

# THE HIGHLAND FILING

Northern Highlands Regional High School | 298 Hillside Avenue, Allendale NJ 07401 | Volume 56, Issue 03 | March 2022



The Northern Highlands School Mascot at the front of the school, urging people to vote for the referendum.

## MASKS OFF, SMILES ON

The mask mandate has been lifted in New Jersey schools

Kaitlynn Karoleski '23

At the beginning of February, Governor Phil Murphy announced the end to the statewide mask mandate in New Jersey schools. Not long after, an email was sent out to Northern Highlands parents stating that on Monday, March 7, 2022, Highlands would move to a “mask optional” status.

After nearly two years of wearing masks, students and staff were ready for this announcement, but it comes with concerns and continued precautions to make sure the district can maintain this “mask-optional” status.

The school is taking multiple measures to continue to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at school. Just because masks are no longer required at school doesn't mean that students and staff should stop sanitizing as often as they were before.

Principal Joseph Occhino also tells parents to “keep children who are not feeling well at home” and to “not send a student to school if they have a pending COVID-19 test.”

Additionally, he also encourages students and staff to “maintain three feet [of] distance when possible.”

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## \$8,827,000 REFERENDUM PASSED

### Highlands gets referendum approved to update campus

Catherine Corrado '23

Voters from Allendale and Upper Saddle River went out on March 22 to vote for Northern Highlands' proposed bond referendum. The referendum, totaling \$8,827,000, will be used to improve multiple areas of the school, including the Planetarium, the TV production classrooms, and the creation of a new field house.

There are many potential benefits of the proposed referendum. The first one to be addressed pertains to the drainage issue on the baseball/softball fields. For many

years, athletes and other members of the community have not been able to use the grass fields after rain because the fields may flood for several days.

softball player, Emilie Chin, voices “I’m really excited to be able to get back on the field quicker after it rains and be able to play more as a team.”

**“I think this will be a great aspect of our school.”**

*Junior Lily Rodriguez*

To alleviate this, a state of the art drainage system will be installed underneath the fields. This will allow for maximized use for the fields and an overall better experience for community members and students. Junior

The next important piece of the referendum is the large creation of the 7,600 square foot field house. The field house will be located where the old tennis courts currently reside and will contain an advanced fitness center

for students and staff, public restrooms intended for sporting events, team rooms for athletes, a trainer's room, a referee's room, and a community meeting room. This will allow students and coaches to easily obtain their equipment without having to enter the main building of the school and create a positive environment for teammates.

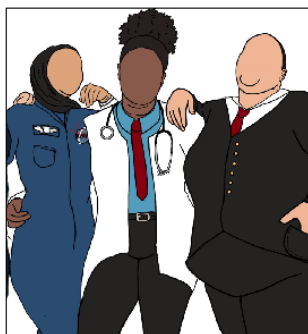
Junior cheerleader Lily Rodriguez shares her opinion on the addition. “I think this will be a great aspect of our school. This is because I can leave my cheer-leading equipment in the field house and it'll be

a lot easier to grab it before practice since it is closer to the area we cheer at. I can't wait to spend time in the team rooms with my teammates.”

Another aspect to the referendum is the creation of two new classrooms. These classrooms, both 1,400 square feet, will replace the current weight room. They are intended to be used by every freshman in the school for their Freshman Seminar classes. There will also be two offices created inside of the large classrooms to be used by staff.

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## INSIDE



Art courtesy of Hayven July '25

### Celebrating Women

Hear the inspiration behind Junior Margaret Bainbridge's celebrations of Women's History Month.

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Photo Courtesy of Sydney Hogue '23

### Theater Returns

Students share their experiences of acting, singing, and enjoying the Spring Musical, *Something Rotten*.

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Photo Courtesy of NH Hockey

### Hooray Hockey

Sophomore Dan Moor and his teammates give a first-hand account of winning the Public Group B Hockey State Championship.

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# SAY “YES” TO THE PROM DRESS

## The most anticipated event for the Class of 2023



Photo courtesy of Jamie Meyer '23

Jamie Meyer '23

Being an upperclassman at Highlands comes with a lot to look forward to. Junior Prom has been one of the events that I’ve been most excited to go to since being a freshman.

This year, prom at Highlands came with a list of scheduling mishaps.

Originally, Highlands scheduled to host it on March 11, which was the night before the SAT.

Because of the interference, the administration sent the juniors a survey to determine whether to change the prom date to March 4 or March 11. Students voted to have prom on March 4, but since the Spring Musical “Something Rotten” was

meant that prom would be on the same day as the SAT. Juniors had to choose a priority: Prom or SAT? For some people, preparing for the SAT took precedence over the dance. Junior Arnav Kalekar says, “I haven’t done much for prom since the SAT is more important, but it’s

lots of preparation. Many juniors bought outfits and made plans with their friends. Junior Cai Mapes, says “I’ve bought a dress and shoes and have plans to get my hair done as preparation.”

Others are doing similar things. Junior Isabel Padilla says she’s “[preparing] by getting a group of friends together and buying a new dress as well.”

The excitement for prom has been building for a while. Mapes says, “I am most excited about being able to dress really formally and take pictures with my friends.”

As the date approaches, more and more plans are being solidified. In February, prom table sign-ups were sent out. Juniors joined together to create

a 12-person list to fill up their tables. There are some other complications as the date draws closer too. The weather forecast predicts several inches of snow on the Saturday of prom.

Students should be careful driving to the event and trying to stay warm. Despite this, prom is shaping up to be extremely fun this year. As a junior, I can say that I am looking forward to it. ■

### The excitement for prom has been building for a while.

scheduled for the same night, prom was moved to March 12. Unfortunately, this better than having it the day before.” For other students, prom is a big deal with



Art by Izzy Levine '23

## 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

Welcome back, it’s been a while. After a four-month hiatus, the *Highland Fling* is back and better than ever. Though we’ve been gone, change has been more present than ever. From our Highlands community to our world, life is nearly unrecognizable from the last time we released an edition. When the October issue came out, leaves were still on the ground, football was still happening on Fridays, and Jake Gyllenhaal’s Instagram was still getting spammed with scarf emojis. A lot has changed for all of us since then, but most importantly, we have a brand new *Highland Fling* staff.

In order to successfully send out a paper every month, every single individual must be working towards that same goal. A twenty-page paper takes dedication, patience, and astronomical amounts of effort. On behalf of this entire new staff, we pledge to create a paper that offers you a glimpse into the Highlands community every single month. Though our world has completely been turned upside down since the last time we met, we promise that a new monthly edition of the *Fling* will remain a constant.

We would like to take this opportunity to think about what isn’t constant in our lives. On February 24th, Russian leader Vladimir Putin suddenly launched what Ukrainian officials described as a full-scale invasion of the country. This marked the start of a grim new chapter of foreign relations that has already claimed thousands of lives. At Highlands, many groups of students are stepping in to raise awareness, money, and supplies for those affected by the crisis, such as the girls’ soccer team collecting necessary supplies for Ukrainians. Highlanders’ ability to quickly adapt and step in during times of desperation with a helping hand and an open mind is one that is both remarkable and admirable, and we plan to place more of an emphasis on the good deeds that Highlanders do in the coming issues.

Another change we faced was the removal of the mask mandate on March 7th. Within the past two years, we’ve all faced a rollercoaster of COVID policies here at Highlands from limited capacity to half days. We returned to school our junior year finally with a sense of normalcy seeing everyone in our classes, in the halls, and at lunch. Masks were definitely one of the more difficult of the precautions to adjust to, and when they were finally deemed optional a few weeks ago, it was refreshing to see so many friendly faces at last.

As we reflect on all the changes we’ve faced in the past four months, we realize that none of us have had quite the same experience. From how to properly deal with a global pandemic at Highlands to a global crisis nationally, our opinions differ and often divide us. We hope that we can all come together as Highlanders and enjoy the first edition of the new era of the *Highland Fling*. We can’t wait for you to read it.

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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# THIS ONE'S FOR THE LADIES

## Who are some of the women you look up to?



Margaret Bainbridge '23

March brings warmer weather, brighter skies, and blooming flowers, but above all, it brings Women's History

Month. This celebration began in 1982 as "Women's History Week", but it was later changed in 1987 to dedicate an entire month towards celebrating women. There is an annual designated theme for the celebration, but the main goal remains constant: educating the nation on the role of women. The theme for this year, "Providing Healing, Promoting Hope", celebrates women through

demonstrations, educational activities, and gifts. As a woman, this holiday is very empowering. Having the chance to honor and learn about the women who came before me sparks inspiration. Without the influence of people like Susan B. Anthony or Ruth Bader Ginsburg, American women would not be where they are today. I look up to Susan B. Anthony for her efforts in leading the

Women's Suffrage Movement. Anthony was a fighting for women to be able to openly protest for what they

**Celebrating Women's History Month is crucial because it honors the women who break down barriers and open doors for other women**

social reformer and women's rights activist in the late 1800s. She played a key role in this movement by believe. She faced brutal police force and harassment, but never strayed from her goal. Women can thank her

for their rights to a voice. Another inspirational woman is Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She was the second woman and first Jewish person to become a Supreme Court Justice. During her career, Ginsburg dealt with sexism and had to work harder than the male lawyers to keep up in her field. Due to this disparity, Ginsburg avidly fought for gender equality.

In the past, society has been very harsh towards women: limiting job opportunities, causing conflicts with authorities, and reducing them to nothing but housewives.

Celebrating Women's History Month is crucial because it honors the women who have broken down barriers and created opportunities for others.

It's important for people to educate themselves and others about the significance of these female figures in the world. ■



Art by Hayven Auriy '25

# GOING FOR THE GOLD!

## The origins, meaning, and celebrations of St. Patrick's Day



Isabela Canavan '24

Saint Patrick's Day, celebrated annually on March 17, is a celebration of Ireland's patron saint who is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. The holiday is commemorated with parades, wearing green, leprechaun decorations, eating corned beef and cabbage, and the iconic McDonald's Shamrock Shake. In the current day, Irish customs have been woven into American culture, despite resistance. The prevalence of Saint Patrick's Day is demonstrates the change in the country's attitude

towards the Irish. Due to the Irish Potato Famine in the 1800s, an estimated 4.5 million Irish immigrants arrived on the east coast of the U.S. Like most immigrants, they faced opposition from the general population. In the Irish's case the resistance was mostly because of their Catholicism.

Due to the massive influx of Irish people in major cities like New York and Boston, they began to fill positions of power and became a voting group politicians needed to win

but you won't find any of us eating corned beef and cabbage. In 1991, President George H.W. Bush proclaimed March as "Irish-American Heri-

Bond, Saoirse Ronan, an Oscar-nominated actress, and George Clooney, a Golden Globe Winning Actor. Irish-Americans have also played important roles



Art by Emily Gan '23

**The prevalence of Saint Patrick's Day is symbol of a change in national attitudes towards the Irish.**

over. Consequently, the Irish went from being treated poorly to being respected citizens. To celebrate Saint Patrick's Day, many areas host parades. Some cities, like Chicago, color anything they possibly can green. To celebrate, my family mostly sticks to the traditional celebrations

tage Month" in order to celebrate the achievements and contributions of Irish-Americans to the country. Irish-Americans have made a lasting impact on several industries, including entertainment, politics, and sports. Some notable Irish-American figures in entertainment Pierce Brosnan, who played James

in our government. Many notable presidents such as Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and John F. Kennedy have Irish roots. The Irish have helped shape this nation's history and culture in many different ways since the beginning of the 19th century and continue to do so in modern-day America. ■



# LAST STEP BACK TO NORMALCY?

## Highlands says bye to masks

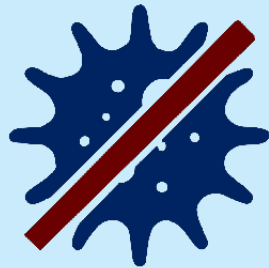


Photo courtesy of Jiya Singh '24

Jiya Singh '24

The long-awaited end of the mask mandate is here. Many find themselves excited to return back to the pre-Covid school atmosphere, yet some are still worried about a covid outbreak.

Personally, I have never felt as though school was



different with the masks. It was definitely surprising seeing some maskless face for the first time, hence the concept of “mask fishing”, yet I had never felt like it took away from my experi-

ence at school.

In fact, the mask was comforting as it let me hide my acne or even my facial expressions from everyone.

After two years, the mask feels almost like a part of school.

Having said that, masks will always have a crucial role in stopping the spread of COVID-19.

Ever since the CDC advised the world to social distance and sanitize frequently, people have

stopped listening to the guidelines for the most part. In fact, wearing masks has recently felt like the only restriction that people have actually complied with, even if some failed to wear them properly.



Despite students and have grown used to people

### After two years, the mask feels almost like a part of school.

staff voicing concerns about how the pandemic is not over yet, Northern Highlands opting for mask-optional is not surprising. The majority of students have expressed relief that they no longer have to wear masks.

Sophomore Sophia Schack says, “I think it’s better for overall interactions between students and teachers.”

On the other hand, sophomore Chloe Tsarnas comments, “I think that I

not seeing my face.”

However, they both agree on one thing: if cases rise, masks cannot be optional.

That being said, this step provides hope that this pandemic will soon come to an end. In spite of that, it’s certain that this pandemic strengthened and unified the Highlands community.

The way students were able to be compassionate and supportive of each other in a time like this is impressive.

