

THE HIGHLANDS FLING

Northern Highlands Regional High School | 298 Hillside Avenue, Allendale NJ 07401 | Volume 55, Issue 04 | December 2020



Veronica Iorriani '21

As the weather grows colder and snow begins to fall, the Highlands community is left to wonder what virtual learning means for snow days.

ARE SNOW DAYS STILL AROUND?

How inclement weather will affect virtual learning

Mitsuki Uehara '22

As the winter season approaches, Northern Highlands will have to make a crucial decision regarding snow days.

Principal Joseph Occhino explained that “if we have inclement weather, we just say it’s a virtual day and we count it as a school day, and nothing else in the calendar will ever change.”

However, if there is a major power outage where most students and teachers cannot connect to their classes, a school-wide shutdown would be necessary.

As much joy as snow

days bring, it may pose a challenge this year. Math teacher Christian Aldea believes that snow days will not be necessary if school

year, I think a lot of people would be more inclined to still teach a little bit, but maybe not the entire time. So me personally, I would

“If we have inclement weather, we just say it’s a virtual day and we count it as a school day.”

Principal Joseph Occhino

is done all virtually.

“Because of how tight the curriculum has been this

still want to get some stuff done,” stated Aldea.

He stressed the impor-

tance of getting through the curriculum, especially in his AP classes.

“The schedule is tough as it is just to get everything done. We’ll make it work one way or another, I just don’t want to skip out on any material for [students] because I’m trying to do the right thing by [them].”

English teacher Michele Zungoli also noted feeling “the brunt of classes not meeting as often as we usually do.” All teachers have set up certain units and information to cover during each marking period, however “with the time restraint, it’s definitely been a

bit of a challenge.”

If Highlands continues to hold classes online, power outages are a potential inconvenience. However, Aldea is not too concerned about its impact. He emphasized the importance of recording lessons so that “if a student’s power goes out, it’s okay that they’re not in class since they can always watch it later.”

Like most aspects of daily life, snow days will look and feel much different this year. However, Highlands is ready to take on any challenge to come... even if that means fighting a big, snowy whiteout. ■

KEEPING UP WITH KOTH

The USRA Coalition’s new podcast

Jessica Gao ‘23

Northern Highlands just launched our new podcast “Let’s Talk About it!” through the USRA Coalition.

The USRA Municipal Alliance is a coalition formed in 2017 on a drug free community grant from the CDC, consisting of \$125,000 annually for the next four years.

Their goals include preventing and reducing substance abuse as well as other health issues in the Upper Saddle River and Allendale school districts.

It consists of a mix of elected officials, teachers, students, parents, local health professionals, law enforcement, and many others.

“It’s a really noble undertaking and a great cause,” emphasizes Michael Koth, Assistant Principal of Northern Highlands and host of the new podcast.

He goes on to explain the thought process behind the launch of the podcast, commenting on the challenges that the coalition faces with programming in the midst of a pandemic.

Continued on pg 8

INSIDE



Photo courtesy of The Today Show

Movie Showdown

Students debate which holiday classic takes the cake. Who will win, *The Grinch*, *Elf*, or *Home Alone*?

Page 5



Photo Courtesy of Kyle Kutnicki

Pursuing Passions

Senior Matt Onufrak discusses his love of filmmaking and how he has been able to explore it thus far.

Page 12



Photo Courtesy of Ruby Van der Heide

College Commits

Aidan Joyce, Danny Coleman, John Santoro, TJ Buono, and Ruby Van der Heide further their athletic careers.

Pages 18-19

MASCULINITY DOESN'T GO IN ONE DIRECTION

Harry Styles breaks toxic masculinity with his cover on Vogue



Photo courtesy of Liam Cassidy

Phynn Campos '21

Harry Styles. The famous British singer, songwriter, and music composer has continued to make history over and over again. This time it wasn't just with his music. He was the first solo male artist to appear on the cover of Vogue. And he wasn't just on the cover of Vogue in a traditional "male" outfit. He was wearing a lilac-blue Gucci ball gown with black lace trimmings, topped off with a black tuxedo jacket, all created by the creative director of Gucci—Alessandro Michele.

The directors of Gucci and Vogue sent many people, primarily gender conformists and conservatives, into a frenzy. Candace Owens, a member of the conservative party, wrote on Twitter, "There is no society that can survive without strong men. The East knows this. In the west, the steady feminization of our men at the same time that Marxism is being taught to our children is not a coincidence. It is an outright attack. Bring back manly men." When I read this, my jaw dropped. This is absolutely ridiculous for many reasons. She is actively attacking Marxism and basically saying that there's something wrong with the feminization of men. Recently I had the opportunity to truly open up about myself and my gender identity. I was able to come out as a transgender

male in a quite oppressive society. This sparked my love for the study of gender. Now, what exactly is gender? Gender and sex are two very different things, and that line has been blurred in our current day society. Sex is biological. It can be categorized into 3 things. Female. Male. and Intersex. But gender is much more than that. Gender is a social construct. Gender expression has no limitations. Gender expression was created by man to enforce stereotypes about the two sexes. So who is to say what expression belongs to which sex? If man created gender, can't we destroy it? And that is my point when talking about Harry Styles. After seeing all the backlash he has received on his photoshoot, I realized how ingrained these stereotypes are in our mod-

ern-day society. Stereotypes are a dangerous thing. Why are skirts just for girls? Why are suits just for boys? The answer I get is "because that's the way it is."  Well, why is it that way? Why can't Harry embrace his feminine side? Why is fashion such a stereotyped thing? These are all questions that can be answered with one simple answer. Clothes

Image courtesy of www.dazedigital.com

have no gender. Clothes are a way that humans express themselves. Neurodivergent people, for example, find gender as a more expressive thing. They find ways to dress in a way that they feel reflects their gender perfectly. And that is a beautiful thing. Fashion is something that has no limitations. Coming from a small, conservative area, Northern Highlands has a long way to go. We have to create an inclusive environment for all our peers. But we have only made small steps. Northern Highlands recently started its Gender Sexuality Alliance Club, a club for everyone at Highlands to come together and embrace our differences and celebrate our community. This club is a great place for students at Highlands to be who they want

without judgment. This is a place where we can learn more about each other and why we all love what we love. Because gender is no debate. Gender expression is something that we all incorporate into our everyday lives. It's the greatest form of self-love and appreciation. Harry Styles expressed himself, broke free from the stereotypes, and didn't let the hate overcome what he truly wanted to wear. Everyone can wear what they want, love who they want, and be who they want. At the end of the day, we are all human, with feminine and masculine qualities, and we should learn to accept each other regardless of our differences. ■

The Highland Fling

Editorial Staff

Editor-in-Chief
Api Dhadda '21
Melissa Reifman '21

News
Samantha Lever '22
Michael Reifman '23

Sports
Kiki Riley '21
Isabella Torriani '21
Mikayla Walsh '21

Features
Nina Evans '21
Noreen Hosny '21

Layout Editor
Jed Katz '22
Kaitlyn Shang '22

Adviser
John Kaminski

Voices
Isabella Levine '23
Shania Li '21

Arts & Entertainment
Ariana Eftimiu '21
Kira Eske '21

Photography
Veronica Torriani '21

Business Manager
Jake Fishman '21
Kassidy Fishman '21
Vivian Jones '21

Copy Editor
Olivia Burchell '23
Steven Johnson '21

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

An Ode to Pre-COVID Highlands

In the spirit of our fourth week of all-virtual learning, we had a quick chat about all the Highlands experiences we miss...

Api: You know what I miss about in-person school? Getting ready and actually changing out of sweatpants for once.

Melissa: Agreed, I'm not sure I even remember how to put on mascara anymore.

Api: I even miss seeing all the classic NH fits: slides, leggings, white sneakers, etc.

Melissa: True, how am I supposed to know what new, trendy shoe I should ask my parents for for Hanukkah?

Api: And I just miss waking up early and—

Melissa: Can't say I agree with you there, I was genuinely a walking zombie most mornings.

Api: Ok, but I really enjoyed getting our morning coffee together in the Caf and watching you turn into a functioning person.

Melissa: I'll give you that. Drinking our coffee as we wandered the halls before classes began is a tradition I still hold near and dear.

Api: Definitely, we spent many mornings together... and classes... and lunches... and afternoons. Throwback to that time when we ran into Mr. McCabe and he asked us if we were always together.

Melissa: The answer is obviously yes. And though we never have had a gym class together—

Api: Which I'm grateful for, you get way too competitive over wallyball, even though it is definitely the inferior Highlands gym activity. #SpeedBallForTheWin

Melissa: That is blasphemous. But as I was saying, although we never had gym together, we've shared many other classes. I always used to love when the teacher would have us turn and talk to a partner.

Api: Yeah, Zoom breakout rooms just aren't the same. Half the time, you say enter a room and say "hi," but everyone else stays muted. Very awkward.

Melissa: Well, maybe that's just a you thing...

Api: Rude.

Melissa: You know what else I miss?

Api: The deafeningly loud, super niche Friday music?

Melissa: You read my mind! Anyways, I also really used to enjoy watching students periodically come into school wearing suits. Always knew they were about to go do something smart.

Api: You're so right! Hordes of DECA-ers, Model UN-ers, FED Challenge-ers.

Melissa: Ah that makes me miss in-person clubs, where we'd stay after school long past the departure of the last white Jeep from the parking lot.

Api: So true, but in all seriousness, we have had a lot of amazing experiences in school. And we are so thankful for the encouraging community of students and staff who have helped us grow into the people we are today.

Melissa: Agreed. Within the halls of Highlands, we have made a lot of great memories and hope to create some more before we graduate in June.

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

National Alliance on Mental Illness:
1-800-950-6264

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

'TIS THE SKISON

It's that time of year again



Photo courtesy of Amy Tullett

Amy Tullett '23

New Jersey winters can be long and brutal. However, this change in weather is also exciting for some because it indicates that it's finally skiing and snowboarding season.

I've been skiing since I was 7 years old and every year when I see that there is snowfall predicted, I always get excited because I get to ski.

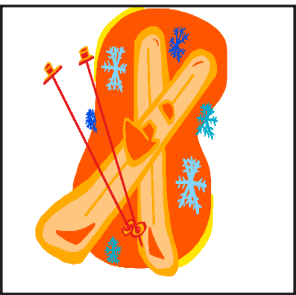
Nevertheless, we haven't had any snow yet this year like we have had other years, but I don't think the lack of snow so far will affect the ski season much. Ski resorts in New Jersey mostly have man-made snow via snow guns or fan guns, so it's more important that the temperature is low enough for the water blown to freeze midair than the actual amount of snowfall.

I think the bigger worry I have is the COVID restrictions. I've heard that at certain ski resorts they are only allowing season pass holders to ski there this year, which is unfortunate for those who get day passes.

Regardless, I will still be trying my best to ski this year even with any of the changes that get imple-

mented (considering the fact that skiing and snowboarding can be pretty COVID-friendly activities with the proper measures). For these reasons, I think skiing and snowboarding will be really popular activities this year.

My favorite place to ski is The Mont-Tremblant Resort in Canada which is about 80 miles from Montreal. I love Mont-Tremblant for its 100 trails and its incredibly well-managed lifts. I really appreciate that because I didn't come to the slopes to wait on the lifts all day long.



Art by Emily Cepales '21

Although the quality of skiing is most important to me, Mont Tremblant checks an extra box with its views and its village. The views while skiing down the mountain are stunning and the large village at the bottom of the mountain offers multiple nice stores and restaurants, making skiing at Mont-Tremblant really feel like a vacation.

Unfortunately, I don't think I will be able to ski Mont-Tremblant this year because of the quarantine rules with COVID. Although they don't compare to Canada, I do still plan on using the local mountains like Campgaw, Mount Pe-

ter, and Mountain Creek.

I'm also hoping to get up to Vermont a couple of times to ski Okemo, another mountain which I'm a fan of. But, that all depends on the COVID guidelines and quarantine restrictions.

For me, skiing is also a very social event. I've made some of the best memories with my family while skiing and it's a really fun thing to do with friends, too.

I know for some people, skiing or snowboarding is an individual activity where they prefer to listen to music. I personally don't do that because I like to be able to talk to the people I'm skiing with.

In addition, I think it's important to be aware of your surroundings when skiing so you don't crash into someone and I find that listening to music can be a distraction. Aside from my personal opinions, I do still see how for some, listening to music is appealing.

One thing I have noticed is that preferences in skiing and snowboarding are very personal in everything from whether you're a skier or a snowboarder, where you like to go, whether you listen to music or not, and what you wear.

Learning to ski or snowboard can be tedious at first, especially when it involves a lot of falling down. But once you get it down, it's a really great skill to have and certainly makes the Northeast winters a lot more fun! ■

CANCEL CULTURE

The toxicity of a popular trend



Photo courtesy of Rebecca Steinfink

Rebecca Steinfink '22

Cancel culture has never really sat right with me. We are talking about human beings learning and growing over time, not a faulty product or outdated television show.

I think we have all made decisions that if we were to look back on we would regret. If you disagree, you are either a saint or probably sugarcoating some of your actions.

The wonderful thing about being a human being, though, is that we are capable of learning from our mistakes and growing into better, kinder people.

I know many people who actively participate in cancel culture. From their point of view, people deserve to be punished for their mistakes, and I am inclined to agree, but we should also keep our compassion and empathy.

Obviously, if a person committed some horrific crime against humanity or if they participated in an illegal act, they should get in trouble, but too often I see celebrities being canceled for an offhand comment said ten years ago when they have learned from their mistakes.

I am sure that you have at one point said something you deeply regretted. For example, maybe you got into a fight with a friend and said something truly awful to them. But you probably learned why what you did was wrong, apologized, and grew into a better friend because of it.

So should all of us be canceled? I doubt anyone reading this would enjoy that very much. This is such a widespread phenomenon that there are websites and social media pages dedicated purely to digging up information on celebrities and "exposing" them.

I cannot be the only one who thinks that that is sort of creepy and obsessive. Celebrities are people too, and they have feelings. They get hurt, they do reckless things, and they live and learn just like every one of us.

But the difference between us and celebrities is that in their case, everyone is watching their every move and they have to deal with the pressure of being perfect and pleasing 24/7. Try to put yourself in that position and I bet you would feel overwhelmed.

The worst part is that even if you are perfect now, some dumb thing you did or said when you were younger can resurface and the next thing you know you are trending on Twitter for all the wrong reasons. We should express the same empathy to everyone in the world, and in our everyday lives too, we should be more open to second

chances.

The biggest issue with cancel culture to me is just how extremely unproductive it is. It actually removes the incentive for people to improve because once they are canceled there is not much they can do. Why care about being a better person and learning from your mistakes when everyone will still see you as the same person you were when you made said mistake?

So what should we do, just ignore problematic behavior? No, absolutely not! Be kind and non-judgmental and explain why a certain behavior or comment is harmful. If it happened a while ago, give the person the benefit of the doubt that they may have changed.

I am all for making the world a better place, and am therefore a huge proponent of learning. Speak out about what you believe in, but don't cancel real human beings who are not only capable of making mistakes, but also of bringing so much goodness to the world.

Educate people with kindness, but do not tear down a person's entire life. And if you ever happen to meet a person who does or says something that is questionable, sit down with them and talk about it, because chances are that they just have a lack of understanding in what they are saying or doing. ■

ARE THE GRAMMYS WELL DESERVED?

