

# THE HIGHLAND FILING

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Headshot of the the new teacher of the year, Raymund Meizys.

## THE MARVELOUS MR. MEIZYS

### Raymund Meizys wins Northern Highlands' Teacher of the Year

Ksenia Suchkova '25

Recently, students and faculty members dedicated their time and effort to vote for the 2022 Teacher of the Year. They elected Raymund Meizys for the award.

Meizys currently teaches AP U.S. Government and Politics, and has previously taught a myriad of other courses such as U.S. History I & II, Criminal Law, among many others.

Meizys revealed that winning this award was, "very humbling, considering how many great teachers there are here," and he described this recognition as "an incredible honor".

With 27 years of teaching under his belt, he said that he has never won the Teacher of the Year award before, and stated that, "I never expected to win teacher of the year."

This humble sentiment may be surprising for members of the Highlands community, considering how many previous students reach out to him, expressing their gratitude and appreciation for how well he has prepared them for their post-secondary schooling.

Principal Joseph Occhino affirmed this, saying that, "Mr. Meizys loves the award, but what he appreciates the most is when he gets all the emails from students that he had...saying

how well prepared they are, not only for the course that they are sitting in for college, but the connections that the student is able to make because of being in class with Mr. Meizys."

Meizys' current students also brought up similar points.

Autumn Chiu, sophomore and current AP U.S. Government student, explained that, "What I like most about Mr. Meizys is his personality and his dedication to teaching."

She said that he not only "creates a positive environment in the classroom", but also applies real-world situations to his lessons, going "beyond the notes".

Jacob Berwitz, another sophomore taking AP U.S. Government and Politics as well, described Meizys with, "very good explanations for everything" and highlighted how Meizys, "always makes stuff interesting with simulations, and by showing tv episodes, clips, or songs to the class," to help strengthen the student's knowledge of the topic being taught.

Both students agree this award is well deserved, with Chiu elaborated on how, "He is a teacher that wants other students to thrive in his class and he creates a classroom that makes you want to do exactly that. I look forward to class every day and to see

what happens next."

Berwitz agrees with Chiu and said, "He absolutely deserves teacher of the year and most of the people in my class seem to agree. He makes every lesson easy to understand and he is always able to make it fun and entertaining."

Occhino said that, "I think this is an award that is well [deserved]. Mr. Meizys has taught loads of classes, he's started some courses for us here. But the work that he does, in his law class, and with his advanced placement class is amazing; he is an excellent teacher."

*Continued on Page 8*

## EXTRA EXAMS IN '24?

A look into the new final and cumulative exams

Rebecca Hoffer '23

Throughout the last few years at Highlands, the policies for final exams have changed drastically.

Due to COVID-19, as well as other extenuating circumstances, finals have not been administered at Northern Highlands for the last three years. For seniors, many haven't taken a final in the entirety of their high school career.

However, an email from the administration revealed that finals are coming back for the 2022-2023 school year. In addition to that, cumulative exams will be added in the next coming years as well.

In past years, cumulative exams haven't been administered officially, besides teachers who choose to give said exams. The final exams have had a 15% weight on students' final grades, a requirement that has changed for the future.

Final exams for this school year will have a 10% weight on students' final grades, and students are able to be exempt from two exams if they achieve a grade of an A minus for both semesters.

*Continued on Page 8*

## INSIDE



Photo Courtesy of Belle Bennett

### Bennett to Cornell

Senior Belle Bennett commits to continue her athletic career at Cornell University as a runner on the track team.

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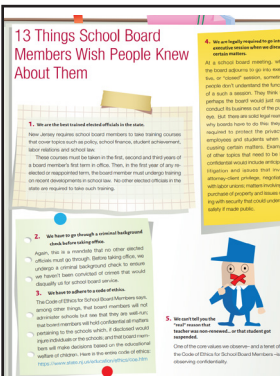


Photo Courtesy of NH Board of Education

### Board of Ed Email

The Board of Education recently sent out an email detailing their responsibilities as members of the BOE.

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Isabella Canavan-Pena '24

### Help Make a Change

Climate change is becoming a growing concern across the world. Read what a Highlander as to say about how you can make a change.

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# THE PURRFECTION WAY TO GIVE BACK

Learn more about a community organization dedicated to helping cats in need



Photo courtesy of Belen Okezie '24

**Belen Okezie '24**

Feral Cats of Bergen County is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Mahwah, NJ that works to save the lives of feral cats all across Bergen County.

This organization, led by Michele Staada, provides resources to vet and socialize feral cats to eventually find them permanent homes. The story of the shelter began four years ago when Staada found a stray cat outside her business and decided to feed it.

Before she knew it,

more and more cats began to show up and as the winter was approaching, Staada's love for these animals compelled her to let them inside to avoid the cold. Several members of the Junior Class Council, including myself, Jiya Singh, Natalie Choi, and various others help out at the shelter weekly.

We dedicate hours of our time each week to ensure that these cats are properly taken care of so that they can be adopted and lead happy lives.

We decided to get together and ask Highlands students to donate supplies. We have the utmost confidence that the students at Northern Highlands would help our cause; our community is incredibly generous and sympathetic to important causes.

The fact that many students from Highlands already volunteer their

time at the shelter is proof that our community values the cause of helping animals in need.

When Highlands offered this opportunity to volunteer at the shelter, I immediately signed up due to my personal love of animals and I have been consistently helping out there for at least three hours a week since early October.

My own dog, Houdini, is a rescue who was saved from a high-kill shelter in North Carolina. My family adopted him through a local rescue shelter about five years ago and he has been a loveable addition to our family ever since.

This experience with my dog inspired my passion to help animals of all kinds in need. Millions of animals each year rely on shelters to survive, and a significant percentage of these animals are unfortunately euthanized in some

shelters due to a lack of resources.

across Bergen County. The organization is

**By running this cat drive, we hope to raise significant funds for the shelter and the cats that rely on it.**

In general, it is incredibly important to supply shelters with the necessary supplies so they can continue to responsibly care for the animals there until they are able to find permanent homes.

By running this cat drive, we hope to raise significant funds for the shelter and the cats that rely on it. Feral Cats of Bergen County currently cares for more than 50 cats of all ages, breeds, medical conditions, rescued all

nonprofit and none of its workers are paid. Because of this, it's essential that



as a community we come together to support and recognize the remarkable effort and care that Staada and her staff put towards such an important cause.

We are looking for a wide variety of supplies including but not limited to cat toys, food, litter, and cleaning supplies. Additionally, we are accepting donations through our venmo @Jiya-Singh-2.

Already, we have accumulated significant monetary donations alongside an abundance of cat food and toys and we could not be more grateful to those who donated.

As the holiday season approaches, myself alongside various fellow Highlands students will continue to raise as many resources as we can and continue to volunteer our time to ensure that the cats are well-taken care during their search for their forever homes.

If you're looking to give back to the animal community, consider giving your time or resources to Feral Cats of Bergen County. ■

## The Highland Fling

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The views of the staff do not necessarily reflect the views of the administration. The administration has the right to review and alter an issue of the newspaper for five school days after it has been given to them by the staff. In the process of prior review, the original content of the paper may be changed or deleted. Regardless, the staff of *The Highland Fling* prides itself on delivering the most relevant and accurate reporting it can.

## From the Desk of the Editors-in-Chief

It's 2023.

23—the two digits before our student ID numbers and our last names on our laptop stickers. The number always seemed so far away, despite constantly being reminded of it. When we called out our number to Chef David in the lunch line or typed it into the computer in Guidance, it was hard to envision a future where the 23 coincided with the end of our high school years.

If high school is a marathon, the true meaning of the 23 that clings to our last names and the 3 proceeding digits of our student ID numbers has been hidden around a bend. It's there, and we know it's there, but we also know that we're eventually going to graduate college and maybe have children and inevitably die.

But it's 2023. We can finally see the finish line. And it's terrifying.

Belonging to the class of 2023 seemed like some sort of practical joke. The year just seemed impossibly far away, as if we would remain in the comfort of the red, black, and white hallways of Northern Highlands forever. Sure, the years would change, but our second home didn't. The next time we find ourselves erasing the last number of the date at the top of our page, we won't be in Mr. Kim's calculus class. We might not even be in this state, or even in this country.

Suddenly, the finality of our high school careers feels so real. It's almost over. In 5 months, we will know where our new second home will be, who we'll be spending it with, and who we'll be leaving behind. The familiar, comforting faces we've grown so used to won't be the ones we'll see during lunch.

So as we sign off as your Editors-in-Chief and embrace the true meaning of 23, we wish for those who are attached to slightly higher numbers to enjoy the time they have left. As we can now finally attest to, your graduating year comes faster than you know.

- The Editors-in-Chief of *The Highland Fling*

If you are interested in joining *The Highland Fling* or have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact [fling.eic@gmail.com](mailto:fling.eic@gmail.com). If you are interested in placing an ad or subscribing, please contact the email listed above.

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1-800-950-6264

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-273-TALK (8255) [24/7 hotline]  
(Spanish) 1-888-628-9454



# CHEERS TO THE HOLIDAYS

No matter what holiday you celebrate, there’s a reason to smile this holiday season



Photo courtesy of Emily Kam '25

Emily Kam '25

The weather is getting colder, frost is covering the ground, and homes are decorated with dozens of string lights. When I sit in the cafeteria with Highlands’ hot chocolate, I start to feel the buzz of festivities as we move into the winter holidays.

I’m looking forward to seeing my extended family and doing our fun holiday traditions. Some of these holiday traditions include watching Christmas movies, putting up a tree, and unwrapping mystery gifts with mittens.

It was always so exhilarating when you were able to successfully tear off a part of the wrapping paper but heartbreaking as time ran out and you had to hand the gift off to the next person.

Despite all the holiday

traditions we do, there was one I realized had slipped my mind. One holiday tradition that we never did was having an elf on the shelf.

While my brother and I believed in magical characters like the tooth fairy, Easter bunny, and Santa, we never believed in the magic of “elves on shelves”. In fact, I had never heard about the elf on the shelf until a few years ago.

For those of you who

too long ago in 2005. These elves are from Santa’s workshop and their purpose is to watch over the kids to see if they have been naughty or nice leading up to Christmas.

The elf is able to move and pops up in places around your house for you to find him. You are also not supposed to touch the elf or else it could lose its magic.

Honestly, when I was younger, the idea of an elf on my shelf watching over

them in stores around the holidays, and I would

they would lose their magic made me feel strangely

**While I’m no longer a child, I think I would like to try this tradition just for the fun of it.**

quickly sneak past them with suspicion.

In the rare instances when I did look into one of their eyes, I felt shivers down my back.

Even the idea that you couldn’t touch them or

uncomfortable. I would want to stare at these elves to make sure they didn’t move.

Now that I’m older though, I look back and laugh at my uneasiness with the elf on the shelf

tradition.

While I’m no longer a child, I think I would like to try this tradition just for the fun of it.

It would be funny to have someone in charge of moving the elf around the house and try to predict where they might put him.

Maybe I would see the elf on the mantle of our fireplace one day and then he would appear on our Christmas tree the next day.

I think the important thing about these traditions is that there is a certain kind of magic that they hold- a fun, innocent kind of magic.

Even though I may be older and not as naive now, I am more than willing to still partake in this fun holiday tradition.

Whether it be Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Ōmisoka, or other holidays that you might be celebrating this month, I wish you a happy holiday season.

Have fun celebrating the different holiday traditions you share with your family. Now I’m going to go buy an elf on the shelf so he can see how I belong on the nice list. ■

**I think the important thing about these traditions is that there is a certain kind of magic that they hold- a fun, innocent kind of magic.**

might not know about the “elf on the shelf” tradition, this tradition of putting an elf doll in different places in your home started not

me 24/7 and appearing out of nowhere in my house scared the living daylights out of me.

Sometimes, I found



Art by Emily Gan '23

# PAST, PRESENT, OR FUTURE?

If you could travel through time, which period would you pick?



Photo courtesy of Sebastian Tabakov '26

Sebastian Tabakov '26

Happy Holidays Highlanders! As you all know, the holiday season is rapidly approaching, as is the end of this year. The end of the year usually makes me reflect on the year that has passed.

What would I do differently? What would I keep the same? What would have happened if I had chosen a different path?

Contemplating my choices also makes me wonder: what if I lived in a different time? Personally, my favorite Christmas carol matches this notion. What if the ghost of Christmas past, present, or future visited me?

If I was visited by

either the ghosts of the past, present, or future... the ghost of my past would be my pick of the litter. In the past, life was easier. Life was better. Life was perfect.

Personally, I am usually told that I am an “old soul.” I take this remark as a compliment. My favorite musicians had their

Eagles, and many others.

My favorite styles had their peeks in the past: baggy jeans, rhinestone T-shirts, grandpa sweaters, bell-bottom jeans, and anything else you could fish out of a thrift store. My favorite movies had their peaks in the past: Se7en, Gia, Thirteen, Kids, Romeo & Juliet, and Rocky

from the past.

However, art and entertainment are not the only reasons why I would

only used for communication. Phones were not used for entertainment or social media—strictly for commu-

have access to money even though you may have forgotten your wallet at home is beyond convenient.

However, these are things that can be easily given up in order to be truly happy.