The sense of community will not leave now that this pandemic is over – it’s evident that the Highlands spirit is here to stay. ■



Art by Jana Dabbagh '24

# FOR THE LOVE OF HAL

## One student shares their favorite class at Highlands



Photo courtesy of Jana Dabbagh '24

Jana Dabbagh '24

Probably the most commonly asked question a student will ever hear in their academic career is, “what’s your favorite class?” I never really knew exactly how to answer that question, until now.

Let’s be honest though:

a lot of them are boring. Or at least one of them is bound to be in the normal student’s schedule.

Honors American Literature, or as my teacher Mr. Stephens likes to call it, “HAL”, is more my speed. Any type of English class has always been my go-to answer for this question.

In my experience, many of my peers would look at me with a funny expression and say that reading is tedious, though I truly enjoy it.

I feel like I have fun during American Lit and always look forward to it in my schedule.

From the 5-minute warm-ups where the class gets to ask Mr. Stephens

questions about literally anything, to the engaging conversations we have about whatever current passage we’re discussing,

and opinions.

The environment of the classroom is another aspect of the class which makes it my favorite one. Our class

### Each day brings a new challenge and an opportunity to share my thoughts and opinions.

HAL will always hold a special place in my heart.

Mr. Stephens never leaves us hanging.

He helps us with our work and always has interesting stories to tell us. Each day he brings a new challenge and an opportunity to share our thoughts

works so well together, and we get along very easily.

One of the very first things we discussed during American Lit was the importance of “being a good citizen in a learning environment.”

I’m glad we spent time on that because we now

have a steady and positive vibe in the classroom.

Besides this, the work we do in class doesn’t feel demanding. Instead, it gets me to apply myself differently than other classes.

HAL is very different from other English classes I’ve taken, and I like this change.

I am definitely enjoying American Lit, and I hope whoever’s taking it now, or in the future enjoy it as much as I do! ■



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# IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR...

## Time to organize your life and get it together!



Photo courtesy of Emily Kam '25

Emily Kam '25

It's that time of the year again! That can be said for a lot of events, but this time, it applies to everyone's favorite nostalgic spring activity: spring cleaning!

Time to clean up your kitchen and bathrooms, go through the old clothes you haven't worn in years, and relish

in the memories of the past. That is, if you can even get through your things!

For me, spring cleaning is something that I like to do mainly so I can tidy up and reorganize, especially in my room.

When things pile up in my room and there's barely enough space to fit new things, it can get overwhelming.

Occasionally sorting

**I learned that organization needs to be a priority.**

out your room or clos-

et when you see it in disarray is a good habit to have! Simply doing things like organizing your winter season's clothes into bins and storing them can be very useful in the long run. Especially when you're looking for the shorts you love as summer creeps up!

I used to be pretty unorganized but since I started high school, I learned that organization needs to be a priority.

With several school clubs, schoolwork, and taekwondo outside of school, organizing my life activities is almost like organizing all the things in my closet during spring cleaning.

That's why it is so important to be orga-

nized at Highlands. It's amazing to participate in

### 5 Must-do's for Spring Cleaning

- 1. Your Room - You never know how messy your room could get until you can't find anything! ☐
- 2. Backpack - Keep all your school supplies organized. ☐
- 3. Schoolwork desk - A messy desk just makes it harder to focus! ☐
- 4. Closet - You always want clean clothes! ☐
- 5. Locker - So that you never forget something you'll need! ☐

all the clubs and sports that Highlands has to offer, but having all of those activities can be stressful.

Organizing your schedule is an important way to keep things

simple. Just make sure you organize your schedules more often than you spring clean!

Once a year planning isn't going to cut it!■



Art by Jana Dabbagh '24

## LUCKY CHARMS

Do you believe in luck?



Photo courtesy of Mia Wang '23

Mia Wang '23

Throughout my life, I've had charms that I thought would bring me an

luck; they just put me in a happier mood.

These objects don't cause anything to happen, but they are extremely meaningful to me. Now, I wear a red bracelet with



my lunar animal that my grandma gave me.

My grandparents went

Sometimes I think whenever we look at our good luck charm or something meaningful to us, it boosts our performance.

Maybe the object has a positive energy, but we definitely can't rely on it to do well on something.

I believe that every good thing that happens to us is because of what we do/did.

Remember that your hard work on a test or a sports game is not because of luck, it's because of your effort, abilities, and hard work! ■



Art by Emily Gan '23

immense amount of luck. It would be a pencil, a stuffed animal, or a necklace.

As I grew older, I realized that these charms didn't actually bring me

back to China a few years ago, and whenever I look at the bracelet I am reminded of them and the special memories I share with them.

**I believe that every good thing that happens to us is because of what we do/did.**



## TEACHER'S CORNER:

Doing What You Love = Loving What You Do



Photo courtesy of Michele Zungoli

Michele Zungoli

Many years ago I stumbled across this brilliant equation. Since then, I have shared this advice with many.

I have often found myself having discussions with my students about what their interests are for their future endeavors.

Typically, they respond with ideas about career paths that will, "show them the money."

Now I love the film

Money does give us all a certain freedom, a sense of independence, even a feeling of control.

My experience, how-

- whatever that means to you.

Because of this, I urge my students to think about what they love, what in-



Art by Izzy Levine '23

**I urge my students to think about what they love, what inspires them, what fills them with joy and a sense of purpose.**

Jerry Maguire as much as the next person, and I get it, money is a potential driving factor when it comes to one's future.

ever, has shown me that this passion for money could also be a person's

downfall.

Burnout, fatigue, and stress are high prices to pay for "financial success"

spires them, what fills them with joy and a sense of purpose.

I love coming to work every day - and enjoying what I do makes all the time and effort worth it.

All careers require an individual to put in their time and energy, so you may as well be enjoying yourself!

Go out today and do something that makes you happy! ■



# LET’S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS

## DECA members dominate at NJ State Career Development Conference

**Roman Dario ’23**

Just like many other school events, in-person New Jersey DECA competitions were canceled for the last 2 years due to the pandemic.

The Distributive Education Clubs of America, or DECA, is an organization which prepares students for leadership positions in real world marketing, finance, hospitality and management positions.

DECA gives the opportunity for those interested in business to perform roleplay activities in certain scenarios and compete with other like-minded students at a regional, state, and national level. The organization also offers students the chance to earn merit based scholarships.

Northern Highlands is notorious for advancing students from state to national competitions.

Melissa DeCarlo, a second year business

education teacher at Highlands, is also a DECA advisor. She gave her thoughts when asked about the success from Northern Highlands at the State Career Development Conference (SCDC) in Atlantic City.

DeCarlo mentioned that Highlands had “about 130 students attend the state conference, and that was a success in itself. Out of those students, [there were] over 50 qualifiers to nationals”.

Principal Joseph Occhino and Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca share a similar optimistic viewpoint. LaRocca shared that he “got to sit down and watch one of the presentations and it was incredible”. Occhino followed with how unbelievable it was to see “the amount of work that goes into their planning, and over the years it’s remarkable to see how well Northern Highlands does in both regional, state and

national competitions.”

Junior Sam Shulman was eager to share his reaction on qualifying for the International Career Development Conference (ICDC) to be held in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shulman expressed that he “was shocked at first but was proud of [himself] and what [he] had accomplished. It was also great to be able to celebrate this achievement with [his] friends and family”.

He “had a lot of fun with [his] friends and also enjoyed the challenge of the competition,” and he described DECA to be “a great experience whether or not you move on to states or nationals.”

DECA members had to achieve a passing score on

a multiple choice test at the regionals competition in order to make it to the state competition.

To prepare for the SCDC, Junior Jai Khosla completed a number of practice tests for the state conference. He believes it “helped him prepare to roleplay as an investment banker and explain securities, balance sheets, and income statements.”

Junior Emily Bulko competed in Sports Marketing and Entertainment. To prepare for her presentations, Bulko sharpened her public speaking skills by performing mock sessions and keeping up to date with current trends in the business world.

Last year, members of DECA had to take a written test to attend the state competition. Then, for the state conference, they videotaped themselves roleplaying, uploaded their videos to YouTube, and were judged online. Their results came back after a few weeks.

Due to the area’s consistent decline in COVID cases, all events were able to be held in person. LaRocca was ecstatic for this opportunity post-pandemic, mentioning “the relief that the students and advisors had to be able to be back in person [and] to do their presentations in front of actual judges.” He believes “the competition was equivalent to what it was prior to the shutdowns.”

In a more serious tone, he expands: “Listen, we just want the kids to go down there and do the best they can, show what they’re about, and be successful.”

Northern Highlands is happy to recognize the hard work all DECA members put in, from regional, state, or national qualifiers. ■



Deca members getting their glass at SCDC

Photo courtesy of @nhdeca on Instagram

# THE PRESENT TAKES PRECEDENT

## History teachers focus on current events of the Russia-Ukraine conflict

**Emma Pereira ’24**

On February 22, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, devastating millions. While the war continues to escalate, and questions of the future arise, the world wonders how to help Ukrainian people and what will come next.

In times like these, the Northern Highlands Social Studies Department has the responsibility to educate Highlands students on the war. Head of the Department Robert Petrosino describes that during the last department meeting, prior to the invasion, the department focused on a powerpoint detailing Russian and Ukrainian history, which several teachers

took to their classrooms.

Petrosino assures that history teachers, “as professionals, are going to be addressing this on their own” and that, “this is what they do.” Petrosino expresses how current

include “being a global citizen,” and elaborated saying that “I can’t imagine not recognizing and discussing this in class.”

Principal Joseph Occhino remarks, “teachers have a part to actually take

about what is happening in our world.”

Occhino also emphasizes the importance of student’s taking their own initiative to stay informed on current events. Occhino states that “while we have a part as educators you also have a part as citizens to at least do your part and to keep up to date with certain news events that are taking place.”

Furthermore, AP Government and Criminal Law teacher Raymund Meizys incorporates current events in his classroom on a daily basis, working to connect them to the curriculum. He talks about various foreign policies in his classes and connects them to how countries are responding to the Russian-Ukrainian

War, amongst other connections.

Meizys also shares that teaching about the Russian and Ukrainian War “really hit home”, explaining his parents’ experiences as refugees and saying that the images circulating “are the images that [he] had in [his] head of [his] parents’ stories.”

He explains that “being told about my parents’ experiences and my grandparents’ experiences being refugees and trying to flee Lithuania and the Soviet Union,” it makes him say, “here it is all over again.”

World History and Cultures and Honors United States History I teacher Jennifer Simone has created lesson plans for her students, including

a station activity that will allow students to learn the years conflict between Russia and Ukraine over several years, actions being taken by Russia, Ukraine, and other countries on a daily basis, media coverage on the war, and the possible impact on the United States.

Information pertaining to the war “is something that we’re all trying to accomodate and put into our lesson plans”, Simone says. She emphasizes the urgency of teaching about the war and that “you can’t always wait until it fits in.”

Overall, Northern Highlands teachers are working to inform students and bring awareness to the community and empower students to take action. ■

# STANDIN’ IN THE HALL OF FAME

## 11 individuals and 2 teams are to be inducted into Highlands’ Hall of Fame

**Amy Tullett ’23**

Eleven individuals and two sports teams are to be honored at the Highlands Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Banquet on May 15. Of these eleven individuals, six are athletes and five are individuals who have contributed to Northern Highlands in other ways.

The six athletes being inducted are Steve Bono (Football 2001), Bon Cassavell (Track & Field

1985), Matt Greenberg (Wrestling 1999), Jamie Levine (Tennis 1994), Olivia Streatfield (Tennis 1995), and Caroline Vloka (Fencing 2008). Several of these athletes were chosen for The Record’s All Decade teams and received All State honors.

The other five inductees who contributed to the school in different ways include Lars Larsen, Fred Procopio, Jane Kedron, Rona Meyers and Liz Hopfan (1984) who

will be in the category of distinguished alumni.

Larsen was the first wrestling coach at Northern Highland who led teams to many league and District championships during his 10-year tenure.

Procopio, Larsen’s successor as head wrestling coach, is being honored for leasing teams and individual wrestlers to the highest honors during his 11-year tenure.

Kedron was the first of Northern Highlands teach-

ers to receive the prestigious Princeton Prize of The Governor’s Award for Excellence in teaching, the first chairperson of what was known at the time as the Foreign Language Department.

Meyers was another recipient of The Governor’s Award for Excellence in teaching and eventually became the Director of Guidance Special Services.

Hopfan will be honored for establishing and building a non-profit orga-

nization in New York City which serves to empower underserved youth through art and mentoring.

Finally, the 1985 boys’ baseball team and the 2003 boys’ basketball team have been selected this year for the team category. The baseball team won the schools’ first State Sectional Championship and the basketball team won the schools’ only State Sectional Championship.

More information about the induction cer-

emony can be found on the Northern Highlands Regional High School web page or at [halloffame@northernhighlands.org](mailto:halloffame@northernhighlands.org). ■



Art by Amy Tullett ’23



# THE NIGHT OF ALL NIGHTS

## Northern Highlands Class of '23 attends their Junior Prom

**Cat Corrado '23**

The Junior Prom took place on Saturday, March 12, 2022 at the Pearl River Hilton. Junior Class Council Member Aarna Arora emphasized that prom “is not an event to miss,” especially after uncertainties regarding COVID-19 in previous years.

