

Members of Class of 2024 must take steps to avoid senior slide

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Kam Fox honored at U.S. Bank Stadium for football performance

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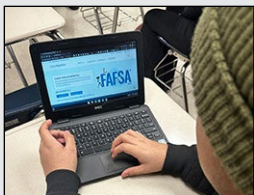


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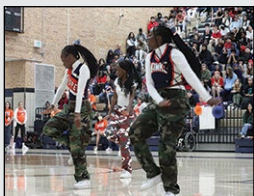


Tower game hits thrilling heights

Thanks to its challenging gameplay and a compelling backstory, *Arknights* demands the close attention of its users

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Step Team enjoys chances to dance

Members of the 2023-2024 squad cite a strong sense of community as a main reason why the team continues to excel in its performances

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SEMESTER ONE ENDS WITH CATCHUP AND RELISH EVENT



Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

Students earning a C or higher in class could visit the Community Gym, Media Center or auditorium for various activities.

By AMARILYS BALMACEA
Quill staff writer

Catch Up and Relish was an opportunity for students to get caught up in class work on January 11-12, one week before first semester came to an end. On January 11, class subjects that took part in Catch Up and Relish were

English, Physical Education, Health, Business, Family and Consumer Science, Science, Music, Performance and EL. On January 12, the classes participating were Social Studies, Global Language, Special Education, Math, AVID and ABC Lab.

According to Assistant Principal Mr. Nelson, who

helped develop the Catch Up and Relish process, using those two days for students to get caught up with their work is an important step toward making sure students earn their class credits for first semester.

“Before we did it this way, the administration and support team would pull students out of class

and try to have students complete their late assignments. It became less about learning the material and more about meeting point requirements for a passing grade. We adapted the way we approached the intervention and decided to have students that were struggling with a class stay with the teachers while

Students behind in their work were able to get extra help from their classroom teachers

they relearn, review and retake their assessments. It gives students a chance to get more access to their teachers and ask questions that they may not have had before,” he said.

While the “catch up” aspect of Catch Up and Relish was targeted at students with missing work and low grades in their classes, the “relish” element was directed at students earning at least a C- in class who were not missing any assignments. These students had the opportunity to participate in leisure activities available in three areas of the school: the Media Center, the auditorium and the Community Gym. Students could also choose to stay in their classroom if they preferred.

For those students who wanted to study or relax, the Media Center was the place in which they could spend their time. In the Media Center, students could work in the quiet study area or in the group area. On the other hand, for students who wanted to release some of their energy or have some entertainment, the gym and the auditorium were the best

CATCH UP continues on page 3

New school policies, hires designed to address truancy

Mr. Lapakko, Ms. Jackson are recent additions to the staff whose job it is to help make sure students are attending all their classes

By NOAH PLAHN
Quill staff writer

Cooper added a new school truancy liaison, Mr. Lapakko, and a new hallway security staff member, Ms. Jackson, as school resumed after the winter break in January 2024. The school is currently in the process of trying to add three more hallway security staff members during second semester.

These new hires came after Cooper’s administrative staff and the school district introduced new rules and regulations regarding student truancy, which refers to students who do not come to school and students who come to school but spend class time in the hallways.

Cooper families were informed of the changes to the school’s truancy policy through a letter from Head Principal Ms. Smith on December 13, 2023. According to the letter, the new rules are targeting students who are habitually truant. For high schools, that is any student “under the age of 17 who is absent from school without lawful excuse for one or more class periods on seven school days if the student is in middle school or high school.” Also considered truant is “a student who is 17 years of age who is absent from school without lawful excuse for one or more class periods on seven school days and who has not lawfully withdrawn from school.”

According to the policy, when a student is identified as truant, the school will follow a series of escalating procedures: parent notification, attendance intervention plan, activity restriction, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, parent meeting with readmission plan, collaborative conversation with district administration, possible alternative placement and termination of enrollment for out-of-district students.

“When students are not in class, it creates a safety concern since we cannot account for all our students at any given time,” Smith said in the parent letter. “By missing class, students are also at risk of falling behind on crucial lessons, assignments and assessments. This can make it challenging to catch up and ultimately reduces their ability to achieve their academic potential.”

Helping support these truancy policy changes are Lapakko and Jackson. Jackson worked in the Bloomington School District before arriving at Cooper this se-

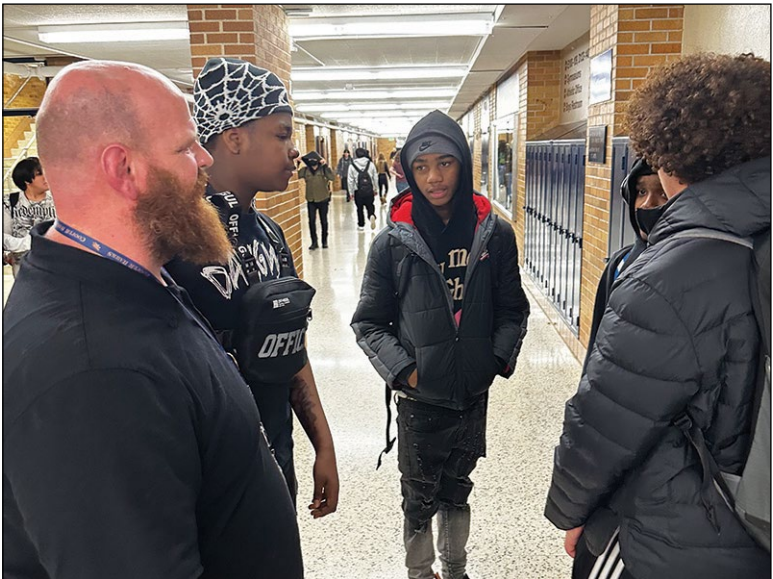


Photo by NOAH PLAHN

Mr. Lapakko started his new position as Cooper’s truancy liaison in January.

Meanwhile, Lapakko had an extensive history in similar positions inside and outside of school systems.

“I’ve been working in youth mental health since 2008. I have had a long career of working with youth in mental health crises for over a decade. Most recently, I was the emotional and behavioral paraprofessional for the Level Three program in White Bear Lake at Central Middle School. Some of the many job titles I’ve held include behavioral therapist [and] mental health practitioner,” he said.

As he looks at ways to make his new role effective at Cooper, Lapakko already has many aspirations.

STUDENT TRUANCY continues on page 8

Robbinsdale district considering ways to tackle budget deficit

District officials have proposed cutting \$17 million from the budget to offset shortages during this, next school years

By HEATHER HOLZERSMITH
Quill staff writer

The Robbinsdale School District will have a budget deficit heading into the next two school years. If the district does not make any changes to current spending, Robbinsdale Schools will be confronted with an estimated \$2.2 million shortfall in the current year’s budget and a \$10.5 million shortage for the next school year. This has prompted Interim District Superintendent Ms. Voight to announce on January 24 proposed cuts to the district budget of \$17 million.

“The district’s overall budget is where the building’s budgets are allocated from. State aid is driven by student enrollment. Therefore, as our enrollment increases or decreases funding

can be impacted at the building level,” Voight said.

The annual district budget is what supplies schools with its resources to help its students. What this means for Cooper will depend on the decisions the district makes about budget cuts.

“For Cooper, we don’t directly know the details of the budget. Robbinsdale has been hosting meetings, but still there is a great deal of uncertainty,” Head Principal Ms. Smith said.

The district’s annual budget is what provides Cooper and other district schools with new Chromebooks, the ability to hire new staff and the means to purchase many other assets that require money. With the current student enrollment rates dropping, Robbinsdale Schools is finding it extremely challenging to get an adequate amount of funding.

The Robbinsdale District has been drafting

some proposed ways to curb current district spending, such as eliminating out-of-state travel that is not paid for by grants, evaluating whether to fill open positions based on necessity, and potentially reducing purchases of supplies, software, repairs and computer hardware.

“It is still too early in the year to determine if there will be any large changes and a lot of people are still piecing together the details of next year’s plans. Meetings will continue to be held,” Smith said.

The Robbinsdale School District has been hosting in-person and virtual meetings to discuss and share feedback regarding the 2024-25 district budget.

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BUDGET DEFICIT
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Prior to the meetings, the school issued an online budget survey in December 2023 and received more than 1,500 submissions. District leaders also conducted a series of in-person meetings with staff from different parts of the district. The information gathered in these meetings is intended to serve as a guide for the budget planning process. Through the various meetings that were held, opinions from staff, students, families and community members were able to be shared.

The district hopes that feedback from the community will help the district build well-functioning schools. While the feedback is taken into consideration, that does not directly tackle the underlying problem of the Robbinsdale District having a \$2.2 million shortfall this year and another \$10.5 million deficit next year.

According to district officials, there are two main factors leading to the budget shortfall. First, federal financial aid will decline. Additionally, Robbinsdale Schools received about \$41.1 million in one-time grants from the American Rescue Plan Act economic stimulus bill during the pandemic that will no longer be available.

These one-time federal grants were to be used as School Emergency Relief funds, and Robbinsdale Schools has already spent most of its emergency funding on technology and teaching positions. The district plans to spend the last \$6.4 million of its emergency funding before the end of 2024. That money will be funding around 70 district positions.

Another huge component of the budget shortfall is the decline in student enrollment. The district currently expects to see student enrollment rates drop by about 147

One component of the budget shortfall is the decline in student enrollment. The district currently expects to see student enrollment rates drop by about 147 students in 2025.

students in 2025. This will result in the total number of students to be approximately 10,174 students enrolled.

“We’re not a district of 12,000 students anymore,” Voight said.

While the budget issue and the declining enrollment rates are both concerns for Robbinsdale Schools, there is still hope that the right steps can be taken to avoid the negative impact of a budget shortfall.

Along with the budget issues, the Robbinsdale District is in the midst of dealing with two issues related to staffing. First, the district is still in the process of negotiating new contracts with eight bargaining groups, including the teachers’ union. Second, the district is actively looking for a new superintendent to replace Mr. Engstrom, who left that position at the start of this school year.