Yes, I completely comprehend that I may not have been alive in the decade(s) I am discussing. Why would I have had to experience it to miss it? I long for a time when the music I enjoy was the norm. I yearn for a time when people would treat others with compassion and kindness. I wish to be in the past.

Whether you decide to live in the past, present, or future, it is your choice. That is your prerogative. I would choose the past in a heartbeat. I wish for the ghost of Christmas past to whisk me away into a time when music was impeccable, fashion was the most fashionable, and entertainment was the most refreshing it would ever be. So Highlanders, where would you wish to go this Christmas? ■

**Contemplating my choices also makes me wonder: what if I lived in a different time?**

prefer to travel back throughout the decades.

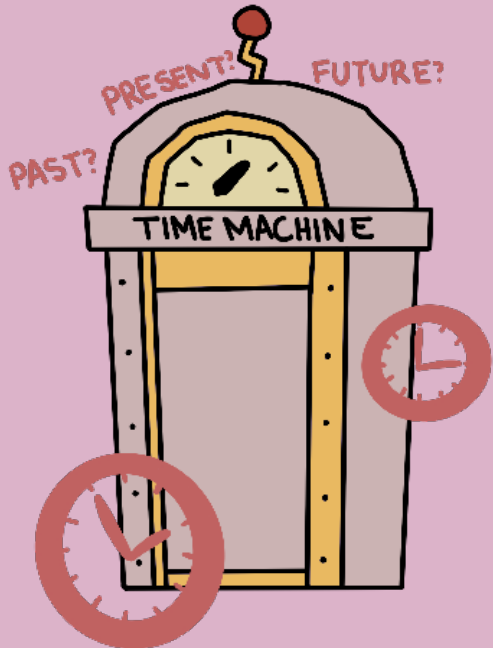
As previously stated, “Life was easier. Life was better.” The lifestyle of the past is significantly different from what we deem normal in today’s day and age. People were more friendly in the past and more neighborly. People would greet each other in the past. Today, people simply grunt.

It makes me wonder, could it be phones that are the issue? When phones became popular, they were

nication.

People in the past would not attach themselves to frivolous games or post rumors about one another on their phones in the past, because people were lucky if they even had access to a personal phone. Ultimately, the past was the best. I would love to go back.

There are positive features to our current time. Being able to see loved ones virtually, no matter the distance is groundbreaking. Being able to



Art by Emily Gan '23

peaks in the past: Nirvana, Sonic Youth, Mazzy Star, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, Strawberry Switchblade,

Horror.

As I read myself, I find that I enjoy forms of entertainment and art mostly

# DEVASTATING CURRENT EVENTS IN IRAN

## President of the Women's Empowerment Club speaks on the issue



Photo courtesy of Emma Pereira '24

Emma Pereira '24

Currently in Iran, mass protests sweep the nation. Contrary to popular belief, these protests aren't new, as Iranians have been protesting an oppressive regime for decades. However, the protests that have been going on the past few months have been heavily publicized, and also include a lot more involvement than ones of the past.

Protesters, many of whom are women, have been protesting laws which require women to wear head scarfs and dress modestly, the imposing of laws in a violent way, and the death of many women at the hands of the Iranian morality police.

One of the women who

was tragically killed was Mahsa Amini, who died in custody after being arrested for not wearing her headscarf properly, as outlined by Iranian law. This is the horrific reality in Iran,

the messages that women and protesters have for them.

Also, arrested protesters are at risk for execution. According to the New York Times, as of now, 11

As a co-president of the club, I had an urge to do something about this crisis, just as the other co-president and all of our members did. We were hoping that this urgency would be

or the oppression that Iranian women and citizens have been facing for decades. Others made a joke out of the situation, showing an utter disregard for the lives at risk in Iran and oppression that Iranians have faced.

It is of the utmost importance that Highlanders are educated on global crises, such as the current one in Iran. Highlands can often feel like a bubble, in which Highlanders are so focused on only themselves, but we each have to take the time to think outwards, not just nationally, but also globally.

I think the lack of global knowledge is in part due to our history curriculum.

only have one year of world history in high school.

That is not nearly enough time to learn world history, and this lack of knowledge shows.

Additionally, we should continuously be learning about current events in our classes. I remember last year, we spent time in my history class learning about the war in Ukraine.

Where is the continued education on the war in Ukraine? Where is this education for the crisis in Iran? Where is this education for the crisis in Afghanistan?

Where is this education for the crisis in Yemen? Where is this education and attention for the crises all over the world?

I also believe it's important that we take education into our own hands. Each one of us should be following the news.

Just because an issue doesn't directly affect us doesn't mean it is not worthy of our attention and care.

Each of us must show solidarity with Iranians and people all over fighting for justice. We have to use our voices to evoke change. ■

**As a co-president of the club, I had an urge to do something about this crisis, just as the other co-president and all of our members did. We were hoping that this urgency would be met by all students, however, we were mostly met with ignorance.**

which Iranian protesters are fighting to change.

Freedom is restricted, especially for women, and these protests show the immense need for change. Iranians want a choice in how they live their lives, so they are taking action. Women have cut their hair, set head scarfs aflame, and continue to protest in other ways.

Unfortunately, protesting hasn't been met with change, but rather with more injustice. Authorities have tried to suppress protests with force, ignoring

protesters have been sentenced to death. Mohsen Shekari was one of these 11, and was sadly executed recently.

There is fear that this is only the beginning of death sentences for Iranian protesters. Still, protesters keep fighting.

At Highlands, we cannot be ignorant of this news. In November, the Women Empowerment Club held a fundraiser in which money was raised for the National Council of Resistance of Iran Women's Committee.

met by all students, however, we were mostly met

**It is of the utmost importance that Highlanders are educated on global crises, such as the current one in Iran.**

with ignorance.

Many people did not even know what was happening in Iran. They had no knowledge of the protests

There isn't as nearly as much focus on world history as there needs to be. Unless students choose to take AP World History, they will

# PRE-HOLIDAY STRESS ON YOUR MIND?

## One student's experiences this month as we approach the holiday break



Photo courtesy of Sienna Shrier '25

Sienna Shrier '25

December is a very stressful month, especially for students at Northern Highlands. With the holidays just around the corner and the long holiday break, there is a lot to be done.

Many people are pre-

paring to spend time with their families or even travel across the United States to celebrate the holidays. Since December is such a short month and the break comes so quickly, many teachers are cramming tests and quizzes into the week before break.

During the week before the holiday break begins, I already have four tests scheduled. This requires me to study from the minute I get home to the minute I go to bed. One of the challenging things about these tests is that they tend to fall on the same day.

The time we have in December is so short, many teachers feel the need to wrap up current units and prepare for an assessment.

**I feel that I never have a break. I'm constantly stressed out because of schoolwork, especially in December.**



Art by Jana Dabbagh '24

Can you imagine having three tests on the same day? Well, I have experienced this before and it was very difficult. I ended up doing well on one of them, but not on the other two.

I prioritized one test and didn't have as much time to study for the other two because the tests were on the same day.

While having to manage all these tests, I also have a lot of extracurricular activities that I am part of, and I don't have time to go to them. There are a lot of seasonal events in school clubs in addition to regular meetings.

I love being a part of these clubs and would love

to be able to devote more time to them and make it to these events.

For Leo Club I wrapped presents, and for TEEM there was a holiday party arranged for members. I would have wanted to attend, but could not find the time due to the amount of work I had.

If students have so much work to do and a test in every subject before the break, they won't have time to do things that are important to them.

I get home from school around 3:00 pm, then I work at an after-school program until 5:15 pm. When I get home, I have to shower, eat dinner,

and immediately start my homework.

I feel that I never have

**I love being a part of these clubs and would love to be able to devote more time to them and make it to these events.**

a break. I'm constantly stressed out because of schoolwork, especially in December.

For final exams, Northern Highlands has an exam schedule that restricts teachers from administer-

ing tests on the same day. One day is dedicated to math, and another day is dedicated to English, and so forth.

This helps manage students' stress levels and prevents them from having multiple tests on the same day.

I think that Northern Highlands should consider doing this all year round. December is a very similar month to June. The se-

mester is almost ending so there are lots of tests.

If exam schedule was implemented where there were certain testing days for certain subjects, many students would benefit. ■



# NATURAL DISASTER IN ITSELF: CLIMATE CHANGE?

## A Junior discusses the importance of caring about our Earth’s Climate



Photo courtesy of Isabela Canavan-Peña 24

**Isabela Canavan-Peña ’24**

This past year, the world has seen a dramatic increase in both the quantity and the magnitude of natural disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes, and droughts. These disasters pose a real threat to Earth’s ecosystems and if not handled immediately, will harm human infrastructure, agriculture, health, and economies.

Taking on climate change is in everyone’s best interest.

In order to properly deal with climate change, it’s important to understand how we got here. According to NASA, the term, “Climate change” refers to a shift in the Earth’s long-

term weather patterns that have come to define Earth’s local, regional and global climates.”

After the industrial revolution, the use of fossil fuels for energy released greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. The greenhouse gasses; carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and chlorofluorocarbons, trap heat from radiating back to space, like a blanket, this phenomenon is dubbed “Greenhouse effect”.

The trapped heat makes temperatures rise, natural disasters more frequent and powerful, and the melting ice caps make the sea level rise.

Climate change has a glob-

ly impacted by melting ice caps and rising sea levels.

The summer of 2022 was an especially hard time for the Earth’s climate. According to Climate Central, “2022 had the US’ third-hottest summer on record”, which led to huge wildfires that “burned more than 7.1 million acres of land”, which diminishes global air quality.

Aside from the harm caused by flames themselves, the air pollution caused by these fires can put stress on the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, putting many people with preexisting conditions in harm’s way.

The summer of 2022 was especially difficult for

**According to Climate Central, “2022 had the US’ third-hottest summer on record”, which led to huge wildfires that “burned more than 7.1 million acres of land”, which diminishes global air quality.**

al impact, but some places such as coastal areas and the Arctic, are more direct-

ly the UK, as the heatwave broke several records and is now Europe’s warmest

**Fixing the problem will be incredibly difficult if lot’s of people don’t even believe that the problem exists.**

recorded summer yet.

An important part of the fight against climate change is for everyone to be on board. Fixing the problem will be incredibly difficult if lot’s of people don’t even believe that the problem exists.

Simply helping the environment by getting others involved, whether through social media or pressuring politicians, is helpful.

Considering the fact that it’s our very lifestyles that contribute to climate change, we must change our habits to cut our carbon footprint. It’s not necessary to change one’s habits dramatically, instead, try to tweak habits slightly in favor of more environmentally friendly options.

For example, try to buy locally grown produce that’s in season. Buying

locally reduces emissions associated with transportation and also supports local businesses.

Although making changes on an individual level is important, there’s only so much one person can do. What’s vital in order to combat climate change is to pressure corporations to lower their emissions as “71% of emissions are sourced from just 100 companies.”

Although some of the companies on this list, such as ExxonMobil, have been exploring greener options, they still have a long way to go, as ExxonMobil is the 5th largest greenhouse gas emitter. We must make sure our governments hold these corporations accountable for the damage they’ve done to the environment.

The constant stream of

bleak news can feel overwhelming, and it may seem that there’s little hope for the future; however, it’s important to note that lot’s of progress has been made recently. According to the New York Times, although emissions are still rising, they’re rising at a much slower rate than before.

Several governments have started to make changes, “The European Union tightened caps on industrial emissions. China and India ramped up renewable energy. Egypt scaled back subsidies for fossil fuels. Indonesia began cracking down on illegal deforestation” (Plumer and Popovich). Although more needs to be done, these are great steps in the right direction.

Through our fight against climate change, we could develop new technology, strengthen communities, build more resilient infrastructure, and make our cities and communities friendlier to the Earth. Taking care of the environment ensures that we have a bright future ahead, for everyone. ■

# GIFTS OR GIVING?

## The importance of Christmas during this holiday season



Photo courtesy of Sebastian Tabakov 26

**Sebastian Tabakov ’26**

Seasons greetings Highlanders! If the increase in cold weather and the flurries have not given it away, this month is December as many of you might be aware—some of you, may not be. Nonetheless, December gives way to many various holidays.

Right now, I would like to put a spotlight on Christmas. Although Christmas is technically a religious holiday for those who identify as Christian, is it known as a religious holiday anymore?

Christmas is originally known for being the “date of birth” of Jesus; however,

December twenty-fifth has been historically discredited as the day of Jesus’ birth. So, what is Christmas about, at least to yours truly?

Christmas is about the ideology of being a good person. In effect, Christmas fosters an environment where everyone is kind to each other. Morale is usually high and the possibility of getting those boots that you have wanted for

gift-giving is a perk, but is also a symbol of the “gift of giving.” The presents are a way for those who celebrate to give to the ones they love and appreciate. Seeing the face of a loved one opening a gift you know they would love is easily one of the best feelings one could feel.

In essence, Christmas is one of the best times of the year. Whether you sip hot chocolate while trying

**In effect, Christmas fosters an environment where everyone is kind and sweet.**

months might be as well.

I genuinely find Christmas to be one of the most beautiful times of the year. Not only is the weather perfect, yet people’s attitudes are as well.