Arora states that she’s “excited to finally get to experience what it feels like to have a normal prom and [she’s] happy that [she] got to make some planning decisions this year.”

A large issue surrounding prom was the controversy in deciding the date for the event. Initially, a letter was sent out in

August to parents and students that stated the Junior Prom would take place on Friday, March 11, 2022, and to plan standardized testing dates accordingly.

The March SAT, which occurred the morning of March 12, would have been the morning directly after prom, which upset many students and parents.

At first, Principal Joseph Occhino was hesitant on switching the day of prom. However, he emphasized his sympathy for the “poor kids”, assuring that “if [he] can move it [he] will try.” There was initially no availability, but after speaking to the Pearl River Hilton again, multiple dates opened up.

A survey went out to

students to see which date they would like the best. The date chosen ended up being the opening night of the school play, March 4, so the decision was finally made to make the prom the night of March 12.

Whilst planning the prom, there were some complications, but the school persevered and solved any problems that came their way.

Principal Joseph Occhino stated, “there was a little concern when we got back from the holidays and Omicron first hit us because numbers went through the roof rapidly... we came to the decision to just wait and see if numbers went down, and they did. It was at that point we

decided to move forward with the Junior prom.”

Due to previous experiences with COVID in the past, Northern Highlands made efforts to ensure that students would be protected.

Occhino mentioned that the venues from both proms —Pearl River Hilton for the Juniors and the Rockleigh for the Seniors— “contain clauses in their contracts that state if at any time COVID prohibits us due to either a governor’s order or if there is a limit on the number of people who can gather, we are able to get out of the contract without any penalty.”

At last year’s prom, Highlands students were

not allowed to bring students from other schools to prom. Many students did not understand why, but it was a necessary step to ensure that the prom would be safe and within COVID guidelines. This year, it was decided that students are allowed to

bring dates outside of Highlands.

Occhino leaves with a final message of, “we did everything we could to accommodate the needs of our students and we are so thankful to be having Junior Prom this year.”■



Ava Waller, Shanaz Ghayazi, Marlo Zambrotta, Arden Flynn and Jamie Freedman posing for pictures

Photo courtesy of Jamie Freedman '23

# SNOWEE MARCH

## Robotics Club makes it to States

**Austin Park '24**

With a grand comeback, the Robotics Club of Northern Highlands has made it to state regionals in the NJ Steam Tank competition. The club has achieved this opportunity through months of hard work and dedication to their craft.

When asked about his impression of the club, Assistant Principal of Student Affairs Dr. Tony LaRocca praised, “that type of success in both a new coach and a team we revitalized is incredible”.

The Robotics Club ran briefly a couple years before the pandemic before being shut down due to lack of interest. Yet, due to the efforts of multiple staff members such as LaRocca, Vice Principal Michael Koth, Principal Joseph Occhino, and Superintendent Scot Beckerman, the club was supported enough to come back to school.

The New Jersey Steam Tank (NJST) Competition allows for students to utilize science, technology, engineering, art, and

math in order to solve real world problems that many face. The Robotics Club has decided to focus on the problem of snow plowing.

When asked about the inspiration behind the NJST problem solving, Purvik Patel, the supervisor of the club explained, “we want to remove humans from inconvenient tasks.” The robotics team ended up creating ‘Snowee’: an automated snow shoveler.

Snowee is easy to operate for all age groups, can function in low temperature weather conditions, and it is economically efficient as well as environmentally friendly.

The target audience described by members of the club are homeowners.

In order to make

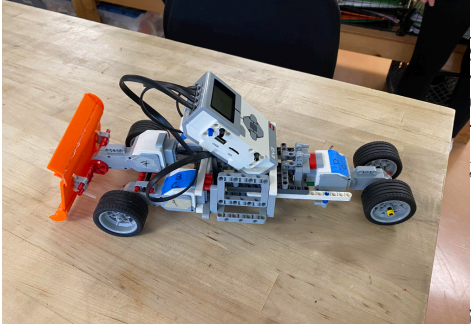
Snowee a reality, the Robotics Club split up into three main teams to tackle different aspects of making the robot.

The first was a team focused on the mechanics, for example, how the robot would drive.

The second being in charge of the programming; the coding club was also recruited in order to help out with the code.

The final group was the electrical and snow removal team, where they tried to brainstorm the most effective way to get rid of snow.

Their hard work and effort has paid off, as Snowee is reaching new heights on a competitive stage.■



Robotics Clubs' 'Snowee'

Photo courtesy of Austin Park '24

# SUPPLIES FOR ALL

## Education For All hosts supply drive

**Jiya Singh '24**

When opening their emails, most Highlanders are met with a couple emails regarding fundraisers occurring at Northern Highlands. Several of these emails have been from Education for All, a club working to help underprivileged schools to provide “adequate educational opportunities,” according to Co-Founder Brianna

Schulstad.

Alongside their K-8 tutoring services, Education for All has been supporting the Paterson School District through donating money and resources.

Now, they have decided to hold a donation drive box for school supplies. Schulstad mentioned how printer paper is one of the most in demand supplies, noting how once teach-

ers use up their allotted amount, “everything else comes out of pocket.”

Schulstad affirms that “any type of office supply you could think of around your house would be greatly appreciated.”

Education For All also offers to pick up supplies from people’s houses. Schulstad explains that people who “are not even affiliated with Northern Highlands” have been

helping to guide the club toward success.

The organization has multiple options for submitting money, either through Venmo or by putting an envelope in a donation box. Schulstad explains that they “try to get the most value out of the donation” by purchasing helpful and relevant supplies.

You can donate to Education For All through venmo to @brianna-schul-

stad.

According to Schulstad, Education For All’s main goal is to ensure “equal opportunities, whether that’s through who’s teaching them, what they’re learning, and the tools they have to succeed.”

Assistant Principal Tony LaRocca shares the same viewpoint, as he believes “funding has a direct correlation to opportunity.”LaRocca also

emphasizes how donating is “an important part of a community like this.”

The donation box is located towards the back of the lobby and will be ongoing, since Education For All is partnered directly with Paterson Public School 1.

“Any time when we can give back to those who are less fortunate really should mean a lot to people,” says Principal Joseph Occhino. ■

# A SCORE WITH SCOIR

## Highlands moves from Naviance to SCOIR

**Rebecca Hoffer '23**

Naviance is a website that guides students in the college process, which has been used at Northern Highlands for several years. Every student enrolled at Northern Highlands receives their own username and login, although the software is mainly used for upper class students, as college starts to become more of a main priority.

There have recently been changes in the school and a new website, SCOIR, is going to be the software that guidance counselors and students use to navigate through the end of high school.

The change at Highlands has already started to be implemented with students. Students have been attending guidance meetings where they receive their new logins for SCOIR. This college tool is almost identical to Naviance, but it has some extra benefits that make it a more user friendly interface.

This will not only make it smoother for students to utilize, but parents will also be able to use the

college tool much more efficiently.

Guidance counselors are hoping that this transition will make the college process more fun because of the easy user interface too.

When asked about the switch of programs, Principal Joseph Occhino mentions the importance of choosing the best method for students and how “Naviance isn’t the only program in the market now.”

There are some different programs for college searching, but SCOIR became the choice for Northern Highlands fairly quickly. There are already juniors who are currently getting their logins so they can utilize this software for their upcoming college plans.

The Guidance Department at Northern Highlands has been working hard to utilize all of the features of the new program, especially taking advantage of SCOIR benefits that Naviance does not currently offer, like drag-and-drop application categories.

Guidance Counselor Daniel Rehai says that

SCOIR shows if a student is “in the top 25 percentile of all applicants, top 50 percentile of all applicants or top 75.” He adds that “[SCOIR] has student testimonials for a lot of the colleges on there and that’s just features Naviance didn’t have that we felt were a little bit of a benefit of having SCOIR.”

Naviance was beneficial when it came to the advanced college search, where statistics for a university were easily accessible. However, SCOIR has the same exact type of search with the key difference of a save button.

With SCOIR, the college searches will all save instead of having to go through the previous hassle of having to search for the same thing over and over again.

Overall, the school’s administration believes this transition to be a beneficial change for the student body. SCOIR is going to make it much easier and more accessible to search for colleges so students can find the proper fit for them. ■



# SETTING THE NEW STANDARD

## Northern Highlands juniors undergo testing for new state graduation requirements

**Keeret Kaur '23**

Teachers and students across Northern Highlands were recently made aware of a new graduation requirement, the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA).

This state test is taken entirely online and is made up of two parts: English

and math. The English section consists of 10th grade English and language arts skills, and the math section consists of algebra I and geometry based questions.

Northern Highlands Juniors will take the test on March 15, 16, and 17. According to the Assistant Principal of Student Affairs, Dr. Tony LaRocca,

Juniors will come in for testing, while Freshmen and Sophomores attend an assembly and seniors meet with their counselors.

District Director of Curriculum, Assessment and Human Resources Robin Knutelsky explains that, "It's a comprehensive test. So it's not just based upon where you are in your English or Math class right now, it's based on the knowledge you have acquired."

Knutelsky also elaborates that the resurrection of standardized tests is a decision made by the state, remarking, "There are federal requirements for accountability and there are state requirements for accountability. The NJGPA is a state requirement and it's our state education code that says that we have

to test juniors to see if they meet this high school graduation requirement."

The decision of reinstating state tests and putting graduation on the line is a decision that many students at Northern Highlands are unhappy with.

Junior Grace Martin is one of these students. Martin said, "I have negative feelings for this test because I feel that it's not important to pass a standardized test to graduate high school since we are already required to get good enough grades to pass the classes we are taking."

Students are not the only ones upset. Principal Joseph Occhino sees the "controversy with the resurrection of state testing," but adds that, "it is a state requirement...so it is just a matter of the states following what the mandates are with regards to testing"

of the passing score is the amount of content the state deemed necessary for students to know before moving past high school.


However, for students who don't do well on the assessment, there are some safety nets in place, with an option to take a remedial course over the summer and retest during the summer or next year.


With the NJGPA in March, NJSLA in April, SATs, ACTs and finals, Occhino notes how Juniors are being thrown back into the waters of testing fairly quickly.



**"I feel that it's not important to pass a standardized test to graduate ... we are already required to get good enough grades to pass the classes we are taking."**


*Junior Grace Martin*





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**"I think our students are always very prepared for standardized tests, no matter how many they have to take."**

*Principal Joseph Occhino*

He offers advice: "take it in stride, you can not prepare for it. We are very confident in our teaching staff...I think our students are always very prepared for standardized tests, no matter how many they have to take. Just go into the test with confidence knowing that you have already learned the material."■

## REFERENDUM PASSED

### What changes will occur for Highlands?

*Continued from Cover*

On top of that, the Arts, TV Production, and Ceramics classrooms, which were built over 50 years ago, are going to be renovated and updated.

A new Kiln will be installed for the Ceramics classroom and new technology including lighting equipment will be installed in the TV Production classroom.

The Planetarium will also be receiving some updates. The Planetarium Projector is outdated, being 12 years old, and will be replaced by modern equipment.

The new additions to the school will begin to

**"We strive to look at the needs of the district to see what is necessary to improve and will continue to do so."**

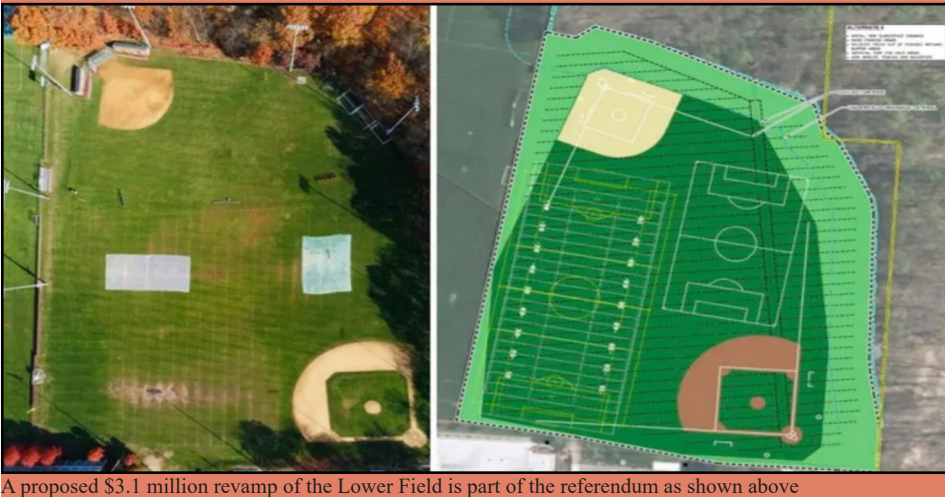
*Principal Joseph Occhino*

serve students completely in the next couple of years and for generations to come.

One thing to note is that taxpayers will not see an increase in their taxes since these updates will be offset by expiring bonds.

Principal Joseph Occhino mentions "we strive to look at the needs of the district to see what is necessary to improve and will continue to do so."

As the referendum date of March 8, 2022 comes closer, there will be more information on specific projects and costs, but Northern Highlands plans to have the referendum "be completely finished in the next couple of years." ■



A proposed \$3.1 million revamp of the Lower Field is part of the referendum as shown above

## MASKS OFF, SMILES ON

### Governor has lifted schoolwide mask mandates

*Continued from Cover*

Following these precautions will ensure that students and staff stay healthy during the last few months of the school year.