It's time for the most popular music award show to break tradition



Photo courtesy of Ryan Gottlieb

Ryan Gottlieb '23

Tradition, to do something over and over again just to honor the first time it was done, is quite a peculiar thing. Some traditions are indisputably good, but there are some instances where they should be questioned. A great example of this is the Grammys.

The Grammys, the most prestigious music award show, is pivotal in pop culture. The award winners are decided by a panel of eligible judges

who are very important in the music industry known as the Recording Academy. In other words, those who decide the winners are a small group of relatively powerful people. This is the root of the potential problem with the Grammys.

Today's society is undoubtedly different from 1958 and it doesn't make sense for the Recording Academy to be so stagnant. The world is changing, but the Recording Academy is still judging the same way. This is obviously problematic and has only skyrocketed in recent years due to social progression.

A perfect example that highlights a bit of the Recording Academy's racist tendencies would be Tyler, the Creator. In the 2020 Grammys, Tyler, the Cre-

ator won the "Best Rap Album of the Year" award for "Igor", a very interesting circumstance considering that anyone who has listened to "Igor" before knows it's not rap.

After the Grammys, Tyler, the Creator, made a very eloquent statement about the whole situation. He said how half of him was ecstatic to win "Best Album of the Year" but the other half of him felt like it was a gift towards the Black community, for them to "shut up and be happy with it".

He summed it up pretty perfectly by saying, "I don't do the radio stuff, I'm not played in Target." What he meant by this was that his music is not traditionally perceived and because he's a genre-bending black

man, he can't help but think he was just thrown in the "urban" category.

Some recent examples of the Grammys snubbing artists are The Weeknd, Phoebe Bridgers, Fiona Apple.

The Weeknd had arguably the worst snub. He should've been in the front for the 3 major categories (R&B, Pop, and Rap) for his new album "After Hours". "After Hours" was an incredible project, yet in possibly the most embarrassing moments of Grammys history, The Weeknd received 0 nominations.

Phoebe Bridgers has become extremely popular in the indie community and her album "Punisher" would've looked really well in the "Best Album of the Year" category. Fortu-

nately, she did get justice in the Rock categories.

In a similar situation, Fiona Apple has also maintained her popularity in the indie community and released the sonically pleasing "Fetch the Bolt Cutters". This was expected to be nominated for "Best Album of the Year" as well, as it would only be rivaled by the Taylor Swift Album "Folklore". However, it didn't make the cut.

Another way the Grammys lost credibility is the nominations they did choose. Specifically for the 2021 Grammys, a few questionable decisions have been made. Coldplay was nominated for "Best Album of the Year" which is fairly surprising considering the majority of people didn't even know they

released an album.

Justin Bieber has also received some nominations for his song, "Yummy" which is tolerable on its own, but seems to be taking away from other deserving artists. And finally, Harry Styles' "Watermelon Sugar" being nominated upset his fans because they argued "Watermelon Sugar" is not even remotely close to Harry Styles' best song.

The topic of altering tradition is always tricky, and the Grammys isn't an exception. However, the choices that they make on how to aid the problems they've created can heavily be influenced by us. It is our job to speak out on issues like these. We will be the ones to incite change so artists get the recognition they deserve. ■

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS HERE!

Three student perspectives on the holiday season and their respective traditions

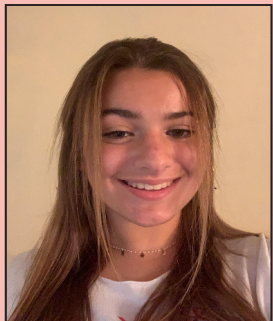


Photo courtesy of Nina Riccardi

Nina Riccardi '23

The first of November every year has a reputation. When the clock strikes midnight on October 31st, it is officially, as they say, the Most Wonderful Time of the Year! The holiday season is such a joyous time to spend time with family and friends, appreciate what you have, and cheerful time to end another year.

This time isn't just about loved ones and reflection, but a time for religious celebrations, like Christmas and Hanukkah. December is favored by a lot of Highlands students, because of the abundance of well-deserved off days and winter break. Personally, this is my favorite time of year!

My family is Catholic Christian, so we celebrate Christmas. I wouldn't say we are very active church members, but we always go to

church for religious holidays--the 11am mass at Guardian Angel is definitely a tradition my family and I value. We like to go to church not only to celebrate Jesus' birth, but to be reminded of what it means to be Catholic.

We show our gratitude to God and our faith in Him, and then after mass ends, my siblings and I always go to the back of our church where there is a box that you put singles in. Once you put a dollar in the box, you

sheet of paper, we bring them to the church. The church gives these gifts to homeless shelters and the less fortunate. This is my family's way of spreading a little bit of goodness into the world during this season, which might be hard for some people.

One of my favorite reasons why I love the Christmas season is because I love gift shopping for everyone. I love when I find the perfect present for my friends,

We like to go to Church not only to celebrate Jesus' birthday, but to be reminded of what it means to be Catholic.

can light a candle and say a prayer. This prayer can be about anything, but I usually express my wishes for all my loved ones to stay healthy and wish for good fortune.

Not only do we go to church, but my mom takes me and all my siblings on errands with her to pick up toys for young girls and boys. After we wrap them in cute wrapping paper and write a list of the items on a

and then the wrapping process is so exciting, knowing that once they tear through the paper, they will be overcome with happiness. The anticipation I feel right before they open them is also enjoyable. With all of the positive stigma around this holiday season, it's nearly impossible to be a Scrooge! ■

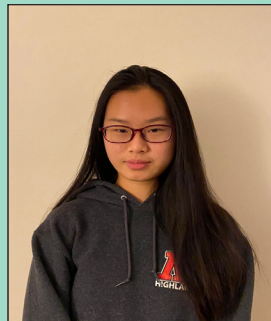


Photo courtesy of Irene Chen

Irene Chen '22

Christmas is one of the most well known and popular holidays around the world. As the name suggests, it is celebrated for the birth of Christ, and so many assume only Christians celebrate this holiday. However, countless non-Christian families that celebrate Christmas, including me.

Regardless of religious beliefs, most people look forward to Christmas for some reason: Some like the longer breaks, some want to get their presents, and some enjoy spending more time with their families. For me, the thrill of buying Christmas presents, the anticipation, receiving the gifts, and seeing everyone's smile are my favorite things about this part of the year and is the reason my family celebrates this day.

Usually, by mid-December, my house is readily decorated: a mistletoe wreath on the front

door, a tree by the living room window with ornaments, lights, and a star, and some garlands by the fireplace. We do just enough to feel festive in the house.

One of the holiday "traditions" that my family does is cozying up in the family room, huddling under one big blanket by the fireplace, and watching a movie together. I always remember not being able to agree on which movie to watch or fighting over the blanket. Memories like these make celebrating Christmas not for the religious meaning behind but rather for the precious

non-Christians, buy presents or celebrate Christmas in some way similar to mine, such as decorating their houses, giving presents, gathering with relatives, and more.

To elaborate on how I perceive Christmas as a mostly commercialized holiday, I believe so because people associate Christmas with "buying," and it is celebrated across different religions, regions, and culture.

To someone in a situation similar to me, a non-Christian that celebrates Christmas, may feel that this holiday is a commercial holiday.

Of course, those are

...the thrill of buying Christmas presents, the anticipation, receiving the gifts, and seeing everyone's smiles are my favorite things about this part of the year...

time I get to spend with my family.

Also, Christmas is one of the most commercialized holidays around the world. After all, gift giving is one of the main traditions of Christmas.

Buying gifts is a Christmas tradition for me. Many of my friends, both Christians and

just my opinions. Ultimately, it varies with everyone, depending on their religion and culture. Even though I believe it is just a commercialized American holiday, this day would still be a religious day to a devout Christian. Do you agree? ■



Photo courtesy of Ciara Schulman

Ciara Schulman '23

Christmas time is around the corner and the festivities have already begun. Although this year is far from normal, this holiday season has the opportunity to be extra special. Despite being all virtual, there is still potential to bring cheer to the Highlands community.

Although I do participate in a few Christmas festivities with my friends, being Jewish and celebrating Hanukkah means that I partake in my own traditions with my family.

Similar to Christmas, Hanukkah is about spending time with your friends and family, and so, my family hosts an

annual Hanukkah party to celebrate with them. We also decorate the fireplace every year, very similar to Christmas, but of course, we decorate with blue lights and Hanukkah decorations instead of stockings and Christmas decorations.

Hanukkah lasts eight nights, so the answer to the common question about whether we receive presents each night, is yes. Maybe not in all Jewish families, but my family

make each day of Hanukkah as special and as thrilling as the last.

Hanukkah rarely falls on Christmas break, and so we generally celebrate on school nights. It's far from ideal that we don't have off of school for Hanukkah, but a few days of Hanukkah do fall on weekends every year, giving us

our friends and family.

Not to mention the perks of having winter break free! While most are spending their break celebrating Christmas, my family and I venture out on a week long vacation. When I was growing up, most winter vacations took place in hot climates, but in recent years my family has resorted to cold vacations out west. Ever since I learned to snowboard I have been in love with the sport and me and my family take this yearly vacation time to travel to the Rocky Mountains.

Along with taking part in some general Christmas festivities, I enjoy watching Christmas movies,

drinking hot chocolate and exchanging gifts with my friends. Most believe that

spending their time at home with their friends and family by the Christmas tree,

I take pride in being Jewish and value the perks of observing Hanukkah.

Christmas is the most festive holiday, but at least in my family, Hanukkah is just as festive.

I take pride in being Jewish and value the perks of observing Hanukkah. I mean, while most of the Highlands community is

my family is spending our time snowboarding in the Rockies, it has its benefits too. It's time to get lost in the joy, and celebrate the holidays! ■

Hanukkah is about spending time with your friends and family.

normally divides up the gifts and gives us a certain amount each night to

the opportunity to appreciate late joyous nights with

WHAT'S THE BEST HOLIDAY MOVIE?

Students debate the best holiday movie: *The Grinch*, *Elf*, or *Home Alone*?



Jana Dabbagh '24

Christmas is undoubtedly one of the happiest times of the year. This year is unlike any other, but it has its benefits--an unlimited amount of time to binge your favorite shows and movies. I know I won't take this time for granted to watch Christmas movies, especially my favorite and the best of all time--Jon Favreau's *Elf*.

It's a story about an elf named Buddy (played by Will Ferrell) who never fit in and goes through quite the adventure far beyond the North Pole in hopes of finding himself. Throughout these adventures, Buddy, the elf, has some seamlessly humorous encounters. We all need a laugh now and then, right?

Well, I'm sure eating syrup-covered spaghetti seems like something normal for Buddy, but not for me. So when I decided at the ripe age of 7 to copy his actions, I regretted dissatisfying my taste buds. But now when I think back to that memory, I laugh hysterically when I watch that scene. The comedy aspect of this movie brings so much more joy in just the simple act of watching a Christmas movie. This movie has to be one of the most iconic ones for actor Ferrell. I'm glad he was chosen to portray such a role that I, amongst countless other *Elf* fans still can't get enough of. I'm sure many can argue that most other Christmas movies also bring happiness. However, Buddy's goal is to find what happiness is to him leaves you with a smile seeing that Buddy is happy too. It's what makes *Elf* simply, the best Christmas movie of all time. ■



Jamie Meyer '23

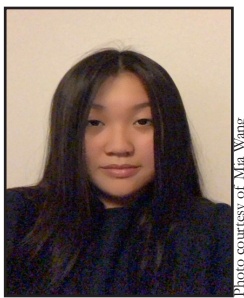
Out of all of the holiday movies that have been produced over the years, my favorite has always been *Home Alone*. This movie is a live-action comedy set in a Chicago suburb during the holiday season. I've seen this movie time and time again, and it always makes me laugh at its hilarious scenes and tear up at its heartfelt ones.

The premise of this movie is that the main character, Kevin McCallister, is a child who is accidentally left home alone in the chaos of his huge family taking a holiday vacation to Paris. At first Kevin is delighted to find that he has the whole house to himself, but soon feels scared and lonely.

When his family realizes that they left without Kevin, they do their best to get home in order to celebrate Christmas with him. This leads to all sorts of funny endeavours in their attempt to get back to Chicago.

While all of this is happening, a duo of thieves decide to rob the McCallister house. When Kevin realizes that they're going to break in on Christmas Eve, he sets traps and waits for them to arrive so he can defend his house.

Throughout the movie, many hilarious hijinks occur. In between these comedic scenes, however, there are some heartwarming themes of family and what the holidays are all about. The comedy, the sweetness, and the absurdity of it all is what makes *Home Alone* my favorite Christmas movie of all time. ■



Mia Wang '23

As we are nearing Christmas, it is important to cherish the ones we love, do holiday shopping, sit near the fireplace, and watch holiday movies.

I never knew how important watching nostalgia holiday movies with my friends and family were until I watched the *Grinch*. This movie is like no other due to the iconic character, famous food, and the plot. It's an evil, grumpy, green creature who learns the true meaning of Christmas! What's not to like? One of my favorite characters is Cindy Lou Who who portrays a little girl that teaches the grinch how to be nice and appreciate the spirit of the holidays. I watch this movie with my friends every year while eating peppermint oreos and drinking hot cocoa.

The *Grinch* by far is definitely the superior holiday movie since there are different versions, the one with Jim Carrey, Dr. Seuss 2018, and the original. Watching holiday movies like the *Grinch* makes me forget about my errands and school for a few hours, but those hours last like a lifetime. ■

ALL ABOUT ASTROLOGY

Zodiac signs and their meanings



Emily Gan '23

Zodiac signs and their meanings have lately gained popularity among teenagers. The concept behind the zodiac signs stems from the connection of Earth and how it moves through the heavens. This is why each sign has a corresponding god/goddess attached to it. The signs are also distinguished based on constellations that mark the path of how the Sun travels annually.

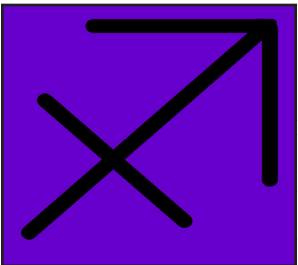
There are three main signs that a person can have-- a rising, moon, and sun sign-- that have different significances behind them. Your rising sign represents your outer appearance, your moon sign constitutes your emotions, and your sun sign rules your personality. Each sign belongs to an element: fire, earth, air, and water.

Fire signs (Aries, Leo, Sagittarius) are said to have competitive energy

and be very passionate and confident.

Earth signs (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn) are grounded, make rational decisions, and tend to be more headstrong than the other signs.

Air signs (Gemini, Libra, Aquarius) rely on their minds and love to think big and have deep conversations with whoever they are speaking to. Lastly, water signs (Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces) are romantics and sentimentalists who like to work out your feelings with you.



My sun sign is Sagittarius which is supposed to mean that I love to explore and try new things. Some of the best traits of a Sagittarius are that they are humorous, fun, and adventurous. On the downside, Sagittarians are also said to be impulsive, blatantly honest, and stubborn to admit when they are wrong. Some generalizations about the other zodiac signs are that Aries tend to be leaders and risk-takers.

Taureans are very persistent and have an abundance of stamina.

Geminis like to explore different routes of thinking and can adapt easily to new surroundings.

Cancers are known to be emotional yet very loyal.

Leos are very proud of who they are and are able to express themselves from the heart.

Virgos like cleanliness and maintaining order in their lives.

Libras like to make decisions that will have the best results.

