletics, which Erin benefitted from as a student, still suit him.

"I am not a yeller, and at Mid-Pen you really can't be," he observed. "I see some of the coaches on other teams, they're yelling all the time, and I think, 'Why are you yelling at a 15-year-old?' Mid-Pen kids just wouldn't accept that. You need to take it seriously for the kids, but you also need to remember that it's high school." 🐉



The Strength of Community

Like many others, the 2020-21 school year began with hope, excitement, and big plans for the year ahead. Unlike any other, it also began with classes meeting on Zoom as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to sweep through the world.

The last year has reminded us of the vital importance of Mid-Pen's mission to empower students with the knowledge and purpose to impact a complex world. We have also been reminded that our students are more resilient and adaptable than we might imagine, and our teachers and administrative team are more extraordinary than we understood. Head of School Phil Gutierrez and all the faculty and staff worked tirelessly to stay in touch with parents, to keep our school community strong and together, and to create a distance learning program for students that continued to deliver on the Mid-Pen mission.

On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, I am extremely proud of what Mid-Pen has achieved over the past year. We know that this could not have been possible without your steadfast support, your unwavering participation, and your continued financial commitment

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.

During this pandemic year, the **Mid-Pen DragonFund**, the cornerstone of the school's annual fundraising efforts, was more important than ever before, providing funding for a host of important projects, including:

- A new school-wide ventilation system and significant investments in protective equipment.
- The creation of five open-air classrooms requiring electrical and technology upgrades.
- Professional development for our outstanding teachers.

Many thanks to DragonFund chair Krishna Yarlagadda P '23 and the half dozen parent volunteers whose efforts helped raised \$353,293 from more than 200 current families, current and former trustees, alumni and alumni parents, plus 100 percent of our faculty and staff.



Under the leadership of trustee Mike Gordon P '22, the school also began work on a capital campaign to raise funds for campus renovation and expansion, as outlined in *The Mid-Pen Promise*, the school's five-year strategic plan. The new **Think Big Be Bold Campaign** promises to be the most significant fundraising initiative in the school's history. When complete, the campaign will provide funds for the renovation of our Willow Road home, including the addition of a 6,000-square-foot building that will transform our campus. In the coming months, you will be hearing much more about the campaign, and the entire community will be invited to celebrate and join us in supporting our campus expansion.

The strength and creativity of the Mid-Pen community was celebrated at our first (and, hopefully, only!) virtual **DragonFest** in February, at the height of the pandemic. As the pictures on the following pages show, it was an amazing "Night of Magic" that brought together Mid-Pen families in an online event space that showcased the incredible talents of the school's students, teachers, and alumni. Event chair Jana Weaver P '21 and procurement chair Andrea Potischman '23 once again did a truly exceptional job. In all, the event raised \$118,600, including nearly \$63,000 in Fund-a-Need donations for further renovations of our Willow Road classrooms.

Finally, over the past year the school received \$61,800 in support of financial aid, plus approximately \$5,000 in restricted and in-kind donations to our art and music programs, and the school's Sunshine Fund to assist Mid-Pen families experiencing temporary financial setbacks or family crises.

Even though the past year was one of great uncertainty throughout the world, here at Mid-Pen we have a clear sense of direction and the future is bright. We can be grateful that we know where we are headed, we have a strategic framework to guide us, and we are traveling with an extraordinary team.

Thank you for your support of Mid-Peninsula High School. We couldn't have done it without you.

Debbie Vielbaum
Chair, Board of Trustees

Gail Reimer P'22 and Head of School Phil Gutierrez host DragonFest live from the school's second floor atrium.