In fall of 2023, the Robbinsdale school board partnered with the Minnesota School Boards Association to search for a new superintendent. On January 17, 2024, Robbinsdale Schools sent out an email to collect responses from community members on who should be selected as the new superintendent. The hope is that, with enough people filling out the questionnaire, Robbinsdale Schools can hire a suitable person to become superintendent and help lead the district through its budget and enrollment rough patches.

“We hope to see someone who is open with the community and will support our school through difficult times,” Smith said.

Even with Robbinsdale schools hitting a rough patch, Smith is confident that the district will hire a suitable new superintendent that can carry Robbinsdale through these hard times of a budget shortfall and dropping enrollment rates.

Twelfth graders struggle to avoid senior slide

From staying organized to avoiding drama, there are many ways the Class of 2024 can keep focused at the end of the school year

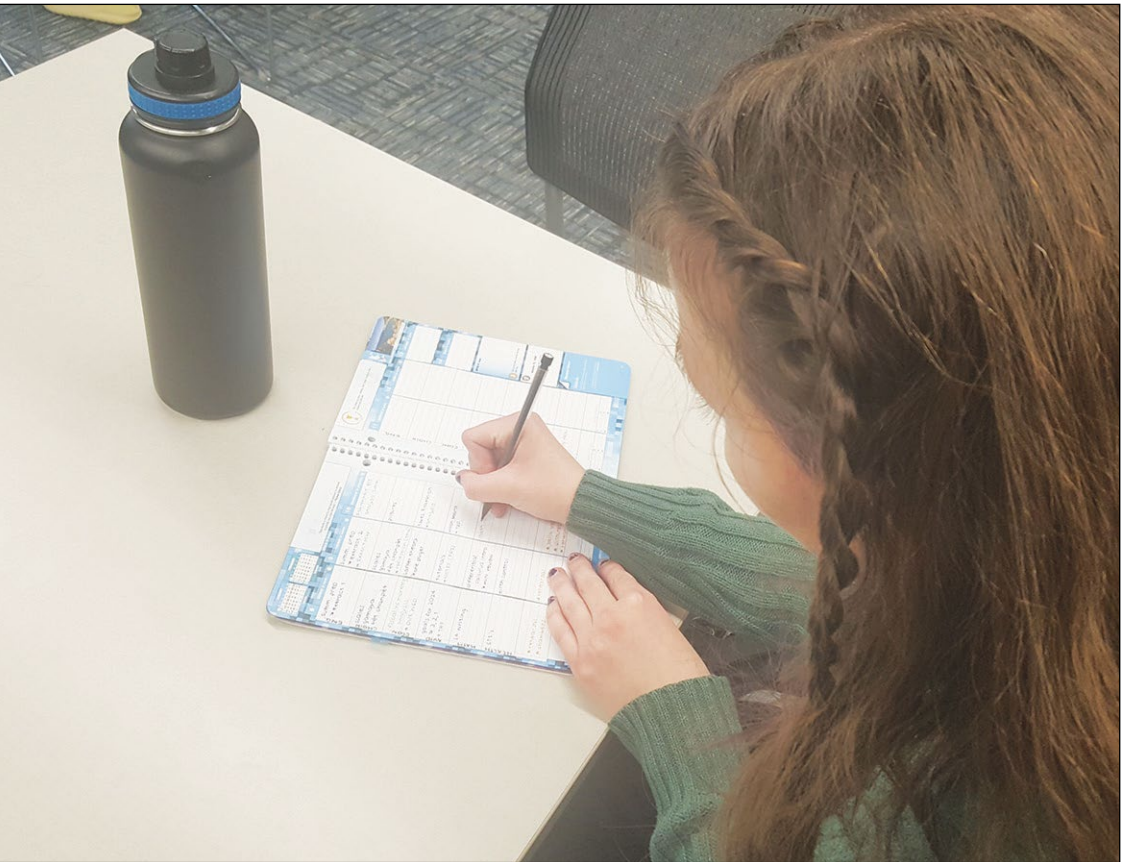


Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

Using a planner, which many teachers require, is one way seniors can stay on top of their work and due dates.

By HEATHER HOLZERSMITH
Quill staff writer

You may have heard the phrase “senior slide” before. Senior slide is essentially sliding through senior year by not taking academic responsibilities seriously. The senior slide is what students should try to avoid because it is the act of doing the bare minimum to get by. A lot of students are facing a lack of motivation to continue with school, so they engage in senior sliding. As easy as senior sliding sounds, it can be very harmful to one’s ability to graduate.

As a student, keeping yourself motivated is the main component to avoid sliding through your senior year. Being unable to find motivation is the hardest thing for seniors to deal with right now, so here are some tips to help you stay motivated and focused on finishing this final semester strong.

1. Stay organized

Keeping all of your assignments in the right location is the most effective solution to never miss a single assignment. It is recommended to use either labeled or color-coordinated folders to organize your assignments for each class. Some students find it helpful to have folders to organize their assignments for core classes.

“The best way I stay organized is by keeping multiple folders with their own designated class. This is especially helpful with my core classes,” Ryan Guillen Barrera (12) said.

Calendars are another great way to keep tabs on all of your assignments without the issue of clutter. Jacqueline McGrew (12) said that staying organized by using a calendar keeps her from feeling overwhelmed.

“The way I stay organized is by using a calendar for important dates that

I need to remember. I also break down large tasks into smaller ones so I’m not too overwhelmed. I keep a clean study area as well,” she said.

McGrew also stays organized by using the school-issued planner.

“I use the planner the school provided me with. I believe it is very helpful and it also makes me feel put together. It helps me stay organized and motivates me to actually do the things I reminded myself to do,” she said.

Making use of the school planner is a perfect way to keep track of your assignments by putting them in order. Teachers are strong advocates for using the school-issued planner as well.

“Using a planner helps your mental health by dividing tasks to specific days instead of waiting until the last minute. Also you’re more likely to miss a due date if you don’t write it down. Me, personally, I tend to remember important things when I write them down by hand,” art teacher Ms. Mielke said.

Being organized is one thing most students need in order to be prepared for whatever life throws at them next. Organization skills improve mental health by removing the stress of being overwhelmed by assignments when they pile up. Stress is always on the radar for seniors because they are in the midst of figuring out what steps to take next for their future. Keeping your “to-dos” organized is one of the most effective ways to avoid that unwanted stress.

2. Make an effort

During these stressful times, seniors may start to put things off or just do the very least to get their work out of the way. When you do not put effort toward your assignments, your grades will take a hit. It is important to avoid brushing off your assignments, especially tests. Teachers recognize when

students really apply themselves to their work.

“Every student should always be doing the best they can on any assignment they are given, no matter how seemingly insignificant it might be,” social studies teacher Mr. O’Brien said. “I can always tell when someone is putting the least possible effort into their work. It’s quite obvious.”

Given their experience, teachers can pick out which students try and which students do not. According to Ms. Major, an English teacher, good grades are connected to effort.

“It is important to put effort forth in your school work. Oftentimes, a good grade can come down to effort, rather than ‘smarts.’ It is obvious when a student doesn’t put the time and energy into class. This lack of effort tends to show up in summative grades,” she said.

Students also know the importance of putting effort into their assignments.

“I try to put effort into my school-work to show what I have learned in the units. Just push yourself enough to be consistent with your effort,” Rosalina Lee (12) said.

Even if the assignment seems pointless, there is no use in not trying. Listening to instructions and following them to the best of your abilities will be a rewarding feeling. Making an effort to obtain good grades will help you out in the long run.

One part of this process is completing and submitting all of your work. Elena Lor (12) said she tries her best to be on top of turning in her assignments.

“I do my best to stay consistent with turning in my work. I show up to class on time and never skip a day,” she said.

Overall, it is important to not deny

yourself the reward of a good grade by not trying. Seniors should show their teachers that they care about class.

3. Set goals

Setting goals for yourself is an excellent way to ensure you will get the most out of your senior year. Whether the goals are big or small, achieving your goals will continue to boost your motivation for success. Goals can be academic or just everyday things to uplift your mood.

“The kinds of goals I set for myself are having good grades, preparing for college, building good bonds with my friends and improving my management skills,” McGrew said.

Now that we are halfway through the year, making this last semester of school count is a goal that a lot of seniors are gravitating toward. Lor said that one of her goals is taking all of the opportunities that she is given as a senior in order to make this last semester count.

“I try to take every opportunity that’s thrown at me since this is my last year,” she said.

A’ahmariel McKenzie (12) is another senior who agrees that setting goals helps you stay motivated. One of the goals she sets for herself is getting her assignments done on time.

“I try to get my assigned work done by the end of the same week it’s assigned so I can relax on the weekend,” she said.

Each day is a new opportunity to give yourself a set of goals to achieve. Do not miss out on watching yourself succeed by hitting your goals.

4. Avoid drama

You are the one who can make all these things possible, so why not focus on yourself and your health? Making friends and forming relationships is a great way to feel connected to your community, but sometimes people can get caught up in the wrong crowd. We all know this school has its fair share of fights.

“I find it extremely disappointing how people engage in fighting which glorifies violence and drama,” Guillen Barrera said.

McKenzie also recognizes the irresponsibility of the students who engage in fighting.

“I see fighting as a childish thing,” she said. “I avoid drama by choosing to not have a lot of friends. I have only four close friends at Cooper and that’s plenty enough for me.”

School is a place to learn and grow as a person. Fighting and creating drama just hurts yourself and others. Using violence to solve conflicts benefits nobody and lessens your chance at a successful year as students who involve themselves in fighting often receive disciplinary punishments like suspension.

“The fight itself isn’t what ends up resolving the conflict. What most often resolves it is the interventions that

SENIOR SLIDE
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Bird Bash event helps raise funds for area schools

The money collected at past gatherings has helped support various purchases, including musical instruments for high schools

By DRIANA SANMARTIN
Quill staff writer

The 11th Annual Bird Bash event organized by the Seven Dreams Foundation takes place at the Heritage Center in Brooklyn Center on March 2. Festivities begin at 5 p.m.