Scorpios can bring light into the world when there is darkness.

Capricorns like to put the best version of themselves forward and strive for success.

Aquarians like to rationalize their feelings and like the sense of being independent.

Finally, Pisces are very compassionate, generous, and enjoy listening to music.

Whether you believe in astrology or not, we all can agree it's interesting to see how your sign corresponds with your personality! ■

TEACHER'S CORNER:

Beekeeping and taking opportunities with Mr. Stephens



Mr. Stephens

My interest in bees and beekeeping started in June of 2018, while I was still substitute teaching at the high school in my hometown. While subbing, I liked to eat lunch with the Engineering teacher, who, like me, is someone with a lot of weird hobbies, one of which happened to be beekeeping.

During lunch conversations, he would, with surprising earnestness and regularity, offer to take anyone up to his beehives and teach them what he could. He even kept an extra veil and bee suit in his car should anyone accept the offer.

Listen, readers, when someone offers to teach you about something just for the love of it, you would be silly to turn them down. Realizing this myself, I decided to take him up on his offer, and one day after final ex-

ams were over, we loaded into his red Honda Fit and drove about 15 minutes out from the school to where he kept his bees on a farm owned by one of the school secretaries.

By the time we drove up the farm's gravel driveway, I had become slightly jittery from remembering that I didn't know anything about beekeeping and, well, don't bees get kind of angry when you do a B&E on their home? Etc.

My friend the Engineering teacher must have noticed me getting nervous (in part because I can't keep a poker face), so, before we walked over to the hives he paused to say, "Just remember, the bees are sensitive to their surroundings, so if you stay calm, they'll stay calm."

Now, under most circumstances, telling someone to remain calm likely won't guarantee that they remain calm, but as I turned his words over in my head, they snapped me into a kind of serene presence that I've rarely felt outside of rigorous physical exercise. As we approached the hives, this serenity phased into the general excitement I feel when I'm learning

something new, when my whole self is focused and my thoughts are electric.

I was quickly absorbed by the tasks at hand, watching curiously as bees landed on my gloved hands and bounced off my veil, hefting hive bodies to feel the weight of the brood and honey, and examining frames for evidence of a healthy, laying queen. In short, I briefly felt like I had been beekeeping forever.

Since that day, I've struggled to articulate what I was thinking in the moments before we opened the hives, though I wonder now if this is in part because it was such an embodied experience. It starts, I think with the kind of openness that friendships can engender. In this case, a willingness to take someone up on an opportunity to learn something that raises your curiosity.

However, like bees are sensitive to their surroundings, I think this willingness becomes an innate sense of possibilities opening up before us. Yes, I think now, the bees could have stung me, but reason would they have had to? ■

WHAT'S UP WITH CLUBS?

As more clubs start, the question arises: how will they run?

Catherine Corrado '23

Highlands has tried to keep as many keep clubs running this year. Beginning November 13th, advisors can schedule club meetings on Fridays from 2:00 pm to 3:15 pm.

Principal Joseph Occhino explains, "the clubs impacted the most are ones that can't function virtually. Right now, as long as we believe a club can run safely and virtually, students are allowed to participate."

DECA recently took a test online and has begun their club meetings. Occhino stated that "this program is necessary because of the high number of students involved and because DECA has created a way that stu-

dents can still compete against other schools virtually."

Another club, Mock Trial, will be running differently too. In an interview with club advisor, Tony LaRocca, he explained that to expose the club he "put together a flyer that got posted to canvas then we held tryouts through zoom."

Mock Trial gained many freshmen this year and has ten new members. "As of now, to avoid the spread of the virus, we will have 3 trial competitions that would lead up to the county battle once seated with brackets like usual, but they will all be happening over zoom."

Highlands also boasts three A Cappella clubs: Highlands Belles, High-

lands Harmonics, and Highlands Voices. All the a cappella groups at Highlands are beginning practice. Club advisor of the Highlands Belles, Alexan-

"As long as we believe a club can run safely and virtually, students are allowed to participate."

Principal Joseph Occhino

dra Falcone, shares some insight.

"We recently had our auditions and sent out the lists of who got into which

a capella groups, so I'm very excited to meet everyone on zoom for the first time."

She went on to explain that the audition process was a little different this year. They had "students send in a video of them singing a solo of any song they would like for a minute or so. Then they had to record a second video of them singing along with a voice track of an acapella song, so they would learn their part and sang with it so we can see how they were able to blend in with a group and learn their part."

The competition this year is going to be all virtual so "the goal is for each member to learn the song that is chosen and have

them go in one by one into the school to record their part, once we're allowed."

"Then we will edit all of the singers together so we can submit a video for the competition. This year there will be a lot of learning music on their own and it's definitely a challenge, but an exciting one."

Occhino discussed the school's decision that, "if a club cannot continue virtually the school is going to wait until the spring to see if they should be allowed to run."

One club that cannot run until further notice is the chess club. Occhino said that this is "because we cannot have students sharing chess pieces and being in close proximity to each

other for a long period of time. Luckily, if students would still like to play chess, they can play in their homes or online with their friends."

Freshmen this year who are not familiar with the clubs yet are encouraged to check the Canvas homepage. This is where announcements will be made from advisors. Additionally, on the Clubs/Athletics page of the school website there is a list of clubs offered.

Even though many clubs have encountered a change this year, the administration is staying positive and hopes students still have the opportunity to participate in their favorite clubs. ■

NEW SCHEDULE? SAME SCHEDULE

Switch to all-virtual classes causes a school-wide debate

Chase Vitale '23

Throughout this unusual school-year, there have been several schedule changes. These changes are due to the numerous shifts between hybrid learning and all-virtual.

The school started with a hybrid system going all virtual in mid-October, then changing back to in person instruction two days after, and once again changing to an all virtual environment after Thanksgiving break.

Although these changes could seem overwhelming to some, most students believe that it gives them some insight into what schedule works best for them.

The normal hybrid schedule lasts from 7:45 to 12:29. After converting to

all virtual at the beginning of December, changes occurred. Highlands reverted back to its 2020 Spring all-virtual schedule, meaning a start time of 9:20, lunch from 11:35 to 12:20, and an end time of 2:35.

According to Principal Joseph Occhino, this change occurred because, "back in March, when we went through this for the first time, we decided that at anytime we needed to transition to all-virtual instruction for an extended period of time, we would use the later start time. We thought it was important for students, and even teachers, to catch up on some sleep in the morning and try to relax. We really thought that is what everybody would like."

Although most would think that Highlanders

would appreciate more time to sleep in the mornings, this was not the reality. After hearing complaints about the new schedule, Occhino decided to release a survey to all students, asking for their opinion.

Of the 1,284 responses, nearly 68% were in favor of reverting to an earlier start time. Due to this, the schedule was reversed (the first day back to an earlier start time was Monday, December 7).

According to Occhino, a few reasons for students liking an early start time are that "there is consistency, it allows for more time after school ends, it benefits students who took advantage of the time to work, and students seemed to be in a good place." Due to these reasons, he decided to send out a survey to determine

the school-wide sentiment. After reading the results, Occhino was "absolutely amazed."

"By the time school ends, it is almost dark, meaning there isn't much daylight left to do things outside."

Sophomore Tyler Chen

Although there was a consensus between 68% of the surveyed students that the earlier start time was more beneficial, there were several different reasons why.

Sophomore Lynn Heo said, "I wanted the earlier start time because with the later start, school ended so late that I didn't have

enough time for my homework and studying. As soon as I was done I basically had to go to sleep without spending my own time. With the earlier schedule, I can finish homework early, meaning I can do other things as well."

Similarly, Sophomore Tyler Chen picked the earlier start time because "with the later start time school feels more drawn out. Along with that, by the time school ends with the later start it is almost dark, meaning there isn't much daylight left to do things outside, like walk my dog. An earlier start time also gives room for more extracurricular activities."

Along the lines of students having more time for extracurriculars, an earlier start time also gave students opportunities to

work. Due to the fact that many students set their hours around an earlier start, the sudden change to a late start meant that they couldn't work their pre-assigned shifts. Therefore, these students would be particularly impacted by the schedule change and vote for its reversal.

Although most students did want an early start time, some felt the opposite and appreciated the extra time in the morning. Sophomore Mateo Sanchez agreed, "I enjoy being able to sleep in. I also find it hard to pay attention 4 hours in a row, which doesn't happen in the late start time due to the designated lunch period."

Though there were differing opinions regarding the schedule, Highlanders are happy they had a say in choosing it. ■

GRABS CHEF'S HAT

Several clubs host virtual cooking classes to engage members

Mia Wang '23

As school has turned all virtual until January 11th, students and faculty find themselves participating in various extracurricular activities this winter.

Many clubs decide to host gatherings to bring Highlanders together. One way they are engaging both the students and staff members in these times is through hosting cooking classes virtually.

These online cooking/baking classes have been hosted by Relay for Life and Italian Club so far.

For Relay for Life, Teacher Kayla Consalvo made her oatmeal banana cookies that are famous amongst her students. Meanwhile, the Italian Club invites everyone for a virtual pizza night.

In an interview with Principal Joseph Occhino, he said that he believes these online events are crucial to "trying to keep things as normal as possible, and to continue to do things that we normally would have done, if we weren't living in a COVID world right now."

Occhino also commented that he is looking for-

ward to possibly even joining these Zoom cooking classes since it's important to look forward to something fun in this pandemic.

"It's great for kids to be involved outside the normal classroom."

Principal Joseph Occhino

"It's great for kids to be involved outside the normal classroom setting," he continued.

With Highlands students returning to hybrid

learning on January 11th, (assuming everything goes according to plan which, to be fair, who even knows at this point?) Occhino says

that "it's important to keep these [clubs] for our students running."

In Italian club, member Daniela Suarez participated in the pizza making

class lead by teachers Celine Poggiogalle and Enza Sardella.

"I really enjoyed this," Suarez says, "a lot of my friends were there, we could all talk and have fun."

She continued saying that hanging out with her friends whilst incorporating Highlands activity gave her back pieces of that lost sense of spirit and community.

"It was fun going there and hanging out with my friends and talking to the teachers," she said.

Suarez elaborated further by saying, "It was

a good way of learning something and making it a lot more fun."

Occhino concurs that virtual events like these are beneficial, saying, "Any club that's running right now that can do things virtually, I absolutely think they should try their best to introduce activities like these."

These virtual cooking classes are a way to join people with common interests and possibly even make some new friends. ■

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

Kaiden Canariato '22

Students participate in the Sending Sunshine Project, sending positivity to their peer through a letter writing campaign

The Sending Sunshine Project has begun to spread rapidly across the Highlands community, nearby schools, New York and even Florida. The project, founded by Junior Sammy Lever, is based around the idea of spreading positivity in someone's life through letters of support. When meeting with Sammy and asking her how she came up with the idea for the project, she has a touching response. "I was watching the movie Letters to Juliet and the idea came to me because I wanted a place for positivity that didn't come from a place of negativity. You don't have to be in a bad situation to feel support from others. I know how it feels to feel alone and I know that some of my personal experiences, I would love to have another channel of support to in-

spire me." The project allows for anybody to be nominated to receive a letter, so that the person does not have to be going through something negative to feel supported. Recently, the Sending Sunshine Project ran head on into a new pursuit collecting letters of support to send to a student diagnosed with cancer. Jack Silver, current junior at Pascack Hills High School in Montvale, New Jersey, was recently diagnosed with Leukemia. This tragic news inspired his older sister, Jayme, to take to Instagram in hopes of creating an outlet of support for Jack during this hard time and created the

#Jack-Strong. The account continues to share updates in Jack's journey, as well as posts of support from his close friends and family. Additionally, numerous professional athletes have also demonstrated their support via this account. News of Jack's diagnosis circulated very quickly over social media and Sammy took a quick notice. She said that "After reaching out to Jayme, we decided to team up to send Jack letters of support during this difficult time." From this, Sammy promoted her project on social media and began organizing a growing amount of people who

were interested in writing to Jack. The project grew within the Northern Highlands community, and eventually grew into Pascack Hills and even people from New York and Parkland, Florida wanted to support it. Sammy explained how she "was expecting this to be something small. As I began posting on the project's and my own personal Instagram accounts, all different people began to repost it, including the Instagram account for JackStrong (@jack.strong2). People from all over the community reached out to wanting to write to Jack. The goal is to brighten anyone's day, no matter the circumstance they are in. Sammy concludes, "If I can make an impact on one person's life, I'll be happy."

OMMMMMMM(G) Yoga Club changes name to Project BAM

Amy Tullett '23

Northern Highlands offers a variety of clubs for students to participate in, one of them being the yoga club whose name was recently changed to "Project BAM". BAM stands for Body and Mind, and this change in name was due to a shift in the club from focusing on just being physically healthy but also mentally healthy.

"I thought it was kind of a good idea because I think people are scared of yoga. I think when they think 'oh I can't touch my toes' they can't do yoga... yoga is really designed as a form of meditation but you do it with your body and it's not about who can touch their toes or who can stand on their head. It's really just about breathing and connecting to yourself," club advisor Mary Lardiere said.

Activities vary but meetings will normally start with some type of yoga practice, either led by Lardiere or from a video. On days with shorter yoga practice there may be mindful meditation or talk

of the practice of meditation.

The club also plans to do little activities such as making avocado toast, making nature mandalas, or little things just to put you in a better mood such as making a 5 song playlist of happy songs.

"I definitely think it's a really unique club."

Junior Sophia Neuendorff

"I definitely think it's a really unique club...taking one step further with project BAM...it's a relaxing experience that can help you deal with stress and anxiety," Junior Sophia Neuendorff said.

Though unable to be done in person right now while all students and staff are working remotely, Lardiere also created a "Mindfulness Room" in the new Wellness Wing over the summer. Lardiere visualized this room as a

space for Project BAM to hold meetings.

"The whole premise of this mindfulness room was to give our staff members a place to go during the day where they can just unwind, relax, do some mindfulness activities," Principal Joseph Occhino said.

This mindfulness room goes hand in hand with the Wellness Department. The importance of the Wellness Department and staying healthy (both physically and mentally) is also recognized by the administration.

"What does a healthy Highlander look like?... We really thought that it would be very beneficial to try to meet the needs both physically and emotionally of not only our students but our staff. We always say this, 'if you as a staff member can't take care of yourself or don't have self care, how in the world are you going to take care of your students?'...That's the way we look at it as educators. We need to take care of ourselves so we can take care of you," Occhino said. ■

NEW WELLNESS CLUB Wellness Club comes to Highlands

Sania Sadarangani '22

Northern Highlands recently welcomed its newest club--the Wellness Club. The focus of this club is improving mental health for students and has been launched in tandem with this year's new wellness initiative. Wellness Department Head, Dr. Jessica Verdicchio, and Student Assistance Counselor, Allison Rocca, are spearheading this club.

When asked about the goal of the club Verdicchio and Rocca said, "The hope is that we provide information about mental health support in our school and community, as well as reduce the stigma around asking for help."

The first Wellness Club meeting was held on Friday, December 4th, from 2:40 to 3:10 PM, with 10 students in attendance. During the meeting, students discussed different ways that positive mental health could be promoted at Highlands and designed digital thank you cards for faculty.

Going forward, meetings will continue to be

held over Zoom every other Friday from 1:30 to 2 PM; students can access the meeting by using the Zoom code.