In addition to the mass amounts of cheer, Christmas is also known for its tradition of gift-giving. The

to warm yourself up from the frigid weather, watch antique Christmas movies you cannot help but love and hate at the same time, or buy/make a gift for someone whom you know will adore any present you could give them...have a Merry Christmas, Highlanders. ■

# TEACHER’S CORNER

## Ms. Howe introduces her quarantine pup



Photo courtesy of Alexandra Howe

**Alexandra Howe**

Growing up I wasn’t really allowed to have any pets. I had a few fish and a hermit crab once, but that was the extent of my experience with pets. I always wanted a dog, but never had the space, time, or income to support one.

Two years ago I finally moved into a house of my own and somehow managed to wear my husband down with the cutest picture of a Samoyed pup just a few hours away on a farm in Pennsylvania.

I have been obsessed with Samoyeds for as long as I can remember, and finally being able to have my

own sweet little puppy felt like a dream come true. August of 2020 Coconut came into my life, and I had never been happier.

I did extensive research on the general needs of samoyeds in terms of activity level, grooming, etc before investing in my own, so I felt prepared and that I knew what to expect. Never having had a dog before, I could not have been more wrong.

A puppy is a huge challenge, and especially a puppy that is an incredibly active breed. I won’t lie, the first six months of having Coconut took a huge toll on my mental health.

I was exhausted, frustrated, and never had any time for myself. I was worried I would regret my decision to get a dog.

It took a lot of time, patience, and training, but Coconut is absolutely the light of my life. She is the sweetest, happiest dog with a huge personality.

She makes every day better, and she even keeps me active. With the holidays coming up I think it

is always important to remember that animals are not just Christmas gifts, they are a 10-15 year commitment.

So many animals are gifted during the holidays and end up in shelters just a few months later. Pets can absolutely enhance your life, but do your research first!

Know what you are getting into, rescue if you can or find a reputable breeder, and pick a pet that suits your lifestyle. ■

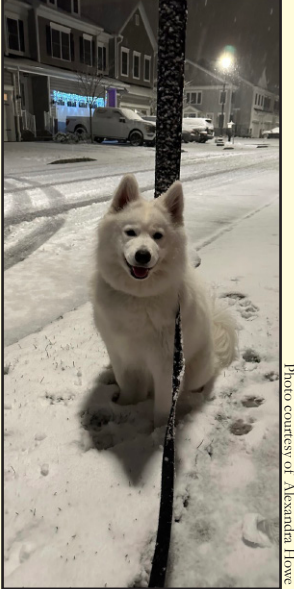


Photo courtesy of Alexandra Howe

Coconut and Ms. Howe outside for a walk in the snow.



# HAWK SAYS “NOT ON MY TURF”

The discovery of an endangered species holdsup the process of installing new turf

Jessica Gao '23

A part of the upcoming referendum is the plan to install new synthetic turf onto the fields. Recently, there was a problem with doing so, because an environmental analysis revealed there to be an endangered species living in the area: a hawk. This requires a submission to the Department of Environmental Protection, which was done on November 15 and is now awaiting response, as well as additional waivers.

According to Principal Joseph Occhino, the allocation of funds towards

the field was, “a must, because there’s wetlands and flooding within the grass field”. He goes on to add that, “We want our students and community to benefit from this space and maximize its use.”

Girls Varsity Soccer goalie and senior Mia Langan echoes this sentiment. She emphasizes that, “as of now, all the teams have to compete for turf time, and it’s unfair for many of the student athletes”. Langan goes on to say that, “I am grateful that girls soccer is prioritized, but some teams... like field hockey for example, often have

problems with practice because the fields are flooded after it rains and they don’t get priority for the turf.”

It can also be dangerous to play in such conditions, as, “people can slip and hurt themselves,” Langan says. Besides safety, the development of athletic abilities is tied to the type of field played on.

As an athlete, Langan has unique insight, explaining, “the feel of grass and turf is very different. A ball will travel at different speeds and for someone who wants to play at higher [varsity] levels, practice on grass won’t be helpful when

you’re set to play a match on turf or against players who have had experience with a different condition.”

It’s clear that these upcoming renovations are sorely needed for the development of athletes here at Highlands. But... What about the hawk?

Environmental Science teacher Ryan Fanelli highlights the importance of protecting endangered species. Fanelli explains that, “there are usually government bodies by the State that regulate what you can and can’t do when it comes to endangered species.”

He goes on to say that, “Endangered species are especially important, because they are closely at risk of declining until their populations reach 0.” By doing environmental surveys, setting up boundaries of protected land when a species is detected, and enforcing fines, the government is able to regulate human activities that impede on habitats.

When asked about the balance between both student interests and environmental protection, Fanelli was quick to point out the nuance of the issue. “Human development

and ecological sustainability can often be at odds. It’s an impossible question to answer. I think it’s on a case to case basis.”

As for the current situation, he says that, “While turfing may have some ef-

ingly, not a lot of people even know what’s going on. Once you get the message out there, people do want to help and lobby for change. Education and knowledge are the biggest [factor].”

Ultimately, it seems

**“Surprisingly, not a lot of people even know what’s going on. Once you get the message out there, people do want to help and lobby for change. Education and knowledge are the biggest [factor].”**

*Ryan Fanelli*

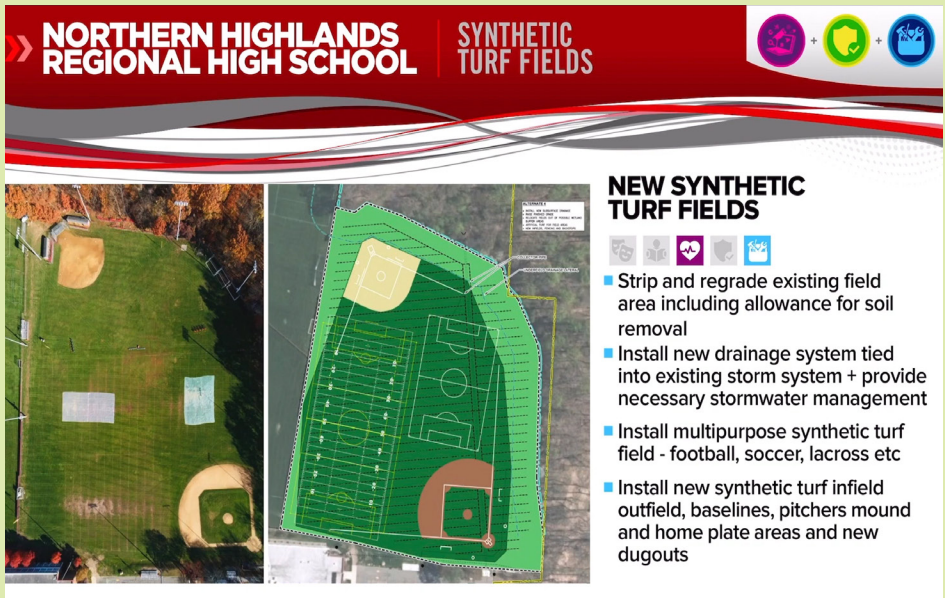


Photo Courtesy of Northern Highlands Regional High School

Proposal for the new synthetic turf fields from the presentation given to the community.

# BOE: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The BOE recently sent out an email detailing their responsibilities in the district

Laney McCrossin '26

The Northern Highlands Board of Education (BOE) recently sent an infographic to clarify certain aspects of their position. This was done in the hopes that by community members having more knowledge of the board’s role, they would be able to increase their input and understanding of the BOE’s job.

This infographic highlighted the many misconceptions with the board including their qualifications, reasons they are/aren’t able to share certain information, their benevolent intents, and most importantly, the unfortunate fact that they are not able to make snow days.

With a new year comes new needs for the community and consequently, new goals for the Board of Education.

As stated by the Board of Education President, Christine Ferrarie, “One of the many responsibilities of the board of education is to set goals for the year, and this year we ambitiously set three. Our goals are drafting and implementing a timeline for phase one of

the referendum, ensuring that we effectively communicate with stakeholders, and creating a handbook for new Board members.”

The BOE has many functions, but predominantly, it aims to help the school community. By communicating their roles and responsibilities, the board was able to enlighten the community in an effort to further their relationship. “The Board of Education consists of community members. We are volunteers, but take our role very seriously,” says Ferrarie. “We appreciate the need for transparency and trust.”

Although efficient communication is important for the adults to understand, it is also important for Highlands students, who are indirectly affected by the board’s decisions. As stated by Principal Occhino, “While they express their opinion to the superintendent, it’s the superintendent’s job then to make sure that administrators, directors, and supervisors are doing what is required to meet the needs of our district. This includes working directly with teachers to ensure that our students are

getting the education they deserve. So it kind of starts with the board, but they’re hands off and that’s exactly the way it’s supposed to be when it comes to the daily operations of the school”

To further share the board’s ideas with students, there are two student Board of Education representa-

ments, our concerns, and interests within our school,” senior Joy Navarro, a student Board of Education Representative, states.

Their roles have been very important to the Board of Education and the student body.

“They are in a unique position to offer us a stu-

**“The Board of Education consists of community members. We are volunteers, but take our role very seriously... We appreciate the need for transparency and trust.”**

*BOE President Christine Ferrarie*

tives. “I applied to be a Student Representative of the BOE to speak on behalf of the students at Highlands and give the student body a voice on our proudest mo-

ment’s perspective, and to learn first-hand about the board meetings,” Ferrarie says. “We all feel very lucky to have them here!”

The Board of Educa-

tion has many responsibilities, but primarily, they work with adjusting and approving the budget, setting policy, and creating standards for the education system. “I feel our top priority is to understand the needs of all of the community and to set the direction of the district.” These tasks are accomplished through meetings typically held twice a month. Unless specified as executive sessions or another type of secluded meeting, these sessions are open to the public and legally required to have a public comment period. Here, the public can express their concerns and comment on issues which the board can take into account when voting on important issues.

It is evident that being on the BOE is a tremendous responsibility, so how exactly do voting members get on the board?

According to Dr. LaRocca who once served on a Board of Education, “[to get on the board,] you run. You submit an application to the county to get on a ballot. There are ballot measures that you have to meet. You have to get a cer-

tain amount of signatures on a petition and you get certified at the county level. Then, you put it to the voters in your community to see if your vision matches what the community wants and if they want to put you there.”

Student representatives have to go through a similar —although slightly less intensive— process of being elected to student council.

The BOE is an essential part of the school community and much can be learned watching their dedication and work ethic.

“One of the many things I have learned is that everything is a process, and things take time,” BOE student representative Madeleine Norian says. “While many things are imperfect, if you can brainstorm ways to make improvements, speak up, and find the right people, changes can be made for the better. If you are willing to put in the thought and the effort, so much can be done.”. ■



# Z PLUS GETS AN A PLUS FOR BUILDING

Architecture students go to Z plus architecture to see their studies in the real world

Rebecca Hoffer '23

Honors Architecture will be taking a field trip to visit a construction site at Z Plus Architecture, based in Allendale. Students will be looking at real homes in their building process and speak with real world architects.

As stated by Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca, "to see it come to life is the value there."

Honors Architecture will be traveling down the road to Franklin Lakes where there are several homes being built on the land of knocked down ranch hall buildings. One home is nearing its final stages while another is in its beginning stages of construction.

Already, the class has visited the site during the end of October. They plan to revisit in the be-

ginning of January and the end of March when there will be further progress in construction. There they will see the 3-D versions of the 2-D plans.

Similarly to many of the other educational trips at Highlands, they offer

"It goes a lot more to see [these construction sites] in person than from a book," Principal Joseph Occhino says.

An alumnus of Northern Highlands Regional High School, Mary Scro, is a current President at

of complications, such as cost. It is essential to know that laid out plans do not always carry out in the way they are expected to.

"They get to see the real world applications and the plans come to life.... all the aspects and phases of building a home," architecture and engineering teacher Al Mugno says.

Students are also able to ask questions and acquire information about the architecture field from professional framers and general contractors.

In addition to these trips, there is a mentorship program in which students are separated into four groups, one mentor per group. Mentors will be reviewing floor plans, plot landscape plans, and house orientation, four times throughout the year.

All the mentors are past Northern Highlands

students. Amongst them, one mentor was taught by Mugno. He pursued architecture at Yale University and is one of the lead architects of Disney. Other mentors include Scro, as well as an individual who owns a local Paulius architecture.

There is also an architecture review night that welcomes friends and family to attend alongside with students. Architects go

around and give constructive criticism to students' models they have built in class with Capstone.

These opportunities are curated to the curriculum to help shape a students' understanding of the field and give them the opportunity to see professionals at work in a career students are interested in pursuing.■

**"They get to see the real world applications and the plans come to life... all the aspects and phases of building a home."**

*Honors Architecture and Engineer teacher  
Al Mugno*

this opportunity to see something students normally see in class in the real world; an opportunity that may serve as a very profound experience to students interested in the field.

Z Plus Architecture. Scro offers hints and tips on various aspects of the construction process like what to look and plan for. Many times, plans are corrected due to all types



Z Plus construction site

Photo Courtesy of Z Plus Instagram

# TIMES CHANGE, AND HIGHLANDS WITH IT

After a student noticed an offensive poster, the school decided to take it down

Amy Tullett '23

Posters and paintings containing famous quotes or the faces of well-known people are used as wall decor throughout Northern Highlands. However, a poster containing a quote by Indira Gandhi no longer hangs after senior Keeret Kaur took initiative to get this poster taken down.