The Seven Dreams Education Foundation is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(3) group organized by community members, parents and education professionals of Robbinsdale Area Schools. According to the group’s website, more than \$1.4 million in donations has been raised and 247 grants have been funded to support student success in the district since the foundation’s inception in 2003. The “seven” in the group’s name represents the seven communities in the Robbinsdale Area School District: Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, New Hope, Plymouth and Robbinsdale.

Cooper Assistant Principal Mr. Nelson, who has attended past Bird Bash events, said that the main goal of the event is to give



Photo by SEVEN DREAMS FOUNDATION

One highlight of the annual banquet is a formal dinner for guests.

back to Robbinsdale schools and benefit the students in the district. He said the Bird Bash is a gala with a theme and lots of different fundraisers happening, including silent auctions. According to Nelson, some of the funds raised during the Bird Bash go to teachers who need grants for classroom projects and supplies.

“It has been a bit since the last Bird Bash I went to, but the

greatest part was not only being with the company I had, but also the overall goal of the Bash and its results,” Nelson said.

One past Bird Bash beneficiary is band teacher Mr. Hahn. Hahn said he has been leading efforts in recent years to diversify the concert composers Hawks musicians can play in class. Thanks to funds raised through Bird Bash, the Seven Dreams Foundation was able to

allocate money to help district music teachers purchase new music last year. Hahn said he submitted a list of desired songs for the Cooper band, and they have been performing works from it throughout this school year.

“Because this has been a personal goal of mine, I had a substantial list of music that I submitted for purchase. They bought all of it, a total of over \$1,000, for Cooper band,” Hahn said.

Beyond the help given last year to district music programs, science teachers recently received the necessary funds to purchase tools and materials required for pig labs and other experiments.

Overall, the main objective of the Bird Bash event is to give back to the district by using the collected funds to support area schools, teachers and students. According to the group’s website, the Bird Bash event has been successful in achieving many goals, and the funds raised go right to classrooms. Funding of this sort contributes to the success of the classroom experience and the students’ development in the district.

Updated FAFSA open to applicants

Several aspects of the application have been streamlined or eliminated to make getting money for college an easier process

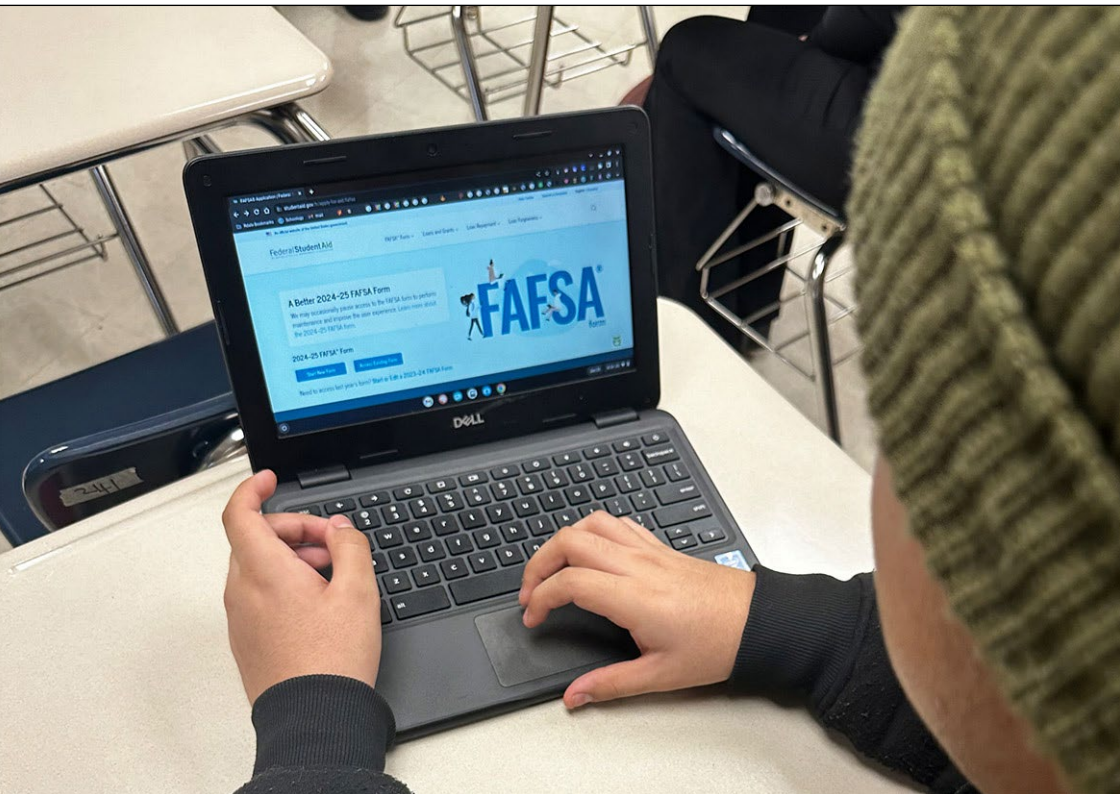


Photo by NOAH PLAHN

Students can register for the FAFSA using a secure government website that went live in January 2024.

By **DRIANA SANMARTIN**
Quill staff writer

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) was finally opened up in January with some important changes that require the attention of seniors as they prepare to complete the application.

One of the changes is that parents or guardians must now obtain their own FSA IDs in order to complete the application process. Additionally, the 2024 FAFSA has a shorter questionnaire with fewer questions than before, which

should shorten the application process for seniors.

When tackling the FAFSA, it is crucial to not just delve into the process. Instead, applicants must pay close attention to the essential components involved. According to Ms. Yang from the Get Ready program, ensuring a successful and accurate completion of the FAFSA form hinges on having a clear understanding of the necessary elements. She encourages students to be proactive in gathering and familiarizing themselves with the required information, as it plays a crucial role in

enhancing the likelihood of a smooth and successful submission.

“Students should be looking out for terminology and ensuring that they know what FAFSA is asking for. For instance, when FAFSA asks if a student, parent [or] guardian has a visa, FAFSA is trying to verify immigration status and not a VISA card. Answering incorrectly can prevent one’s FAFSA from being processed,” Yang said.

According to Mr. Rosenblum from Cooper’s College and Career Center, students will notice a significant streamlining in the FAFSA reporting

process compared to the previous version. Now that students have their own FAFSA IDs, they will have the convenience of sending the link for the parent part of the application directly to their parent’s email address.

“The process seems to be streamlined from the previous FAFSA reporting. Students having their ID, and being able to send the link for the parent part directly to their parent’s email address, is another refinement. All around, it is a better experience for those who use the form,” Rosenblum said.

While filling out the FAFSA, it is important for students to remember that there are many people in the building to help if they are having difficulty or need some assistance in filling it out. In addition to Yang and Rosenblum, 12th grade counselor Ms. Walters can be of assistance. Additionally, Get Ready will be hosting FAFSA workshops four days a week during fifth period for the next couple of months.

“My best advice to students who are filling out the FAFSA: ask for help. FAFSA can be a frustrating process and even more so now that there are changes to it. Lots of teachers and staff in Cooper can help,” Yang said.

Due to FAFSA changes for this year, students should brace themselves for the possibility that the website will experience glitches and that processing the form may take a bit longer. While there is no overarching deadline for FAFSA, individual schools set their own deadlines, so seniors need to be diligent in checking with their schools and understanding their specific timeline.

“Get your FAFSA completed as soon as possible,” Rosenblum said.

CATCH UP

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places to go. In the auditorium, students got to enjoy movies, and in the gym, students could play sports.

According to English teacher Ms. Prillwitz, the ability to catch up on work or have some leisure time were both beneficial to students.

“I think there are two immediate benefits from Catch Up and Relish. It motivates students to be on-track with their learning so they can leave class for a fun activity. It [also] allows me to focus my attention for a day exclusively on the students who need the most help,” she said.

Agreeing with Prillwitz about the value of the two days was social studies teacher Mr. DiSalvi, who cited the ability to give students focused support as a highlight of the Catch Up and Relish system.

“I think students benefit from knowing what exactly they need to do to earn their credit,” DiSalvi said. “I think students benefit by being able to ask questions easily in class. Also, there is an opportunity for students to easily make-up or retake tests, even if they are not necessarily in danger of failing my class.”

Although the Catch Up and Relish days have their benefits, Nelson said the process of planning and supervising them can be challenging.

“The first time we had Catch Up and Relish, it was over four days. Over the years, we have reduced the number of days to two days. The other issues are making sure we are able to supervise the areas, while still making sure the school can function normally. Using the gym space and auditorium can create issues, however, the P.E. and music departments have always been very accommodating during those days that we are doing Catch Up and Relish,” Nelson said.

The Catch Up and Relish days also require planning by the classroom teachers, who must alter their schedules to accommodate the lost instruction days.

“It helps me to have a specific plan for Catch Up and Relish days so I can focus on helping as many students as possible. The students who are earning a C- or higher leave so that all of my attention can be given to those who most need to improve their grades. I often make a tutorial or step-by-step instructions for the students who need to catch up. I can then post those directions on Schoology, which frees me up to work individually with students who need more help,” Prillwitz said.

Also making use of Schoology during Catch Up and Relish days is DiSalvi.

“I usually begin by having students do a really quick activity while I take attendance and write a pass for Catch Up and Relish. Next, I check my gradebook for students who have a C- or better, call out their names, ask where they would like to be, and send the student out as soon as possible. From there, I have students check their gradebooks for assignments that are still missing and provide them their work. During the rest of the hour, I individually check in with each student to see what they are working on and how I can help them,” he said.

Ultimately, it is the hope of teachers and administrators that all students receive some sort of benefit from the two Catch Up and Relish days.

“The Relish aspect allows students the opportunity to do something they choose during school and it is a powerful way to create a great positive connection to learning. The Catch Up aspect is focused on learning or relearning the material and giving students and teachers a chance to build meaningful relationships that may not have been there before. Working with a smaller group of students allows teachers to do more one-on-one instruction with students that are struggling in their class,” Nelson said.