DRAGONFUND GIFTS

INDIVIDUALS

- Anonymous
Phil Abrahamson & Dana Shelley
Antonio & Anne Abreu
Steven & Wendy Ackerman
Richard & Sue Alvarez
Jacqueline Anderson & Frank Meerkamp
Kaci Anderson
Kendall Anderson '12 5
Bart Andre 5
Mark Anson & Mary Hayes 10
Jon Austin 5
Jeff Baker & Shaula Kumaishi
Meenu Baloda
Maira Baraldi
Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton
Ariana Beil & Karlis Felzenberg
Gregory Bellomy & Karen Bloom
Susan & Wade Benton
Daniel Beringer
Caitlin Berka 5
Mark & Yuet Berry
Tim & Carolyn Biglow 10
Jeff Birkeland & Charlene Prince Birkeland
Michelle Boire 5
Lisa Bourgeault
Steve & Gabriella Bowling 10
Susan Briggs
Amy Cai
Alan Cameron 10
Armando Castellano & Andrea de Wit
Gerald & Paula Chacon
Lily Chang & Peter Eldredge
Mukund Chavan & Minoti Amin
Yu-Tse & Jui-Ping Chen

- Kris Chiongbian & Justin Strachan
Jason & Roxanne Cohen
Michelle Crabb
Jamie Das
Joe De Primo 5
Jim & Susanne Dern 10
Erez & Merav Dolev
Mark & Kim Drury
Richard & Jean Duda 5
Susan Eddins
Scott & Ashley Eikenberry
Maggie Elias
Daniel & Sonia Elkes
Shirley Ely 10
Rachel Esquivel
Matthew & Caroline Evans
Kirk & Rebecca Dishotsky
Cathleen & Michael Foster 5
Mike & KT Foust 10
Edward & Doris Frey
John Furlong & Sara Valentine
Raymond & Janelle Gale
Andrew & Patricia Galligan 10
Quin Garcia '99
Jeffrey & Kari Garratt
Levi & Gisele Garraway
Ernesto Godinez & Fedra Romero
Teresa Gomez 5
Aurora Gonzalez & Rigoberto Concepcion
Baudelia Gonzalez
Michael & Loren Gordon
Jonathan & Denise Gottfried
Jonathan & Natsuko Greenberg
Ken & Sally Grossenbacher
Sudhakar Gundubogula & Jayasree Bade
Hans & Melissa Gustavson
Phil & Robbie Gutierrez
Mike Haas & Lisa Porter
Merrilee Harris 5
Aragorn Healy & Jennifa Gosling
Andrea Henderson & Andre Cotton 5
Alma Hernandez
Gabriele Hilberg
Raymond Ho & Yolanda Cheung
David & Marleen Hood
Sean Hopkinson
Cory Huttenga 5
John & Kim Iarocci
Earl Jackson
Mark Jaremko & Joanne Quan
Zhen Jiang & Zhen Hu
Belinda & Brent Johnson
Randy Johnson 5
Robert Johnstone
Sheree Johnstone
Christopher Kaprielian & Petra Pino
Barbara & Scott Knaster 5
Frank Knowles & Cynthia Newth
Alfred & Maureen Lane 5
Kurt Lange 10
Mary & Robert Lazarus
Lucinda & Rob Lenicheck
William Leonard & Victoria Wang
Sarah Levine & Adam Schwartz



Performers at this year's DragonFest included Tanisha Gundubogula '24, top left, and Mid-Pen's Studio Ensemble, featuring clockwise from top right: Aaron Posternack '21, Kylie Casal '21, Mayan Dolev '22, Sebi Strachan '21, and Bridget Cruz '21 (center).



Clockwise from top left: Sara Berry '21, Julia Weaver '21, Sarah McKinley '21, and Yness Riedel '22 perform "Seasons of Love" during DragonFest.