In order to join the wellness club, students can fill out an interest form on the wellness website under the school web page, or email Rocca or Verdicchio.

"A club like the Wellness Club can really start to make strides in providing resources and health advocacy for our students," said Principal Joseph Occhino.

Wellness Club meetings will be centered around mental health advocacy and action. It was created with the intention that students who are struggling with personal issues outside of school will have an outlet to converse with peers facing similar problems.

"The one thing about emotional wellness is that people shouldn't feel alone," said Occhino.

When asked about the addition of the wellness club, Junior Ayana Amin stated, "I think that a club dedicated to student wellness could be beneficial

for students who are looking for a safe and laid back outlet... this club may be what some students are looking for."

Another activity for this school year aimed at student health advocacy is the Unity Walk. It is similar to the Stigma-Free Walk that took place during the 2018-2019 school year, in that it is intended to enforce solidarity amongst students dealing with personal struggles. Similarly, the addition of the mind, body, and soul club was arranged to provide a vent for students to relax and destress.

"In the future we hope that the club will drive other initiatives and activities, such as awareness weeks and the annual AFSP Suicide Prevention Walk," said Rocca and Verdicchio.

The administration has plans to continue this journey of mental health advocacy in the future with the hope that the school will become a safe place for students to feel comfortable and cared for in regards to their wellness. ■

THE NEW NATIONAL HONORS SOCIETY

National Honors Society requirements change due to COVID-19

Clare O'Connor '22

The National Honors Society is a club at Northern Highlands based on character, scholarship, leadership, and service. Its main purpose is “to create enthusiasm for scholarship, to stimulate a desire to serve, to promote leadership, and to develop character in students of Northern Highlands Regional High School (NHS Constitution).”

Mr. D’Elia runs the Northern Highlands chapter along with a faculty council. In September, a group of seniors were invited to apply for membership. A few weeks ago, qualifying juniors were invited to apply as well. To be eligible, all students were required to have a GPA of 3.80 or higher.

In general, the qualifications for seniors to be evaluated for membership

are as follows: meet or exceed the GPA requirement, accumulated eight participation or service points, and demonstrated leadership abilities.

Juniors have similar requirements, but with a few small adjustments: meet or exceed the GPA requirement, have accumulated six participation or service points, and demonstrated leadership abilities.

Of course, there have been modifications put in place as a result of the pandemic. D’Elia explains that “this summer, the NHS Faculty Council, Mr. Occhino and I discussed temporarily amending some of the member selection requirements for this year’s applicants.”

For this school year only, seniors must have seven points of participation and service and juniors must have five. Specifically, the mandatory service

point requires only 20 hours of unpaid community volunteering, compared to the 30 hours in prior years. Despite these changes, the GPA requirement remains the same.

D’Elia adds that “We feel these changes will help to accommodate for any unexpected challenges the pandemic brought about with regard to participating in Highlands clubs and/or sports and engaging in community service.”

Principal Joseph Occhino agrees that “students weren’t going to have all of the opportunities that they had [in prior years] to meet their community service requirements because of COVID and all of these stipulations and guidelines.”

Kirsten Scro, a student invited in December to join, understands the importance of these changes and believes that, in order

to maintain the fairness and integrity of the NHS, the modifications were necessary. “Since students were unable to become leaders or participate in clubs, there had to be a change to the requirements.”

In addition to the changes made for the 2020-21 school year, there has been a major alteration to the requirement list for the class of 2024 and forward. The change consists of a higher GPA cutoff. Specifically, the Northern Highlands chapter will require students from the class of 2024 and on to maintain a 3.95 or higher in order to be eligible for membership in the National Honor Society.

D’Elia notes that while the increase is a Northern Highlands initiative, “In recent years, many schools in our area have increased the GPA requirement for their chapters for a variety

of reasons.”

Occhino comments on the increase saying that, essentially, there were too many students being admitted to the NHS. “We just have such smart students!” he exclaims. “We had 36% of our students in the NHS. In prior years, that number was closer to 20%.”

D’Elia elaborates on this issue and explains how “it should not be the case that a student who is not in the National Honor Society is in the minority.” D’Elia continues to add that “no student should feel singled out because most of their peers are in the National Honor Society and they are not.”

One of the key parts of being an active member in the NHS is tutoring lower classmen. There are only so many students that need tutors, so Occhino adds that “the well is drying

up.” In other words, there is a surplus of tutors.

D’Elia emphasizes this issue by explaining that “when the officers or I request volunteers to peer tutor, provide tours of Highlands, or help at various school events such as the Class of 1969 reunion last year, those requests are filled within seconds, causing us to have to turn away eager volunteers.”

Hopefully, this increase will make membership more exclusive and motivate students to perform better in their classes.

Overall, both sets of modifications to the requirements for the NHS were necessary to accommodate for lost extracurricular participation and declining levels of competition. ■

CONTINUE KEEPING UP WITH KOTH

The new USRA Podcast is here and ready to help Highlanders

Continued from cover

The first two episodes of the “Let’s Talk About It!” podcast series have recently been released, with eight episodes in the first season.

Topics will include addiction and recovery, as well as new trends in substance use.

There will be mental health aspects as well, incorporating what Highlands is doing to help those who are struggling.

Furthermore, there will be many interviews

within the podcast, with one already aired, guest starring local resident and philanthropist, Lauren Wright. Wright is a Highlands graduate of ’99 and currently lives in Saddle River. After losing her brother to addiction, she shares their story.

“It was sobering, but we hope to take from that and learn from her experience” resolves Koth in a solemn tone.

There are also other interviews, including ones with Dr. Jenn Altman, a local therapist and Dr. Jessica Verdicchio, the supervisor

of wellness at Highlands.

Koth goes on to elaborate on working with Melissa Reifman, a senior and student activist. He highlights her individual work on her own podcast, along with her efforts to drum up awareness about anti-bullying and addiction through traveling around the county.

Future interviews will hopefully also involve guests such as another local therapist, Dr. Jolene Arasz and Officer Anthony Pulizzano of the USR Police Department, who will talk

about the local D.A.R.E. program.

Moreover, the podcast is in contact with Kristine Johnson, a co-anchor at WCBS-TV in NYC, who will talk about social issues and how it is approached from a media aspect.

When describing the target audience of the podcast, Koth emphasizes reaching both students and parents.

“It’s a dual purpose,” he hastens to say. “We can all take something from this, as a student, but as a parent you want to know

the signs to look for and how to approach your kids to have tough conversations.”

Indeed, this was the thinking behind the title, “Let’s Talk About It!”

A visual of sitting around a table and tackling difficult discussions or topics is woven into the philosophy of the podcast.

Koth expands on this, stressing, “What’s the takeaway? What can people use and apply to their everyday life?”

The end goal of this podcast may not be to have

someone who is using addictive substances stand up one day and reach a revelation to quit perhaps, but rather to help appeal to the “takeaway” and to bolster the relationship between a student and parent, as well as with the school.

Ultimately, the USRA Coalition hopes to create interpersonal relationships where if the student does go down the wrong path, they will feel comfortable reaching out for help or sitting around that table and talking about it. ■

DEJA VU: IT’S TIME FOR ROUND 2

Everything that you need to know about remote learning

Aden Jama '22

On November 25, Superintendent Dr. Scot Beckerman sent a letter home to parents stating that starting November 30, Northern Highlands High School would be going all virtual until at least January 11, 2021.

The Restart and Recovery is planning to reassess these plans on January 7 and will notify both parents and students with their decision.

Northern Highlands made this decision after the Northeast region of New Jersey moved to the “orange” threat level which signifies a high risk

for residents.

According to Beckerman, a factor that impacted the school’s decision to shut down was that schools would be required to perform contact tracing and quarantine individuals who had been in contact with persons exhibiting COVID symptoms, even without a positive test.

Beckerman said that “We find that this demand would be too great for our school staff to meet or sustain for any duration of time.”

A final factor that led to the decision to close the school was that many families have requested to have their children do all

virtual learning after the state’s numbers have continued to rise in the past weeks.

In the weeks before and after the holiday seasons of both Thanksgiving and Christmas numbers are likely to get worse before they improve.

Beckerman says, “a fully virtual opportunity for students will provide both a safer educational environment as well as a more academically appropriate overall experience.”

Despite Highlands closing, several area schools in the Quad District remain open including Ho-Ho-Kus Public School, Emil A. Cavallini Middle

School, and Brookside School.

With the vaccine rollout likely to begin this month, a major question is are students and staff required to receive one in order to attend school in the future?

Mr. Occhino says that the answer to this question is most likely no. When asked about required testing for the community,

Occhino discussed that “Prior to coming to school we would say go for this testing, if you test negative then, by all means, come to school. If you are positive then we hope they would stay home.”

In terms, of remote

learning, he told me the administration would look at it from a monthly basis.

The current goal is to get 50% of the student body back in the building during this year, but on the presumptive date of in-person instruction resuming on January 11th, that number will still be 33% with the 3-cohort system.

“When we get back we’ll look at the numbers and then from that point we’ll see where the numbers are and from that point we’ll determine whether we can let more students into the building.”

When asked for his opinion on whether school will resume on the 11th or

not, he said the following, “Right now my gut feeling tells me yes unless during the community testing that we have a lot of people test positive.”

Though the student body has differing opinions on virtual vs. hybrid learning, the general consensus is that students miss being in school. Although obviously the cohort system is far from normal, it’s a small step in the direction of full capacity. ■

DOES THE EARLY BIRD GET THE WORM?

Students have varying opinions on the early and late schedules



Nina Evans '21

Chahat Arora '22

After starting this year off with the hybrid schedule, we were in the habit of waking up early and starting our school day at around 7:45 and ending around 12:30. This is very different from what we have done in the past, our normal school day running from 7:40-2:36.

However, since circumstances all around us have changed, it makes sense that our schedule has changed as well. Recently, we changed from our hybrid schedule back to all

virtual, as the COVID crisis has continued to escalate around the globe.

At the start of this transition back to all virtual, the school made the decision to revert to a schedule which entailed waking up at 9:20 and ending at 2:35 with a 45 minute break in between for lunch. The school day was technically longer, only because of the 45 minute break that had been added in.

While this schedule was meant to last the rest of the time we are in school solely virtually, it only lasted a week before reverting

to the original schedule after a school-wide vote. According to the survey results, the school had 68% in favor of an earlier start time, which is a clear majority.

Noah Langevin, a senior at Highlands, prefers the earlier schedule. He says that he likes this schedule because it gives him time to do any extraneous activities that he has to complete.

Serena Dhupar, a sophomore at Highlands also says that she prefers the early schedule. She explains, "I prefer the early schedule because it gives me more time to do other activities and have free time throughout the day. It also motivates me to sleep earlier because I have to wake up earlier for school."

On the other hand, there are a number of students at Highlands who prefer the late schedule. One such student is Esther Park, a junior at Highlands. Esther says that she likes the late schedule because it lets her establish a better

morning routine, such as having enough time to eat breakfast. She also said that she likes the break because

According to the survey results, the school had 68% in favor of an earlier start time.

it helps her focus more, as she'd rather sit through only two classes at a time in a row, which is something

that she is not able to do with the earlier schedule.

Another student who prefers the late schedule is junior Rachel Finkelshteyn, she said with her regular bedtime waking up with the late schedule was a good eight hours of sleep, but with the early schedule she only gets about five hours of sleep. She said that she understands that ending earlier is better, but for her personally, getting enough sleep and waking up ready for school is important to her, which is more attainable with the late schedule.

No matter what the schedule, this year has been a whirlwind, and our schedule has the power to change at any time. Jumping from the hybrid schedule to all virtual classes and jumping from different schedule to schedule has definitely not been something easy, but it is something that we, as Highlanders, have been able to persevere and successfully navigate. ■

THE COMMON APP: I LIVED IT

Students from the Class of 2021 finish up college application season

Ayana Amin '22

As a high school student, some of the most commonly asked questions are, "What do you want to do in the future?" or "Where do you want to go to college?" Whether you know the answer to these questions or not, college gives us infinite opportunities to branch out, explore fields of interest, and set a precedent for our future. And, with this year's college application season in full swing, high school seniors across the nation are competing for admission at their dream school.

Now, more than ever, students are ambivalent and overwhelmed by the

race to get in the last batch of college essays and supplements. Three Highlands students from the Class of 2021 share about their stress and experience with college applications.

Senior Sania Sadarangani is stressed but has learned to come to terms with the suspense and uncertainty of the grueling and all-consuming college application process. During an interview, Sadarangani explains, "I am pretty stressed about college due to the uncertainty of it all, but I try to remind myself that at this point it's largely out of my control and there's really nothing I can do."

With her early appli-

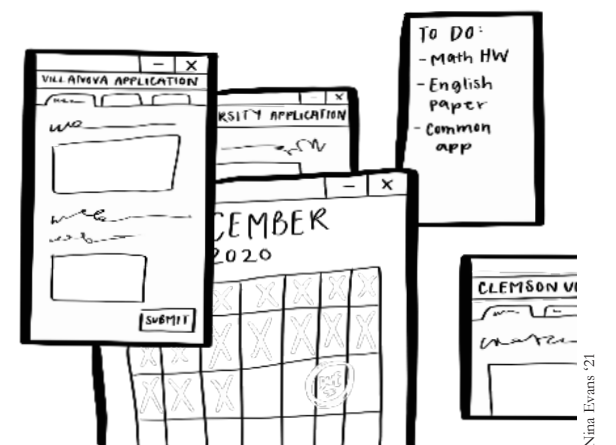
cations completed, she is working on getting through her regular decision applications. Even though she is in the home stretch of her admissions process, the stress that comes along with college applications can carry on into the spring. With the possibility of having to wait until March to receive a response, Sadarangani indicates that she copes with stress by reminding herself that "worrying doesn't help anything, and the college I go to doesn't necessarily define my future."

Despite her associated feelings towards her application process, she expresses excitement towards "learning in a different en-

vironment and meeting new people."

Like Sadarangani, Senior Vanessa Shoenholz holds a similar perspective. Especially with the challenge of having to manage college applications with schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and downtime, the life of a highschool senior can be demanding and, ultimately, enervating. Shoenholz indicates that "applications have a ton of essays that go with [them] and balancing that with normal class work can be a lot! I'm coping with stress by taking time each day to do something I enjoy."

Especially during this time for seniors, balance is key. It can be easy to overwork yourself and feel consumed and unmotivated, so taking time to regroup and decompress after a long week can be therapeutic. With most of her applications already done, Shoenholz is excited to break the boiling suspense and dive into a new chapter of her life: "There's definitely a lot of unknowns in regards to what the next four years of our lives will look like. I think it will be nice to get in and pick a school and



Nina Evans '21

start planning for that!"

Senior Michelle Bechtel's take on college applications is not too far off from that of Sadarangani or Shoenholz. During an interview about her college application process she emphasizes how "it is a difficult process to go through but it's comforting knowing that everyone is going through the same thing." She explains how the feeling of being in the same boat as her friends can be motivating, comforting, and a source of guidance as she tackles her application journey.