Highview provides alternative path to graduation

High school students who struggle with the structure of a school like Cooper may see success in Highview's environment

By **BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO**
Quill staff writer

Highview is the alternative high school for the Robbinsdale School District. Many students who have fallen behind on their credits at Cooper and Armstrong elect to transfer to Highview in order to make up missing credits and graduate from high school on time.

Highview is designed to benefit students who operate better with smaller class sizes and increased flexibility. Students at the school have a four-block schedule that repeats over five cycles, which allows students to earn their credits at a faster rate than they would in a typical high school.

According to Highview teachers and students, there are many ways in which the school is structured to support student success. One teacher is Ms. Parrish, who teaches English 9, English 10 and Digital Communication.

“This is my seventh year teaching. I taught at Armstrong for three years, FAIR Crystal for one year, left the district and taught in a different one for two years and now I am back at Highview,” Parrish said.

Parrish said she is excited to teach at an alternative school and that Highview “just felt right” from the moment she started in the job.

On a given day in her classroom, Parrish said students are required to complete a certain number of assignments either together or independently.

“This is basic skills practice,” Parrish said. “Students then have eight weeks’ worth of folders for each cycle in my class, and each week has different

checkpoints that students must complete as well as two projects,” Parrish said.

Parrish said she tries to be accessible to her students in many ways whenever they need help from her.

“I encourage students to send me emails if they are working outside of school if they need assistance. I am also willing to adapt certain assignments if it best fits the needs of the students. I also have my assignments translated into Spanish. I’ve also done assignments in Farsi. Language should never be a barrier to furthering education,” Parrish said.

According to Parrish, one of the

number of assignments to complete to earn their English credit.

“There are three projects and students need to complete the summatives to earn credit for the course. Another thing is there are checkpoint assignments for students to prepare them for the summatives. I do a demonstration of the checkpoint activities, but students could also choose to work at their own pace,” Fuller said.

Something Fuller does to help her students get their credits is to try and remind them of the importance of their education. She also helps students stay focused on what they are hoping to

subject-area classes they need to pass in order to earn credits toward graduation.

“I have been a teacher for 17 years and have taught at all K-12 grade levels in schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul. I have also taught adult EL and GED classes in our state’s adult basic education system. I have to say my favorite group is right where I am with high school students,” Chalmers said.

In addition to the age range of the students, Chalmers said she also enjoys the environment of Highview.

“I was excited to teach in a school that prioritized smaller class sizes, individualized student supports and a high degree of collaboration among staff and students,” Chalmers said.

During her time at Highview, Chalmers said she has found many strategies that help her guide students to academic success.

“I am big on goal setting and have students track their own progress, celebrate accomplishments and reflect on the next steps needed on their pathway towards graduation. I also support students with academic English in their core classes and communicate frequently with families regarding progress,” she said.

According to Chalmers, one unique element of working at Highview is the personal backgrounds of the many students with whom she works.

“We all have a story and the stories of Highview students are some of the most compelling I’ve encountered,” she said. “In addition to working toward

“We all have a story and the stories of Highview students are some of the most compelling I’ve encountered,” Ms. Chalmers said.

major differences between a traditional high school and Highview relates to the style and flexibility of the classroom.

“Most of the work is independent without the large group projects and presentations. We try to make our classroom be different and have variety,” she said.

Another Highview teacher in the English department is Ms. Fuller. After teaching in the Robbinsdale School District for more than 20 years, this is Fuller’s first year at Highview.

“I was ready for a change and the smaller community was appealing,” Fuller said.

Students in Fuller’s class have a

achieve in the course and the progress they are making toward graduation.

“There are so many reasons students come to Highview,” she said. “Some need an alternate environment to a big school, while others are facing significant challenges and have many credits to make up. Some want to graduate early or take college courses, while others may be trying to recover from poor choices or setbacks.”

Also teaching at Highview is Ms. Chalmers, who works with the English language learner (EL) program. Her primary purposes are to provide instruction in academic English as well as support multilingual students in the various

HIGHVIEW
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Speech team aims for success in the 2024 season

The squad's new head coach is Mr. Brynteson, a veteran of the team who just graduated from Cooper in 2023

By **AKEYA EASLEY**
Quill staff writer

For the Hawk speech team, talking is not just talking, it is an art. Each word, each pause, each gesture is carefully crafted to convey meaning and connect with an audience of judges. During competitive speech, participants go beyond mere conversation; they immerse themselves in the complexities of communication, where every performance is an artistic accomplishment.

The Cooper speech team has just started its 2024 season. The head coach for the team this year is 2023 Cooper graduate Mr. Brynteson. He said he was inspired to take on the coaching role since he used to be a competitor for

the team as well.

Most of the people on the team joined speech after the debate season ended. A majority of the team members are first-timers this year, with the exception of Lily Plahn (10), the captain of the team, who is in her second year competing.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the members practice right after school in room 241.

“Practice consists of focusing on personal growth and just having fun,” Plahn said.

During practice sessions, the team members sign up on a sheet with time slots during which they can practice their speeches and talk with their coaches. Although practicing might involve

the same speech, the competitions are much different, with students delivering their speeches in front of judges based on different speech categories.

“Depending on what category you are in, it can vary,” Rose Vang-Lohnes (10) said.

From January until March, the team competes every Saturday at various schools until the national qualifier tournament and the section tournament.

“These are the big ones that make all of those practices and going to tournaments matter,” Plahn stated.

These competitive events are what the team members most look forward to. As Kyiaa Cooper (9) said, she is “looking forward to each one, tournament by tournament.”

Ultimately, the speech team is designed to be a place where all members can be themselves.

“I genuinely believe they are the most tight-knit but also accepting people I’ve ever met,” Plahn said.

Another highlight of the team is the attitude of the coaches. The team members said they are able to laugh but also know when it is time to focus.

“I look forward to go to practice because I have really fun people to be around,” Vang-Lohnes said.

Members of the team said that speech not only helps you improve your performance skills, it also helps you

SPEECH TEAM
continues on page 10

College choices can overwhelm some students

Picking a final school requires seniors to consider multiple academic, social variables

By AMARILYS BALMACEDA
Quill staff writer

Seniors are starting to figure out what they are going to do in the next phase of their lives after high school. It can be really scary for some people to not know where they want to go to college or what career they are going to pursue. All members of the Class of 2024 either are someone, or know someone, who is grappling with these tough decisions.

One particularly difficult choice that usually emerges at this point in the year for graduating seniors is choosing between several colleges, especially if you have been accepted by more than one school. This is a very challenging situation and having to make choices like this puts a lot of pressure on seniors.

Fortunately, there are a lot of resources to guide seniors along the way, but when it actually comes down to picking what to do, it is a really big deal because there is often not just one right answer. Some seniors might choose a school for college that might seem like the best fit, but then a month into their first year of school, figure out that they hate it. Other seniors may be convinced that a certain college major will form their life path, only to discover that the reality of that major is not as appealing.

Another college-related decision that can be tough revolves around going away for school or staying in town. For some people, it is hard to leave home, so there is always the option of doing two years at a community college close by before going away to a school. This choice could save you a ton of money. However, you will miss out on two years of the whole college experience that makes going away to school so useful and appealing.

Sometimes, parents are not helpful with picking a college. Many parents will have their own opinions about schools, which could be very different from what the students want. There also are parents who may have no opinions on this topic because they have not had the experience of going to college. While it is important to listen to your parents in either situation, you are the one going to college, so it should be your decision.

There are many things to consider when choosing a college. Some of the key ones include cost, how far away from home it is, whether the school has the major you want to go into, whether there is enough to do in the town in which the school is located and whether you will have friends there or the ability to make new friends. This list of questions is a further example of why the college choice process can be a challenge.

Another struggle with picking a college is trying to find a roommate. Once you decide on the college you want to go to, you have to fill out a housing application, which is the easy part. Next, you have to start the journey of picking out a roommate, which for some can be super hard. You might have to reach out to new people and make friends virtually without actually meeting them. You could also choose to have a random

COLLEGE CHOICES continues on page 10

School breaks bring benefits, challenges

Having multiple days away from school during winter, spring breaks can give students freedom but possibly hinder academic gains



Photo by CHIMUAL VANG

When including the weekends at the start, middle and end of winter break, Hawks were away from school for 17 days from late December to early January.

By CHIMUAL VANG
Quill staff writer

I believe long breaks, whether they be from school or other organizations, can be both a good thing and a bad thing. A break is a period of time that people take off in order to recover and heal. Breaks can also be established holidays or set times away from a place, such as winter break and spring break for students. When it comes to long breaks, it may become difficult for some people to adjust to a long absence from something that is routine in their life, but it can pay many dividends as well.

A long break gives time for people to recover and heal in order to improve productivity. This not only aids the individual person, but also those around them, including those people who receive that person's services. Examples of places that use breaks in this way include work places and schools.

When it comes to schools, long breaks allow employed students to focus more on their part-time jobs. This aids the corporations they work for in addition to helping the student earn more money. A long break from school can also allow students, especially seniors, to focus more on what

ways to fix any issues at their company. These breaks can even help those workers bond or spend more time together with their friends and families.

However, there are some flaws to long breaks. Long breaks can adversely effect consistency. It can disrupt a certain flow of mo-

something in the short term.

A long break can also make people procrastinate or even entirely lose motivation to be productive upon returning. If the long break had no proper reason to be a "break," it most likely will not feel like a break to the person. Instead, it may be more like an intermission.

Overall, it is beneficial to have long breaks because, at the end of the day, it helps you. However, if the break has no proper reason behind it, it will not feel like one. Of course, when that happens, everyone will hopefully be able to find a "purpose" for their break.

I believe that is the goal of long breaks: to find a purpose. Breaks give you the time to think for yourself, to further your own personal goals and to reflect on them. Ultimately, long breaks will most likely provide more gains than losses to everyone who has them.

I believe that is the goal of long breaks: to find a purpose. Breaks give you the time to think for yourself, to further your own personal goals and to reflect on them.

they will do after graduation by applying to colleges or for college scholarships.