- Anthony Li & Julie McVay

Raymond & Mia Locsin

Efren & Susan Lopez

Keith & Lisa Lucas

Austreberta Luna & Gerardo Guzman

David & Mimi Lyons

Thomas & Shirley Lyons

Alexander Main & Diane Main

Anthony Marek 5

Kathleen Marek

Georgios Margaritis & Annette Odello

Christopher Maxcy & Daniele Levy

Cynthia McKinley

Kevin McKinley

Stephanie Messina 5

Laurie Miller & Van Whitis 15

Mark & Diana Minkowski

Elizabeth Moore 15

Ryan Moriguchi '91 15

Gary Mulleneaux & Amy Christen 5

Glayde Myers & Stacy Fox-Myers 5

Eliezer Naranjo & America Baltazar

Eloisa Nava-Vazquez

Martha & PJ Nora

J.D. Northway 15

John Northway & Lisa Grote

Joy & C. Larry O'Rourke 15

David Oliver 5

Aryana Ong-Beith '19

Gregorio & Felicitas Payan

Chris Perrone & Stacy Donohue

Francis Phiri

Paul Pitlick & Janet St. Peter 5
- Sherri & Carlos Plaza

Lynn & William B. Poland III

Neal & Andrea Potischman

Gregorio Prieto & Maria Hernandez 5

Krish & Padma Ramakrishnan 5

Tim & Lorinda Reichert 10

Brandon & Gail Reimer

Adolfo & Veronica Riedel

Jennifer & Brian Rodrigues

Jorge Rodriguez

Marco Romani & Teri Felix

Raul & Irma Salazar

Randal & Christina Salvatore

Jose Luis Sanchez & Lidia Luna

Barbara & Bob Sanner 5

David & Sarah Santoro

Anne Marie Schar 15

Gabriele & Stephen Scheid

Heidi Schiessler 15

Jamie Schiessler '99 10

Jackie Schmidt-Posner Ph.D. & Dr. Barry Posner 5

Lisa & Ellis Schoichet

John & Kimberlee Scott

John & Grace Shanahan

Mark Shaw & Allison Kluger

Andrew & Carol Shelton

John Slafsky & Amy Rosenberg

Teri & Garry Spanner 5

David Spence & Tracy Winton

Christina Stankovich

Brad & Misty Steffen

Lisa & Bruce Steinback

Ed Sterbenc & Cathy Fitzgerald

Edward Stern

Christopher & Kristy Stone

Stuart Sussman & Hannah Frost

- Jameson Swanagon 5

Michael & April Takatsuno

Tad & Dianne Taube

Tara Theobald-Anderson 5

Andrea & Charles Thurber 5

Brent Tolosko & Deborah Marshall

Aleksandar & Ingrid Totic

Sandra Trembley

Henry Trevor & Elizabeth Werter 5

Andrew Tucker & Shandon Lloyd 5

Paul & Elizabeth Tucker

John & Callie Turk

Robert & Sahar Uriarte

Cammie & Tim Vail

Debbie & Gary Vielbaum 5

Philip & Ann Vogel 5

Wells Wadleigh & Elizabeth Tsuji

Kit Waffle

Jing Wang & Hongjun Zhu

Anna Waring

Jana & Phil Weaver

Fredric Wee & Cynthia Lee

Ethan Weker 5

Wendi Wells 10

James Whitlock

Keith & Shelley Willig 5

Malcolm Willig '17

Nicola & Richard Willits 5

Roni & Andrew Wolfe

Lester & Ava Wollman

Charlotte Woo & Scott Posternack

Brian & Gina Wood

Eric & Veronica Wood

Kevin & Ellen Woods

Amy Wright

Harriett & Cleveland Wycoff

Bob & Elizabeth Yapp 15

Krishna & Annapurna Yarlagadda

Morgan Yee '17

Donna Young 5

Kirstin & Linton Young

Stanford Young

Gabriel Zubizarreta & Hannah Brooks

- CORPORATIONS, FOUNDATIONS, AND MATCHING GIFTS**
- Amazon Smile

American Brokerage

The American Endowment Foundation

- Amgen

The An Jie Foundation

Apple Inc.

The Benevity Community Impact Fund 5

Bright Funds

California Health Care Foundation

The Castellano Family Foundation

Ebay Foundation

The Eucalyptus Foundation 10

Fidelity Charitable

Genentech

Google Inc.

The Hurlbut-Johnson Charitable Trusts 10

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The JP Morgan Securities Charitable Gift Fund

The Leonard Charitable Foundation

Pay Pal

Robert Half International

The San Francisco Foundation

Schwab Charitable

Silicon Valley Community Foundation 5

Taube Philanthropies

The Terrence and Ruth Elkes Foundation

The U.S. Charitable Gift Trust

Vanguard Charitable

- RESTRICTED GIFTS**
- The following donors made gifts restricted for specific purposes.