However, it is not always smooth sailing, and Bechtel still feels stressed from time to time, explaining how structure and "taking a little time each day to work...and edit [es-

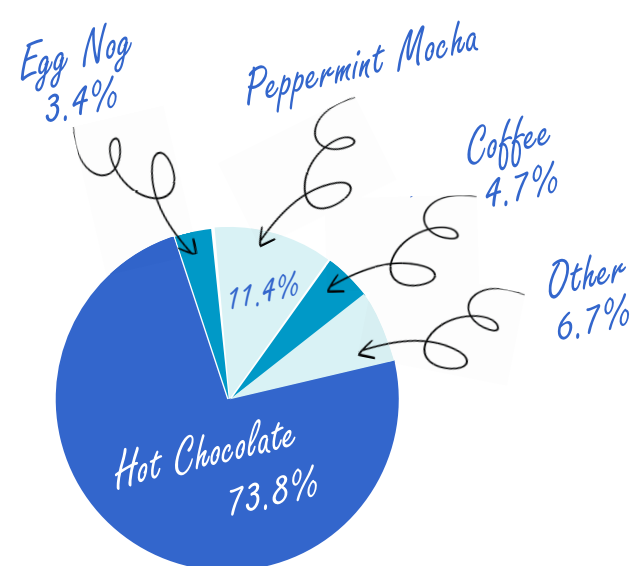
says] has been really helpful." Despite the rollercoaster of emotions and hours of essay writing, Bechtel is most excited about being done and experiencing life as a college student. Like many others, she can't wait to dive into a new realm of possibilities and meet new people.

Applying to college marks a big milestone in a highschool senior's life and it is something that should be celebrated. All of their hard work, passions, countless days of late nights, and everything in between has led the class of 2021 to make big decisions about their future. Wherever this year's graduating class ends up, they all have the power to shape the coming chapters of their life. ■

Holidays at Highlands

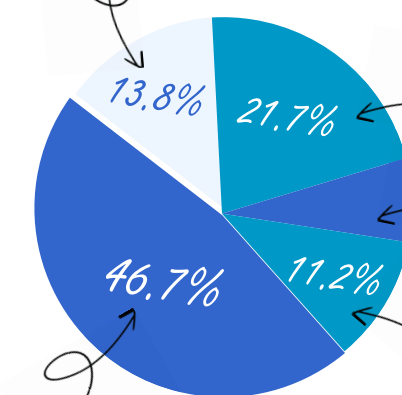
Layout by Noreen Hosny '21

Highlands' Favorite Drink



Hot Chocolate!

Giving Gifts

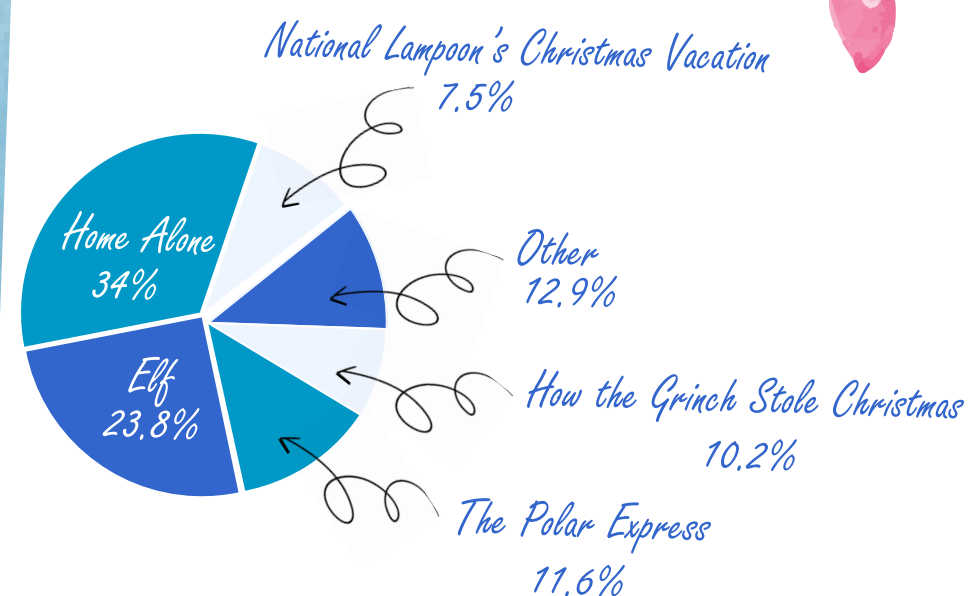


Highlands' Favorite Part of the Holidays



Celebrating with Family!

Highlands' Favorite Holiday Movie



Home Alone!

SHARING MUSIC AND REFLECTION

Spotify Wrapped allows students to see what they listened to each year

Ryan Gottlieb '23

Looking back on things from the future and seeing the choices you made is always eye-opening, and what better way to do this than with music? Spotify Wrapped allows you to do just that.

Spotify Wrapped is a social media phenomenon that students look forward to at the end of every year. It is a data-curated program that Spotify runs which compiles all of a user's listening data from January 1 to October 31.

It records how many new artists you've listened to, how many new genres you've discovered, your top artist (and how far up in the fan base you are percentage-wise), your top 5 artists, your top song of the year, and more.

Spotify provides this information in 15 aesthetically pleasing slides, which students post on their social media to showcase what they've been listening to. This is very popular in the Highlands community.

Sophomore Riley Boyle said that she lis-

tened to Lewis Capaldi a lot this year, and it showed in her Spotify Wrapped. She specifically liked "Hold Me While You Wait" by Lewis Capaldi—she "listened to it over 100 times."

Boyle also rewatched Glee over quarantine, which caused the cast of Glee to be in her top three most streamed artists. With Lewis Capaldi, the Glee Cast, and Juice

WRLD all featured in her top artists, Boyle felt that her Wrapped symbolized the year well, since it "was all over the place just like [her] year."

Sophomore Jamie Meyer was very happy with her Wrapped. Her top two artists were alt-J and Mother Mother, she had around 20,000 minutes of listening, and her top genre was Indie Pop.

Fun initiatives like Spotify Wrapped bring the community together

Meyer remarked that she was "very satisfied with [her] music taste this

year" and is excited to see what the next brings. Meyer said she liked receiving all the statistics about what she's listened to because she "enjoys looking back on the past year in music."

In contrast, Senior Anna Sciuto said she felt "very confused" with her Wrapped. While she did expect her top two artists being Justin Bieber and Drake, she didn't anticipate "Stuck with U" by Ariana Grande (with Justin Bieber) to be in the top slot and "Graveyard" by Halsey to be in the third. She was also "surprised at [her] minutes listened this year, which was 62,000 minutes." Sciuto really liked Wrapped because of the fact that she "enjoyed showing all [her] friends what [she's] been listening to," and she loved seeing what everyone else listened to as well.

This year has been crazy, so taking a step back to look at more lighthearted things, like music, can

definitely be helpful, especially since it provides us a way to bond with family and friends. Fun

initiatives like Spotify Wrapped bring the community together to discuss and connect. ■



CKO kickboxing

3 CLASSES & GLOVES

FOR ONLY-\$29.99!

LOSE WEIGHT, GET FIT, RELIEVE STRESS & HAVE FUN WITH OUR ONE-HOUR FITNESS KICKBOXING CLASSES!

REAL BAGS. REAL PEOPLE. REAL RESULTS

CKO kickboxing CKOALLENDALE.COM • 47 W ALLENDALE AVE, ALLENDALE, NJ 07401
201-236-1000 • @CKOALLENDALE
*Offer valid at listed location only. Boxing gloves are required for our classes.

FUTURE FAMOUS ALUMNI? RIGHT HERE!

Senior Matt Onufrak has been passionately pursuing art and film for years

Simran Dhupar '23

Northern Highlands provides students with countless opportunities in the arts, and senior Matt Onufrak has definitely taken advantage of these artistic opportunities to help him become a successful future filmmaker and actor.

"Some of my favorite experiences have been in the Northern Highlands Theater Company musical productions of Into the Woods, The Drowsy Chaperone, The Government Inspector, and How to Succeed in Business, and in the Northern Highlands Jazz Band...I have also participated in the Marching Band as the section leader of the Pit, the Northern Highlands TV Network, the Improv Club, the Studio 225 Film Production group, and I have started a Film Club at the school, thanks to the help of Mr. Nadal," Onufrak said.

Onufrak explained that he always enjoys being a part of the arts activities at Highlands.

"They provide a great outlet to improve my art and express myself alongside my friends. In addition, they have proven to be endlessly helpful with relieving stress after a lengthy school day," he

"They provide a great outlet to improve my art and express myself alongside my friends."

Matt Onufrak

described.

Onufrak continues to grow as an artist and loves doing so alongside all those who support him.

"There's just something fulfilling about having the opportunity to expand on skills I enjoy so greatly, especially in front of an audience of my peers...I simply believe that the arts programs at this school are helmed by a number of incredibly creative people who know how to put on a show! These people—including, but not limited to

Ms. Rokoszak, Mr. Kiely, Mr. Nadal, Mr. Kubicki, and Mr. Wodnick—have helped me hone my craft and express myself artistically countless times!" Onufrak passionately noted.

His passion for the arts extends beyond Highlands, as Onufrak brings color, music, and love to countless audiences in the quad-district area. Recently, he has entered in film-making competitions.

"I enjoy making my own films with my friends and submitting them to film festivals. I've had a few successes in that regard, but most recently, my short film Doubt won "Best Writing" at the Ramapo College Film Festival," he said.

Onufrak's fascination

with filmmaking started his freshman year when he joined the Film Club.

Onufrak describes this club as a place that "provided time for students to hone their craft and watch movies with friends. It was a great experience, and one I was sad to see

departure, there was no one else able to run the club anymore. With the help of Mr. Nadal, we've managed to revivify the club just in time for my senior year!" he excitedly said.

Onufrak is proud of his club and enjoys meeting

the first meeting was very successful and fun. And of course, I would remiss if I didn't mention that we're always looking for new members—if anyone reading this is interested, make sure to send me or Mr. Nadal an email!"

When asked about his plans for the future, Onufrak said "A significant number of the schools I've applied to either specialize in or have a strong curriculum in writing or filmmaking. As of right now, I simply want to see where I get in! And hopefully, I can make a more educated choice from there. Regardless, I'm optimistic of where the future will lead!"

Onufrak is certainly passionate for the arts, and has grown to become an expert in several areas. He is still uncertain what lies for him in the future and where his fervor may take him, but whether Onufrak decides to pursue the arts in the future or not, there is no denying that he is a talented artist with potential for success. ■



Onufrak smiles for a photo.

go my sophomore year." When it was time for the past Film Club advisor Mr. Brennan's "imminent

with members to watch movies and create films. "While it's been difficult due to quarantine,

Photo Courtesy of Kyle Kubicki

BY THE FIRE WITH FAMILY...AND FOOD

Two wintertime recipes to get even more excited for the holidays

Stephanie Contreras '24

Happy Holidays! *The Highland Fling* is here to share some classic, holiday recipes that readers and their families might enjoy baking together. Both of these recipes are perfect for getting into the holiday spirit!

The first recipe I first made with my mom when I was just three or four years old. These holiday cookies have a delicious, buttery taste, and the fruit preserves in the center make the cookies even better. While my family enjoys strawberry preserves, you can use whatever flavor you prefer. Although Thumbprint Cookies are traditionally thought to be Christmas cookies, you can easily turn this dessert into a Hanukkah cookie by replacing the preserves with a chocolate gelt.

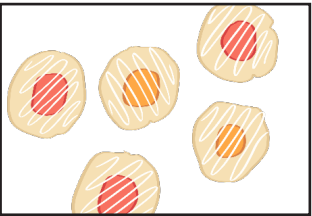
Thumbprint Cookies

Ingredients:
¾ pounds of butter (or 1 ½ sticks), 1 cup of sugar
3 cups of flour, 3 egg yolks, 1 ½ tablespoons of vanilla extract, Fruit preserves or Gelts, Ground walnuts or almonds (optional) (if making Hanukkah recipe replace with sugar)

Instructions:
Cream together butter/sugar. Keep at a low speed when mixing for each step. Add the flour until well combined. Add egg yolks and vanilla extract. (Getting the egg yolks separated from the whites can be tricky! Tip: get a separate bowl and gently crack the egg close to the middle. Then, over the bowl, use your thumbs to pry the egg shell in half letting the egg whites run into the bowl. Move the yolk back and forth between the shells letting as much egg white out as possible. Be careful to not break the yolk. Mix the yolks and vanilla extract into the mixture until it is well combined and starts to have a doughy texture. Refrigerate the dough for an hour to chill. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. After the dough has chilled, remove it from the fridge and scoop about 1 tsp of dough and roll it into a ball. If you include nuts/sugar, roll the dough in the nuts/sugar to coat and place on a cookie sheet. (Put parchment paper on the tray before placing the cookies down so you do not have to grease the tray. These cookies do not spread very much, so you can place them closer together). Place your finger in the dough on the cookie sheet to make an indentation (or a thumbprint). Be careful not to place your finger too far into the dough because you'll be filling these with preserves or chocolate Gelts. Then, fill the holes with the fruit preserves or Gelts. Bake the cookies for 20-30 minutes.

The second recipe is also perfect for the holiday season. I have very fond memories of making this cake with my grandmother for the holidays; it has become a famous recipe in my family. It is super moist with a delicious lemon flavor, topped with a smooth vanilla glaze. There are many different lemon yogurt cake recipes, but if you need a quick and easy recipe, this is the one.

Both recipes are not only delicious, they aren't very complicated and time-consuming either, so you can spend more time with friends and family instead! They are also perfect for any holiday you may celebrate. ■



Art by Nina Evans '21

Lemon Yogurt Cake

Ingredients:
For cake: 1 package of Duncan Hines Supreme Lemon Cake mix, 6 oz of lemon yogurt (I prefer to use french yogurt such as La Fermiere), 3 eggs (at room temperature), ⅓ cup of water, 2 tbsp of vegetable oil (Healthier alternative is canola oil). For glaze: ¼ cup of fresh lemon juice, ¾ cup of powdered sugar

Instructions:
For cake: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease the bundt pan thoroughly. (Can also use a 9 inch round or loaf pan as well). Blend ingredients together for 2 min. by hand or on a low setting with a hand mixer. Pour mixture into pan (greased) and bake for 25-30 minutes or until the cake feels springy to the touch. Insert toothpick into the cake and if it comes out clean, it's ready (every oven is different so be careful not to overcook the cake). Remove the cake from the oven and let cool on a wire rack for 15 min. then turn the pan upside down so the cake falls onto the rack.

For glaze: Combine lemon juice and powdered sugar into a small bowl. Stir until smooth. With a pastry brush, pat the glaze all over the cake. Just keep going over the cake until the glaze is gone. Some of it will drip off, but most of it will soak in. Allow the cake to cool completely. Sprinkle with powdered sugar if desired and serve.

2020: A COVID CHRISTMAS STORY

The pandemic has changed families' plans to celebrate this Winter break

Isha Korgaonkar '24

COVID-19 has brought us into a world riddled with unemployment, sickness, death, and isolation. This virus has changed our definition of normalcy and has challenged our ability to remain optimistic.

However, as freshman Madeline Norian says, "It can be upsetting, but other than trying to be safe... it's out of my control. I've learned to just be flexible and make the most of what I can still do."

With hopes of vaccine distribution and high effectiveness, we are nearing the light at the end of the tunnel.

This is perfect timing as well—the holiday season is already here, and

if there is one thing that COVID-19 cannot take away from us, it is our holiday spirit.

While most Highlanders are staying home this year, some are finding ways to stay safe and still meet up with extended family or friends.

Senior Ellen Lee usually meets up with her extended family for a big dinner, but this year, her family is planning to "keep it small and celebrate separately to keep everyone safe."