Long breaks can improve the overall economy of the community. These breaks can give time for staff members in corporations to brainstorm and come up with

momentum in certain programs or projects. While the goal of long breaks is ultimately to achieve more productivity and better results, this may not be beneficial in some fields if there are no issues to "fix." A long break may waste time that could be used to achieve

Hawks should get more serious about taking MCA tests

Results on the required state exams can have various impacts on individual students and Cooper High School as a whole

The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in April have some students stressed and other test-takers excited. But what are the MCAs? How do these tests affect you as a student? Are these tests even meaningful? Believe it or not, there are many reasons why the MCAs are important.

The MCAs are exams in reading, math and science. These exams are statewide and some colleges look at these scores when assessing if a student has what it takes to be in the Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program, which allows students, typically juniors and seniors, to take college classes for free while still in high school. Additionally, some Minnesota colleges actually look at MCA scores to determine if a student should take remedial courses before starting at that school as a college student or during the

student's first year of college. One issue with these remedial courses is that the student has to pay to take the class but they do not usually count toward that student's overall college credits.

The results of the MCAs can also have an impact at the high school level. Although the MCAs do not alter your grades for any of the classes you take during high school, the MCA scores do affect how the individual school is viewed by the state and whether or not that school might need specific resources. After the MCA results are released, a school is able to see where its resources might need to be placed within the school and what educational areas a school might need to emphasize when it comes to reading, math and science. So, if grades are fall-

ing in a certain subject, they are more likely to put more funding into that subject.

In addition, parents can look at a school's MCA scores when deciding where to send their kids to school. If that family lives in a district that has schools that are not doing well with respect to their MCA scores, those families may choose to move or send their students to a neighboring school district with better test results.

What makes this even more concerning is that schools with lower enrollment receive less money from the state, which can have an additional negative effect on that school.

Now that we know the impact the MCAs have on students and the school we go to, you may be wondering how you can prepare yourself for the MCAs

in April. Given the fact that, for some students, this can be a stressful and overwhelming time, there will be a chance in each student's English, math and science classes to prepare for the exams. Additionally, there will be activities in advisory that are designed to get students ready. Some other ways to do well are to stay on top of your current school work and get good sleep and eat a healthy breakfast leading into the testing days.

Overall, the importance of the MCAs for students, schools and the state of Minnesota is often overlooked. Although some students think they are a "waste of time," it is actually one of the most important parts of the school year. That being said, when it comes around to testing time, make sure to get a good night's sleep and eat a healthy breakfast. Good luck on your MCAs.

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Dream injects fun into sports film formula

The 2023 South Korean movie, which is currently streaming on Netflix, is based on a real story that took place in 2010

By ROSALINA LEE
Quill staff writer

The movie *Dream* was directed by Lee Byeong-Heon and released on April 26, 2023. The reason I chose this film to review is because it is based on a real-life event that took place during the Homeless World Football Cup held in 2010. The film has drama, comedy and sports, which adds a twist to its heart-warming story. Lee Byeong-Heon's *Dream* uses cinematography and costume design to teach audiences they can achieve anything by putting in the work.

Dream focuses on South Korean soccer player Yoon Hong Dae (who is played by Park Seo-joon), who is involved in an incident that leads him to a disciplinary probation. As part of his probation, he is appointed the coach for a special national soccer team that consists of homeless people, some of whom have never played the game before, and some of whom exhibit challenging behavior due to their life circumstances. Hong-dae is skeptical about the team, but eventually warms up to the idea of being a coach. Further complicating matters is that Yoon Hong Dae's experience is being filmed for a documentary being made by videographer Lee So Min (who is played by South Korean singer IU), whose career is also in flux. It is with this set up that we follow the journey of Yoon Hong Dae and his team.

In *Dream*, the use of cinematography is one of the film's highlights. One scene that uses cinematography well involves the camera capturing the movement of the character Yoon Hong Dae. In this scene, the director uses a tilt shift to show the soccer arena, then zooms into the soccer match and follows the soccer ball as it moves down the field. By following the passing of the soccer ball from player to player, the camera guides the viewer to each player who is going to get the ball. Additionally, as



Photo by OKTOBER CINEMA CO. LTD.

Dream revolves around a troubled soccer player who must become a coach to cover his community service sentence.

Yoon Hong Dae is running, a tracking shot is used to follow along with him, a sequence that eventually ends with a head shot into the goal. Through a combination of these camera techniques, the movie creates a sense of excitement in the viewer, which pays off in a moment of triumph when the goal is scored.

Another important element in *Dream* is the use of costume design and makeup. These two filmmaking elements contribute to the creation of realistic characters. A scene that shows the effective use of costume design and makeup can be seen when the viewer is shown the background story of the character Son Beom Soo. We get to see that, before the events of the film, he was a hardworking man who had a job in construction. One day, he was working high above the ground when he lost his step,

which led to him falling, suffering an injury and losing his job. We then transition to the present time, at which point he is homeless. Makeup plays a role in showing us his new reality as the audience sees him lying on the ground at a train station, covered in injuries and bruises. Meanwhile, his outfit at this point consists of dark and damaged clothing, which is a contrast to the past, during which time he wore clean and light-colored clothing. This is one of many instances in which costume and makeup help communicate each character's story and allows the viewer to tell each character apart.

In *Dream*, the overall lesson being taught is that, whatever you want to do in life, you have to put in the work to achieve your goal. You can see this in *Dream* when the Korean homeless team is at the end of its match against the Ger-

man homeless team during the Homeless World Football Cup. Before the match, the Korean team has a meeting during which they discuss their shared goal of winning. You can see how hard they put in the work to achieve this goal leading up to and after this moment, despite not being as talented as the players on the German team. This overall message is a powerful one and the film does a great job of communicating it.

Lee Byeong-Heon's movie *Dream* uses cinematography and costume design to help the audiences know they can achieve anything by putting in the work. I believe viewers of all ages will find this movie to be funny and heartwarming. It is also a technically interesting movie thanks to how each scene was shot and edited. Overall, *Dream* earns a rating of five out of five stars.

Old family film Spiderwick Chronicles still holds up

The movie's fantasy elements add an interesting dimension to the traditional coming-of-age story featured in the plot

By BRYNN TIMLIN
Quill staff writer

The Spiderwick Chronicles is a film directed by Mark Waters that was released in 2008. I decided to revisit this film because I saw it often when I was a kid. Since I have not seen it a couple years, I thought it would be interesting to watch it again as an older teenager. What I found is that the film does an effective job of using special effects and costume design to help communicate some thoughtful messages.

Although the film mostly takes place in present times, it actually starts in 1928, when Arthur Spiderwick writes a field guide about fairies. After finishing the book, he hides it away for fear of Mulgarath (Nick Nolte), a shapeshifting ogre who plans to use the book's secrets for evil. Eighty years later, recently divorced Helen Grace (Mary-Louise Parker) inherits and moves into the abandoned Spiderwick estate with her children, daughter Mallory (Sarah Bolger) and twin sons Jared and Simon (both played by Freddie Highmore). Jared is angry about the move and would rather live with his father, Richard Grace (Andrew McCarthy). After uncovering a hidden dumbwaiter, Jared discovers Arthur's study, where he finds Spiderwick's book. When Jared tells the rest of his family about the discovery of the book and the existence of magical creatures, they do not believe him. However, when Jared meets a



Photo by PARAMOUNT PICTURES

The thoughtful costume design helps keep *Spiderwick* grounded.

fairly named Thimbletack the next morning, it sets into motion a series of events that brings the family into contact with magical creatures and the growing threat of Mulgarath.

Given the film's focus on a fantasy world filled with creatures like fairies and goblins, special effects play a large role in *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. During the scene in which Mallory and Simon see that Jared is telling the truth about the creatures he is seeing, the audience is shown frog-like goblins that are trying to take the book from Jared. The frog-like goblins are created using special effects that make the creatures look and feel more believable. This has an impact on the audience because it helps the film feel more realistic despite its fantasy elements and it helps develop the plot

by allowing Jared's family to experience the magical creatures for the first time. Additionally, it is at this point in the movie that the audience now has a better understanding of who the villain in the film will be.

Another filmmaking element that helps ground the story in reality is the use of costume design. One especially important use of costume design relates to the twins, Jared and Simon. It is through their costumes that the viewer can tell the two characters apart. Moreover, the outfits help emphasize the fact that they do not have the same personality. This can be seen during the sequence when the two are in a pixie garden trying to find Arthur Spiderwick to ask him how to destroy the book. As the scene unfolds, Simon is wearing a plaid outfit, while Jared

wears mostly solid colors. These outfit choices hold true throughout the movie, so the viewer can also keep these characters straight. Meanwhile, the Mallory character is wearing an outfit one would associate with a typical teen girl and Arthur is wearing old clothing that one might associate with a professor or academic person. In these ways, the outfits help communicate information to the audience about the characters.

Through its use of filmmaking techniques and plot, *The Spiderwick Chronicles* conveys the message that we should trust the ones we love, but maybe not too much. Near the end of the film, our central characters think they killed the goblin king, but he has managed to transform himself so he looks like their dad. Fortunately, Jared does not entirely trust that they are seeing their real dad, so he asks a question that only his real dad would know the answer to. When the disguised goblin king cannot answer it, they heroes know he is a fake. In light of this, it can be argued that the film is warning us that even loved ones can lie and that we must be careful about checking the claims that anyone might make.

Overall, the Mark Waters film *The Spiderwick Chronicles* uses both special effects and costume design to deliver an important message to the viewer. I loved this movie when I was a kid, and rewatching it for this review has shown me that I still do like it. I feel that this film is fun for all ages. Therefore, it earns a solid four out of five stars.

HIGHVIEW PROVIDES ALTERNATIVE PATH TO GRADUATION continued from page 3

their diploma, we have students who are adjusting to life in a new country, juggling their studies along with parenting, working on their mental health and overcoming many barriers to meet their goals. Highview is a caring and safe place where students can work on all these goals with lots of support and in community with others."

When it comes to the students at Highview, a primary benefit of the alternative high school environment is the atmosphere.

"It's really chill here," Jordan LeMire (12), a former Cooper student who now attends Highview, said.

LeMire said students are able to do their classwork either on paper or in an online system called Edgenuity.

"Classes are long but fun enough," LeMire said.