While many are glad that mask-wearing has been made optional, it is important to remember that this change can be reversed if the number of positive COVID cases begins to increase.

Occhino says that the metrics will be "a clear indication" of the need to reinstate a temporary mask mandate at school. This can be done without Governor Murphy's order in order to protect the health and safety of students and faculty.

Despite continued precautions, many students remain excited. Junior Kyle Wood says, "I think that the school moving to a mask-optional status was a great choice. A lot of kids weren't wearing masks properly anyway, and the removal of the mandate allows us to feel like things are going back to normal."

Junior Emily Reilly agrees that she is happy about the mask mandate being lifted but says that she is "sometimes still worried about getting COVID" now that the majority of students are maskless.

Junior Karen Bae, claims that she initially "had mixed feelings about the mask-optional status..."

[she] initially wanted to wear a mask to protect others, [but she] kind of felt pressured to take it off because everyone else had it off."

She went on to say that "it's been too long not being able to see each other's faces. I missed people's smiles."

Although there are mixed feelings, most agree that this is an important step towards returning to what life used to be like.

Biology and Sports Medicine teacher Mrs. Le-user summarizes the sentiment: "Everything seems lighter and all the students seem much happier." ■



From left to right: Kaiden Canariato, Sami Fox, Grace LaBarbiera, Annie Gosen, Carly Reimbauer, Caitlyn Kunisch, Richard Golden, & Kate Karmen

Photo Credit: NorthernHighlands.com



# #FEATUREDARTISTS

## Original pieces from AP Art students at Highlands



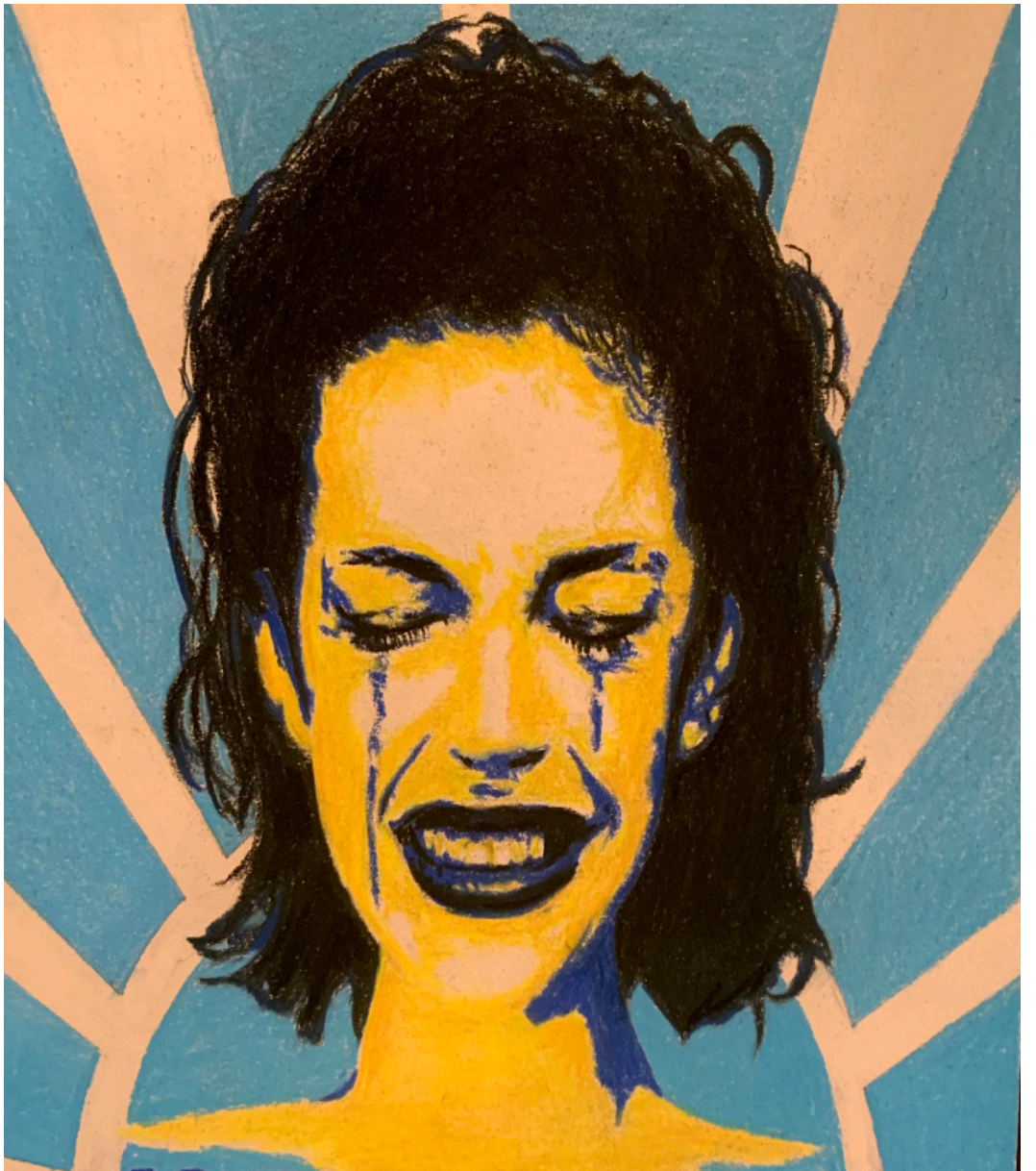
Original drawing by Paulina Granada '23



Photo edit by Bernie Baron '22



Digital photo by Taia Charney '23



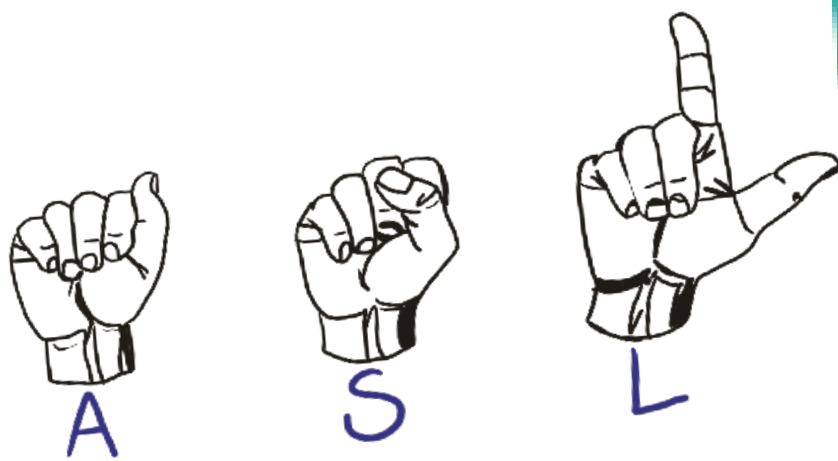
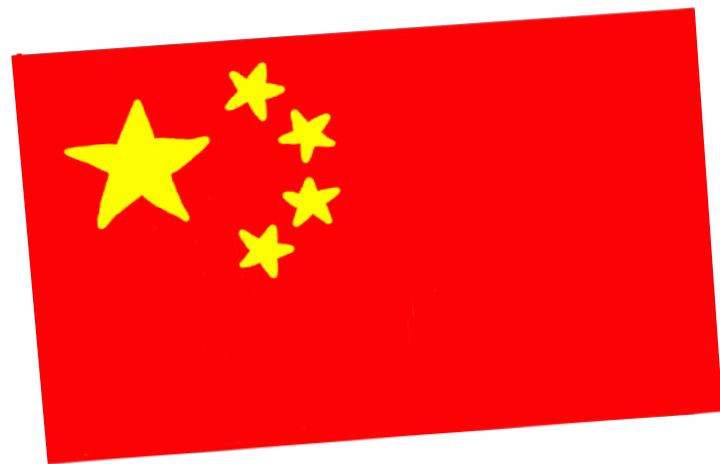
Original drawing by Jessica Xu '23



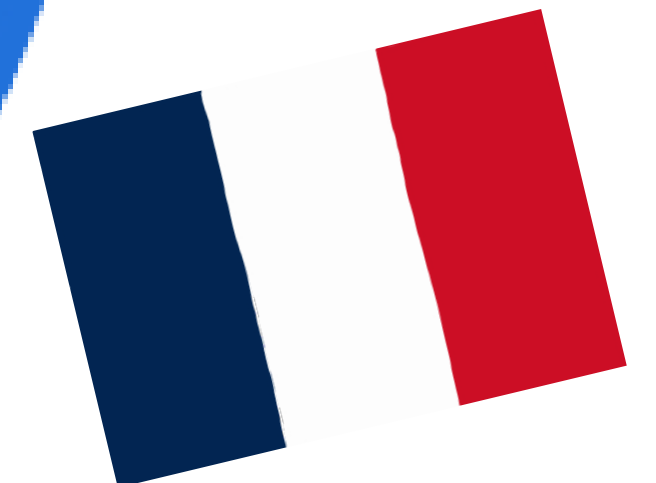
# Foreign Language Week

Layout by Izzy Levine '23 and Ciara Schulmann '23  
Art by Izzy Levine '23

## Bonjour



## Ciao



## NI HAO



# ACA-SCUSE ME? ACA-BELIEVE IT.

## All three Northern Highlands A Capella groups compete at ICHSA quarterfinals

Emma Pereira '24

Highlands A Cappella groups are back in action, performing live for the first time since 2020. After months of rehearsal, this past January, The Highlands Harmonics, The Highlands Belles, and The Highlands Voices competed in the ICHSA Quarterfinals, an annual A Cappella competition that has returned to in-person competition. Even though they will not be advancing to the semi-finals, The Harmonics and Belles competed at the Highlands-hosted quarter final and wowed the crowds as well.

During an interview, Irene Lahr, the director of Belles, described her group's experience. Lahr explained that the Belles have been working on their competition

set, which had a sunshine theme, since The Belles "knew people needed that." Their set featured "Pocketful of Sunshine" by Natasha Bendingfield, "Sunlight" by Hozier, and "Cloudy Day" by Tones and I. Currently, they are learning new songs, one of which is arranged by Belles member Hansa Suresh.

Lahr also described the transition The Belles faced from returning to in person performing explaining that "what we do is not easy," but nevertheless The Belles' "performances have just been outstanding and inspiring and I'm sure that I was not the only one in the audience watching and getting goosebumps and teary eyed."

Alexandra Robins, a senior and member of the Belles, explained that this

year she "enjoyed getting to know [her] lovely a cappella group" She "looks forward to getting to perform with them again."

Also at the ICHSA Quarterfinals was The Harmonics who performed a captivating set composed of a Pentatonic medley of "Save The World" by Swedish House Mafia, "Use Somebody" by Kings of Leon, "Easy On Me" by Adele, and "Fire and Gold" by Bea Miller.

Dylan Yu, a sophomore and member of the Harmonics, explained the struggle of virtual performing last year and the lack of connection that came with it. He is grateful for in-person performing this year as he "really enjoyed getting to know [his] group and improving as a musician." Upcoming, Yu looks forward to "continuing to improve and singing with new people."

Miguel Granda, a sophomore and Harmonics member as well, said, "I have enjoyed the song selection and my part in being in a big group. It feels really nice and it brings community." He

can't wait for auditions next year, as it "keeps you on your toes."

The third Highlands Group, The Voices, competed at the ICHSA Quarterfinal at Neptune Highschool, sweeping away the judges and audience and earning third place, guaranteeing them a place in the ICHSA Semifinals.

Thomas Pastor, the Highlands chorus teacher and the director of the Voices, explained that Voices "have been doing great!" Voices has learned how to "listen again" after much virtual recording last year. Pastor explained that "it has been a big adjustment, but they are doing great with it."

Voices is currently working on their competition set, which is comprised of three songs, all named "I'll Be There," each by different artists. They are rehearsing twice a week and are even working with an A Capella coach in preparation for the ICHSA Semifinals.

Fiyinfoluwa Alao, a senior in Voices, explained that she is "excited for everything that is left." This year, Alao said she enjoyed "getting to know

[her] group." For her, "practicing for competition, talking, and making jokes and just opening up to each other was really an amazing part," and The Voices has "become a family."

The ICHSA Semifinals will be on March 26 at



Photo Courtesy of Adam Keeble

Northern Highlands. The Varsity Vocals website has tickets for this event, where Harmonics and Belles will be guest performers, and Voices will be competing their set in a race to make it to the ICHSA Finals.

Furthermore, Northern Highlands A Cappella Festival will be returning in April, bringing two days full of performing and learning.

On Friday April 1, A Cappella groups will be performing a full set in a Headliner Concert. On Saturday April 2, A Capella students will be attending workshops,

and each group will get a master class with an A Cappella professional. On Saturday night all the A Capella groups will show off what they've learned to an audience, performing alongside various A Capella idols.

This year, Deke Sharon and Black To Gold will be featured. Deke Sharon, the "The Father of Contemporary A Cappella", is known for his production of the television show The Sing-Off and his work in all three Pitch Perfect movies. Black To Gold is a six person A Capella group that was nominated for four Contemporary A Cappella Recording Awards. Their singles can be found on Spotify. These guests will definitely be a special treat!