Similarly, freshman Shreya Sivasubramaniam said, "Usually, I celebrate with my family and then my friends, but because of COVID, I can't be with my friends for the holidays."

Senior Todd Bechtel

and his family usually stay home during the holidays, so COVID-19 has not affected his Christmas plans. He will also be getting gifts for some of his friends and distributing them in a safe, distanced manner.

Sophomore Tyler Chen plans to stay safe during COVID and still travel.

"This Christmas, I'm planning on celebrating with my family. We are... getting tested for COVID, then going up to Cape Cod to meet some of our cousins, who are also getting tested for COVID," Chen said.

Several Highlanders have unique and festive Christmas traditions with their families every year, and many of them might look a bit different this

year.

"Every Christmas, my family makes a special fondue that we have with our breakfast. It's my grandmother's recipe, so my family has had it for a long time," Bechtel said.

Chen's family also has their own tradition, but it is unfortunately affected by the pandemic.

"For my family, it would be tradition to go up to Vermont to ski, and we would meet our extended family in a group of about 30 people; however due to the risk of infection, we will be meeting a significantly smaller group this year," he said.

"Christmas traditions with my immediate family like decorating our Christmas tree will be the same; however, I might



Veronica Torrian '21

Baking cookies as a family is a fun, safe activity for this year.

not be visiting my extended family that I usually see," Norian said.

Living amidst a pandemic has been tough in many ways, and it can seem even worse when holiday celebrations have to be interrupted or altered.

For Junior Fifi Alao and her family, COVID-19 has only made them more grateful about getting the chance to spend Christmas together.

"My mom had COVID-19 earlier this year and was hospitalized for around two months,

which was not all that shocking because she is a doctor in New York. I think that a lot of necessary changes have been made, regarding sanitation and all that...I have realized that things like that are super important and hopefully, people will start to have that same idea," Alao said.

These students have continued to stay hopeful, grateful, and most importantly positive. COVID-19 has not ruined Christmas celebrations, it has only changed them. ■



allendale FLOWERS

Everyday Flowers
Events
Proms
Sweet 16
Birthdays

72 W Allendale Ave
Allendale, NJ
www.allendaleflowers.com
201.962.7272
@allendaleflowers

A HAPPY HIGHLANDS HANUKKAH

Students celebrate with a combination of new and old traditions

Grace Paolillo '22

With 2020 being such a chaotic year, many people have been waiting for the holiday season to arrive in order to raise their spirits and celebrate with friends and family. However, due to COVID-19, many families have had to change their holiday plans in order to stay safe and healthy.

he first winter holiday of the season is Hanukkah, a Jewish holiday celebrating the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian Army which led the Jews to reclaim the Temple of Jerusalem in 2nd century BCE.

In Hebrew, Hanukkah means “dedication,” perfectly symbolizing the holiday’s history. Hanukkah is celebrated over an eight day period, this year it started at sunset on December 10 and ended at sunset on December 18.

One of the most widely known Hanukkah traditions is lighting one can-

dle on the menorah each night of the eight days, but there are many other special traditions.

This year, many families have had to sacrifice some Hanukkah traditions, such as spending time with family and close friends, attending temple, and doing their favorite activities.

Unlike some other holidays, Hanukkah is a winter festivity, making it difficult to safely celebrate outside in the cold weather.

When asked if her Hanukkah plans were changing this year, junior Phoebe Kaufman stated, “Yes, unfortunately we aren’t able to spend time with our family and friends this year as we usually have a big feast.”

Many Jewish people usually celebrate by hosting elaborate feasts at sundown when they light the menorah. These feasts are typically celebrated with family and close friends, but this year, circumstanc-

es have changed. Consequently, some families are starting new traditions and activities to stay festive.

For instance, senior Jake Fishman and his family decided on buying a ‘Hanukkah tree.’ This tree is a fake white tree with blue ornaments, dreidels,

the holiday spirit and start new traditions while complying with CDC guidelines.

Since Hanukkah is spread over an eight day period, there is plenty of time for different festivities and activities to take place. Some celebrations

participate in the game, players each collect 10-15 pieces of chocolate gelt for betting and spin the dreidel. Dreidels have four different sides, and each side determines whether you gain or lose gelt. When one player wins all of the others’ gels, they are declared the winner.

Another common Hanukkah tradition is spending time with family to celebrate.

Junior Maya Resnick states that her favorite part of the holiday is “...really just being able to enjoy time with my family and getting to have family dinners together every night of Hanukkah which is nice. I also love giving gifts and seeing my family’s reaction.”

Resnick also shared her Hanukkah routine, saying “My family usually eats first and then we light the candles and say the prayers and then we give our gifts to each other.”

Another wonderful

part of Hanukkah is the special and traditional foods. A traditional Hanukkah meal is eaten at sunset with family. It begins with a prayer and blessings and is followed by a full feast.

According to freshman Graham Kaufman, these feasts include foods such as “Latkes (potato pancakes), gelt (chocolate coins), babka bread (sweet braided bread), and sufganiyot (round jelly doughnuts).”

Aside from those four foods, traditional dinners also include applesauce, chicken, brisket, matzah ball soup, challah, and many more delicious dishes.

With COVID-19 still a major concern, this year’s celebration was vastly different from previous years. Regardless, in 2020, families have created many new traditions while still celebrating beloved traditions that have been practiced for generations. ■

“We wanted to be more festive this year since we were spending more time at home.”

Senior Jake Fishman

and Stars of David.

“We got this tree because we wanted to be more festive this year, since we were spending more time at home and felt this year could use a little more positive spirit,” Fishman said.

His idea is the one example of how to stay in

and age-old traditions include lighting the menorah on each of the eight nights, playing dreidel and betting with chocolate gimme among friends and family, and exchanging gifts.

Among Highlands students, a popular tradition is playing dreidel. To

HOLLY JOLLY CHRISTMAS TREES

Students discuss how they decorated their Christmas trees this year

Serena Dhupar '23

Over time, Christmas has grown to become a very popular holiday, both among those who celebrate the religious significance and others, including retailers, who love to promote the jolly image of Santa Claus and holiday cheer.

Christmas is widely

celebrated and commercialized, and tree sales certainly help local businesses.

Above all else, the holiday season makes people happier. People spend time with their families by going on family vacations, cooking together, buying Christmas gifts, decorating their homes in festive decor,

and putting up annual Christmas trees. These yearly family-bonding activities build traditions to look forward to every year.

“Every year I get a new Christmas tree...so the whole house smells like pine,” sophomore Mia Wang said.

Having annual traditions provides a deeper sense of meaning and importance to celebrations. It also creates sentimental, long-lasting memories that lead to a tighter connection with family and friends.

Wang said her annual tradition is to “go with [her] dad to get [the Christmas tree] in the freezing cold.” Wang ornaments her fresh tree with “gold and white ornaments, tinsel and a star on top.”

She prefers a classy and shimmery look to her tree, only embellishing it with two colors. The detailed and colorful wrapping paper on all of the gifts placed under their tree definitely adds a cozy touch as well.

Junior Chahat Arora, said that she adds a unique spin to her Christmas tree by “[using] sen-

timental old ornaments plus new ones.”

Arora stated that her “sentimental old ornaments” are “ornaments that [she and siblings] made as kids.”

Her family’s tree also dons store-bought ornaments and lights. They like to go for a simple, bright, and elegant look.

“We like to make sure that our tree is classy but it still has a personalized touch to it,” Arora said. She makes sure not to overcrowd her tree with bold ornaments, decorations and lights; instead, she embellishes her tree lightly leaving room to appreciate the beauty of the actual tree itself.

Sophomore Abigail Jacob and her family went for a monochromatic all-white approach to their Christmas tree, but their color schemes vary each year.

“We usually have a color scheme—this year we did silver/white...we used white Christmas lights for the tree and wrapped it in white ribbon,” Jacob explained. This gives the tree a graceful, stylish, and elegant look. Jacob jazzed up her monochromatic

tree with many sparkling lights, “ornaments and some [silver] ribbon.”

Similar to Arora, Jacob’s family doesn’t overcrowd their tree with an abundance of ornaments. Instead, they prefer fewer, but larger and bolder ornaments.

Jacob finalized the tree with “a giant silver star on the top.”

Many Highlanders put up Christmas trees in

their homes for the holidays, and every tree has its own beautiful qualities and differences that separate it from others and portray each family’s vision. Each student and their family decorated their tree with their own tastes and distinctive accent pieces to celebrate the winter season. Here’s to wishing everyone a relaxing holiday and a Merry Christmas! ■



Photo courtesy of Mia Wang

Sophomore Mia Wang’s Christmas tree decorated in a classy and shimmery style

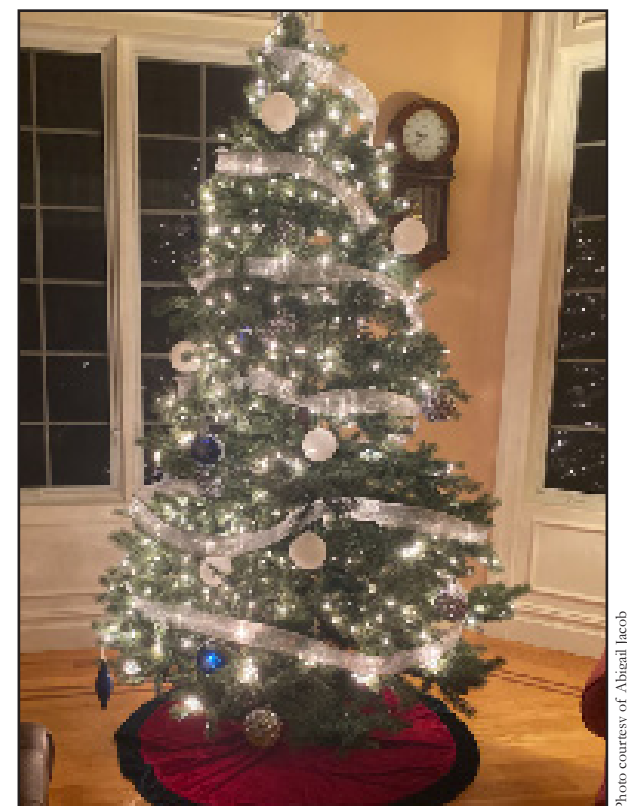


Photo courtesy of Abigail Jacob

Sophomore Abigail Jacob’s monochrome Christmas tree decorations.

IT'S TIME FOR A MOVIE NIGHT

Students and teachers share their all time favorite holiday movies

Kristiana Dedvukaj '23

Now that it's December and the holidays are right around the corner, it's important to get into spirit. There are so many ways to celebrate the season of giving, and everybody does it differently.

Whether it's a family tradition, Secret Santa with a group of friends, baking gingerbread cookies, or any of the other countless holiday traditions, everyone has that one thing that gets them ready to enjoy the holidays—except for the occasional Scrooge that pops up here and there.

A major factor that

fuels the holiday spirit is movies: whether it's a cheesy Hallmark love story or an animated children's classic, there's a holiday movie for everyone. If you're looking for the best holiday movies to watch this December, here is your ultimate guide.

After going around and asking some students about their favorite movies, I found that *Elf* is an extremely popular holiday movie. Starring Will Ferrell, *Elf* is a classic Christmas comedy about an oversized elf—the size of a human—named Buddy, who goes into the real world in an attempt to find his dad.

This movie is popular among students as well as teachers. When asked why this was her favorite holiday movie, senior Maggie Batenhorst, said she liked it most because Will Ferrell is very funny and most *Elf* fans agree.

Theatre teacher Laura

thing happens to Santa, the next person to put on the red coat becomes the next Santa. Scott puts on the coat, and unknowingly becomes the next Santa.

This movie is widely regarded as a classic Christmas comedy. It has been a highly-watched

town. However, he wants something different. Something more.

Jack soon discovers Christmastown and decides that he's going to remake Christmas in his own town. Meanwhile, Sally, a creature similar to Frankenstein's monster, wants to get out and warn Jack that things aren't what they seem.

This movie, although containing some Halloween themes, is a must-watch this holiday season for Halloween fans who want that extra touch of Christmas cheer.

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer is a Christmas classic that senior Flora Dedvukaj loves to watch with her family.

The movie sends a great message to children in regards to celebrating their differences.

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer describes Rudolph, a reindeer who happens to have a red nose—hence the name. Due to this, the other reindeer don't like him, and don't let him play reindeer games with them.

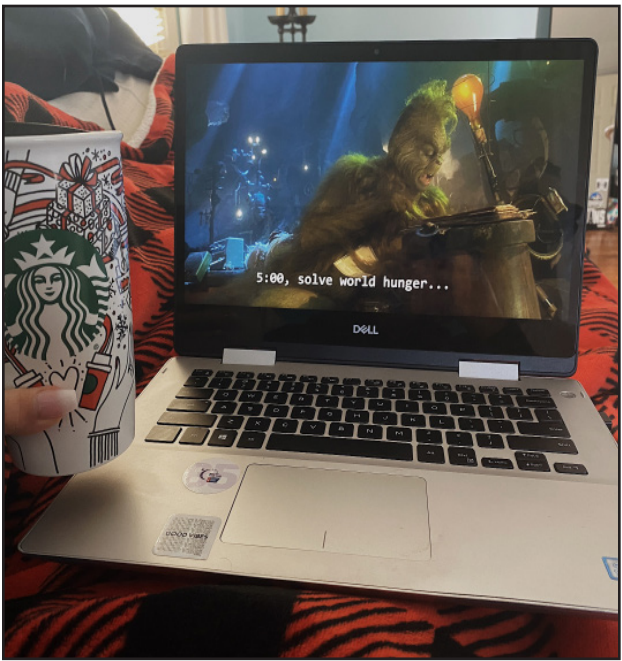
One night, however, Rudolph is approached by Santa Claus, who asks him to guide the sleigh. Rudolph soon goes down in history as the most famous reindeer of all, true

to the song about him in relation to the movie.

This movie is great for families to watch together with their children.

Of course, the best way to elevate a good Christmas movie is with festive snacks and scenery. Sardo said that she enjoys baking Gingerbread cookies and making Gingerbread houses, classic Christmas treats that many people would agree are necessities for the holiday season. Simply drinking some hot chocolate or creating a playlist full of classic holiday songs also helps set the mood for a great Winter movie night (make sure to remember “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer!”).

With COVID-19 restrictions becoming more strict, it's recommended not to go out this holiday season. However, this doesn't mean that you can't have a festive Christmas this December. A great way to watch holiday movies with your friends from home is through Netflix Party, where you can watch a movie and chat in a sidebar chat box as the movie is playing. It's completely free as well. ■



A highlander watches *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

A major factor that fuels holiday spirit is movies.

Rokoszak described *Elf* as a “great, feel-good story that makes [her] laugh.”

The Santa Clause is another widely-loved movie among students and teachers at Highlands.

The Santa Clause stars Tim Allen as Scott Calvin, a man who is visiting his ex-wife, Laura Miller, and son, Charlie Calvin, for Christmas. Laura and her husband, Neil Miller, try to break it to Charlie that Santa is not real.

On the night before Christmas, Santa comes to the Miller house and slips off of the roof, leaving only a jacket and a letter behind. Scott learns about the “Santa Clause,” which states that after some-

movie every holiday season since it premiered in 1994.

The Nightmare Before Christmas is a spooky holiday film that has the perfect balance of Halloween creepiness and Christmas joy. This movie is freshman Abigail Sardo's favorite, along with many other students.