- Financial Aid**
- The Eucalyptus Foundation 5

The Hurlbut-Johnson Charitable Trusts 10

- 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.*
- Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton

Chris & Debbie Crouse

Laurie Miller & Van Whitis

John & Callie Turk

Donna Young



Tripp Lyons '22 prepares to solve a Rubik's Cube blindfolded during DragonFest.

- THINK BIG BE BOLD CAMPAIGN**

The most significant fundraising initiative in the school's history, the new Think Big Be Bold Campaign will transform our Willow Road home, with the renovation of our current classrooms and the addition of a 6,000-square-foot building. Thank you to the following supporters whose generous gifts and pledges received in 2020-2021 have gotten the campaign off to an amazing start!

Peter Barrett & Molly Naughton

Lisa & Detlef Braun

Susan Briggs

Cathleen & Michael Foster Mike
- & KT Foust

Andrew & Patricia Galligan

Michael & Loren Gordon

Merrilee Harris

Belinda & Brent Johnson

Keith & Lisa Lucas

John Northway & Lisa Grote

Jason & Lisa Peery

Gregorio Prieto & Maria Hernandez

Silicon Valley Community Foundation

John Slafsky & Amy Rosenberg

Andrea & Charles Thurber

Henry Trevor & Elizabeth Werter

Debbie & Gary Vielbaum

Brian & Gina Wood

Donna Young

- HONOR AND MEMORIAL GIFTS**
- Jane Fung**
Lester Wollman & Ava Wollman
- Marz John Garcia**
Merrilee Harris
Anna Waring
- Cora Gutierrez**
Amy Cai
Raymond Gale & Janelle Gale
Frank Knowles & Cynthia Newth

- Phil Gutierrez, Wendi Wells, & Alan Cameron**
Jonathan Greenberg & Natsuko Greenberg

- Rosemary Johnson**
Amy Cai
Raymond Gale & Janelle Gale
Frank Knowles & Cynthia Newth

- Gretta Kiely**
John & Grace Shanahan

- Bella Maxcy '24**
Maira Baraldi
Maggie Elias
- The Mid-Pen Faculty and Staff**
Sarah Levine & Adam Schwartz
Stuart Sussman & Hannah Frost
Donna Young
- John Northway & Lisa Grote**
J.D. Northway

- Madison Trembley '19**
Sandra Trembley
- Clevoria Wycoff-Byers**
Harriett & Cleveland Wycoff

- Richard Zumwalt**
Ken Grossenbacher & Sally Grossenbacher

- GIFTS IN KIND**
Mark Anson & Mary Hayes
John Crossman

- 5

5 or more years consecutive annual giving
- 10

10 or more years consecutive annual giving
- 15

15 or more years consecutive annual giving

The list of donors includes gifts received between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of this report. We sincerely apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions. Please contact the Development Office at henry@mid-pen.org with any corrections.

THE JOHNSTON SOCIETY

Beloved science teacher Larry Johnston dedicated more than 35 years to Mid-Pen 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. 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. The Johnston Society was established in his memory to recognize those donors who make provisions for Mid-Pen in their estate plans.

- Johnston Society Members**
- Matthew James '87

Lawrence P. Johnston ✦

Merrilee Harris

Dolly Patterson

Anne Marie Schar
- ✦ deceased

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Parents of Alumni: If your Dragon no longer maintains a permanent residence at your home, please notify the Development Office at 650-321-1991 or alums@mid-pen.org. Thank you for helping us keep our alumni records current.



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WHEN MID-PEN'S CLASS OF 2021 SPRAY PAINTED A MURAL ON THE SCHOOL DRIVEWAY AND CUL-DE-SAC, THEY CREATED A NEW SENIOR TRADITION. SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH AS THEY CREATE THEIR "SENIOR DAY" MASTERPIECE.