Students are welcome at the festival to see all the A Cappella groups perform amongst A Capella legends. Highlands A Cappella is up and running, and you definitely don't want to miss it! ■



Photo Courtesy of Adam Keeble

# RUSSIA UKRAINE WAR STORMS THE INTERNET

## In the 21st century stay updated on the war through the click of a button

Taia Charney '23

For the past couple of weeks the War in Ukraine has only just dominated the news media despite the crisis being a result of the culminating tensions between Russia and Ukraine since the winter of 2021. To provide context for those who aren't aware, President Vladimir Putin—autocratic leader of Russia—invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022 after Ukraine had expressed interest in joining NATO.

NATO is an international defensive alliance of 30 countries (excluding Russia). NATO offers political and military safeguards to the security of the allies, and all countries are obligated to defend one another if one feels threatened or is attacked.

Since the 1990s NATO has admitted more than 14 Eastern European countries into the alliance, and Putin fears that Ukraine's admission would threaten the security of the Russia-Ukraine border. Additionally, some view Russia's invasion of Ukraine as inevitable, citing Putin's long-expressed desire to reunite the Soviet Union that infamously fell

in December of 1991.

Since the invasion, Russian forces have ruthlessly attempted to take over Ukraine's capital of Kiev, sending missiles and launching airstrikes on neighboring towns and cities. Most experts and leaders thought that Russia's invasion would be immediately successful, but the Ukrainian people have proved otherwise.

Led by their President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, ordinary Ukrainian civilians refused to give up their freedom and have taken up arms against the Russians, fearlessly risking their lives to drive out the enemy. More than two million Ukrainians have left their homes, loved ones, and country behind as they seek refuge in neighboring countries, packing their entire lives into what little they can hold on their backs.

In response to the invasion and increasingly disastrous and deadly attacks not only on government buildings, but also on innocent towns, villages and even maternity wards, the West has imposed catastrophic sanctions on Russians, Vladimir Putin, and his Oligarchs.

In international con-

demnation of the horrific attacks, NATO crippled the Russian economy by cutting Russia out of SWIFT: an international payment cooperative which facilitates trillions of dollars of cross-border payments between over 200 countries.

Along with countless others, NATO also placed severe sanctions on Putin himself and powerful businessmen who

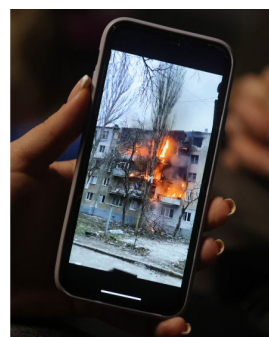


Photo courtesy of Texas A&M Today

many believe have influence over Putin's decision-making. Regrettably, the West has been unable to halt the death and destruction inflicted on the innocent Ukrainian people, and President Zelenskyy attributes this to their resistance of declaring Ukraine a no-fly zone.

Since airstrikes have continued, the Ukrainian government has demanded that NATO defend their airspace to shoot Russian

missiles and prevent further shelling, but NATO refuses, arguing that doing so would erupt into World War III.

As the war continues, so does the media coverage, and platforms such as Twitter have been doing their part to censor false Russian propaganda appearing on the feeds of uninformed Russians.

To justify his war to his people, President Putin has called the Ukrainian government "drug addicts and Nazis," appealing to the strong anti-Nazi sentiment and pride of the Russian people. Russians who live outside of cities believe the war is justified, unaware of the atrocious and unprovoked crimes of their leader's actions.

Although the Kremlin (the Russian government) has restricted access to social media, the rest of the world is fully informed, and the extent of mass media in today's society offers pros and cons. The pros are that reliable information and news sites are accessible at the click of a button, and when responsible citizens search for information, news can travel fast and urgently.

The cons are that mass media also comes with

unpreventable misinformation and bias of news networks, promoting propaganda and misleading curious consumers. Despite this, the entire western world seems to agree on the criminality of Russia's actions, and teens are more aware than ever of current events thanks to social media platforms like Tik Tok and Twitter.

When asked about the impact of social media and the Russian invasion in general, Junior Daniela Suarez said "Tiktok and other social media platforms have made [her] aware of things that [she] would not have known about otherwise." Suarez states that "although the news is on in [her] house a lot and [she usually knows] what's going on, Tiktok showed [her] how the war is affecting Ukrainian citizens who would otherwise never be able to tell their stories."

Suarez also commented on the Russian's restriction of news; "I read that Putin had a 60% approval rating when polled about the war, and I think that says a lot about his regime. We know that Russians on the outskirts of the major cities have access to nothing but

state-news, and the way they're describing the war on a 'Nazi' government, it makes sense why people would think they should support it. It's terrible that Putin is not only pointlessly slaughtering thousands of Ukrainians, but also misleading his people and controlling a terrible and false narrative."

After more than two weeks of relentless attacks, Russia has not backed down, but Ukraine remains headstrong and unrelenting. Despite President Putin's atrocious disregard for human life, the world has come to know the Ukrainian people as unwavering and stubborn fighters; lovers of their country who are willing to die for their freedoms. That is something truly admirable that no amount of brutality can break.

As war continues to wage, citizens of the western world must continue to educate and inform themselves and others and help where they can. To make a donation or learn more, please visit [unicef-usa.org](https://www.unicef-usa.org). ■



# HIGHLANDS' VERY OWN BROADWAY STAR

Highlands' theater student acts in new Broadway musical

**Yuichi Hincapie '23**

Senior Emily Pellecchia has recently been cast in a revival of *The Bridges of Madison County* at the Axelrod Performing Arts Center in Deal, New Jersey. The show opens on March 11 and runs through March 27, 2022.

Pellecchia plays Carolyn Johnson, the daughter of the show's lead, Francesca Johnson, played by Kate Baldwin, a two-time Tony nominee, who most notably starred in the Broadway revival of *Hello, Dolly!* Pellecchia also stars alongside Aaron Lazar, who is most known for his work on FOX's drama, *Filthy Rich*.

Pellecchia first knew she wanted to be on

stage when she saw the original cast of *Aladdin* on Broadway in 2016, when she was in the sixth grade. Pellecchia says, "...



Emily Pellecchia acts alongside Kate Baldwin.

for some reason, I left the theater in near tears.

Well- not near tears- I was actually crying. Sobbing, because I was so overwhelmed by what I had just witnessed. I had

never felt so moved... and not because *Aladdin* is so heartwarming, but

because of the spectacle that is live theater. To me, nothing is as special."

Since then, Pellecchia has been featured in dozens of productions, her most recent and favorite roles including Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, Ella in *Cinderella*, and as Nostradamus in Highlands' own production of *Something Rotten!*

When it came to auditioning for Madison County, Pellecchia responded to an open call on Playbill and sent in an audition video. "I didn't really think much of it, but then I got a callback, and they asked me to record another video and send it in! And then a few days after that, I got the call that they wanted me

to play Carolyn!" Pellecchia says.

Pellecchia has always dreamed of pursuing theater as a career, although it wasn't always an easy path. Pellecchia says, "for a while I was trying to convince myself that I didn't want to go into theater because of the competitive nature, but I slowly came to the realization that if I tried to pursue anything else I would live my life thinking 'what if?'" Pellecchia hopes to inspire a new generation of young actors, "just like the 2016 cast of *Aladdin* did for [her]."

The so-called "first revival" of *The Bridges of Madison County* opens on March 11, 2022, a show that many members of

the original cast and crew will be coming to see. Tickets are on sale now. ■



Emily Pellecchia performs as Nostradamus.

Photo Courtesy of Emily Pellecchia '22

# ASK AL, HE KNOWS THE DEAL

Al Mugno creates a weather website

**Matthew Reichert '24**

The weather app is on every iPhone. Nearly 80 million households receive the weather channel, and 238 people are subscribed to Alq Weather, engineering teacher Al Mugno's weather site. However, on February 24 they all equally predicted a few inches of sleet and snow, and the resulting snow day.

Mugno runs Alq Weather alone, checking maps around the area and analyzing the weather patterns of the areas surrounding Northern Highlands. He gets information from being a part of groups such as the NJ Weather Forum. But really "it's just one man with an enthusiastic passion," Mugno said.

Following the last few correctly predicted snow

days, the blog became so popular at Highlands that traffic to it nearly overloaded the school's server. A post to the site on March 7 said, "Peeps, Ice Call for 2-25 Verified." Mugno's casual language makes his site more entertaining and fun for Highlands students.

When explaining how the project all started, Mugno mentioned a TV weatherman from when

he was a kid: Joe Witte. During the great winters of 1976-1978, most



Al Mugno and his weather website.

reporters declared there would be four inches of snow, Witte predicted six inches. Witte was so impactful that Mugno even made his own weather broadcast on a recording device when he was six.

Mugno's website did not start because of a fascination with precipitation patterns. Instead, it was because of the fun a snow day would bring him when he was a child.

Even in recent posts, Mugno openly roots for snow days. With his personal, sentimental, and wholesome responses, the site connects to Highlanders in a unique way. As Mugno says, "life should be fun. It should be entertaining." ■

# HIGHLANDERS: UNCHARTED FANS?

Tom Holland stars in new action movie

**Aarna Arora '23**

The movie *Uncharted* is one of this year's most anticipated movies, especially for all the video game lovers out there! This movie is a prequel to the *Uncharted* Video Games, which have amassed a fan base of over 40 million across the globe. These games have been around for over ten years and there are currently 9 video games in the *Uncharted* series, meaning this movie held a lot of big expectations for fans.

As mentioned before, *Uncharted* is a prequel to all the video games and is the origin story of Nathan Drake, the main character who is a treasure hunter, and the beginning of his partnership with Victor

"Sully" Sullivan, the other protagonist.

The film starts off with Drake's love of treasure hunting. Nathan, played by Tom Holland, and his older brother Sam, played by Rudy Pankow, are both orphans who only have each other.

The movie starts off with Sam and Nathan sneaking into a museum trying to steal the map of explorer Ferdinand Magellan's treasure. However, they get caught which leads to Sam having to leave Nathan alone in the orphanage. The movie then has a time skip, which leads to an older version of Nathan Drake; this is where the story begins.

Sully seeks out Nathan Drake because he part-

nered with Sam before, and asks Nathan if he wants to help Sully find

crazy stunts and incredibly surprising plot twists.

Some of the most

**"If you are a person who likes action, then this movie would be perfect for you."**

*Junior Janice Kim*

the 500-year-old lost treasure of Ferdinand Magellan (the same treasure that sparked Nathan's love for treasure hunting).

The treasure hunting starts out as a heist, but it soon becomes a race to find the gold before Santiago Moncada, the villain, can get his hands on it. This movie is action-packed, filled with

unique parts of this movie are how well they incorporated the video games without making it the exact same storyline. One incredible scene, which was pictured in the trailer, is when Nathan Drake gets hit by a car out of a cargo plane and lands on a bunch of cargo boxes; this scene was taken directly from the video

games and is so well incorporated into the films.

Another small mention to the video games that featured in the films was the small cameo of Nolan North. Nolan North is the actor for Nathan Drake in the video games so it was nice to see an homage to Nolan's Nathan Drake incorporated into the film.

Throughout the media this movie has gotten some great reviews, but what do Highlanders think? I personally thought this movie was amazing and it was a fun experience to watch it in the movie theater.

Junior Janice Kim shared a similar opinion saying, "This movie is a must-watch and if you are a person who likes action then this movie would be perfect for you." Another

junior, Cat Corrado, also voiced her favor for the film saying that, "it was an amazing movie and as someone who doesn't watch many movies, I can say this one is definitely one of the good ones."

Seems like Highlands has some serious love for this movie. I would definitely recommend this movie to someone, especially if they like both action and comedy. If you go and see this movie in theaters, remember there are end-credit scenes that you don't want to miss out on! ■



# OMELETTE OR HAMLET?

## Students share their thoughts on the musical *Something Rotten*

Sophia Schack '23

This year's school musical, *Something Rotten*, took an interesting approach to classic literature. The musical revolved around Shakespeare (played by Jackson Gray) and Nick Bottom (played by Brady Anderson) and their competitive relationship in Renaissance play-writing.

Nick Bottom, so intent on outstanding Shakespeare, seeks help from the seer Nostradamus (played by Emily Pellecchia and Isabella Fernandez).

This results in a fun and entertaining musical focused on the very concept of a musical itself.

Incorporating refer-

dence. Director Joseph Kiely chose this musical because it "had enough intellectual jokes about Shakespeare for my fellow English teachers, mu-

rating her own personality in the role, Pellecchia remarked that "Nostradamus is kind of the crazy, excited, bubbly girl that hides inside of me constantly so it was almost therapeutic to play the part because I didn't have to hide or suppress any of that energy!"

Kiely did an admirable job at involving everyone in the musical. Ensemble-member Elizabeth Marino said, "although I didn't have a huge role, I was able to add my own flair to my character even if I was just in the ensemble. I tried to react to things how I would personally react while keeping my character in mind."

The experience was amazing both for the audience and the cast. Pellecchia remarked that on opening night "[she] had been at an eight-hour rehearsal for another show [she] was in, and being able to come back to the school with such a supportive cast was the best. Not only that, but we definitely killed it."

And killed it they did! For days after, many people were humming the catchy tunes under their breath, chuckling about the jokes, and commenting on the amazing cast and fun costumes. It is

apparent that this might have been one of the most fun musicals to watch and participate in.

When recounting the overall experience, Mari-

had a joke for everyone, no matter their age.

Whether they felt more drawn to the sweet love story between Nigel Bottom (played by Pat-

### There was "barely a dry eye in the room."

Elizabeth Marino

ences from modern musicals and events, this show did a wonderful job at fully engaging the au-

sical jokes for the theater people, and regular jokes for everyone else. I felt that this show would offer a fun relief from the stress." The musical was wonderfully light-hearted and funny, so the audience and the cast enjoyed the experience greatly.