Originally written by Tim Burton, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* highlights the story of Jack Skellington, a citizen of Halloweentown, a town that dedicates itself to scaring as many people as they can on Halloween.

Jack Skellington is widely renowned as the best “scarer” in the whole

EVEN NOW, THE SHOW MUST GO ON

How the music department will hold the winter concert during COVID

Eleanor Ha '23

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, one of the many things we can no longer participate in are in-person concerts, but what can we expect instead? We should expect to be introduced to a new world of virtual concerts.

By implementing a click track, some video editing skills, and a lot of hard work, a perfect virtual concert can be constructed and viewed by anyone interested.

Mackenzie Kim, a senior in wind ensemble, said to expect “a well-composed recording that consists of all the parts in the piece. A virtual concert can work by combining different parts for a piece by connecting them together using an audio click track. The click track is the spine of the process and allows every

individual clip to be lined up accordingly in order to have a functioning virtual concert.”

What's surprising is that these videos aren't

vious years, since last year we got to learn the parts and play in school with our peers, but since I was all virtual, I did not get a chance to do that.

“Despite the obstacles that we had to face, with a lot of hard work we were able to make a video.”

Sophomore Lynn Heo

made by a professional, although they may look the part. They are actually created by a former student, Olivia Materetsky, class of 2020.

Lynn Heo, a sophomore in wind ensemble, stated that “the process was definitely more challenging compared to pre-

Despite the obstacles that we had to face, with a lot of hard work we were able to make a video, and it actually came out great so I was very happy about it!”

It is evident that this year, due to COVID-19 and virtual learning, collaborating with the other students was especially

hard to accomplish.

This caused a huge barrier, since band is all about collaborating and working together in order to create something that doesn't sound like ten solos, but one unified piece.

Concert choir has also had to face the same challenges of there being no in-person concerts and very limited rehearsals together.

“For the winter concert this year, we aren't having a formal in-person concert, for obvious reasons. Instead, we all sent in recordings of us singing our voice parts for ‘Carol of the Bells’ and Mr. Paster is going to mix it all together so we have a virtual performance for the holidays,” Sophomore Sydney Hogue explained.

Concert choir is using the same method as the wind ensemble, creating a video by mixing multiple

recordings in order to create a small virtual concert.

Another challenge students must face is practicing and learning the music without being in the classroom. Luckily, band teacher Kyle Kubicki has figured out multiple ways to keep his students engaged and help everyone improve even through a computer screen.

“This year we will not be able to hold our traditional Music Department Holiday Concert in the auditorium due to COVID-19 restrictions regarding social distancing, crowd sizes, etc. However, that is not stopping the music learning and performing in our Music Department classes,” Kubicki said.

Beyond completing daily assignments and group projects during class, students have been practicing and recording

solo pieces as well as ensemble pieces in their own time.

Band students are given constant guidance and feedback on their performances in order to continue improving.

The Symphonic Band and Honors Wind Ensemble recently released virtual concert videos for Veterans Day and plan to release a virtual winter concert video of “Sleigh Ride,” featuring special guests. Kubicki encourages everyone to check out the videos on YouTube.

While the winter concert must be done online, Kubicki is optimistic about an in-person spring concert in May for all the performance groups at Highlands. For now, both band and choir are making the best of the situation by continuing to grow as musicians despite the drawbacks they have faced. ■

FOOTBALL’S PANDEMIC PRESSURE

An inside look into the successes of a football season in the middle of COVID-19

Chase Fishman ‘23

A rollercoaster of a season is the best way to describe the year for the 2020 football team. In a year like no other, Northern Highlands managed to prevail in the setting of football given the conditions.

It began a month after it normally would have, and rules and regulations were tight. Many players, coaches, staff members, and family members wondered if a season would even happen, but it did in the end. The season finished with the team winning the Freedom Red Division, beating some very solid schools, and finishing with an overall record of 5-2.

Both Senior John Haemmerle and Coach Jonathan Schmitt thought the season was a success.

“Of course, you wish to go undefeated, but we finished 5-2, beating teams Highlands has never really won against ever. Making history and winning another league title, especially

since the league we are in is the toughest public school league in the state, really felt like a championship,” Haemmerle, a captain, said.

“Any time you are able to beat three Group 5 schools and two Group 4 schools in a 7 game season

The defense was led by senior and captain Nick Holle, who had 14 tackles, and Haemmerle, who had 9 tackles and the game sealing interception. Junior Ian Langan also recorded 2 interceptions.

Haemmerle went on

Old Tappan game, junior Charlie Johnson hurt his ankle and had to take a few plays out. On a punt a few plays later, there was no long snapper to fill Johnson’s spot, so sophomore Ryan Mattessich was called to step up.

jured his wrist and was forced to miss the rest of the Hackensack game, and the Ridgewood game the following week.

Junior quarterback Kyle Major stepped up to fill Arjona’s shoes and led the Highlanders to wins

could not have recovered better from these losses.

“After the loss against River Dell, we rallied and came together, there was no finger pointing at all. We finished the year with three straight wins, beating a undefeated Wayne Hills team, a very talented Union team which felt like a play-off game, and Old Tappan, a team we have not beaten in a long time,” Haemmerle said.

Haemmerle also expressed that it was an awesome way to go out as a senior.

“Most importantly, underclassmen stepped up and made plays. As a senior, that’s what you love to see because you know you’re leaving the program in good hands. I just want to say that we have the best coaches in the state and we couldn’t have done it without them. We are very thankful,” he stated. ■

“Making history and winning another league title, especially since the league we are in is the toughest public school league in the state, really felt like a championship.”

Senior Captain John Haemmerle

you would consider it to be a pretty successful season,” Coach Schmitt added.

In the final game, the team managed to pull out a 14-0 victory against Old Tappan, a team Northern Highlands has not been able to beat in over 20 years.

The Old Tappan win was largely due to the team’s defensive efforts.

to win North Jersey’s Player of the Week award for his play.

“It was an honor to get nominated for the award and then my friends, family, and the Highlands community did the rest by voting for me. It was very special seeing everyone support me,” he said.

In the middle of the

Although Johnson did make it on the field right before the punt to take out Mattessich, he noted that “it’s important for everyone to be ready to step up when they are needed.”

This has been the case many times throughout the season. In a game against Hackensack, quarterback Enzo Arjona in-

in both games. Additionally, throughout the season, some players were not able to participate in certain games because of COVID-19 regulations, forcing other players to step up.

After starting the year off 2-0, the Highlanders fell to 2-2. Haemmerle expressed how the team



The seniors on the football team pictured at the end of their last game.



Girls soccer poses with their state sectional championship plaque.

SOCCER SUCCESS

A review of the championship games against Millburn

Charlotte Riley ‘24

COVID-19 has definitely had an impact on soccer and other sports here at Highlands, but that didn’t stop both the girls and boys soccer teams from winning their respective state championship games against Millburn High School.

Both games were also moved up several days following news of Governor Phil Murphy’s decision to pause all sports activities due to an increase in COVID cases across the state of New Jersey.

Despite these issues, senior Kenna McGahren remarked on the season saying, “Our attitude throughout the season remained consistent: we were all in, all the time. Every practice, scrimmage, and game we worked as if it were our last. Every game we won, especially the championship, was more than deserved.”

Following the pause in fall sports, Senior Thomas Piazza said, “Right when we came back, we lost our first 2 games which were our first 2 losses of the season, and that’s when things didn’t start to look so good.

“Everyone was getting down on themselves and on their teammates which wasn’t good, but I think it brought us closer together as a team because we knew we had to come together to finish the season strong. Once we started getting going again, we were unstoppable just like before which helped our confidence a lot.”

McGahren had many reasons why she decided to play her senior year. “We played for the legacy, for our coaches, and most importantly for each other,” she commented.

“We may not have been as technical as some teams, but our sheer grit and work ethic allowed us to come out on top,” McGahren continued.

As a senior, McGahren said, “Holding that State Sectionals trophy in the air, I couldn’t think of a better way to end my high school soccer career. This season goes unmatched for me. I wouldn’t change anything about it. Just as much as we put our all into every play, we had the greatest time together. This group of girls was truly the best, and I’m so incredibly lucky to say

that they were my teammates.”

McGahren stated that “Our team chemistry this year was insane and definitely helped us play together on the field. We were friends on and off the field and all proud to be a part of the program. COVID limited us in our gatherings, but when we were allowed to be together, we made the best inside jokes and had the best laughs. This group this year was truly special.”

Piazza echoed McGahren’s sentiments, saying, “We all knew how each player played and what to expect from each other. I also knew that every guy on this team always had each other’s back no matter what. This group of guys was more than just a team to everyone; we became a family. I wouldn’t change anything about this season or anything about the team. I will remember this program forever, and I am so happy to have left on such a high note.” ■

Photo Courtesy of Greg Taraglia

Photo Courtesy of Robert Aikin Jr.

A TEMPORARY PAUSE FOR WINTER ATHLETES

NJ regulations mean that sports have to say goodbye until January and February

Jake Fishman '21

In the last week of November, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy decided to delay the start of all winter sports.

Basketball is planning on starting around January 11th, swimming and track on February 1st, and volleyball and wrestling on March 1st.

Senior athlete Christina Hughes runs track and plays volleyball. Volleyball usually takes place during the fall, but earlier this year, the season was delayed to the first week of February.

This originally worked out perfectly for Hughes' schedule since winter track was supposed to start in December and end by February. With winter track now being delayed, this causes a dilemma for her.

Although upset at first, Hughes looked at the bright side, "which is how much better the weather is going

to be since it will be later in the winter season, and it might be warmer, which is better than the freezing cold weather [she] would normally run in in December and January."

Now that the winter track season has moved like the volleyball season, Hughes' seasons will be overlapping for a full month.

"I am going to have to have to go to double the meets/games and practices. My coaches all understand the position that I am in though, so they will help me figure out what I can do to be a part of both teams and get the full experience," Hughes said.

Senior Kenny Morrissey and Junior Ruby Van der Heide are in similar situations. When sports were delayed, Morrissey looked at the pros and cons.

"On the positive side, I will have my first free winter in all of high school,

meaning I will have more time to go skiing, but on the negative side, it's going to be much harder to stay in shape and be ready for winter track," Morrissey said.

This is something most athletes will have to face with the delay.

Senior basketball player, Victoria Booth, also looked on the positive side of delaying sports.

ball delay is not as long as other sports, the team still had to stop having captains practices because of the delay. Booth said she is still staying in shape by running on her own and practicing in her driveway.

When questioned about Murphy's decision, both Van der Heide and Hughes had something to say.

Van der Heide stated

October, and things have been working out pretty well. However, I know that taking away indoor sports was the safest decision for the Governor to make."

"Honestly, I think that pushing back some sports was smart of Phil Murphy, but there also could have been ways around this," argued Hughes.

"He could have come up with a plan to have students get tested, or found a way for these sports to happen. For Winter Track, we could have held outdoor meets, and figured something out. I also think that he was inconsiderate, not thinking about some of the kids that might be overlapping sports," Hughes continued.

Murphy also said he will not be allowing competitions against teams from other states, which presents a problem for winter track athletes, all of whom usually have meets at The Ar-

mory in New York City.

The delayed seasons have also been shortened dramatically. "This gives athletes less time to train and less opportunity to [achieve personal records]," Morrissey said.

Hughes said this gives teams less room for errors and mistakes since teams don't have time to correct mistakes as they used to.

New Jersey, currently in the midst of the pandemic's third wave, has been forced to make decisions that, despite witnessing mixed responses, have ultimately been put into place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

News of incoming vaccines has brought some degree of hope, but projections that the general public might not be inoculated until the spring have left many athletes desperate to maintain any semblance of a season. ■

"I am so sad that we have to wait longer, but it is more time to practice and get in shape!"

Senior Victoria Booth

"I am sad that we have to wait longer, but it is more time to practice and get in shape," Booth said.

Although the basket-

that "pushing back sports was definitely a controversial decision by Governor Murphy. I have been playing club volleyball since

2020 HOCKEY REMAINS ON THIN ICE

Team petitions for a season, after NJ regulations canceled Hockey

Emma Hekemian '22

With the most recent restrictions and concerns regarding the latest wave of COVID-19 cases, Highlands Hockey unfortunately has been cancelled, and the future of the 2020-21 season is surrounded in uncertainty.

Despite the disappointment of players across the state, awareness about the severity of the pandemic brings about an understanding among players.

"Even though I don't like the decision made by Murphy, I understand that COVID has forced many people to make sacrifice," junior Alden McGivney explained.

As COVID-19 numbers remain on the rise, athletes, parents, coaches, and administrations debate two very significant and different sides of an argument.

Since it was announced that the hockey season would be cancelled, several petitions, with the aim to salvage the season, have been circulating.

"I encourage everyone to do so even if you don't play the sport," Senior Joey Dalasio explained

Junior Owen Roy also shared his feelings about the situation: "My teammates and I have been working too hard this off season for the season to go

to waste."

Will the petition help? That seems to be the question at hand. The persistence and dedication on the part of the players truly

"My teammates and I have been working too hard this off season for the season to go to waste."

Junior Owen Roy

shows how passionate they are about their sport. They haven't given up.

"The petitions may not make the governor change his mind, but it makes me feel better about the situation knowing that I did something to help," Roy explained.

Like most years, freshmen hockey players hoped to make their debut. However, our 2020 freshmen are missing out on yet another high school experience adding to an already uneventful first-year. Returning players offer advice on how to stay motivated for the next season, whenever that may be.

Roy had a message for freshmen: "Train as hard as you can this off season."

Being a team is more

than just a trophy in the trophy case. Teams become their own sort of family. Potentially missing out on a season means missing these bonds that we bring with us

for the rest of our lives.

"I think the thing I will miss most in the event

that we don't get to have a season this year is the Seniors...I can only imagine how hard it would be for them to not get the chance to have their senior year season," McGivney explained.

Arguably the most heartbreaking effect that COVID-19 will have on hockey is robbing seniors of their final year together.

"Thank you for making high school hockey one of the best times of my life. I truly will not forget the people I've met and the experiences I've gone through," Dalasio said to the teammates he's grown with over the last three seasons.

"Hockey is a different kind of sport in a way that you don't just make friends, you make brothers that have your back at all times," he continued.

With no clear path ahead, staying engaged in training can seem like an uphill battle. Thankfully, we can learn from observing fellow Highlands athletes.

"For me personally, I've never been more motivated to train for sports in my life. I have seen these seniors be stripped of their final seasons, and now I know to never take a season for granted. You never know what will happen and when the last time you play

a game will be, so play every one like it's your last," Roy explained.

As of now, the cancellation of the hockey season remains the same. However, some have confidence that the petition shows promise. Other winter sports have been pushed to later dates with the hope that as numbers go back down seasons will be possible, so why shouldn't hockey? If you would like to support the petition in favor of a 2020-21 season and give hope to our Highlands Hockey Team please copy the link below.

<http://chng.it/ggGJdQjwyp> ■



NOW OPEN

Visit us at
37 W ALLENDALE AVE
LOCATED IN ACME SHOPPING CENTER



COMMITMENT CORNER

Senior Aidan Joyce commits to Sarah Lawrence College



Photo Courtesy of Aidan Joyce.

Joyce going up against an opponent in the 2019-2020 season.