According to LeMire, the Highview setting is different than a traditional high school. The school is located on one floor of a larger building and students have access to a single bathroom that has a lock switch on it.

"There is no bell, more freedom and open lunch for everyone," LeMire said. "Teachers go by their first names, we share a building with a middle school and have to go there to get lunch. We're not

allowed in Highview during lunchtime."

LeMire said they recommend Highview for anyone who is not connecting with "a regular school." Currently, LeMire is close to finishing all their credits toward graduation. After leaving Highview, LeMire wants to go to college and become a mechanic.

Another former Cooper student who is finding success at Highview is Angel Orozco Orozco (12). Much like LeMire, Orozco said he likes the feeling of going to school at Highview.

"It's really nice and chill. You really don't have to worry about anything there besides work and being sure that you're

going to graduate on time," he said.

Orozco added that another important part of Highview's atmosphere is what the school does not have when compared to a traditional high school.

"I like it there because there is barely any drama," he said. "It's a really small school so I don't get lost and the teachers are really nice."

Thanks to his time at Highview, Orozco is on track to graduate with the Class of 2024.

"I plan to achieve all my credits in time to graduate on time and maybe go to a small college for a better future," Orozco said.

SENIOR SLIDE continued from page 2

our administrators and staff put in place after a fight, like a discussion to resolve the issue and find a solution to the problem. Instead of getting in a physical altercation, it makes more sense, and is more mature, to seek assistance in resolving the conflict if it's something that you're unable to resolve yourself. There's nothing wrong with getting someone outside of the situation to help you resolve it; a fresh perspective can be extremely helpful," Major said.

It is important to try not to engage in those kinds of discourteous behaviors and seek help if your peers are pushing you to fight someone. If your friends urge you to be involved in unwanted drama, then distance yourself from them and focus on yourself. Violence is an immature way to deal with your problems. There is no shame in doing the right thing, so focus on you, your health and what the right things are to do in order to better your future.

Also important is to stay away from friends who pressure you into doing drugs. Drugs may seem like a cool way to have fun and connect with people, but in reality, drugs are only chemical compounds that temporarily impair your brain. Drugs like marijuana are associated with altered connectivity and reduce the brain's ability to operate specific regions that are in control of executive functions such as learning, impulse control and memory.

"Using drugs, especially in adolescence, can really mess with your brain development and mental health. Poor or low mental health will affect school and grades. It's such a vicious cycle because poor grades can cause low mental health over and over again," Mielke said.

Engaging in drug use negatively impacts your grades and most importantly negatively impacts your health. By avoiding drug use, you can steer clear of this vicious cycle Mielke referred to.

5. Get proper rest

Getting a good night's sleep is what will make all the previous tips possible. Without a healthy amount of sleep, students begin to feel sluggish and lack motivation to put in effort toward their assignments. After recently welcoming her second child into the world, Mielke said she is more aware than ever of the importance of sleep.

"I recently had my second baby, and let me tell you, sleep matters. Whether it's not enough or too much, it will affect how you feel throughout your day and definitely affect your mental health," she said.

The right amount of sleep affects your ability to perform your day-to-day routine. O'Brien said he can vouch for the impact of sleep on his students' academic performance.

"You can't think or recall facts very well when you're tired. Sleep studies have proven that your ability to perform mental tasks suffers when you are sleep-deprived. Those same studies show that your ability to do mathematical calculations is among the first mental tasks to suffer when you're sleep-deprived. Teenagers are the most sleep-deprived of any age group," he said.

Going to bed at a reasonable time is a great way to maximize the use of your time. In contrast, not getting enough sleep increases your stress levels and irritability.

"I believe a healthy sleep schedule allows for increased focus and a better mental state. For me, going to sleep at a reasonable time helps me feel more energized," Guillen Barrera said.

The average amount of sleep a teenager needs is between eight and 10 hours. Going to bed before 11 p.m. is recommended.

Final thoughts

By following these tips and advice from your classmates, you can really hone in what you would like to see yourself accomplish in the future. Hopefully, with your newfound motivation, you can finish your senior year strong and avoid letting the temptation of sliding through your senior year rob you of a chance at success. You should make sure you are staying organized by keeping track of your assignments, putting in your best effort for important assignments to increase your chances of getting a better grade, setting goals for yourself to lock in your vision of success, avoid getting involved with sticky situations such as fights and drugs and, finally, getting a healthy sleep schedule in place to accomplish all of the above.

Premier Performers

The story of the musicians and artists who bring their talents to Cooper

Carissa Chilson

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Carissa Chilson (12) plays violin in Symphony Orchestra.

"I started playing the violin in fourth grade. I initially started playing it because I eventually wanted to learn the harp, but I ended up enjoying the violin, so I stuck with it," Chilson said.

Also motivating Chilson to stick with music are the friendships she has formed with her fellow musicians.

"One of the things I've enjoyed the most about being in orchestra is the community and friendships that I've found," she said.

Chilson's favorite orchestra memories include going on a tour last spring and being in the Pit Orchestra for the winter musicals. Her years of experience have led to Chilson taking on some

leadership roles.

"I am a part of the Orchestra Leadership Council, which I have been in since freshman year. I am also the first-chair violin, though this alternates for some concerts and events," she said.

Not surprisingly, Chilson cited orchestra as her favorite class because she gets to make music with her friends. She also enjoys her English class because she enjoys writing.

Outside of school, Chilson's hobbies include dancing, reading, drawing and listening to music.

Currently, Chilson said her plan for college is to finish getting her associate's degree at the University of Northwestern, St. Paul, after which she will take a gap year.

"I hope to explore some career possibilities and get a solid idea of what I want to do for the majority of my life," she said.

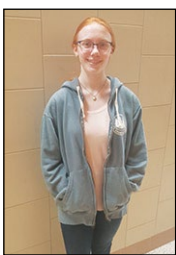


Photo by C. VANG

Maggie Stassen

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Maggie Stassen (12) participates in theater and art classes at Cooper.

"I was in the fall play, *Murder on the Orient Express*. I played Princess Dragomiroff. I'm also in a clay class and a painting class," she said.

Stassen has been doing theater for five years.

"I started doing theater because I loved musicals, and I always enjoyed singing, so it was a good way to do both of those things and meet new people," she said.

Meanwhile, Chilson has been painting her whole life.

"It's really one of my passions," she said. "I started painting because my family is very artistic."

Chilson said she has enjoyed the time spent in each of her many artistic pursuits. In theater, Stassen has especial-

ly enjoyed working together with other actors and the stage technicians to put together a show.

"I love seeing the process for the shows we put on and seeing everyone's hard work pay off," she said.

As for art, Chilson said her time in class is relaxing.

"I love how it gives me time and space to expand my art style in ways I wouldn't have on my own," she said.

Beyond her love for art class, Chilson said she enjoys HL English with Ms. Kope.

"We recently read the Greek play *Medea*, and I really enjoyed reading and analyzing a script," she said.

After graduating, Stassen will finish her associate's degree at Anoka-Ramsey Community College before moving to Montana or Alaska to continue school. She hopes to be a geological analyst or a heavy equipment operator.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Madisyn Pepper

By EMILY CARRILLO ACEVEDO
Quill staff writer

Madisyn Pepper (12) is a violist in several Cooper orchestra groups.

"I'm involved in the Symphony Orchestra and Pit Orchestra for the musical. I'm also in Chamber Strings," they said.

Pepper shared that they have been in orchestra since fourth grade. With that beginning, they have joined many music groups over the years.

"I joined Pit Orchestra in my sophomore year for *The Wiz* because a senior at the time said I should, and I enjoyed it and came back last year. I plan to join this year as well. I joined Chamber Strings because I liked playing my instrument and playing more music sounded fun. I've been in that since sophomore year as well," they said.

As a senior in orchestra, Pepper has been a role model for the underclassmen.

"I'm in the Orchestra Leadership Council. I'm a stage manager. There hasn't been much going on with my role specifically since there's only been one concert at Cooper, but that concert went well," they said.

In addition to orchestra, Pepper shared that microbiology is their favorite class. Pepper said they love the community and friends that orchestra brings and the bacteria that grows and changes in microbiology. Outside of school, Pepper enjoys playing softball.

"I've been playing since fourth grade and started pitching since eighth grade," they said.

Next fall, Pepper plans to major in either microbiology or biology at either the Twin Cities or Duluth campus of the University of Minnesota.



Photo by C. VANG

Kindric Yang

By EMILY CARRILLO ACEVEDO
Quill staff writer

Kindric Yang (12) is a violinist in Symphony Orchestra, a tenor in choir and was the lead for 2022-2023's winter musical *Newsies*.

Yang has been in orchestra and choir for seven years.

"I joined choir because of the influence of friends and family, and I joined orchestra because of the influence of family," he said.

Yang has enjoyed many parts of his activities. He shared that what he enjoys most in choir is singing, while in orchestra he enjoys "playing together and listening to each other to grow."

Being a senior comes with some responsibility for Yang in choir.

"In choir, since I'm one of the

many people who have been there the longest, I've been practically nominated as a leader for one of the four choir groups. I watch and guide the tenors of my group and it's been going fairly well," he said.

When it comes to his classes, Yang said choir, orchestra and math are his favorites because "they are the most engaging classes" he has.

Although Yang has had fun in his classes, his time outside of school is spent on his hobbies and interests.

"My outside-of-school hobbies are playing video games, dancing and going fishing," he said.

Yang shared that he is not exactly sure of which major he will pursue in college next fall, but he has a few in mind. He added that he will likely continue with his arts-related activities after high school.



Photo by C. VANG

Uncut Gems is a stellar suspense film

The 2019 movie by the Safdie brothers hinges on a career-best performance by Adam Sandler



Photo by A24

NBA star Kevin Garnett plays himself alongside actors Lakeith Stanfield and Adam Sandler (left to right).

By MILO ATHIAS FINN
Quill staff writer

Uncut Gems, directed by the Safdie brothers, was released to audiences December 25, 2019 after premiering August 30, 2019 at the 46th annual Telluride Film Festival. I chose to review this film because of its strong plot and compelling characters. The film also utilizes clever music and creative cinematography to create a movie unlike any other in Hollywood.