Emily Pellecchia, who played the character Nostradamus for the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday shows, said that "[i]t was a super eye-opening experience!" Pellecchia, who originally auditioned for the role of Shakespeare, said that her character "was an absolute joy to play." Nostradamus, a loopy seer who helps Nick Bottom on his journey to upstage Shakespeare, was a wonderful and scintillating character that was depicted remarkably by Emily.

In regards to incorpo-



The cast performing in their colorful costumes.

Photo Courtesy of Sydney Hogue '23

no says that it "was one of the best things [she had] ever done. There were such incredible people to work with, and such a great show in general. [She] can't wait for next year."

Emily added, "I learned a lot about who I am as a performer and human through this musical and cast. Not only that, but I learned a lot about my castmates as well! It was a super eye-opening experience and I'm incredibly thankful for it."

Closing night was bittersweet. Marino said there was "barely a dry eye in the room." It was wonderful to see the on-stage performance, banter, and relationships between characters. This musical

rick Keeble) and Portia (played by Sydney Hogue) or perhaps Bea and Nick Bottom's relationship with a baby on the way, it surely made a connection with the entire audience.

Kiely said, "[t]here were certainly difficulties along the way... it was great to get back to performing and working together."

This musical was an experience in of itself, both for the cast and the audience, and will definitely not be forgotten for a very long time. With a hardworking cast and director, a beautiful set, and extravagant costumes, this musical is truly one for the books. ■



Hamlet or OMELETTE?

Photo Courtesy of Sydney Hogue '23

# "HAVE YOU DONE THE WORDLE?"

## People are going crazy over this *New York Times* game

Elise Choi '22

Over the course of just a few months, *Wordle* quickly became one of the most popular games played by Highlands students. As the popularity of this game grew, students, parents, and faculty alike all began to enjoy the game. How did a simple word game transform into

a viral hit?

*Wordle* is the work of software engineer Josh Wardle, who created the game in October of 2021. He made Wordle because he and his wife were avid fans of the New York Times' daily crossword and spelling bee games. Little did he know how popular this game would become. Wardle eventual-

ly sold Wordle to the New York Times at the end of January.

His game will now sit alongside the puzzles that he and his wife once enjoyed. Despite the change in ownership, Wardle ensures players that the game will remain free-to-play, unlike a portion of the games offered by the New York Times.

*Wordle* is a word game that you can play once a day. Every 24 hours, a daily word is generated, and players have to guess this randomly selected word in six tries. To guess the dai-

ly word, players must plug in five-letter words to garner hints.

According to the rules, if you have the correct letter in the correct spot, the box turns green. A correct letter in the wrong spot shows up yellow. A letter that isn't in the word in any spot shows up gray.

According to senior Kathryn Horkan, her favorite part about the game is sharing her results with her friends and family. She notes that "once you've successfully or unsuccessfully done the puzzle, the site gives players the op-

tion to share their Wordle journey with others."

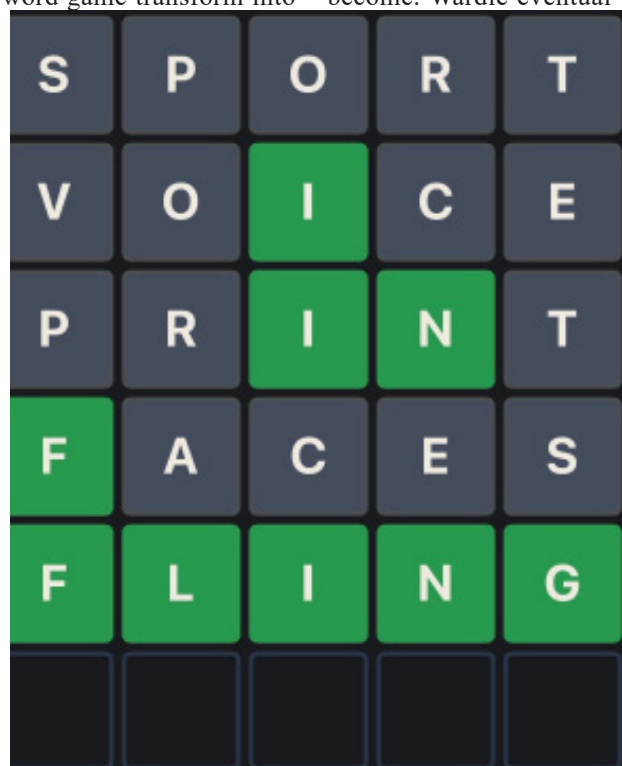
When sharing your *Wordle* results, the words and letters you chose are obscured, removing spoilers. Kathryn currently sits at a 58-day streak and has been playing since mid-January. Her favorite puzzle was released on February 3rd, when she guessed "shard" in two tries.

Since the success of Wordle, many sites have released games nearly identical to the original Wordle game. Worldle, for example, has players

guess countries based on their outline.

Taylorlde is a word game where you guess Taylor Swift-related words. Nerdle has players guessing math equations. Dordle challenges you to solve two Wordles at once. And there is even Quordle, which has four games going on simultaneously.

It is clear that *Wordle* has become an entertaining game for many people, including Highlands students, and it is here to stay. ■



Custom Wordle created by Isabella Levine '23

Photo Courtesy of Isabella Levine '23



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# SHIMMER & SPARKLES

## A look at *Euphoria*’s contrasting cinematic style and social commentary

**Izzy Malley ’23**

Not only is *Euphoria* season 2 taking over the internet, but it’s also all that Highlanders can talk about. For eight Sundays, we all anxiously waited for a new episode to come out. “I think the show is definitely worth the hype,” Junior Bella O’Callaghan said.

In almost every episode, the characters are seen wearing eccentric makeup looks that have become a trend on social media to copy. Characters like Maddy and Cassie wear jewel studs that outline their eyeliner and bright-colored eyeshadow. Even the outfits, which always radiate confident energy, have made their way

show so appealing is the incredible cinematography the producers create. The show features sophisticated camera movement, cinematic lighting, and a saturated color palette gling with recovery and drug temptation leads a depressive, destructive life.

The show attempts to bring focus to the hardships and consequences Maddy in a multitude of episodes, however, they always find their way back to each other.

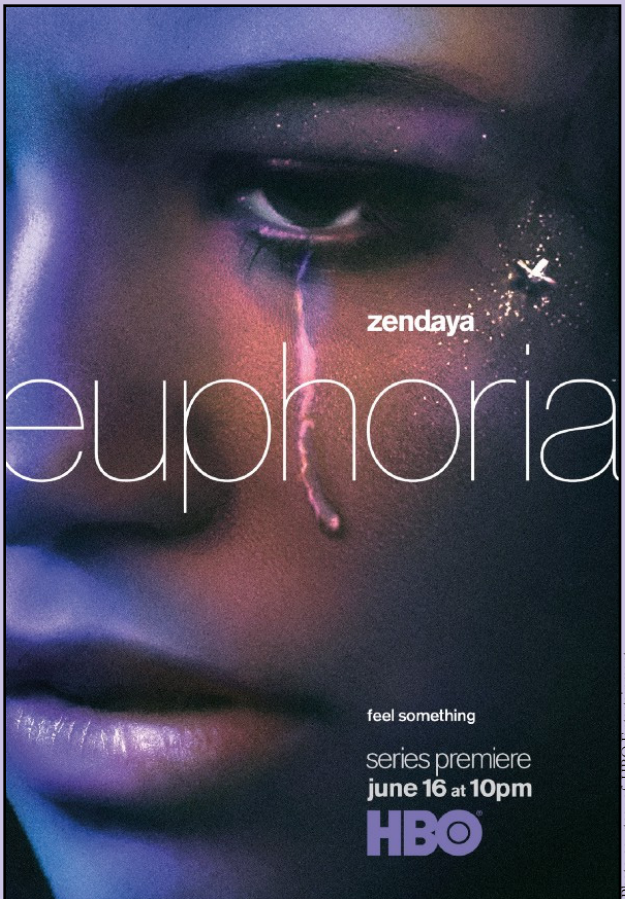
It has become a big question as to whether *Euphoria* communicates these problems well or if the show instead romanticizes them. “I think the show definitely shows the real side to many real world problems, like drug

detrimental to a person’s life, not an aesthetic to recreate. The romanticism of these issues also brings up the question whether us, as highschoolers, should even be watching this show.

O’Callaghan explained, “I think it depends on whether you can handle the material in the show. Most of it are

**“I think the show is definitely worth the hype.”**

*Junior Bella O’Callaghan*



**It has become a big question as to whether *Euphoria* communicates these problems well or if the show instead romanticizes them.**

“The performances from each and every actor in the show is award winning.” If you haven’t seen the show, it’s about a group of high school students and their experiences with drugs, friendships, romance, social media, and drama.

Rue, a struggling drug addict, is the main character of the show. However, the cast consists of a variety of personalities: Nate, Cassie, Jules, Maddy, Fez, Lexi, and so many more.

Each character has a backstory of their own, and the show goes into depth about how they cope with their complicated high school lives. There are multiple factors that make the show binge-worthy. For example: the makeup.

Trends such as *Euphoria*-themed parties have become popular because the characters’ styles have become such an appeal to fans of the show. Besides the costumes the show created, another huge draw to *Euphoria* is the soundtrack. Another junior Sydney Vandersnow said, “I have never listened to a show or movie’s soundtrack as much as I have with *Euphoria*’s.”

Labrinth, a popular musician, is the mastermind behind the soundtrack. It fits best in the pop genre, however the captivating songs are far from generic. To understand, you’ll have to listen for yourself.

What also makes the

to real-world fashion.

that creates an aesthetically pleasing visual in each episode. However, despite the appealing imagery of the show, *Euphoria*’s main purpose is to touch on modern teenage issues.

These issues include drug abuse, family dysfunction, and abusive, toxic relationships. The awareness of drug addiction is most observably present in Rue’s character. A high school girl struggling with recovery and drug temptation leads a depressive, destructive life.

The issue of toxic relationships is shown in Maddy and Nate’s romance. Nate has shown signs of psychological and physical abuse towards

addiction,” O’Callaghan said. “But sometimes, I think the drama is too romanticized by the glamorous makeup and the trendy outfits that the problems are minimized.”

Bella O’Callaghan isn’t the only one who thinks this. Junior Keira Klatt says, “Most people who are watching it are mostly just focused on the drama and the aesthetic. If the issues weren’t being romanticized, there would be more of a conversation about them, not just a conversation about the entertainment.”

Clearly, many of the show’s own viewers believe that the issues aren’t presented well enough to show high school students that these problems are serious issues that some people might not be ready for.” In order to watch the show, you need to have the mindset that the purpose of it is not only to entertain, but most importantly to spread awareness of the multiple issues presented.

Yes, it’s hard not to love the makeup and outfits, however, it should be noted that the show sprinkles fantasy on trauma. So, whether you are about to watch the show for the first time or you’re going back to binge the new season again, pay attention to the incredible cinematic details, but also to the issues that are relatable to many teenagers’ lives. ■

# HIGHLAND STUDENT SINGS NATIONAL ANTHEM

## Zaara Israni takes the stage at DECA State Competition

**Emma Pereira ’24**

The opening ceremony of the recent DECA States competition featured a special performance of the National Anthem by Highlands’ one and only Zaara Israni.

After receiving an announcement that any singer could audition, Israni emailed her video audition, earning her a spot on stage. She was cheered on by all the Highlands DECA participants and advisors that attended the state conference.

In an interview with Israni, she explains that she has been singing all her life. Israni discusses her family connection to singing, “My grandma is a singer and so is my dad and aunt. Singing has always run through the

family, so growing up and seeing my dad sing made me want to sing.”

Israni stays connected to singing through her singing lessons, which

she has been taking for the past nine years. She is also a member of the Highlands Belles and performed a solo this year in the ICHSA Quarterfinals.

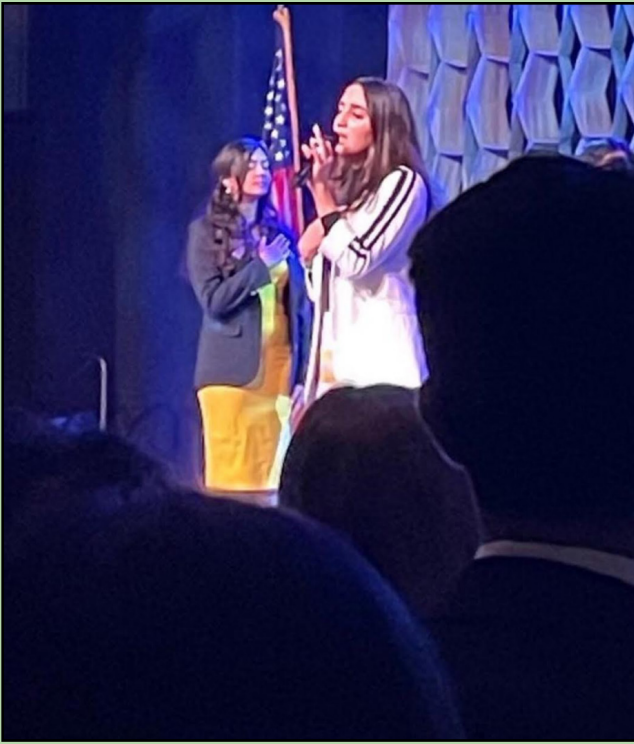
that way.”