Vivien Jones '21

Over the summer, senior basketball player Aidan Joyce made his commitment to play his longtime sport at Sarah Lawrence College. He made his mark on the Highland's indoor court during his freshman year, and as he continued his academic and athletic career, he grew as an athlete. Now, he is excited to start a new chapter of his life in close proximity in Bronxville, New York.

Joyce began playing basketball in the third grade, when he signed up for the recreational league; the sport of basketball being a childhood hobby. "Except for football, I tried out basically every

sport I could, from baseball to snowboard," explains Joyce, however, he quickly found that basketball was his true calling, labeling this sport as his "main focus" from a young age.

In middle school, he used off season sports such as cross country and track and field to train himself when he wasn't on the court. Early on, basketball created tunnel vision for Joyce, as every move he made was for the sport since he says, "I always wanted to be as good as I could be."

Joyce has always had a drive and love for his sport, as his motivation to compete in collegiate sports started at the end of his middle school years. He knew he was good, but he never thought he could

achieve his dream until he started receiving some buzz from colleges and receiving invites to elite camps.

At Columbia University's camp, D1 and D3 coaches observed Joyce in a showcase, which as he mentioned, really kicked his "college basketball opportunities into high gear." He also stated that a wide range of D3 coaches were attracted to his performance before he even started high school.

This clear interest in Joyce from college coaches made it obvious to him that basketball would be the deciding factor of where he would attend college.

When asked about his history in choosing the perfect school that would

fulfill his basketball career, Joyce said that Sarah Lawrence has been a household name since freshman year. During ninth grade, Joyce took a trip to Texas where he met Harvey Rubin, the college advisor of Academic Basketball Club.

This encounter led to an invite to play with a 17U team at Sarah Lawrence. This team would then come to play against the Sarah Lawrence Gryphons, as Joyce was particularly excited to scrimmage against college athletes.

"I've been practicing at Sarah Lawrence and playing against their players ever since I started high school," Joyce explained, "so when Coach Chris Ehmer offered me a roster spot, it was a no brainer."

Academics, as he described, are unique at Sarah Lawrence. He stated that he adored the small class sizes and the close student-teacher relationships

whereas equally over the moon about his decision as he was. His parents can easily be described as a motivating factor in his entire college search process.

"From bringing me to all different camps and trainers, they've wanted me to be the best I can be since the very beginning," Joyce proclaims. He also feels secure knowing that his parents are confident in the fact that he will be able to flourish as a student-athlete in college.

Joyce adds that he is happy to be close to home so they can fill the stand with their supporting presence. "I get to have my two biggest fans in the stands for four more years," Joyce says.

As most students know, COVID-19 has been an ongoing burden to the 2020-2021 school year. For student athletes, including Joyce, the ongoing pandemic has been extremely

essentially the only thing that was wildly different.

As for the next four years, Joyce is enthused to be part of a great team with a big following. At Sarah Lawrence, the fan base for men's basketball is overwhelming, with the crowds consistently including with the college president.

"I love playing in front of big crowds; I feel it brings out an extra gear in me so that I can entertain," says Joyce. According to Joyce, this experience is a vast comparison to the culture at Northern Highlands, where men's basketball seldom sees roaring crowds. "Boys basketball doesn't really get that much attention at Northern Highlands, but those [Ramapo games and Pastamania] always filled up the student section," Joyce states.

Joyce talks about the defining moment of receiving his acceptance into the school of his dreams: "I got my offer when I toured the campus with the head coach on my birthday this year. I accepted it the next night, which was a Friday."

Joyce states that it was the perfect weekend to celebrate and he indulged in the company of his family via FaceTime. Joyce will continue to push himself to be a strong player and contributor at Sarah Lawrence and the Highlands community wishes him luck in doing so. ■

"When Coach Chris Ehmer offered me a roster spot, it was a no brainer."

*Senior
Aidan Joyce*

that a Gryphon will experience during their time on campus.

Just as Joyce fell in love with his perfect match of a school, his parents

detrimental to the "recruiting landscape."

As described in the interview process, Joyce had to have his recruiting visits outdoors, but that was

Senior Danny Coleman becomes a Miscordia Cougar

Nicole Dreznin '23

On September 17th, 2020, senior lacrosse star Danny Coleman committed to Misericordia University to continue his lacrosse career for the next four years.

Coleman began playing lacrosse at the age of five and ever since then it's been his world. Lacrosse surrounded him at home, both his brother and sister played for highlands, and his brother is currently furthering his own career at Army West Point.

Coleman's love for the game is drawn from the combined aspects of other sports that lacrosse brings to the table. Saying that, "You have the physicality of football, the quick movements of basketball, the stamina of soccer, and the athleticism of hockey."

In his mind there was

always the idea that one day he would be a college athlete, but it wasn't until his sophomore year that the idea became serious to him.

When Coleman woke up on September 13th, it was just like every other day, besides the fact that

didn't seem real, and still doesn't today. Explaining that, "It's crazy to think that my high school career is almost over and the next stage is already lined up."

A few days later on September 17th all of the hard work that he had put

"Not knowing whether or not your last game could be yesterday or tomorrow has mademme push harder to make every moment on the field count."

*Senior
Danny Coleman*

his life would soon change with the ring of the phone. On the other end of that phone call was his offer to play at Misericordia.

He was full of excitement, but admits that it

in over the years paid off, and he accepted the offer from Miscordia, solidifying his commitment.

Playing lacrosse through a pandemic changed recruitment and

the game itself tremendously. Coleman lost his whole junior season, a key year in the recruitment process and admits it was hard

COVID defeat him, he used it to push himself harder for his dream. "Not knowing whether or not your last game could be yesterday

every moment on the field count," says Coleman.

Lacrosse isn't just a sport to him, but a tool in life that continues to teach him new things every single day. Stating that, "It's taught me that no matter what happens, your team will always be there for you and that there is no greater feeling than being a part of a true team; win or lose."

Coleman is ready to unlock new lessons and experiences at Misericordia, and thanks his family, friends, and teammates for helping him along the way, saying, "I'm looking forward to continuing playing the sport that I love and to meet new people along the way!" ■



Photo Courtesy of Danny Coleman.

Coleman clearing a ball out of the defensive end in the 2020 season.

for him.

But instead of letting

or tomorrow has made me push harder to make ev-

THIS LION CUB IS READY TO ROAR

Ruby Van der Heide commits to Columbia University

Carly Simmel '23

On October 23rd, Ruby Van der Heide, a junior volleyball player committed to Columbia University in New York City, NY to continue her athletic and academic career.

Van der Heide is a seasoned volleyball player, starting her career in 6th grade. She has become one of the best players in the state, last year being nominated for the top 80 girls volleyball underclassmen in the state.

Aside from her career at Northern Highlands, Van der Heide plays for the Digs Club Volleyball team, where she goes to tournaments during the fall and summer. Being on a club team is a very important aspect of the volleyball recruiting process.

"I went into the recruiting process knowing that I wanted to play for a high academic school, more specifically looking at the Ivy league," Van der Heide stated. After visiting Columbia's campus in the fall of her sophomore

year, she immediately loved it, and knew it was the place for her.

Van der Heide's position is a setter, which can be thought of as the person who essentially runs the offense. Her job is to receive the second touch, and set it for an attacking player.

"She is a great all around volleyball player and a very skilled setter," said Coach Caryn Schanstone, the head coach for the Northern Highlands volleyball team.

"This summer I was able to talk to a lot of schools, and Columbia always stood out to me most. After spending time speaking to the coaches and getting to know some of the team, I knew that Columbia was the place for me."

Van der Heide is a very driven volleyball player, and the work that she has put in has paid off. It's no surprise that with 423 assists in her sophomore season, she has perfected her position.

She made a huge impact on the court last season for the Northern Highlands

"After spending time speaking to the coaches and getting to know the team, I knew that Columbia was the place for me."

*Junior
Ruby Van der Heide*



Van der Heide setting up a ball during a match last season.

team, playing a large role in their astounding record of 23 wins, and four losses.

Volleyball was not the only sport that Van der Heide played and excelled in. She played competitive lacrosse for many years, until 8th grade. However, volleyball was the sport that she was truly passionate about.

Along with being an outstanding player on the court, she is also a special teammate to those around her. "I know her teammates appreciate her on and off the court," Schanstone states. She continues, "and I certainly appreciate how coachable Ruby is."

Van der Heide's impact on and off of the court shows, and this led her to become as successful of a player as she is. Van der Heide trains year round, and continued to work in the midst of the pandemic.

Although the high-school volleyball season has now been pushed back to March, Van der Heide is optimistic for their March season. She knows that many players including

herself have not stopped playing, and have been continually practicing on their club teams.

Van der Heide explained that they have a very skilled team returning in March, and she has very high hopes for a successful season.

Columbia is a very selective, elite college and it is amazing to see that all of Van der Heide's dedication has led her to this success. This is obviously an incredible accomplishment, but her coaches, teammates, and friends expected nothing less of her.

Although Van der Heide still has two years left wearing the Northern Highlands uniform, she will certainly be missed on the court when she heads off to Columbia. However, she will definitely be a player to remember, as she inspires so many teammates and younger athletes.

We wish Van der Heide all the best in her future years as a lion! ■

Santoro becomes a Captain

Leah Rimland '23

As of November 13th, senior John Santoro committed to play lacrosse at Christopher Newport University for the next four years. He started playing lacrosse in third grade after choosing to play lacrosse over baseball in the spring.

A lot of his friends were playing lacrosse and he decided to try it out. He claims, "that was the best choice I've ever made."

He continues practicing and working hard

in lacrosse. Now Santoro plays midfield for Northern Highlands and has been an amazing contribution to the team. During his Northern Highlands lacrosse career so far, he has scored seven goals and three assists.

Santoro has made a lot of amazing memories from lacrosse at Northern Highlands. One of Santoro's favorites was during his sophomore year at Highlands. They were competing in the county semi-finals against St. Joes High School and nearing the end

of the first half he scored a huge goal.

Northern Highlands ended up winning by only one point (7-6). His goal set the tone for the rest of the game and the stadium was packed.

All of Santoro's hard work is paying off and when he found out he was committed he said he felt like, "It was super stress relieving being done with the recruiting process."

Christopher Newport University is ranked in the top 25 for men's lacrosse and Santoro describes it as, "a good sized school with a beautiful campus."

Santoro is going to continue to pursue his passion for lacrosse for many years to come. He stated, "My favorite thing about lacrosse is the creativity you can put into your own game. There is no set one move or play you can perform. Anything can happen out there and I love it."

Santoro loves lacrosse and will continue to practice and train to reach his goals at Christopher Newport University. All his hard work and dedication is paying off and he deserves it. We all wish Santoro the best of luck! ■

Buono to Canisius College

Shannon Flatt '21

On November 11, senior athlete TJ Buono signed to play division I lacrosse at Canisius College next year. "I'm excited to be playing Division I and playing with a new group of guys" states Buono.

Buono has been playing lacrosse since first grade. He explains how, "lacrosse has helped me get a good work ethic. It has [also] shown me that hard work does pay off."

With many colleges to choose from, Buono narrowed down his decision to Canisius. "I chose Canisius because I wanted to get a chance to compete for a conference championship every year and maybe get a bid to the NCAA tournament," Buono begins. "I also chose Canisius because I really liked the area and the coaches."

Canisius College is located in Buffalo, New York. The Men's Lacrosse team has accumulated many titles, awards, and championships throughout its history, including multiple MAAC championship titles. Buono's hard work, skill, and determination will make him a great fit here.

Buono states how, "I was excited to be done



Buono running with the ball in the 2020 season.

with the whole process because now I can focus on winning a state championship with our Northern Highlands lacrosse team."

This year's boys lacrosse team has a lot to live up to, for the program has won multiple county and state championships throughout its history. Many of Buono's teammates respect and look up to him as a player.

Senior athlete and teammate to Buono, Leo Plasker states, "TJ is one of the most hard working people on and off the field. His speed and his IQ helps the team out tremendously. I'm not surprised he committed to a D1 school. He has that winner mentality that not a lot of people possess and I think he's truly going to do big things this season."

"TJ is a great leader," begins senior athlete and teammate Danny Coleman.

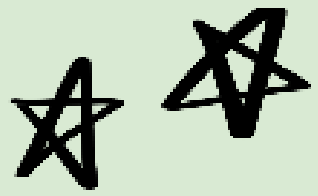
"He is always putting the team above himself and he never hesitates to help someone out. He's a great person both on and off the field."

With COVID being a big factor affecting both winter and spring sports, there is no solid and clear future ahead. It's hopeful that spring sport athletes will be able to continue with their seasons, especially the senior athletes who have worked extremely hard their four years as a highlands athlete.

Buono and his team have time before the season begins, but just because the season doesn't have a guarantee of happening, Buono has been working extremely hard in the off season to better himself as a player. We wish him and the rest of the highlands boys lacrosse team luck with their season in the spring. ■

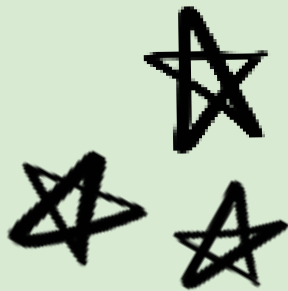


Santoro attacks down the field during a game in the 2020 season.



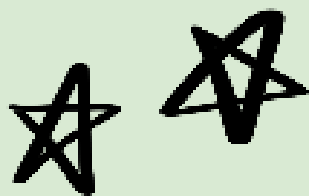
***A cute mug from
Etsy or Urban
Outfitters***

***Bonus points if you
put their favorite
candy inside!***

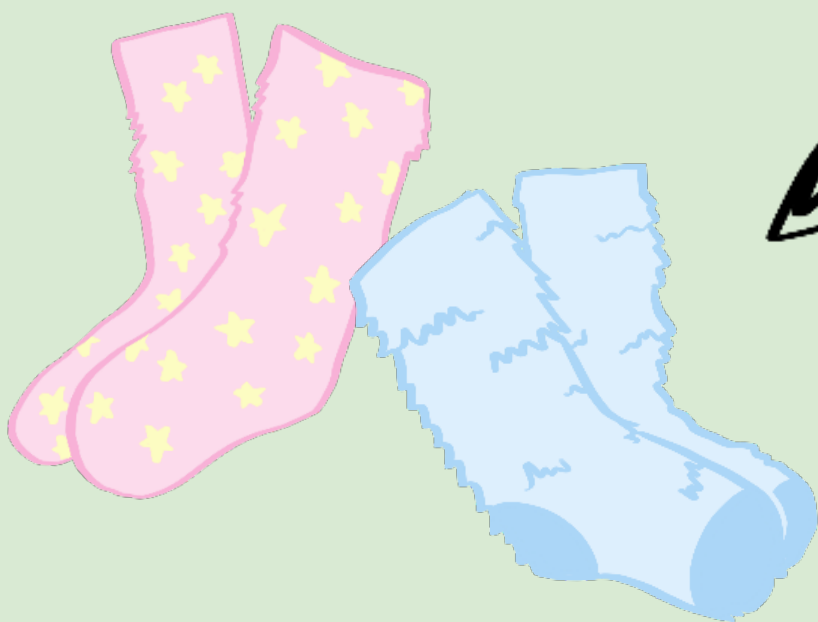


Easy Gifts for the Holidays

Nina Evans '21



***Vinyl version
of their
favorite album
from 2020***



***Some comfy fuzzy
socks for them to
loungue in***