The Safdie brothers have several notable films on their resume, including *Heaven Knows What* and *Good Time* (a fast-paced, anxiety-inducing thriller). In addition to their strong resume, *Uncut Gems* is produced by A24, a company that has released fantastic films in every genre, some of the most notable ones being *Moonlight*, *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, *Pearl*, *Midsommar* and *Eighth Grade* (my personal favorite coming-of-age film of all time). In an era of predictable plots and lazy film structures, A24 carries themselves with pride as a company with creative projects unlike any on the market. With such dedicated minds on and off the screen, the quality of *Uncut Gems* comes as no surprise.

Uncut Gems centers on the protagonist Howard Ratner (Adam Sandler), a jeweler in New York City's diamond district. Ratner's popularity in the fashion world allows him to supply gems to high profile figures, like basketball star Kevin Garnett (who plays himself). At the beginning of the film, Ratner acquires a rare opal from miners in Ethiopia initially valued at more than \$1 million.

While this acquisition seems to promise good things for Ratner, as the film progresses, we realize that he is a gambler whose poor financial decisions cause him to owe money to several loan sharks, one being his own brother-in-law, Arno (Eric Bogosian). Ratner is also having an affair with a younger co-worker, Julia (Julia Fox), who stays at his private apartment. Ratner's marriage with wife Dinah (Idina Menzel) is on the ropes, and his relationships with his three children are subpar at best.

When the opal finally arrives, Kevin Garnett happens to be buying jewelry in Ratner's shop. Ratner flaunts the opal in Garnett's face in bragging fashion. Garnett instantly falls in love with it and asks if he can purchase it, but Ratner tells him no. This angers Garnett, who then extends an offer to Ratner: Garnett asks if he can hold on to the opal for his upcoming game and bring it back to him at the end of the week.

He even offers his NBA championship ring as collateral. Ratner eventually accepts the deal and immediately pawns Garnett's ring at a nearby shop.

It is at this moment that the extent of Ratner's gambling addiction is made apparent to the audience. Instead of using the money he just earned by secretly pawning Garnett's ring to pay off his debt to the loan sharks, he spends it on a parlay for the upcoming Celtics game. This angers the loan sharks, who beat up Howard and force him in the trunk of his car at his own daughter's music recital.

Ratner realizes the urgency of his situation and the fact that the loan sharks are out of patience with him. He then decides to enter the opal into an auction in hopes that buyers will see its value and give him the millions of dollars he needs. However, Garnett has not returned the opal yet, despite it being days past the deadline agreement.

Ratner and his partner Denny (Lakeith Stanfield) agree to meet Garnett at a private concert by artist The Weeknd, but to Ratner's dismay, Garnett is not there and neither is the opal. Time is

lywood. Ratner's flaws exceed those of a typical protagonist. In fact, he has fewer redeeming qualities than negative ones. The main tool the Safdie brothers use to make the audience care for Howard is human empathy. Ratner is an extremely believable character. The Safdie brothers go to extreme lengths to hammer this home, casting several popular celebrities like Kevin Garnett and The Weeknd to star as themselves. This makes it seem as if Howard is just as real as them.

Despite Howard's flaws, the audience roots for him to succeed and overcome his battles because he is human. He is not inherently a bad person at heart; he has just made some very bad decisions. The Safdie brothers make it clear that Ratner is trying to become a better father to his children, and husband to his wife, while also settling his gambling issues so he can put the past behind him.

The acting in this film is incredible, with Adam Sandler delivering the best performance of his career. The supporting cast is also extremely strong, with Idina Menzel and Lakeith Stanfield playing especially memorable roles. It also does not hurt that Kevin Garnett and The Weeknd kill their cameos and hold their own with the established actors. The great performances by the entire cast allows the anxiety of *Uncut Gems* to illuminate itself.

The plot is fast-paced with no wasted scenes, making two hours and 15 minutes feel like an hour and a half. Helping main-

With 2019 being a relatively weak year for film, I am surprised *Uncut Gems* did not fare well at the Academy Awards. This film is clearly better than many of its counterparts from that year. Despite its awards-related underappreciation, the film remains well-loved by the majority of critics who have viewed it.

running out and Howard has a lot of money to make in a very short amount of time. Can Howard locate the opal and find a buyer who is willing to pay enough for him to settle his gambling losses? That becomes the focus of the film's second half.

Uncut Gems tackles the issues of gambling addiction as well as the crippling weight that unrealistic expectations can put upon you. Ratner's decisions to gamble at higher stakes to atone for his previous gambling debts is both infuriating and heart-wrenching, as is his need for a mistress despite being married with three children. It all points to the truth that Ratner is addicted to the thrill of a high-roller lifestyle. His antics serve as the incentive for which he lives, but also as his biggest downfall as a person. Ratner juggles so many conflicting characteristics and schemes at once that his life is practically a ticking time bomb. Making matters worse is that he is too stubborn to accept that his efforts are futile.

Uncut Gems is an incredibly unique film that does not follow the traditional movie structure that is so commonly used in Hol-

tain this pace is the use of music, which is carefully placed throughout the film, creating various effects. For instance, the film uses aggressive synthesizers to heighten tensions but also demonstrate Ratner's occasional triumphs. However, I found it most interesting when the music is used as a juxtaposition. In scenes when something disturbing is occurring on screen, the Safdie brothers have a tendency to play arcade-style music. It is almost as if it is all some twisted game and not real life. This is incredibly disorienting, which helps tie into the controlled chaos of the film.

With 2019 being a relatively weak year for film, I am surprised *Uncut Gems* did not fare well at the Academy Awards. This film is clearly better than many of its counterparts from that year. Despite its awards-related underappreciation, the film remains well-loved by the majority of critics who have viewed it. If you are ever in the mood for a thriller that keeps you on the edge of your seat, or just well-done cinema, I highly recommend this film. I give *Uncut Gems* 4.5 out of five stars.

Arknights may be best strategy game ever

Thanks to challenging gameplay and a compelling backstory, *Arknights* demands the player's close attention

By CHIMUAL VANG
Quill staff writer

Arknights is a fantasy tower defense game developed by Hypergryph and published by gaming corporation Yostar. Originally launched on Chinese servers on May 1, 2019, it was then translated and launched on January 15, 2020 for American servers. The game is currently available on three different platforms: IOS, Android and PC. Despite the stress-filled challenges from *Arknights*, I love the game's mechanical difficulty and I believe it is the best strategy video game to have ever existed.

The story of *Arknights* takes place in the future on the formidable, dystopian world of Terra. Plagued with an epidemic, its societies are on the verge of fragmenting, forcing the people to adapt to more nomadic lifestyles. The story starts with you, the narrator, waking up from a coma. As you awake, you see a young girl, who is relieved that you have finally awoken. She refers to you as "The Doctor."

Soon, another doctor walks into the medical room and notices that you are awake. You then learn that you have been unconscious for several months. Additionally, you learn that the young girl is named Amiya, and she is your subordinate. The other doctor leaves the room shortly afterwards after diagnosing you with amnesia.

The next day, Amiya guides you through the facility that you have woken up in. You learn that you are on a self-sustained, massive landship called Rhodes Island. This ship is a pharmaceutical company that travels and recruits talent from across the world regardless of the person's background.

As you wander around the ship, relearning the things you at one point knew, one thing you discover is that the world you have woken up in is under a global epidemic from a disease called Oripathy. Oripathy is a progressive, terminal disease in the world of *Arknights*. It is caused by direct or prolonged exposure via air particles to an ore called Originium. This ore was discovered in the veins of mines that had been around since ancient times during a desperate search for renewable energy.

Despite its dangers of poisoning people, the nations of Terra kept exploiting the resource regardless, leading to the



Photo by YOSTAR

Arknights takes the classic structure of a tower defense game and does some innovative things with it.

consequences that changed their world. Individuals with Oripathy are referred to as "The Infected." The Infected exhibit hardened skin at the site of their contact with Originium, which appears as a dark color that rises in elevation on the skin much like a scab. Infected people with prolonged exposure will experience internal burns along with the scabs across their body, and the growths will continue to harden to the point of crystallization. In the worst conditions, the scabs of The Infected will begin to cause hued cracks across their skin, which can lead to organ failure and even death.

Despite efforts to cure the disease, little progress has been made and very few methods can prevent its further spread. The primary way to contain the disease is to shackle the host's body parts with a special cuff invented on Rhodes Island that can temporarily stop the infection's recognitive multiplying.

As fate would have it, the player soon finds out that The Doctor was the one and only person who knew how to cure this disease, but due to the amnesia from your coma, you now must start over. You also discover that you once led Rhodes Island, but due to your absence, Rhodes Island's progression in pharmaceuticals has halted. With your return, you

must now continue your past legacy. Helping you in this task is Dr. Kal'tsit. Though an she is an Infected, Kal'tsit is highly regarded on Rhodes Island. However, due to your history together, she regards you with slight animosity at times. Though uncertain of who you were, the rumors on Rhodes Island suggest that you and Kal'tsit are a divorced couple who are still on good terms. This is the first clue to The Doctor's past.

Eventually, you begin venturing the world of Terra to rediscover your memories in order to find the cure for Oripathy. During these journeys, you encounter many individuals that treat you in a wide variety of ways. You also witness the issues and effects of Oripathy on this world. This leads you to start questioning yourself: Who were you? Why do the people around you treat you the way they do? One answer seemingly only leads to more questions.

As your journey continues with your allies on Rhodes Island, you arrive at Lungmen, an ancient city filled with tradition and history, where you meet Wei Yenwu, the Duke of Lungmen. He gives you many hints and clues as to who you were, yet nothing seems to help. Next, you meet Ch'en, the captain of Lungmen Guard Division, the local

law enforcement group. She tells you about her long-lost half sister, Talulah, a Lungmen half-breed who is also an Infected. According to Ch'en, Talulah is now a leader in a terrorist organization fighting for a cause that has its roots in the past. This leads to your discovery that the world of Terra was once occupied by only one group of people, the Sarkaz, but it is now fragmented.