"When I saw the poster...I was stunned by how I had missed it before this. It was huge and hanging for everyone to see...Having a poster with an Indira Gandhi quote is not only an insult to the Sikh community but an insult to human rights," Kaur said.

Daughter of the first Prime Minister of India, Gandhi was the first female Prime Minister

of India and under "her power some of the worst human rights violations occurred," Kaur noted.

Kaur explained that one of these violations include ordering an attack named "Operation Blue Star". In June 1984, Sikh civilians went to the holiest place of Sikh worship, the Golden Temple, to celebrate Gurpurab, the anniversary of a Guru's birth. These civilians were attacked under the operation and 554 casualties occurred.

However, "the most heartbreaking part," Kaur expressed under Gandhi's rule was "Operation Woodrose", where "thousands of Sikhs, mostly young men, were kidnapped by police, beat and tortured for any number of days." Baptized Sikh

men wearing religious articles of clothing are labeled as terrorists in their own country to this day and Kaur recognized that "Gandhi's action led to the migration of Sikhs out of their own country because

ica because of how unsafe they were in their motherland. So to see a poster glorifying the woman who caused so much pain and trauma is disgusting."

To get the poster taken down after seeing it, Kaur

**"Our quotes around this building should be meant to inspire, we don't want anybody to read a quote and be uninspired, so that's why we decided to take it down."**

*Principal Joseph Occhino*

of how unsafe they were."

Underlying her reasoning for wanting the poster taken down, Kaur explained, "My parents both immigrated to Amer-

"immediately emailed [her] guidance counselor and informed him why it was wrong to have a quote from Indira Gandhi hung up."

At the time the post-

er was hung up, students were picking out posters to be hung around the school and "I don't think whoever was doing that at the time dug any deeper," Principal Joseph Occhino said.

However, once brought to the attention of the administration, they looked into the quote. Based on the research conducted it was concluded that "while the quote is good, the person who is quoted probably is contradictory," Occhino revealed.

The poster got taken down within a few days of sending her email "which I greatly appreciate," Kaur expressed.

"Our quotes around this building should be meant to inspire, we don't want anybody to read a quote and be uninspired, so that's

why we decided to take it down," Occhino explained.

In terms of other cases where students may find something offensive around the school or have an opinion that something should be changed or taken down, the administration may not see anything that should be done at that point in time but, "I can tell you a conversation will be had," Occhino reassures.

"We don't have a problem as an administration hearing what our students have to say, it's important, but also in the end, whatever decisions are made, we would just hope that respect is reciprocated enough to say 'although our administration feels differently, we do respect their decision,'" Occhino expressed.■

# STEM CLUB E-NABLES FOR PROSTHETIC HANDS

The STEM club competes in a time crunched science competition

Karina Rosenberg '26

On December 16, Al Mugno and the STEM club attended a competition at Bloomfield High School. The STEM club has been at Northern Highlands since 2013 and was founded by Mugno, who is currently running the club, with Senior Tyler Chen as club president. The STEM club includes working with sciences, technology, engineering, math, and more complex ideas.

Recently, the club has been working on a project called E-NABLE, where prosthetic hands

are being made for children. After working on the hands, they are sent to a humanitarian organization, where the prosthetic is finalized. In addition, Chen has incorporated additional aspects to this club, including NASA and space asteroid projection.

Their projects generally take three weeks to complete, while participants are only given one school day to complete a project, during a competition. As such, an ample amount of work and dedication is needed to complete the STEM club's projects.

The STEM club meets

every two weeks, and the meetings are increased to once every week as competitions approach. STEM competitions occur every few months, including one in May of 2023, which will be hosted at Northern Highlands. Mugno states, "We go to STEM competitions that are in the New Jersey STEM League. We compete against other schools at the competitions and we form a team of around five to six students from the club."

The STEM club includes around 50 students, and competition participants are chosen based on their availability, as well

as their strength and skill level for the competition. However, if students are capable of attending the competition but are not chosen, they will be one of the first choices for the following competition.

Upon arrival, students are given their task/problem. At their most recent competition, they began around 8:30 am. During the limited duration of the competition, students are to complete an engineering log and CAD drawings, complete a science lab and intense research, write an explanation, build a model of their design, test

their model, and present their project to the judges.

According to many, this intensity of a task in a short period of time can be not only stressful, but also incredibly beneficial to the students. Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca explains, "...everyone in the STEM club is given the opportunity to work together for a common goal and to really put their minds together and compete to try and satisfy a task."

LaRocca later states, "I think it provides the students the ability to work on the fly. Whether that's a competitive advantage in

an interview or a college atmosphere or in a workplace, being thrown a task and being able to find a solution is a life skill that students are getting from the club and its competitions."

To conclude, the STEM club's main goals are to compete in competitions, as well as forming a strong team of persistent students, and expanding their perspectives and ideas on sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics; STEM.■



# NHRHS TEACHER OF THE YEAR

## Meizys wins Highlands Teacher of the Year and looks for more

Continued from Page 1

Why exactly is the Teacher of the Year award so important?

Occhino describes the impact it has on the Highlands community, saying how, “it gives teachers an opportunity to showcase their talents, and really understand the importance of the value they have as educators here at Northern Highlands.”

So, what’s the next

**“I think this is an award that is well [deserved]. Mr. Meizys has taught loads of classes, he’s started some courses for us here, but the work that he does, in his law class, and with his AP class, is amazing; he is an excellent teacher.”**

*Principal Joseph Occhino*

step? one wins the Teacher of apply for county level for Occhino states that if the Year award, they can Teacher of the Year next.

If a teacher wins this, they can run for state Teacher of the Year.

Meizys affirmed that he will be running for County Teacher of the Year, saying, “I feel like I owe it to all the great staff we have here to do that, to show what great teachers we have here. If I win the county award, it’s kind of like a win for the school.”

As for his “prize”, Meizys says that he has received many congratulations and even recognition

from the Board of Education.

He says that he might be leading the graduates out during graduation as well.

The school has shown immense support for Meizys and his well deserved award.

Only time will tell what is in store for him and his possible future awards.■

# COMING SOON: CUMULATIVE EXAMS

## New final exam policies and addition of midterms exams to be put in place

Continued from Page 1

Seniors are currently exempt from all of their finals if their average for the final year is an A minus. For students in AP classes, the final is not required if a student chooses to take the AP exam. Otherwise, a student must achieve a B minus or higher to drop the final for AP classes.

It is also important to note that the final exams will no longer be called finals, but instead be referred to as “cumulative exams”. The weight of the cumulative exams will also be 5% for each semester exam, instead of having just the final exam at the end of the year be worth 10% of the student’s final grade.

Principal Joseph Occhino explains the newer cumulative exams, “what we are trying to do is to redesign the way in which we asses our students that not only depicts if students have learned subject material but

to do so in a way that is less stressful. With first semester cumulative exams, students only need to focus on material taught from September through mid-January. Second semester exams, will

ter two, but those exams will be weighted half the amount than they were in the previous two years.

Additionally, teachers will be able to split their curriculum up into two

vironment. The hope is that students will be able to take final exams. However, with the lack of practice due to extenuating circumstances, there is still the worry that students don’t know how to take an exam at such caliber.

With the new cumulative exam system, every student leaving Northern Highlands will have some experience with exams that will be similar to those at a higher level of education, like college, which will allow students to adjust better to college. Although there will still be stress surrounding these exams, the likelihood of the stress being as bad further down the line is diminished with the practice of these cumulative exams.

In response to the lack of practice for these cumulative exams, junior Giuliana Jens commented “I am a little nervous since we’ve never had cumulatives before and it is a bit frustrat-

ing that we have to take them out senior year and can’t exempt them.”

“Many of our students have not sat for what we would consider a high stakes exam, especially kids that are now going to college that will be required to take some type of semester exam. So we’re trying to mirror more what students will be doing at the collegiate level because you really have to come out of here taking some type of exam that encompasses what you’ve learned over a period of time,” Occhino also remarked.

Although Occhino thinks the new style of cumulative exams will be beneficial to students, some Highlanders are not so fond of the idea of these new exams. Junior Gari Lenkowsky mentioned, “since not a single grade level has ever had a true year of finals, cumulatives seem like a bit too much.”

For students worried

about stress when it comes to these cumulative exams for the future years, it is important to remember that these exams are only worth 5% per semester.

Additionally, the faculty will adjust to best help students who are especially worried about these exams.

Overall, the exams will give students a chance to relearn vital test-taking skills that might have been lost during the recent pandemic, returning Highlands back to normalcy.■



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# WHEN THE RANDOM FACTS MATTER

## Quiz bowl team knows their facts, helping them make it to the Play-offs

Matthew Steinfink ’25

Throughout the year the Quiz Bowl team has multiple competitions where they compete against other high schools answering trivia questions.

Their next competition is set to be on January 14 at Ridgewood High School, which is specifically a History Bowl, where most of the questions are history-related.

The club meets once a week to prepare for these competitions where students are asked “jeopardy style trivia questions”, as the club’s advisor John Gornell describes.

During these tournaments, students play to-

gether in teams where they work together to figure out the answers, and teamwork is a major part of the activity.

During the competitions, the teams are given a wide variety of questions ranging from topics including history, literature, math, science, geography, and more.

The questions can be quite difficult to answer as they are each around a paragraph long and require the teams to pay close attention to specific details in order to get them right.

The questions are also very specific, which allows for students to show just how much information they know about the subjects.

When sophomore Michael Grinberg, a member of the club, was asked about why he joined, he responded by explaining it was, “because I was inspired by Jeopardy, and wanted to showcase my trivia knowledge”.

During the tournaments, students are given two types of questions. First, there are toss-up questions where both teams are given an opportunity to answer. The first team to press their buzzer and answer the question correctly gets points.

If a team answers the tossup question correctly, depending on the question they may be even allowed to answer a bonus question

which allows for even more points. These bonus questions build off of the previous tossup question.

Speed, of course, plays an important role. Gornell explains that if students “answer it real quick before the question is finished [they] get bonus points.” This is referred to as power, where if someone answers a question before a specific point, their team gains extra points. This requires the participants to be very quick on their feet in order to get even higher scores.

Recently the team had a competition at Milburn High School where the team made it to the playoffs and as Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca stated, “they

are doing incredibly well”.

**Teamwork is a major part of the club and an important benefit of the team “is the camaraderie that comes from it.”**

*Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca*

The students who participate in the club seem

to be very dedicated and like-minded people, and this club and the competitions provide them with an opportunity to showcase their talents. Teamwork is a major part of the club and an important benefit of the team “is the camaraderie that comes from it,” as LaRocca highlights.

The club has different members throughout the year, but overall “there’s twenty-five plus kids in the club and they are locked in,” LaRocca notes.

The club spans as of right now across two seasons, so it gives students who are part of a sport an opportunity to participate in the club during another time of the year.■



# SPREADING HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Caleigh Amano '23

Aside from December being all about the holidays, it is also an important month to give back to the community. Here at Highlands, there are so many ways during the month of December that we can volunteer and help make a difference.

One popular and great way Highlands students make a positive difference in the community is through Cardz for Kidz.

This organization provides uplifting cards for children in hospitals. Fun and positive handwritten cards have been made by students all throughout the month of December.

This is a great way to give back while also allowing students to show their creative side. Cardz for Kidz also runs through the spring so there is another opportunity to participate in this amazing organization.

Another great opportunity here at Highlands is Adopt-A-Family. This year we were tasked with purchasing gifts for an 11 year old who is hospitalized with a long term illness. This is an awesome way to help a family in need around the holiday season. Students bought gifts that were on the families wishlists and then wrapped them up so they can be delivered to those families. We participate in this every year and it is great to make a difference in a family's life during the holiday season.



Art by Izzy Levine '23

## ALZHEIMERS AWARENESS

Matthew Reichert '24

The Northern Highlands Alzheimer's Awareness Organization and Highlands Cares would like to thank the listed businesses for their support of the Alzheimer's Association. Alzheimer's is a devastating condition that requires a united effort to combat. These businesses did their part in helping those with Alzheimer's and for that they deserve recognition. If you would like to contribute to the Alzheimer's Association find information at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).