Considering her extensive singing history and hard work, Israni described her accomplishment as meaning “a lot to

rani’s performance was “beautiful” and “the highlight of the opening ceremony.”

For everyone there, especially Highlands DECA members, her performance made the opening ceremony even more special, and it was the perfect way to start off the conference.

It is safe to say that Highlands students loved Israni and cannot wait to see her perform next. ■



Zaara Israni singing the national anthem

**“It was a really cool experience to be sing the national anthem at such a place and to be able to honor the country that way.”**

*Zaara Israni*

After her performance at DECA Israni “felt incredibly proud and honored” and said that “it was a really cool experience to be able to sing the national anthem at such a place and to be able to honor the country

see that I’m working towards something.”

Israni definitely impressed the audience as sophomore Drishti Chauhan, a DECA member, said “she was amazing.” Another DECA member, Jiya Singh, added that Is-

Photo Courtesy of Zaara Israni '24



# HOCKEY MAKES HISTORY

## Highlands emerges as state champions for the second time in history

Dan Moor '24

On Monday, March 7th, The Highlands Hockey team exited Prudential Center in Newark as champions. The team prevailed over Middletown North in a great 3-1 win.

Players up and down the lineup brought their “A-game”.

Some highlights of the game include Senior forward Will Fuller netting two goals, freshman forward Brent Beswick sealing the game with his empty net finish, and impressive defensive play from all of the defenseman.

The Highlanders attribute much of their success in the game to their extensive pre-game routines.

Sophomore forward Vincenzo Capano stated, “We were focused on keeping our pregame rituals consistent, since they have brought us success in the past”.

The Highlanders listened to the same pregame music as always, were delivered to the game by school bus as they were to all other games (even though they were offered a coach bus), and were driven by Samir: the team’s lucky bus driver.

All of these superstitions factored into the Highlanders success by giving the team confi-

dence.

Once Samir pulled into the parking lot of Prudential Center, the Highlanders meant business.

They began their routine warmup, led by the seniors, and ended with a fiery speech given by captain Nick Lardieri.

Freshman forward Jake Barrata commented on the locker room environment. “Before the game we all knew that it was going to be our last together. We all knew that we just had to do three things. Relax, be ourselves, and play our game, and we would be state champions”.

Senior Assistant Captain added on, “the environment in the locker room before the game was unique to say the least. It was this combination of nerves, excitement, and focus that you can only really feel before games like the state championship.”

Right before the players got on the ice, Assistant Coach Joe Sabino presented his endless hours of scouting reports to the boys.

Head Coach Jason Beswick had the players take off their jerseys, and put them on all at the same time in unison, as they had before every other playoff game.

“As you know, I consider the NH jersey a

privilege to be worn and most don’t get that many opportunities to wear it. I feel putting the jerseys on together shows we are a team and willing to do whatever it takes to win for the Jersey, especially for our seniors.”

Over the years, many seniors have come to me afterward and told me how emotional it was for them, knowing it could be their last time representing Highlands hockey,” Beswick stated.

The players took the ice for warmups, each one of the players getting the chills.

The atmosphere was incredible, playing in a rink where many NHL legends such as Martin Brodeur, Scott Stevens, and Ken Daneyko built their careers.

The presence of fans also played a huge role in the game. According to senior assistant captain Nick Lardieri, “As far as the fans go, I know the team did not care about how many kids Middletown North had... either way they were the ones who had to drive an hour and a half home after a loss.”

He adds, “I do know that a lot of the school is still upset with not being able to come to the game Monday, but I’m just happy we could bring the

hardware home.”

The game began and the Highlanders brought their best.

The first period resulted in a scoreless 0-0 game, but in the second period, both teams brought more intensity, each finding a way to bury a goal with senior forward Will Fuller finding the back of the net for the Highlanders.

Finally, the third period brought the most exciting period for many of the players’ lives.

Will Fuller was a huge asset as he scored a goal with 6:23 left in the third period.

Freshman forward Brent Beswick sealed the game with his empty net goal, indicating that the Highlanders would bring

home the title.

As the final seconds ticked away from the board, the celebration began.

For many of us the game and our time at prudential center flew by.

This crazy experience will forever be engraved within our minds. Freshman forward Brent Beswick explains this, saying, “The game was a blur. The fact that we were state champions only struck me hours later”.

The locker room was filled with hugs and lots of tears of happiness. For the Highlanders, there was no better outcome imaginable.

The team was later crowned as the Bergen County Team of the Year by NJSIAA hockey over

Don Bosco and Bergen Catholic.

Many players built long-lasting friendships with the teammates that will last beyond their years of highschool, one of them being Sophomore team manager Christopher Saadi. Saadi joined the team late in the season, but nonetheless became a part of the team.

“I came to one game because my friend convinced me to come and I loved it. I came to more and more games and eventually became a manager.” He continued on to say, “I made so many new friends, the boys are just great.”

No matter what their role, every player was a huge part in bringing home the trophy. ■



NH hockey moments after winning the state championship

Photo Courtesy of NH hockey

# FENCING TO FIRST PLACE

## Junior Kevin Bae dominates in Bergen County fencing tournament

Joey Manburg '23

As Northern Highlands ends its winter sports and transitions into the spring, athletes have started to look back and reflect on their achievements of this past season.

For fencing team captain Kevin Bae, he looks back fondly to a historic season filled with many awards and trophies.

With three years of high school fencing under his belt, Bae is highly qualified for the title. Combined with years of fencing experience even before entering the high school team, it is the perfect storm for a leader like no other.

Even as a freshman, Bae was known to excel. He proudly shares “I have won the Bergen County Foil Champion title as a

Freshman during the 2019-2020 season.

“I have contributed to several Foil Squad tournaments and won each and every one of them alongside several notable Foil Northern Highland graduates.”

For the first time in what seems like an eternity, fencing and other winter sports were able to compete with little to no obstacles due to the pandemic, allowing sophomores and freshmen to finally learn and grow with the help of their team.

Bae is one of the most qualified on the team, with enough experience to lead them successfully through a season unlike any other: “This season definitely packed a different experience for me.

During the start of

the season, we received a massive amount of new first-year recruits on the team and an additional coach.”

“Although they didn’t know much about fencing at first, the captains were able to teach and lead the way for these recruits to become much more skilled than when they first held their blade.”

As the season progressed, the team made substantial progress as they would win with no stop at all. And winning was followed by confidence.

For Bae, it was that boost of confidence that gave him the drive to lead the team to victory.

“What motivated me to achieve my goals for this season was the opportunity to be captain.”

“Last year, a vote was

held for me to be captain and I was terribly nervous of the decision at first. I had little experience with leadership, let alone coordinating large groups of people.”

“Over time, I gained confidence as the recruits looked up to me as an example of what a good fencer and captain should be like.”

“The coach also assisted me in this journey of what it means to be a captain through inspirational speeches and announcements.”

As the end of the season approached, it was time for the bigger tournaments and championships. Packed with talent, Bae led the Foil squad to a county championship, an outstanding achievement.

“We were given a

trophy for the County Foil Squad 1st award, dedicated to members of the Northern Highlands Regional High School Foil Squad of Senior Ethan Augustine, Junior Kevin Bae, Freshman Jacob Lee, and Freshman Aaron Augustine.

Everything said, Bae would like to clear up the confusion about winning the County championship.

“To prevent further confusion of the title, I am not the Bergen County Foil Champion. That title would rightfully belong to Liam Bas, a sophomore from Fair Lawn High School.”

For next year, the Northern Highlands fencing team can be assured they will have a leader who can lead them to victories again and again, just like Bae did this season. ■



Kevin Bae holding trophy

Photo Courtesy of Kevin Bae '23



# TRACK TEAM EARNS A TITLE

## NH track brings home North 1, Group 3 State Sectional Championship

**Joey Manburg '23**

Last year, due to the pandemic, the boys' winter track team were not able to participate in indoor meets. That said, the team worked harder than ever this year and were able to put on a show, winning the North 1, Group 3 State Sectional Championship in Tom's River, New Jersey for the first time in school history. The team worked all season to perfect their game in order to reach their ultimate goal: states. Under the guidance of experienced seniors and coaches Joel DeStaso, Annais Cumminskey, and Dorsey Willaims, the team was able to excel.

Johnny Golden, a sophomore jumper on the team, spoke on how the coaches helped him and the team: "Our jumpers wouldn't know the correct form if it weren't for coach Monchek and our throwers wouldn't know how to throw very far if it weren't for coach Williams."

He adds that the "long-distance runners wouldn't know how to pace themselves if it weren't for coaches DeStaso and Cummiskey, and our sprinters wouldn't be able to hand off a baton if it weren't for Coach Buono."

In order to qualify to compete in states, the team had to finish top three in the prior thirteen meets throughout the season and this was a feat in itself.

On February 20th, the

boys winter track team took home their first ever title. After edging out their opponents Bergenfield and Morris Hills 44-39, the team took home their first title victory in the history of Highlands boys winter track.

Sophomore Freddy Liljegren gives most of the credit for the team's victory to the coaches. He says, "They helped us at practice all season, deciding what events everyone would be fit for, for example, helping me learn to pace myself while I was doing long distance running."

**"Our jumpers wouldn't know the correct form if it weren't for Coach Monchek and our throwers wouldn't know how to throw very far if it weren't for Coach Williams."**

That advice from the coaches proved helpful for the team as everyone shined at their own event. Senior Dante Lateano and Junior Zach Madison were the only jumpers over 5-10 and Lateano beat his own personal record at 6-0 to help the team achieve victory. Junior Ian Kearney

was also a key asset to the team, matching his personal best of 11-6 to win the pole vault.

Points were coming from all over the track and field team, which led to their success at the end of the day. Notable Highlanders include sophomore Maxwell Gurkovic coming 5th place in the 400m, senior Harrison Flynn coming in 5th for the 800m, junior Gabe Johnson coming in 5th for both the one mile and the two mile and junior Jackson Vogel coming in 4th for the two mile.

Although everyone took their events very seriously, the members of the winter track team were able to loosen up and have fun as well. The familial sense of closeness the team developed is something that they valued and considered a key factor in their success.

"The team had really good chemistry," sophomore Freddy Liljegren explains. "When we weren't running, throwing, or jumping, we would cheer on the athletes who were competing at the time."

He elaborates how their "good chemistry definitely was a factor in winning. At every event, no matter the meet, there would always be someone cheering one of the runners, throwers, or jumpers on."

Golden added how "although track meets are mostly a place to do well individually and not necessarily as a team, you would always see teammates cheering each other on and giving each other tips on how to improve their results."

Liljegren adds how another strength the team had was that "there was no weakest event for our team."

There was someone who could do the job at every event."

Asked what their strongest event was, he claims "If I had to say the event we were best at, it would probably be the long jump and the high jump with Danny and Zach."

"It felt great to win," Liljegren said "I am proud to be part of a team that is bringing another title back to the school."

With their strong performance as a team, the boys indoor track team was able to make Highlands history as the first team to

ever bring home the North 1, Group 3 State Sectional Championship. ■

**"Long-distance runners wouldn't know how to pace themselves if it weren't for Coaches DeStaso and Cummiskey, and our sprinters wouldn't be able to hand off a baton if it weren't for Coach Buono."**

NH boys' winter track moments after winning states.



Photo courtesy of NH track



Photo Courtesy of NH track

NH winter track at a meet.

# NH GIRLS' SWIM DOES IT AGAIN

## NH swim advances to face No. 1 seed, Summit, in the Public B semifinals

**Hayoung Sohn '24**

This year, the Northern Highlands girls' swim team secured yet another sectional title, making it the 7th straight sectional title Highlands has won for girls swimming, and allowing them to advance to face No. 1 seed, Summit, in the Public B semifinals.

Northern Highlands went into the final race with an 81-75 edge, and tensions were high at the pool. The noise level at Passaic Tech reached a fever pitch during the 400 freestyle relay with the Highlanders clinging to a six-point lead.

Northern Highlands successfully wrapped things up with Katherine Kaminsky, Grace Lee, Kathryn Horkan, and Meghan Rourke racing to the win in 3:39.79. Rourke swam strong in

the final lap to send Northern Highlands past Morris Knolls, 91-79, in the North 1, Group B final.

The team's confidence and success stem from having many talented swimmers, including one of the state's best freestylers, Meghan Rourke.

She showed her speed by sweeping the sprint events and anchoring the Highlanders to first in the 200 freestyle relay. A 52.95 split in the meet finale resulted in a first-place finish for Highlands.

In addition, Rourke has brought many victories for the school with her powerful sprints in several of her best events.

"In the pool, I have contributed in my individual events, usually in the

100 fly and 100 back, and relays. I am proud of my individual accomplishments on this team from leagues and Bergen Meet of Champs, but it is much more fun to focus and win as a team rather than individually," Rourke says.

The girls were ecstatic after their big win and took the time to celebrate their amazing performances. "No matter if you're placing fifth or first, everyone counts," Kate Karmen, a senior swimmer states. "That's what makes the dynamic of our team better and stronger each day. I think that's how we were able to pull out this win today."

During practices and meets, Coach Viscardi never fails to remind the girls that "every point counts." Senior Kathryn Horkan added, "I think what is

really amazing about our team and what makes us so successful is that we have so many fast swimmers."

is always pushing for us to get faster to increase our powerpoints so we can have the best seed in

team would not have been able to come this far.