*Toscana Pizza*



**allendale**  
FLOWERS

# HOLIDAY SPIRIT IS IN THE AIR AT HIGHLANDS!

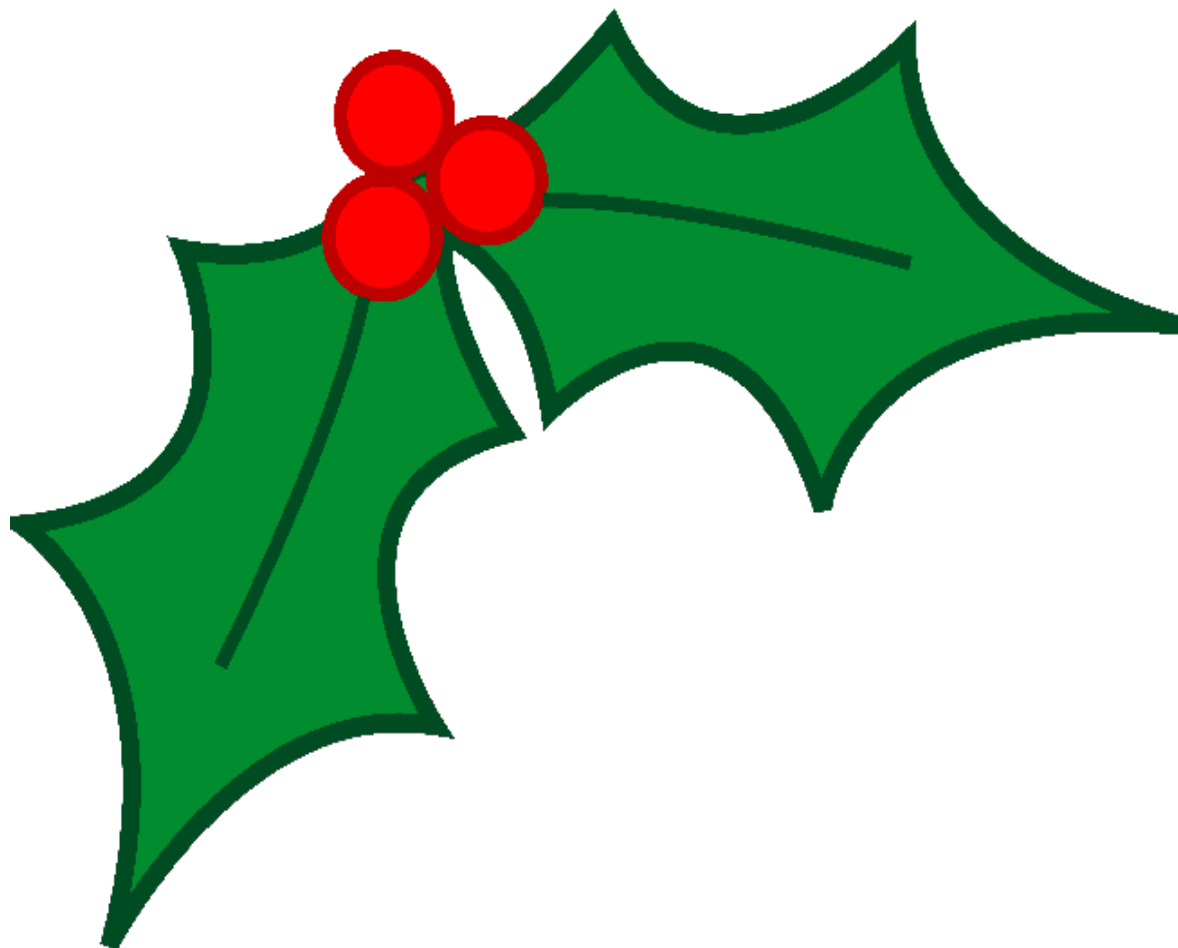
## HOW STUDENTS ARE STAYING FESTIVE THIS MONTH

It's the most wonderful time of the year. The holiday season is arguably one of the most memorable times of the year. Whether it be smelling the tasty scent of freshly baked cookies that pervades the food/nutrition class hallways or learning about how French culture celebrates the holidays with the *Buche de Noel*, the holiday season is something no highlander wishes to miss out on. Today we will dive into how Highlanders celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah and how they are unique to them.

Excitement is at an all-time high for the Jewish Community at Highlands once Hanukkah rolls around. Hanukkah consists of 8 nights; Hanukkah starts on December 19 this year. I had the opportunity to interview Jesse Milston '23 about what Hanukkah means to him. Milston says, "we celebrate Hanukkah usually by staying home and cooking together. Most years, we'll also go into the city to visit my grandparents and spend time with them. Hanukkah is super important to me because it's a fun holiday and a story of tragedy and triumph. I get to keep alive my heritage and religion by celebrating it." I also had the opportunity to speak with Ava Gamburg '23 about how Hanukkah is unique to her. When asked what is most special about Hanukkah to her, Gamburg said, "Hanukkah is an exceptional time of year for my family and me. My cousins, close family, and friends all gather at my house to celebrate. We make food and have a traditional Hanukkah dinner. Hanukkah is a time of year when I can spend quality time with my family and friends, all while eating yummy food like potato pancakes."

This year, Christmas time engulfs American pop culture with festive songs, such as Mariah Carey's "All I Want for Christmas is You". Highlanders spend more time with family this time of year, making cheerful gingerbread houses or decorating the Christmas tree. Speaking of Christmas trees, Madame King, one of the French teachers at Highlands, has a real Christmas tree in her classroom. She wanted to teach her students how French culture celebrates Christmas with fun decorations such as the Christmas tree or the *Sapin de Noel*. The AP French class helped decorate the tree in preparation for the holiday celebration they will have before the break. The AP French holiday celebration will be adorned with French food such as *raclette*, *charcuterie*, and *le Buche de Noel*.

When talking to Carlie Barsanti '23 about how Christmas is special to her, she says, "Christmas is indeed such a magical time of year for my family and me. I love the excitement of the holiday time, such as fresh cookies, gingerbread houses, fun holiday movies, beautiful Christmas lights illuminating the houses as you drive home from school, and fun Christmas tunes. My family always shares special memories that I cherish forever. We have an annual tradition of going to a Christmas tree farm in New York and chopping down our Christmas tree. We love decorating it with bright lights and ornaments, all while watching our favorite Christmas movies." Barsanti, like many others, loves the



MADAME KING AND ALEX SOGNATOVICH  
'26 POSE IN FRONT OF OF MADAME KING'S  
CHRISTMAS TREE.

WRITTEN BY LAUREN ROWLAND '23





# SPOTIFY WRAPPED WRAPS UP THE YEAR

## Students share excitement over the anticipated Spotify Wrapped

Jiya Singh '24

As the year draws to a close, we are all looking forward to one very special thing. If you thought this was about the holiday season, you're wrong. As of November 30, Spotify users were able to access their Spotify Wrapped.

Released at the end of every year, Spotify Wrapped allows users to look at their listening data over the past year. Ever since its release in 2016, it has become one of the most iconic and memorable features of the music platform.

Spotify Wrapped provides an opportunity to bring people together over something as simple as listening habits.

"If you enjoy music that someone else also enjoys, when you listen to the music together, it is similar to participating in a mutual hobby which can strengthen your relationship," sophomore Gabby Rodriguez says.

Spotify Wrapped compiles data from January 1 to October 31, which many speculate is to prevent Christmas music from changing the data.

The data compiled shows one's top 5 artists, songs, and genres, and

the total minutes a person spent listening to music. It also tells users how many types.

"I think these new additions were a nice sur-



Jiya Singh's audio day from her Spotify Wrapped this year.

genres, songs, and artists they've explored.

Some newer features are the Audio Day and Listening Personality. In one, Spotify tells you how your listening changes throughout the day while the other judges you based on your listening habits to assign you one of sixteen listening personality

prise because they provide information on my music taste that I might not have noticed," junior Austin Park says.

While the new stats are interesting, the basics still reveal things about everyone's listening habits. Senior Allie Paganessi's top five artists were Morgan Wallen, Rihanna,

Pitbull, Bruno Mars, and SZA. Her top three genres were Country, Pop, and Hip-Hop.

"I feel like listening to various genres lets me connect with lots of new people," Paganessi says. Even though they are all popular, Paganessi's top genres and artists all have unique sounds, exhibiting her variety when it comes to music taste.

The Spotify Wrapped also tells users how many minutes they've spent listening to each artist and how that relates to other listeners worldwide.

Junior Grace Zimny was in the top 0.5% of Lana Del Rey listeners with nearly 4,000 minutes spent listening to her. "Lana makes me feel empowered. She just gets me," Zimny says.

For many people, it appears that their favorite artist or song is something they can relate to and identify with.

But for some Highlanders, it's all about the way the music sounds. Sophomore Alex Khoury says, "I like the song "After Hours" by The Weeknd because there's a beat change that keeps it interesting. Also, he has such a nice voice."

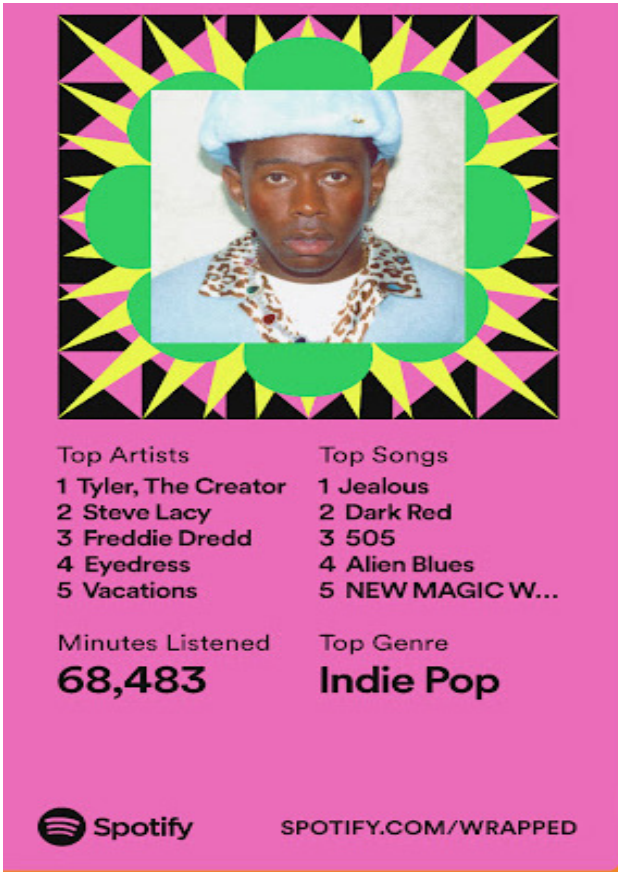
Despite all of the ex-

citement, some Highlanders feel like the Spotify Wrapped is not completely accurate.

"I feel like my mu-

frequently like every six months."

If the Wrapped were to be compiled biannually, it would likely lessen



Austin Park's top artists and songs from his Spotify Wrapped this year.

music taste changes halfway throughout the year, so it only takes into account the first half," junior Drishti Chauhan says.

Similarly, Rodriguez says "I would prefer to get my results biannually instead because personally, music taste changes

most of the excitement and hype surrounding it.

It is an unlikely change, even if it will improve the accuracy of the data. Even if there's a change, I don't think the hype surrounding the Spotify Wrapped will ever die, rightfully so. ■

# HIGHLANDS SHINES BRIGHT THIS YEAR

## Theater students rehearse in the school musical, *Bright Star*

Raya Baghal '26

The school musicals and plays never disappoint here at Highlands. There is something great in store for the upcoming winter musical, *Bright Star*.

This tuneful show is

town and her baby is taken at birth without her or the father of the child's consent.

She then grows into a successful magazine editor and encounters an unexpected surprise later in her life.

Critics' review on this

sical happened in early December.

Freshman Sebastian Tabakov got the opportunity to take on the role of Stanford, the mayor's lawyer. Tabakov explains his love for the musical and what makes it so special: "*Bright Star* has

expectations of growing up, and teen pregnancy."

Tabakov continues to explain, "it is very im-

Behind everything, there is always a hidden meaning. Tabakov describes the theme of the

thing."

This musical already seems to be amusing, entertaining, and pure. Although the dates to watch the musical are still to be determined, Tabakov suggests that everyone should bring family and friends, and maybe even some popcorn.

He says, "I would recommend all Highlands staff and students to come watch and support us because though the musical is set a century prior to where we are now, it's relatable, and many teenagers can compare their lives to this production. It is a theatrical experience that is important for the youth. When you watch this musical, it's as if you like a show or a movie so much because you relate to it so deeply."

Whether you may think you can directly relate to the musical or not, the moral of the story can be understood in multiple ways, so everyone will be able to take something away from it. ■

**"The musical just highlights the importance of not letting others get in the way of what you desire, and prioritizing your happiness..."**

*Freshman Sebastian Tabakov*



The *Bright Star* musical poster.

inspired by a true story, written by Steve Martin and Edie Brickell, about a girl who becomes pregnant as a teenager. However, her pregnancy is hidden from her entire

musical is, by no surprise, amazing. "The musical is gentle-spirited, not gaudy, and moves with an easy-going grace where others prance and strut."

Auditions for the mu-

a very deep and unique story behind it. This is a musical that can relate to many teenagers our age. It deals with many emotions. It deals with having overbearing parents, ex-

Photo Courtesy of The Curran San Francisco.



# THE ACA-SHOWDOWN IS COMING

## A cappella groups are preparing for the upcoming ICHSA Quarterfinals

Drishti Chauhan '26

The Highlands Harmonics, Belles, and Voices will be competing in the International Championship of High School A Cappella (ICHSA) Quarterfinals on January 29, February 4, and February 25, respectively.

The Harmonics will kick off the quarterfinal frenzy in their home auditorium, right here at Highlands, with the Belles road-tripping to Cherry Hill the weekend after for their competition. The Voices will pull up the rear, traveling to Bayonne for their quarterfinal.

The Harmonics will be performing "Ocean Eyes" by Billie Eilish, "Golden" by Harry Styles, and "Wonder" by Shawn Mendes.

The Belles will be singing "Greedy" by Ariana Grande, "Dandelions"

by Ruth B, and "What is Love" by V. Bozeman for their set.

The Voices will sing "Miracle" by Kimbra, "Minefields" by Fauzia and John Legend, and "Viva las Vengeance" by Panic! At The Disco.

Voices members are excited about all of their three songs, but they certainly have favorites. Senior Sanai Fowler states that she likes "Viva because it's very upbeat, and it's very 'yeah, I'm a rockstar' and [they] haven't sung a song like that before."

On the other hand, senior Patrick Keeble said that "Miracle" was his favorite because "It's upbeat in a different way than Viva, Viva is more in your face, but Miracle sets the tone."

Belles' members have favorites as well. Freshman Paige Ellis

said her favorite song is "'Greedy', because, from the first note, it sets a really good tone for the rest of the set."

Sophomore Daphne Laterra says her favorite is "'What Is Love', because [she] really likes her alto part and thinks it is a really fun song with a lot of big chords to sing with everybody."

Harmonics members expressed their favorite songs as well. Farrah Dello Russo says her favorite is "'Wonder', because [she] sings that solo, but [she] really likes all [of their] songs." She added that "'Golden' is also a really good song."

The ICHSA Quarterfinals are quite important for all three groups to exhibit their hard work from the season so far. Dello Russo says, "it's really important because it kind of displays everything we

have been working on."

Laterra said that "it's a really fun exciting chance, especially since it's [her] first year in Belles, so [she's] really excited to

try [her] best."

As seniors, Keeble and Fowler will be having their last quarterfinal this year. Keeble mentioned that "something

**"You go in there wanting to pass on to the next level, but once you get off the stage you're really satisfied with what you've been working with, no matter what."**

*Senior Sanai Fowler*

have the first competition with everyone, and it will be a great experience to bond."

Ellis will be competing for the first time, so the quarterfinal takes on an extra special meaning as well. She says she's "going into it with a go-with-the-flow mindset, and [she's] just going to

felt different about last year compared to this year... like the pressure seems on."

Fowler spoke about



# WEDNESDAY IS A SMASHING HIT

## Netflix's new *Wednesday* adaptation is a hit amongst students

Isabel Malley '23

It's easy to say we all know and love the haunted and infamous Addams family. They have been the epitome of spooky, scary Halloween classics we grew up watching and singing along to.

That's why on November 23, when Netflix released the spinoff series "Wednesday," it became an instant hit.

As the plot focuses on the eldest daughter of the family, it's all viewers can talk about, including many

If you have not seen the Addams family and have no idea who Wednesday is or why anyone is talking about the show, here's a quick summary: an oddly wealthy, goth, and grim family is seemingly unaware that anyone finds them unsettling. Their family consists of Gomez and Morticia Addams, and their children, Wednesday and Pugsley, along with other household members.

Each member has their own distinctive super power, making them

This Netflix original series, however, follows the life of Wednesday played by Jenna Ortega, and her adventures at her new school, Nevermore Academy — a school par-

her previous high school for gruesome revenge, she is forced to attend this school by her parents.

Though at first she is determined to escape, she eventually finds a multi-

ers, indulge in her new, one-sided love interests, and to solve a mystery.

The series is directed by the iconic Tim Burton, who is known for his gothic fantasy and horror

ton produces clay-mation movies. When I found out he was producing a live action series, I was immediately interested," senior Mia Anselmi says. In this show, he truly works hard to make Wednesday's character the monotonous, dark, and macabre-fascinated girl she is.

Every detail of Wednesday, from her hair to her facial expressions, is carefully crafted by Burton. In fact, in a recent interview with Jenna Ortega, she explains how Burton taught her to do her deadpan facial expressions. "[Wednesday] doesn't blink. He likes it when I tilt my chin down and look through my eyebrows."

Now that you're all caught up on Netflix's latest hit show, it's time to binge. "I would definitely recommend the show to other Highlanders because it's a very engaging show. It's hard to not watch the whole thing at once. There are so many different characters and personalities, you begin to grow connections," senior Jordan Roth says.

Students only have the best to say about the series, so it's safe to say you won't be disappointed with "Wednesday." ■



Christina Ricci (Ms. Thornhill) was child actor of Wednesday in 1990s.

of our own students here at Northern Highlands. "I like that the show brought back an old movie and made it modern," senior Bella O'Callaghan says.

all the more frightening.

The fictional family has been featured in comic strips, TV shows, movies, songs, and has become a staple to popular culture.



Official Netflix poster for the 2022 TV series.

ticularly for outcasts. After she is expelled from

tude of reasons to stay: to master her psychic pow-

works.

"Usually Tim Bur-



# KICKING AND SCREAMING

## Qatar punts the World Cup back into the focus for the end of 2022

Gabriella Ragazzo '26

To kick into the latest news, the World Cup has been the topic for the last couple of weeks.

The 22nd FIFA World Cup was held in Qatar from November 20 through December 18t 2022. It is the second World Cup to be hosted entirely in Asia after the 2002 competition in South Korea and Japan, and the

be accomplished with money and football.

The move of the fixture schedule from the customary summer timetable to the late autumn was the biggest concession in World Cup history. This was caused by the scorching summer temperatures in Qatar.

The effect has been a month-long disruption in major league schedules. The top 32 teams in

The eight sites are all within easy driving distance of one another, with the longest driving distance between stadiums being 34 miles, thus the action will take place within a fairly manageable distance.

Getting in the mood for the sport, popular songs are being shared mainly because of the World Cup. Some songs that are relevant are “Dreamers” by Jung Kook of BTS, “World Cup” by IShowSpeed, and “Tukoh Taka” by Nicki Minaj, Maluma, and Myriam Fares.

The significance of these songs is that they represent the excitement and focused mental stability for fans and players. Having outside events that tie back to the World Cup makes it more enjoyable and famous.

Switching topics, here are key moments you may have missed: The streets of Doha were influenced with a somewhat different form of the thobe, which is traditionally worn by Arab males and is typically a long, flowy garment in the demure white hue.

The brilliantly colored thobes worn by fans who wanted to fully experience Middle Eastern culture could be seen from a distance. Many also choose to wear a similar ghutra or shemagh, a common head covering in the Arab East.

Social media was swamped with popular videos of people discover-

ing Qatar’s national clothing and learning more about the region’s history.

Due to cultural differences, many people had expressed skepticism about the Gulf nation hosting the tournament prior to the matches, however on the field, spectators could be seen joyfully embracing traditions.

In one widely shared video, a Qatar influencer was shown demonstrating how to correctly wear the ghutra to an England fan before taking a picture with him. A lot of companies have also popped up right before the games, offering fans thobes and ghutras.

On November 23, when the Japan national team’s match against Germany ended, fans rose to clean the stadium in accordance with a long-observed custom. By setting a positive example, the fans made sure that the stadiums were kept pristine after matches, winning them the hearts and respect of people all around the world.

Even at events where Japan wasn’t participating, the practice was observed several times. Videos showed Japanese fans cleaning up trash on the stairways and between the seats in the stadiums while holding throwaway bags in their hands. The group effort has received praise online, with several commenters suggesting that other initiatives may take note.

At the World Cup, games may be intense. Fans naturally express their emotions when watching their team play, especially since many of them have strong allegiances to their nation.

This happened during the game between the tournament’s hosts, Qatar, and Ecuador when a fight sprang up in the fans. A video of a Qatari fan responding to an Ecuadorian fan’s taunts during the World Cup’s opening game was circulated online. “I hope that everyone shares this clip...in the end, we’re only here to watch this beautiful game,” he stated.

“Passion sometimes makes people upset, but

and most popular sporting event in the world is the World Cup.

“The joy that people have of watching their country play at the World Cup, and the excitement and the passion that it elicits is something that no other event-be it in the field of sports, entertainment or politics-in the world can match,” Bradley boldly stated.

Soccer by no means has the only national representation authority. More fans around the world followed the World Cup than any other event, including the Olympics, with a devotion that was intense, fanatical, and almost religious.

“Simply put, football



Picture of the 2022 Fifi World Cup which was held in Qatar.

first to be staged in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

When the World Cup was declared to be held in Doha 12 years ago, it was an entirely different experience to go through the city. Qatar has undergone a transition that can only

the world are traveling to Doha, with Italy being a notable exception.

The World Cup has a wide range of subtitles. Due to the autumn season, the competitors show up prepared for the demanding competition.



we come together for sports...I wish Qatar the best and it’s a beautiful World Cup so far,” the Ecuadorian fan responds.

Soccer is a universal sport. It is the most widely played sport in the world and is practiced everywhere. The largest

matters, and by extension, the World Cup matters,” Gleeson stated. “It’s the world game and you have this amazing confluence of the sport’s best players coming together in one spot for a month. It’s magic.” ■

# NH MUSIC IN THE WINTER SPIRIT

## The holidays are near and the NH music department is in full gear

Danielle Larsen '24

On December 14, the band and choir will be performing their annual winter concert at 7pm in the Hopkins Hall auditorium. In addition, on the day following the concert, they will be touring the district middle schools, performing for the younger grades.

The concert will feature Highlands’ three a cappella groups, the jazz ensemble, the concert choir, and the wind symphony.

To be performed is “a collection of nice ambient music, as well as some holiday classics to celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah,” as put by Miguel Granda—a junior who will be performing with the a cappella, chorus, and band groups.

Band Director Taylor Rehe elaborates, saying the concert “will feature a really fun variety of music, including a fast piece with lots of notes for the woodwinds and some really good percussion parts, a ‘programmatic’ work that tells the story of a ship’s journey through music, a slow, lyrical piece where the band can work on playing musically and finding the beauty in long notes, and a march by the ‘march king’, John Philip Sousa. Of course, we’ll be closing the concert band’s portion with Sleigh Ride, and we will be doing a combined piece with the chorus at the very end.”

The vocal contingent of the concert will also be performing a variety of holiday songs, including some annual favorites.

Junior Drishti Chau-

han, a member of the Highlands Bells and the honors concert choir, comments, “the chorus has our Parade of the Wooden Soldiers song which we do this fun dance to, and it’s really fun to watch and perform because you can just feel the energy radiating off of everybody else.”

Not to be forgotten is the hard work and dedication the music students and directors have put into the concert. Band Director Taylor Rehe reflects, “the band members have been open to the challenges that they have faced in the music. Each piece of music has its own unique set of challenges for each instrument, and by and large, each band member has taken ownership of their music to learn their individual part so that we can work on making mu-

sic during class, not just practicing the notes and rhythms.”

Then on December 15, the day after the concert, the groups will be appearing at the nearby middle schools to perform their sets. The performance at the middle schools is a beloved tradition among the music students, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the groups have not been able to partake in this event for two years.

Though now that COVID-era precautions have loosened up, the tradition will be resumed this concert season. Choir Director Thomas Paster explains, “I’m very excited because we haven’t done it in three years, since 2019. It’s a good recruiting tool for us because it lets everyone see what we

do and that we’re good at it. It’s great we get to do it the day after the concert since everything is really fresh.”

It’s expected to be a fun event for the middle schoolers and performers alike. Senior Lynn Heo reminisces, “the first time I went to the middle schools was in my freshman year, but we had to stop going because of COVID. So I’m really excited to visit the middle

schoolers and encourage them to join our music programs.”

Overall, the Highlands Music Department has worked tirelessly to put together an exciting, festive musical experience. So please consider supporting your fellow peers by attending this year’s winter concert, and good luck to all the performers. ■

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# DIVING INTO AP PHOTO CLASS

## A closer look at what Highlands' AP Photo class has to offer

Isha Korgaonkar '24

AP Studio Art: 2D Design Photography, taught by Mary Lardiere, is one of the many art classes here at Highlands. Students in this class utilize “graphic design, photography, collage, printmaking, fashion illustration,” and more to create unique and creative artwork. Students are required to submit digital portfolios to the AP program.

Currently, AP Photo students are working on ideas for their sustained investigation project, which they will be submitting to the College Board. Junior Sophia Chieffi is considering a couple topic ideas including “scale or intimate moments people share in crowded places.”

Of the many projects that AP Photo students have completed this year, there are definitely a few favorites. Lardiere loved the double exposure assignment, which involved a single roll of film with portraits layered over. She found this project to be “uncontrolled and unexpected,” which is why it

exposure project.

Senior Ella Powell's favorite project was “taking portraits using water

students' are in their lives. She stated that the class involves close proximity with such serious topics

interested in the art I recommend it.”

Chieffi says, “when I was coming into high school, this class was my 4th and last elective choice -- literally a last resort. When I found out that's the class I got, I was kind of upset about it, but it's turned into my favorite class for the past few years. Everybody I know that's taken the class has loved it.” It definitely seems like AP Photo is an enjoyable and exciting class that any Highlands student could enjoy.

Many AP Photo students are planning to pursue photography in one way or another in the future. Powell has been interested in photography for many years and “can't imagine that [she] wouldn't study it further.”

Although Schaffer is not planning on pursuing photography in college, she does “plan on taking classes on photography in college.”

Although Chieffi cannot take any more photography courses at Highlands since AP is the final level, she is “thinking about minoring in photography in college.” She thinks “it would be a good side gig taking portraits and [she] also loves being in the dark room and the art itself.”