Both Viscardi and Cerelli take an approachable, encouraging, and determined approach to coaching which is undeniably extremely effective, and the girls have the plaque to prove it.

The loss of last year's state tournament also provided motivation to work even harder. In the end, the girls' swim team was able to come home victorious once again.

Congratulations to the Northern Highlands girls' swim team! We can't wait to see what you bring home next season. ■

**"No matter if you're placing fifth or first, everyone counts."**

*- Kate Karmen, senior swimmer*

Horkan explained how her teammates have "worked so hard this season to contribute major points for the team. "Coach Viscardi

the state tournament as possible."

Without the help of Coaches Tom Viscardi and Steven Cerelli, the



# COMMITMENT CORNER

## CHRIS BACICH COMMITS TO TAMPA

**Joey Manberg '23**

As Northern Highlands transitions into spring sports, many look towards the new high school season. However, for Senior Chris Bacich, he looked towards College lacrosse.

Bacich signed his letter of intent to play College

lacrosse at the University of Tampa. He is one of 9 students that signed to play sports at a Division-1 or Division-2 level.

Bacich has played lacrosse for Northern Highlands since his freshman year, starting all 19 games on varsity in his first year and being named to

NJ.com's Top Freshman list. He has since gone on to be named one of the top juniors of last year's season.

That being said, Bacich's athleticism extends out of lacrosse. He also plays for the school basketball team.

The University of Tam-

pa has only recently added lacrosse to their lineup of sports, becoming it's 18th sport in 2012. Since then, the lacrosse team has been on a dominant tear, claiming 6 Sunshine State Conference Championships, having 32 All-Americans, naming 81 all-conference selections and qualifying for 7 NCAA tournaments.

Northern Highlands, on the other hand, has had plenty of success in the last few years. Since the 2013-2014 season, Highlands has posted a winning record every year.

The Highlanders' best year came in the 2017-2018 Season, posting a 20-3 record. Unfortunately, the team lost in the first round of the NJSIAA Tournament of Champions.

The lacrosse team is headed by Coach Oljakian, who also coaches (and founded) the local lacrosse team, Brotherhood Lacrosse.

Bacich praised last year's Gibbs Division Coach of the Year, stating, "The coaching staff from Highlands taught me what it was like to play for a successful lacrosse

program. Coach Ojakian is one of the best lacrosse coaches in the state. He knows the game inside and out. This certainly influenced me when making my decision."

As many student athletes will tell you, getting recruited is not an easy process. Bacich noted, "The recruiting process is slow and frustrating. I had to see where I would get offers from before I could make a decision. I was certainly relieved once I committed to Tampa and I'm proud of my decision."

Though the decision to commit to Tampa took much time and thought for Bacich, it became clear the school was more than average.

"Tampa's lacrosse program is extremely successful. I will have the opportunity to be in the running for the NCAA D2 National Championship every year. They also have a great coaching staff that made me feel welcomed on my official visits. There was nothing to complain about with Tampa."

Bacich also acknowledged the difficulties of

transitioning from high school to College lacrosse. Bacich noted, "College lacrosse is very different from high school. It is a faster-paced game, though I am confident I will be able to adapt to this change. I'm hoping to make a name for myself in Tampa. I have an amazing opportunity to be playing for Tampa, and I want to take advantage of it the best I can."

Lastly, this opportunity is like no other. Few athletes have the chance to make their dreams of college sports come true. Bacich intends to make the most out of this opportunity.

"I'm looking forward to joining Tampa's lacrosse family and making the most of my opportunities. I will be playing with a great group of guys and I'm hoping to have a blast playing lacrosse in Florida. Most importantly, I'm looking forward to having a chance at a national championship." ■



Chris Bacich celebrating after scoring a goal.

Photo Courtesy of Chris Bacich '22

## GAVIN SOARES AS AN EAGLE

**Connor Darling '24**

For as long as Gavin Soares can remember, he has always loved sports.

Since he was eight years old, he was faster than other kids, threw a ball faster than other kids, and just looked more natural and excited to be on a field than everyone else.

As he grew older, whether it was football, basketball, or baseball, Soares always looked effortless as he scored touchdowns, baskets, and runs. However, he has decided

to key in on his true passion: baseball.

Soares can throw a pitch about as fast as anyone. Last season, Soares' fastball hit 90 miles an hour with pinpoint accuracy. Soares was throwing these speeds at just 15 years old.

As a freshman, Soares made the Northern Highlands Varsity baseball team. His primary position is pitcher, but he can also play other infield positions, such as first and third base.

Senior catcher Sheldon Wright said, "Gavin was a

great addition to our team.

He is committed to not only improving his skills, but also helping others work on their skills. He also is a very supportive teammate and is always there when you have a bad game to help boost your confidence."

Soares also loves football and is a vital part of the Northern Highlands football team. He plays tight end, and runs the ball in Wildcat formation. He has also hit many extra points, field goals, and has had many successful

kick-offs this season. He also plays linebacker on defense.

While a strong basketball player growing up, Soares now enjoys the winters in Vermont with his family, who are all prolific snowboarders and skiers. Not having the six-day-a-week basketball schedule that would be necessary to play at Highlands also gives Soares time to strengthen his arm in the winter and get it ready for baseball's spring season.

Wright added, "Gavin is a great pitcher because he works very hard. He works his butt off all winter, training and lifting so he is ready for the Spring."

Soares elaborates, saying that "in the winter, I work out for baseball five days a week, throwing on three of those five days."

Over the summer of 2021, it was Soares' eye-popping pitch velocity that got College coaches to come to see him in person.

Soares had serious conversations with the University of Alabama, the

University of Virginia, the University of Miami, Duke, Boston College, and Rutgers. He wanted a college experience that provided the highest level of baseball competition with a premier academic program and strong alumni network.

All of the schools on Soares' serious consideration list met those stipulations, but the one that stood out the most, and where he ultimately decided to go, was Boston College.

Boston College is in the ultra-competitive Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), where Soares will play against many of the teams interested in him (Virginia, Miami, and Duke), along with Notre Dame, Clemson, and other national powerhouse teams.

In addition to the school's academics and baseball prowess, Soares cites a new three-year old baseball facility and the leadership of the coaching staff. Mike Gambino, a Boston College graduate himself in 1999, is in his 11th season as the

head coach of the Eagles. Kevin Vance was made the Eagles pitching coach this past summer.

Soares has strong relationships with both coaches and frequent dialogue about how he is training in the offseason and to see how well the Northern Highlands football team is doing. Soares says the coaches support him being a multi-sport athlete, which is making him more muscular and athletic. These are both traits that will ultimately allow Soares to maximize his success on the mound. ■



Gavin Soares pitching a baseball.

Photo Courtesy of Gavin Darling '22



# MOLLY BENNETT TAKES OFF TO NOTRE DAME

Charlotte Riley '24

Throughout the past few years, Molly Bennett has been a dedicated track runner. Earlier this school year, Molly Bennett decided to continue her passion for track at Notre Dame.

Bennett stated, "I decided that I wanted to run in college after my first winter and spring track seasons. I saw how fun this sport could be and I wanted to run at the next level in college."

As any athlete would know, coaches have a huge impact on the players. Bennett stated, "My coaches have definitely impacted my decision, always giving me great

advice. They talked me through my different options and helped me pick the best choice."

Playing a sport in college is a huge commitment. Bennett said, "I look forward to all the new competition and teammates I will practice with and play against at the college level. The Notre Dame track team seemed like a family and they were very welcoming. I can't wait to become close with all the girls and practice with them."

Persistence and hard work have guided Bennett through her journey to her commitment.

In fact, Bennett said, "I would say the best piece of advice is to always work hard. Keep running in the off season and work hard in season to get the times you want. Also, make sure you are actively reaching out to the coaches and showing how much you

are interested in their program."

Along with advice, athletes connect with certain people who become their inspiration. Bennett stated, "I would say I look up to my parents the most. They are always cheering me on at every track meet and were supporting me through the whole recruiting process."

Playing in college can create a build up in an athlete's mind. This build up consists of emotions, such as excitement and nervousness. Bennett is very excited to continue her journey at the University of Notre Dame.

She said, "I am very excited about college overall. I love everything about Notre Dame and I can't wait to start my college and track experience there."

Saying "yes" to running at Notre Dame was a huge decision to make for Ben-

nett. There are definitely some pros and cons to generate when making this decision.

In fact, Bennett said, "I think there are many pros to playing a sport in college. For example, I have four more years of a sport I love playing and I have a team that will support me and be my best friends. I have academic, nutrition and strength coaches and advisors, and I have a set routine to follow. However, some of the cons are that it could be time consuming. Additionally, you might have to sacrifice something in order to make it to practice or a meet. However, I think the pros definitely outweigh the cons and I am very excited for the next four years." ■



Molly Bennett in position to start a race

Photo Courtesy of Molly Bennett '22

# JOEY SPACCAVENTO SWINGING FOR MERRIMACK

Vincent Laviano '22

On October 20th, Joey Spaccavento verbally committed to continue his baseball career at Merrimack College. Twelve years ago, if you told him that he was going to commit to a brand new Division

1 school, odds are he probably wouldn't believe you.

At that point in his life he was having a catch in the backyard with his mother. "She would practice with me, take me to little league games, and be properly equipped," Spaccavento explained.

Spaccavento's dad was there by his side to travel with him all across the country when the Highlands standout got older, a few examples being Nebraska, Florida, and Georgia. He adds that his dad always made sure he was at the best of his abilities throughout his career.

His parents were always there by his side, pushing and motivating him. They were willing to do anything for him to meet his dream of playing collegiate baseball.

Whether it was him swinging off the tee in little league, or facing the nation's top pitchers throwing faster than cars speeding on the freeway, what made Spaccavento realize baseball was for him was during the spring/summer of his junior year.

The Merrimack commit explains that he had just joined a new club team. He was confident in himself, but not enough to play at a higher level. Talking to

new coaches about what potential they saw in him, though, made him look into himself and gain that confidence to play at a higher level. "I realized if I could just stay on my path, nothing would get in my way of accomplishing my goals."

Merrimack's history of Division 1 baseball is short, but Spaccavento wants to create an immediate impact on its eventual history. He elaborates saying, "I think being the newest Division 1 program is very promising. It seems as if the school is prioritizing athletics. They want to turn the sports programs around in the school, which is something I want to be part of."

A deeper explanation for the decision stems back to the coach Brian Murphy contacting Spaccavento as a head coach from William and Mary. Spaccavento saw great player development and coaching in William and Mary. However, once Brian Murphy left to

go take a coaching position at Merrimack, Spaccavento received another call; this time about whether he wanted to take his talents to Massachusetts.

He brushed upon the idea of immediately impacting the program not only statistically but to set up himself as a leader for his teammates. Another goal for him at Merrimack is to attract not only other baseball prospects but all athletes to consider Merrimack even more.

Spaccavento also has his focus on this upcoming baseball season, his last at Northern Highlands. He, as well as the rest of the team, is looking for a bounce-back year. "Last year didn't go the way we wanted it to go. It was difficult because of COVID. But with us being seniors and having a lot of varsity experience, I think that if all goes well we could have a successful last ride."

Spaccavento looks to end his four years as a Highlands baseball player

with a well-rounded season, and his best effort, down to the last out.

Spaccavento never did this alone. There were many people right there with him during this ride. "I want to thank my friends and family for being by my side throughout this whole journey. At times, it felt as if I was being tested. But I learned everything bad that happened to me was a test to make me stronger, and better prepare me for my end goal."

We all wish Joey Spaccavento nothing but the best at Merrimack. Good luck Joey! Go Warriors! ■



Joey Spaccavento running to home base

Photo Courtesy of Joey Spaccavento '22



# Mardi Gras Meets European and American Culture

Article by Ash Kim '25 & Art by Izzy Levine '23

Layout by Kaitlyn Harle '23 & Izzy Levine '23

Mardi Gras is a pagan holiday that dates back centuries ago, celebrating spring and fertility. It directly translates to “Fat Tuesday.” Mardi means Tuesday in French, and gras means “fat.”

It’s just one day, but it’s become a week-long festival over the years in many areas.

America’s first celebration of Mardi Gras was back in 1699 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

On March 3rd, when French explorers Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville and Sieur de Bienville came to this part of the country. Present-day, New Orleans holds a yearly festival for this holiday every year.

Despite where it may have started in America, Mardi Gras is a well-known and celebrated holiday around other countries. Pre-Lenten festivals take place all around the globe.

It has spread to France, Spain, Germany, and England. It tends to be more popularly celebrated in the areas with more Roman Catholic people.

Many Highlanders celebrate Mardi Gras as well, specifically former Highlanders who now attend Tulane. I had the chance to talk to former highlander, Jake Gamburg, who attends Tulane, about how Mardi Gras culture surrounds the school and New Orleans. He said, “New Orleans during Mardi Gras is filled with light and excitement. It is truly one of my favorite times of year.”

Jake’s siblings and current Highlanders, Ava and Jordan, have also witnessed New Orleans during Mardi Gras and they say that it is a festival of happiness, colors, and light.



Regardless of where Mardi Gras originated, Americans have adopted the traditions of Mardi Gras by dressing up in exotic colorful clothing or by simply enjoying the French Delicacy of the King’s Cake.