Lardiere had her own journey in photography as well. She learned photography in senior year in the dark room class. She then pursued a Spanish major for two years, and eventually switched to a photography major.

When she started

teaching at Highlands, there was one level of photography. The program has grown immensely over time, and now there are three levels of photography.

For Highlands students just starting out in photography, AP Photo students have a few tips. Powell started taking photos with her phone—she had initially gotten interested in photography be-

interested in photography should “always have a camera.”

It is important to experiment and explore everything, even things that seem familiar. She states that with photography, we are “forced to look harder at the things in front of us.”

To all Highlands students who want to explore photography, it is important to keep these tips in



Photo on film of a bicycle rack taken by senior Ella Powell.

in unconventional ways.”

Lardiere commented that part of the reason why she loves teaching AP Photo is that she gets to know her students in an individual setting. The

and matters which brings inevitable “bigger connections.”

Many AP photo students would recommend the class to their fellow peers. Powell states that students “need to have the prerequisites from Photo 1 and Honors Studio Photography,” but AP Photo is “a very fun class.”

Schaffer enjoys the great variety of projects and also “learning new techniques throughout the class.”

Chieffi states that “it depends on what a person is interested in and how they like a class to run.” She went on to say that “this class is very independent and if you're in-



Photo on film shot for Chieffi's AP Photo summer project.

was so exciting. Chieffi and senior Mia Schaffer also enjoyed the double

Photo courtesy of Sophia Chieffi '24



Photo on digital camera of a willow tree taken by senior Mia Schaffer. cause her dad had a digital camera.

Powell recommends that Highlands students who are interested in photography but do not know where to start should “learn how to use [their] camera and learn what kinds of photos [they] like taking.”

Schaffer adds that it can be helpful to “experiment with different techniques.” Lardiere emphasizes that students

mind and maybe even consider taking AP Photo in the future. Remember to experiment with new techniques, try new ideas, and have fun with it. As Powell says: “it's art. There are no wrong answers.” ■

Photo courtesy of Mia Schaffer '23

# 'TIS THE HOLIDAY SEASON

## How Highland students are celebrating the holidays this

Abigail Koudinov '26

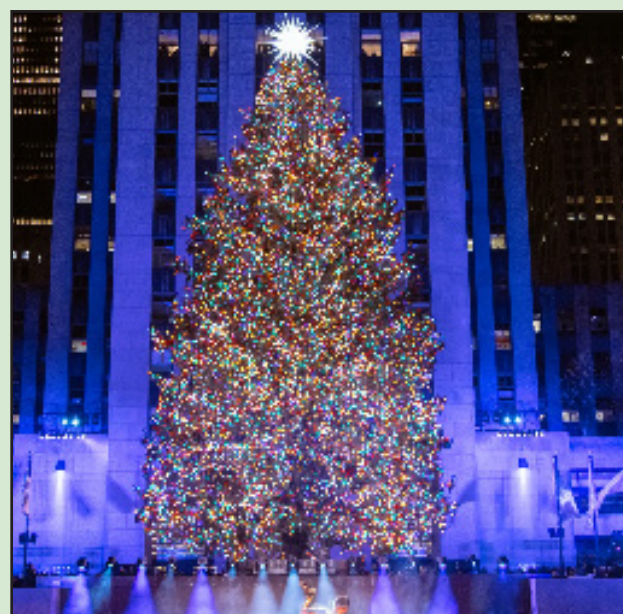
When it's December, everyone is gearing up for the holidays, but what does that entail? Distinct traditions and holiday activities are what makes the holidays so memorable and exciting.

The attractions that are available for a limited amount of time are an addition to this special time of the year. This is how many individuals get in the holiday spirit.

One of the most famous events during the holidays is what Rockefeller Center offers. Rockefeller Center is located in the heart of New

York City, New York and delivers festive activities

famous rink and the annual tree lighting ceremony.



Ice skating at Rockefeller Center at night.

such as ice skating at the

Jami Patterson, a

freshman at Highlands, says, “my favorite attraction during the season would definitely be ice skating in New York City.” Visiting Rockefeller Center is a part of a tradition for many Highlanders during the month of December.

A junior at Highlands says, “my family and I love going there and getting their infamous hot cocoa: my absolute favorite.” Rockefeller Center is not the only festive place people love going to. Many agree that the mall is one of their favorite places during the holiday season.

Freshman Emily Vac-

carino says, “my favorite place to go to over the holidays is the Garden State Plaza mall. It is decorated and has such good deals. Holiday shopping there is great.”

The Garden State Plaza mall is decorated with lights everywhere and standing pine trees with ornaments. There is also holiday music playing at different locations to add to the ambience. The deals on Black Friday make it a prime place to visit for buying gifts.

During the holidays, it isn't necessary to leave your house for holiday entertainment. Many activities you can do are at

home.

Watching a movie can always put you in the spirit of celebration. When asking some Highlanders what their favorite holiday movie is, the responses are varying.

It was concluded that the top three favorite movies at Highlands are “The Grinch” (cartoon version), “Home Alone”, and “Elf”. Put on one of these movies, and make some hot chocolate for the optimal experience. ■

Photo courtesy of Rockefeller Center



# CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS ROCKS OUT

## Northern Highlands Cross Country comes to a close

**Samantha O’Connell ’26**

Year in and year out, both the Northern Highlands girls and boys cross country teams succeed and finish the season ranked amongst the top teams in North Jersey. This year was no different, with the boys team finishing ranked 3rd according to northjersey.com and the Girls team being ranked the best team in North Jersey.

The girls team finished their season by finishing 3rd at the State Group Championship and then 5th in the statewide Meet of Champions race. On the other side of things, the boys finished their season with an 8th place finish in the state Group State Championship. It was a season so elite, they were recognized by the BCWCA as the cross country team of the year.

When asked about the season, sophomore Lawson Vogel said “I think it’s

safe to say we had a very successful and fun season. We were able to mature a lot and practice harder than ever before.”

His brother, Jackson, who recently committed to run cross country at Colgate, a Division 1 level program, said, “The season was great. There was a lot of improvement on both the girls and boys side of the team.

“Additionally, most of the individual runners improved their personal bests significantly. I loved the training that started in the summer and went through November.”

Junior Freddy Liljgren spoke on his goals prior to the season: “At the beginning of the year we were ranked very highly in the county and were even the favorites to win our county at some points.

“As a team there were a lot of injuries that different people dealt with throughout the year, but

we still performed pretty well. I expected us to win our section at the State Sectional meet and make it to State Groups again this year because we did it last year and still have everyone who scored in those meets.”

There were clearly high standards for the year, those standards were met and passed.

Rebecca McLaren, a Junior, talked about the girls season and how well it went.”We had a few new people who joined the team this year and we became very strong as a result. We were all able to work together to progress as a team throughout the season. We had some rough patches with sickness but overall, we were able to push through and succeed together.”

Maclaren was a key part of the team with one of the highlights of her year when she placed 7th in the Darlington County

Park, finishing the race with a 19:02 5k time, according to NorthJersey.com.

Maclaren said that the standards set before the season for the girls team not only met, they were surpassed, “At the beginning of the season we didn’t expect to make it this far! Our season went on for a long time and we were very happy with the results. In the beginning, we were just there to race and have fun but after a few meets, we realized we

were in reach of accomplishing some big things as a team. As the season progressed, the team grew stronger together and we were able to exceed our goals.”

Maclaren wasn’t the only one who was surprised by how successful the season was. Junior Allison Courtney said “Coming into cross country, I wasn’t expecting to make it this far. We were definitely not predicted to, let alone be ranked as one of the top five teams in the

state. The girls team has come a long way and have really worked hard to make it to this point. We would not have made it this far without our supportive coaches and motivational spirits. We have a very strong dynamic that we hope to carry on through next fall.”

Along with crediting the runners for the win, Coach Destaso also credited his team’s success to the other coaches, “The assistant coaches, Coach Pazmino and Coach Travers, do an excellent job working with the team, and they played a big part in the team’s success. Having knowledgeable coaches to work with helps tremendously.”

Congrats to both the boys’ and girls’ cross country teams on another amazing season. ■



Cross country girls posing for a picture.

Photo Courtesy of Tia Charney '23

# WORLD CUP TAKEOVER IN CLASS

## Highlanders become deeply invested in the 2022 FIFA Qatar World Cup

**Hayoung Sohn ’24**

The entire world has seemingly been hit with “Soccer fever” amidst the World Cup tournament in Qatar. The World Cup has especially been the center of attention for many students at Highlands as they cheer on their favorite players and teams.

Students report watching games both during and in between classes, anxiously cheering on their favorite teams. A handful of teachers have even been said to have played the games for students during class periods!

The most common

Cristiano Ronaldo, Spain’s Pablo Gavi, Brazil’s Neymar, Argentina’s Messi, and Jude Bellingham of England. Junior Hansa Suresh says, “One of my favorite players is João Félix playing for Portugal. It’s very fun to watch him play.”

Félix is only 23 years old but has been showing excellent talent throughout his performance in the World Cup. In fact, Felix became the fourth most expensive soccer player in history when Atletico beat off competition from around Europe to pluck the young striker from Benfica after just a single season of

in the World Cup are extremely talented, but my favorite player is Brazil’s Neymar.”

Neymar has been a fan favorite for many years. A prolific goalscorer and renowned playmaker, he is regarded as one of the best players in the world.

These players had a large fanbase coming into the World Cup, but a rookie player that has been especially popular amongst students is South Korea’s number 9, Cho Gue-sung. Cho Gue-sung is a South Korean footballer who plays as forward for Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors and the South Korean national



Students watching the World Cup.

Photo Courtesy of Tia Charney '23

after he started appearing on my TikTok for-you page. He was all over my Instagram page as well. People from all around the world were posting fan edits of the player and all of it was going viral.”

Fan reactions to Gue-sung have been documented across social media platforms in many languages, including Korean, English, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic.

On TikTok, videos related to “Cho Gue-sung” have garnered 25.5 million views, while the hashtag of his name written in Korean has received 224.4 million.

It is clear that a lot has changed for Gue-sung since his World Cup debut up to today. Junior Sota Shimizu states, “I found out about Cho Gue-sung after he scored two headers during the game against Ghana. These goals played a big role in his rise to fame on top of his good looks.”

This year’s World Cup has brought many surprises, with South Korea beating Portugal and Brazil losing to Croatia being among them. Students wait as they anxiously watch teams go head-to-head for the ultimate win. ■

the World Cup for the first time without a name for himself, Gue-sung has been experiencing a meteoric rise in popularity amongst fans all around the world.

His Instagram following has amassed from 20,000 to nearly 3 million within the span of just a few weeks. Gue-sung scored two goals within just three minutes during his second World Cup game against Ghana.

He is the first-ever Asian soccer player to score two headers at the World Cup. Not only has Gue-sung been recognized for his spectacular skills, but his sudden rise to popularity can be greatly credited to his good looks. Gue-sung first generated

buzz in his World Cup debut during Korea’s match against Uruguay, which ended in a scoreless tie.

But the match against Ghana, in which he headed the team’s two goals within minutes, catapulted him to fame as both talent and eye candy. After the Ghana match, a fan cam video of Gue-sung simply sitting on a bench, staring into space, garnered nearly 10 million views. Many Highlands students report their TikTok for you pages being flooded with fan edits of the player scoring his infamous headers to simply resting on the bench, all of which seem to be going viral.

Senior Karen Bae states, “I first found out who Cho Gue-sung was



Photo Courtesy of Tia Charney '23

Fifa World Cup Logo. favorite players among Highlands students include Portugal’s João Félix and top-flight football. Junior Autumn Ritter states, “All the players team. He has been playing with the team since 2020. Despite going into



# SENIOR WINTER ATHLETE PROFILES

What are some '23 winter athletes looking forward to most this season?

Olivia Burchell '23



Photo courtesy of Meg Rourke '23

Rourke after winning the 100 fly.

**“I’m extremely excited for the state sectional meets towards the end of the year because we’re at our strongest then and the energy that we bring to those meets is unmatched. They’re always the most intense and the most fun.”**

*Meg Rourke, NH Swim*

**“This year, I’m looking forward to having more responsibility on the team and going after my 3rd League championship in 4 years. I’m also excited about hitting headlocks on unsuspecting opponents and getting my hand raised while staring down the other team.”**

*Anthony DiGiacomo, NH Wrestling*



Photo courtesy of Anthony DiGiacomo '23

DiGiacomo wrestling against a Ramapo opponent.



Photo courtesy of Gabe Johnson '23

Johnson at the Group III championship.

**“I am looking forward to the sectional championship because last year the boys won our first ever sectional championship in the school’s history. This year we bring back a lot of strong seniors so we should be very competitive this year.”**

*Gabe Johnson, NH Track & Field*

# UNDER THE LIGHTS ONCE AGAIN

Highlands narrowly loses the State Finals game at Rutgers against Millville

Charlotte Riley '24

The Northern Highlands football team made their way back to Rutgers Stadium for the state final game at the beginning of the month, and the hype was over the roof.

The seating was packed with eager Highlands students waiting to see who would take home the championship title. Football has always been extremely popular at

Northern Highlands.

The Coaches prepared the team very well for this big game. According to Nj.com, “Smiechowski was sure-handed for the Northern Highlands offense, coming away with catch after catch as he ended the contest with six receptions for 64 yards. He caught a 10-yard touchdown pass in the second quarter, which gave Northern Highlands a 7-6 lead after the extra point.”

The team put every ounce of energy into the their last game of the season.

Highlands was up at half time, leaving the fans on their toes.

Nj.com states, “It’s the fifth consecutive win for Millville when trailing at halftime as Northern Highlands led 14-12 at the break at SHI Stadium.”

In addition to Smiechowski, JR Walley, a junior at Northern Highlands,



Photo courtesy of northjersey.com.

Highlands at SHI Stadium.

put forth his best efforts: “Walley stepped in early in the contest for starter Nate Johnson and turned in a gutsy performance. Walley ended the night 14 of 31 passing for 158 yards and two touchdowns. The junior was effective with his legs as well, rushing for a team-high 48 yards” (Nj.com).

Interestingly, both Northern Highlands and Millville have first-year head coaches. The Highlanders’ last two playoff

wins both went to overtime before Highlands won.

On the other hand, Millville trailed in the fourth quarter in its past two playoff wins.

In addition, “both Millville and Northern Highlands played Irvington this season. Millville lost to Irvington 25-17 on Sept. 2. Northern Highlands beat Irvington 17-13 in the North 1 Group IV semifinals” (pressofatlanticcity.com).

Unfortunately, Highlands lost the game 14-18, ending their season in heartbreak.

The team has made it to Rutgers for the past two seasons. There is no doubt they can do it again to bring home the championship title next year.

The student body and the entire community are so excited to see what the team has in store for us next season. ■



Photo courtesy of northjersey.com.

Junior Freddie Kanning in action.



# SENIOR SWIMMERS FINAL SOAR

## Highlands senior swimmers hope to continue their success this season

Carly Simmel '23

The Northern Highlands swim team is notoriously known for their dominating presence in the state of New Jersey. Last year, they won their 7th straight North 1, Group B sectional title.

In total, they lost ten seniors from last year, including star swimmers Jack Krause and Kathryn Horkan.

However, the senior class will not let this stop them from having just as much success as they have in the years past.

These seniors have worked so hard to get to this point, and their leadership will be the guiding force behind the team towards another extremely successful season.

There are ten seniors on the girls team. They are led by Meghan Rourke (committed to swim D1 William and Mary), Sanja Radan, and Katie Kamin-

sky. However, all of the senior girls play a vital role on the team. In the pre-season rankings, the girls' team was ranked #16 in the NJ and #2 in North Jersey.

Radan states that to prepare for the season "we have started practicing 5 times a week at the YMCA." The team definitely sacrifices a lot, as their practices can start as late as 9 PM.

Radan adds, "I am looking forward to championship meet season. This part of the season is the most competitive, but the most fun."

Cheering for your teammates when the meet is tight is one of the best feelings in the world." It is clear that this team is such a close knit group of people, who are very supportive of each other.

In terms of the boys team, they only have two returning seniors, Cole Asplund and Gavin Deleon.

Yet, they are just as



Senior Ava Kearl posing with Coach Viscardi before a meet.

eager to defend their title. They were ranked #5 in the North Jersey preseason rankings.

Asplund explains, "We have been practicing really hard and getting conditioned for the first couple of meets we have coming up. We're definitely going to keep working hard for the remainder of the season." Their hard work is sure to take them very far

this winter.

With such a dedicated and talented senior class, there is no doubt in anyone's minds that they will lead their team to even more accomplishments. This group of twelve is a special group of athletes, who have been competing since freshman year.

There are certain responsibilities that come along with being an upperclassman. Radan states, "As a senior, I am usually there to help out the underclassman with whatever they need. I also help out with the team Instagram and spreading info to everyone."

Asplund adds, "My responsibilities as a senior this year are to really set the example for the underclassmen and the freshman coming in and show them how hard work in this sport pays off."

Leading by example is such a key aspect in anything, especially when

it comes to sports.

This is exactly what this senior class has already executed and will continue to do this throughout the whole season.

Their years of experience on this team are crucial to demonstrate what it is meant to be a part of the Northern Highlands swim team.

Team bonding is another way to bring everyone together. Radan explained that "My favorite thing to do as a team is definitely pasta parties."

A senior usually hosts one the night before a meet." She continues, "Although these have been put on pause because of covid, me and the rest of the seniors are super excited to be bringing them back this season."

Small team bonding

events like these are truly what bring a team together, which helps create such a strong dynamic in and out of the water.

With that being said, it is clear that the Northern Highlands girls and boys swimming teams will be a force to be reckoned with this year.

They hope to win sectionals for the 8th year in a row. With the leadership that this senior class brings, this is definitely a feasible goal for them.

Asplund ends off by saying, "This season I'm really looking forward to getting stronger over the winter and having a fun and successful season with my fellow seniors and teammates."

We wish the seniors the best of luck in their final season as a Highlander. ■



Senior Megan Rourke swimming in the freestyle event for a meet for Highlands.



Senior Candace Massimi getting ready to race for Highlands.

# NHFFH'S DOMINATING SEASON

## Northern Highlands Field Hockey is named BCWCA Team of the Year

Samantha O'Connell '26

Northern Highlands Field Hockey has had an amazing season from being named BCWCA team of the year to winning the Bergen County tournament. This year's varsity field hockey season was one of the best.

Led by team captains Belle Bennett, Sarah Batenhorst, and Kate Pedicano and their coaches, they have accomplished amazing things this year.

Sophomore varsity player Shannon Arber said, "It was a great feeling to hear the news that we were named the BCWCA team of the year."

She adds "we have been so close and have created so many unforgettable memories as a team during the season on and off the

field, and even after the season ended as we still are all family."

Arber explains that for her, "the team of the year felt like recognition more than a reward because being a part of this team was a reward in itself."

Not only did the girls win BCWCA team of the year, but they also competed in the Bergen County tournament and dominated the field, bringing home another win for Highlands.

Sarah Batenhorst, a senior and one of the field hockey captains, states, "Winning the Bergen County tournament was such a fun day. It was so heartwarming to see so many of the team's friends and family come to Westwood to watch us beat Ramsey."

"Whenever we play

Ramsey, there is always tension in the air, but we used that tension to our advantage and fed off of the energy positively. Everyone was ecstatic to win because we wanted to prove to ourselves, and everyone else, that we were one of the best teams in New Jersey."

This year's field hockey team has created strong bonds even between the various grade levels.

The underclassmen got to learn new skills from the upperclassmen on varsity and how to improve as a player and work together as a team.

Kendall Krawczyk is a freshman on varsity and she explained how much having the older girls as role models helped her throughout the season.

"I have learned quite

a lot from the varsity team about teamwork and skills. I have grown a lot as a player and learned many different ways to work well as a team member."

Further, she says "not only have my skills grown, but so did my communication on the field. I learned

new shots to take to goal, better ways to get around a defender, as well as new drills to reach an even higher speed of play."

Krawczyk explained how having the upperclassmen there to guide her helped her during the season, ultimately helping

the team as a whole.

The varsity team has shown great skills on and off the field and they have shown amazing accomplishments this year.

They pushed throughout the season and were determined to accomplish their goals for the season. Underclassmen are planning to carry on their legacy for next year.

Grey Deleon, a freshman on the freshman field hockey team, shared "I don't think the coaches put any pressure on us; instead, we put pressure on ourselves. But each year we have the potential to be as good as we can."

Laney McCrossin, also a freshman on the freshman field hockey team said, "With so many incredibly gifted seniors leaving the team next year,



Seniors Bennett, Batenhorst and Pedicano named 1st team.

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freshman to push themselves to better our team.”

“The varsity team had a spectacular run this year, but their success was not only defined by their record and instead measured by their drive and determination. As long as

the freshman field hockey players continue to play with a desire to be the best that they can be, success is sure to follow.”

Both of these girls are only freshmen, but they are excited to continue their journey playing field hockey for Northern Highlands for the next four years.

The seniors leaving the

team this year have helped leave behind their legacy for freshmen to follow.

Alexa Birch, a sophomore on varsity, expressed her thoughts for next year, the varsity team, and the pressure they might face.

“I wouldn’t say there is a lot of pressure, but we want to follow in the footsteps of our amaz-

ing season this year with hopefully another County Title and BCWCA team of the year.”

She concedes that with the loss of some key seniors on the field “it will set us back next year, but I am still so excited for what next season will bring us, and as long as we give it our all we can be satisfied with what we do.”

With everything they have accomplished this year, the coaches are so proud of this year’s varsity team and they are so excited to have the next set of players.

Coach Paton explains, “I’m extremely proud of the efforts of our varsity team. A lot of hard work went into this past season and each victory was earned. There was never a day that intensity dropped at practice or during a game. Our players never



Photo courtesy of Tia Charney '23

The girls huddling together and getting hyped before their game. settled and frequently set new goals to achieve throughout the season. I know our team achieved much of what we set out for and for that our players should be so proud.”

Congratulations to the field hockey team on their phenomenal season this past fall. ■



Photo courtesy of Tia Charney '23

The varsity field hockey team celebrating after scoring a goal during a game.

# COMMITMENT CORNER

## BENNETT RUNS TO HER DREAMS

### Belle Bennett commits to Cornell University for track and field

Gabriella Ragazzo '26

Belle Bennett sprints her way to the top of the charts.

In November, she announced her commitment to continue her running career at Cornell.

Cornell University is a private, Ivy League institution that serves as New York state’s land-grant university.

In addition to educating the next generation of global citizens, Cornell’s aim is to promote a culture of broad inquiry both within and outside of the Cornell community.

Additionally, Cornell

wants to improve the quality of life for students, New Yorkers, and everyone else through public service.

Accepting Bennett was the right decision made by the school. Bennett is a well-rounded student, excelling in the classroom and on the track.

Since sophomore year, Bennett has been thriving at her sport and her determination and hard work has finally paid off.

Sydney McLaughlin set the curve of what Bennett always dreamed of being.

Sydney McLaughlin is an American 400-meter hurdler and sprinter with

a focus on speed. She has the Olympic record for the 2020 Tokyo Games, and with the current world record of 50.68 seconds, she is also the 2022 world champion.

“She is from New Jersey and is a great track runner,” stated Bennett, explaining her awe towards her role model. From her inspiration, motivation and leadership, she learned that anyone can achieve their goals.

Knowing that she can continue excelling in the sport she loves, she states, “I’m excited that I don’t have to stop playing my sport and that I will continue to have a team atmosphere at college.”

This journey is a huge milestone and a sense of maturity, but Northern Highlands has prepared her for the next chapter of her life in college.

Her surroundings at this school helped her to be the individual she is today.

Bennett gives credit to Highlands, as without it, she likely wouldn’t have found her love for track.

“The teachers and the hard course work has prepared me to be able to manage my tests and quizzes for college.”

Despite her total excitement about track, she is also “looking forward to meeting new people from all over the country and being able to take classes

that are high level education.”

She also adds laughing that she is “especially looking forward to the really good cafeterias.”

Not only was Bennett thrilled to be accepted to any Ivy League school, but her friends and family were abundantly supportive and excited.

Her mom stood out to be the biggest fan of her accomplishments. Bennett shared “she was the one that was taking me to different colleges every single weekend and was helping debating what college to choose.”

Some small fears that she has about starting track at Cornell is the “future competition and going up against girls that are well trained.”

Nevertheless, her ambitions and goals take over those small scary feelings.

“I really want to score points at the Ivy League championship because then you get to wear a special uniform for the rest of your track career at Cornell.” Bennett stated.

After looking at options and lots of deliberation, she decided on Cornell University because she “loved the girls and the team atmosphere as well as the coach and how it was close enough to home that my parents could come and watch all of my track meets.”



Photo courtesy of Lia Miller '23

Belle Bennett during her visit to Cornell University.

Not only is track a fun and overwhelmingly an amazing sport, Bennett also learned life lessons that will stick with her.

“I learned how dedication and time really show improvement and hard work pays off. I also learned how to be patient and to wait to see that progress happen.”

From all of these memories, friendships, and life-long bonds she encourages advice for fellow individuals who participate in track. She encourages people to “try new events and even if an event seems hard at first keep on trying and putting in the work to practice.”

Bennett will be missed throughout the Highlands community, especially on the track, but she says you can always visit her up at Cornell and cheer her on as she leaps into another amazing adventure in her life.

Additionally, there is still a lot of time left for Bennett to continue to make history here at Highlands. With the winter season only beginning and the entire spring season still ahead, there are still many opportunities for Bennett to break records here before she starts her next journey as a collegiate athlete. ■



Photo courtesy of Tia Charney '23

Belle Bennett signing with Cornell University on signing day.



# DOOR DECORATING CONTEST



Sidonie King's door - (language department)



Axelle Sandt's door - (language department)



Natasha Collova's door - one of the two winners (science department)



Michael McCabe's door - one of the two winners! (Social Studies department)



part of Kayla Consalvo's door.



Kayla Consalvo's door (English Department)



Darrel Norrell's door (English Department)

Teachers participated in a door decorating contest for a last week of school before break. Students were sent a survey to vote on which door was the best. 773 votes came in, but there was a tie between two doors - Michael McCabe's & Natasha Collova's. Each door received 113 votes. The winning doors are rewarded with a bagel breakfast for their department.