Later, you ask the people of Rhodes Island about the Sarkaz, but they simply do not know much about them since most of Terra's history was burnt to ashes. Likewise, when you ask questions of Dr. Kal'tsit, she tells you that her history with you was a foggy time that she chooses not to revisit. However, when you ask Amiya, she reluctantly explains that you were once part of an organization called Babel.

Through Dr. Kal'tsit's archives, you learn that Babel was once a Terran organization whose goal was to bring a better life to the Sarkaz and end the fragmentation of the nation. However, due to the mysterious death of their leader, Theresa, the organization disbanded. After this incident, Theresa's brother,

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Call Me By Your Name is a thoughtful romance

The 2017 movie features excellent direction by Luca Guadagnino, whose new film, *Challengers*, comes out this spring

By KAPOZIA KORICH
Quill staff writer

Call Me By Your Name is directed by Luca Guadagnino and was released in 2017. I chose to review this film because Guadagnino's new movie, **Challengers**, is being released this spring. *Call Me By Your Name* shows the rawness of a summer love and how love can consume you. The Luca Guadagnino film uses lush scenery, beautiful color patterns and an amazing soundtrack to help the audience witness what happens when people fall in love.

Call Me By Your Name takes place during the summer of 1983. The film focuses on 17-year-old Elio Perlman (Timothée Chalamet), who is spending time with his family at their 17th-century villa in Lombardy, Italy. During this visit, Elio meets Oliver (Armie Hammer), a handsome doctoral student who is working as an intern for Elio's father. As the two begin spending time together, Elio and Oliver dis-



Photo by FRENESY FILM COMPANY

The film follows the growing relationship between Oliver and Elio.

cover a connection that will alter the course of their summer and change their lives forever.

Within the film, Guadagnino effectively uses cinematography to help capture the emotions of the characters and the beauty of the Italian countryside. In one particular scene, we get a shot of Elio as he is sitting in front of

a fire and mourning the loss of something he wonders was ever really his in the first place. The director captures this moment in a close-up shot that lets the audience see every emotion on Elio's face. As we are connecting with Elio and his emotions through this shot, we can hear his mother in the background moving plates

around while calling his name. It is at this moment that we realize one of the messages in the movie is that the world never stops moving, even when someone is in pain. Overall, the way the director films this scene affects the viewers emotionally.

Another filmmaking technique that is well used in the movie is lighting. One scene in which this is especially apparent is when Elio and Oliver are lying in bed together at night. As they do so, the only light source in the scene is the moonlight shining through the window. The use of the moonlight gives the scene a simple, soft and gentle overtone. It is almost as if their love is equated with the moonlight itself; their love is the one source of light in a world of darkness.

While *Call Me By Your Name* deals with many issues, one key message of the film revolves around the importance of speak-

CALL ME
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Roger Rabbit effectively mixes live action with animation

Although it was released in the late 1980s, the technology used to blend real actors with illustrated characters still looks convincing

By FUNANYA JIBUNOR
Quill staff writer

Who Framed Roger Rabbit is a classic family film first released on June 2, 1988. This movie, which was directed by Robert Zemeckis, has always stuck out to me because of its unique story and the way in which it combines animation and live-action footage. The animation blends into the rest of the frame so well that you really believe that the

animated and real-life characters could be in the same room. Over the course of the film, Robert Zemeckis uses creative set and costume design to portray a story that deals with the impact of grief and joy.

The film takes place during the 1940s in Los Angeles. The setting is a world where humans and cartoon characters co-exist. As the story beings, a famous "toon" known as Roger Rabbit has an

easy life until he discovers that his wife, Jessica Rabbit, may be having an affair with the head of Maroon Cartoons, Mr. Maroon, who soon ends up murdered. When Roger is accused of the crime, he turns to a down-and-out, human detective named Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins), who takes the job despite having a prejudice against toons. He reluctantly agrees to help Roger try to clear his name and escape from an uncompromising

Judge Doom.

The element of costume design is important to the film because it reflects each character's personality traits. During one scene, we get introduced to the main villain, Judge Doom. When he enters, Judge Doom wears a long, black, flowing cape, and as he moves, eerie music plays in the background.

ROGER RABBIT
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Willy Wonka shows that first films are usually the best

While the new prequel *Wonka* is fun, it cannot compare to the charm of the original 1971 film

By LEO PEREZ
Quill staff writer

Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory is a family movie released in 1971. It is a classic film that brought magic and fascination into movie theaters and helped make a star of Gene Wilder, who plays Willy Wonka. Released by Warner Bros., this movie is one of director Mel Stuart's best. It is a great movie for those who would like to revisit the past, a time when the music was original and beautiful, a time when the wonder and magic of these characters was put on the screen for the first time. These types of oldies can make you feel like a kid again thanks to the nostalgia they produce in the viewer. With the prequel film *Wonka* currently in theaters, now is the perfect time to watch the original *Willy Wonka*. If you want to reach back into your childhood days, I believe this feature film is for you.

Willy Wonka takes place in an intentionally vague year, which helps the movie feel timeless. The main characters are the children who win the golden tickets to visit the chocolate factory, and the main chocolatier himself, Willy Wonka (Gene Wilder). The plot revolves around Willy Wonka looking for a child to inherit the factory, and the candidates are Charlie Bucket (Peter Ostrum), Mike Teevee (Paris Themmen), Veruca Salt (Julie Dawn Cole), Augustus Gloop (Michael Bollner) and Violet Beauregarde (Denise Nickerson). All of these children are placed in a secret competition that they are unaware of in order to prove one of them is worthy of inheriting the factory.

An important aspect of this movie that has to be discussed is the casting. Every actor in this film makes this movie believable and turns the story into something that is truly special. Leading the cast is Gene Wilder, who gives a spectacular performance as the charming chocolatier Willy Wonka. It was Wilder's idea that his character's first appearance on screen would feature Wonka walking with a limp and a cane before suddenly leaving his cane stuck in the ground and somersaulting in front of the kids. When asked why this sequence was important, Wilder stated in an interview that, "from that time on, no one will know whether [Wonka is] lying or telling the truth."

The actors portraying the children are also extremely talented. Most of the scenes require the performers to display real wonder and amazement, and the young actors do so consistently. For example, when Willy Wonka first opens the doors to reveal the candy garden, the reactions from the children feel real. That is what makes this movie so beautiful: the way children see the otherworldly elements of the chocolate factory is exactly the same way we see them as the audience. The child characters show real smiles and genuine happiness, and seeing that from the actors makes us, the viewers, feel happy as well.

Another strength of the film is its use of sets and special effects. Nowadays, most movies rely too heavily on computer-generated special effects. While it is well done in some movies, it definitely leaves much to be desired in others. *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, on the other hand, does not have any CGI; instead, the filmmakers use physical sets and props to create the world of the film. Real props are much more effective because they do not look as obviously fake, which is often the case with many computer-generated film effects. Instead, the effects in *Willy Wonka* seem natural. You can see the actor touching and holding an actual object, which helps you anchor yourself in the reality of the *Willy Wonka* universe.

At the same time, I will admit that using real props limits how much this movie can actually show. As a result, the original *Willy Wonka* does not always show the grand scale of the chocolate factory in the same way that the two more recent *Willy Won-*

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STUDENT TRUANCY
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“I’m trying to create a program to get kids into class who have not been attending; kids who come to school and don’t go to class. My job is to figure out what prevents them from getting to class and remove that barrier. You don’t like a teacher, let’s try to get a schedule change. I monitor daily attendance data and try to find students so that I can help them get to class,” he said.

One strategy Lapakko is working on involves incentivizing attendance for students who are struggling.

“I’ve been given the opportunity to create an incentive program that will reward students for having positive attendance. As a father of four young boys, my goal is to create an environment where I would feel comfortable sending my children. My wife is a Cooper graduate and current staff member and we both want to make this school as great as it can be,” he said.

Meanwhile, Jackson said she is trying to build positive relationships with students as she gets used to her new job at the school.

“[I am] getting to know the kids and hope to get more kids going to and staying in class,” she said.

According to Smith, Lapakko and Jackson are already demonstrating what she expects from new hires.

“[Jackson] helps monitor our hallways and helps to keep our buildings safe as a part of the security team by monitoring restrooms, hallways and helping students get to class, things of that nature,” she said. “In regards to [Lapakko], his role is a little more complex since he is working mostly with students who are not going to class. He has a caseload but he also supports in the hallway like you see. Mainly, he has a caseload of students who have displayed concerns with going to class, and so he’s working with those students, putting plans in place, providing interventions, meeting with grade-level teachers, contacting parents, etc.”

Smith said there were many reasons for the new hires and for the changes to Cooper’s truancy policies.

“I would say the factors that led to these concerns [are] security and safety of the building. We just don’t have enough staff in the building, long story short. We felt we needed more staff in the building, so that was a conversation we had with the district in order to get more support here. The district listened to us, and we kind of met and processed through how that looks and what we need here at the building. [We needed] more people in the hallways, more eyes in the hallways,” she said.

Smith attributed a review of the school’s student absence data as another key part of making the policy changes.

“First of all, attendance is one of our school improvement plan goals. We already came into this school year knowing that was one of our focus areas, and what the data shows is that we have a group of students that are having difficulty going to class and that our grade-level teams were having a hard time keeping up with the demand of what is needed with that group of students,” she said.

All these new changes and hires are part of Smith’s continuous effort to build upon existing school regulations.

“I just think we need to be more consistent in what we do. For example, there was a security EA meeting to go over some of the ways and functions of the job and do a reset, so you’ll probably see the security shifted around. Sometimes, you have to do that and just bring everyone back to remind them this is how the role is,” she said.

When asked about the longevity of the new positions beyond this school year, Smith was uncertain but optimistic.

“We still need to hire at least three more security EAs for our hallways. It’s just kind of slim pickings out there as far as people applying for jobs right now. The goal is to keep these folks around,” Smith said.

Ultimately, it is Smith’s hope that the new policies will help motivate students to attend class.

“In a dream world, all of my Cooper students would go to class, all of them would be there on time, be ready for learning, listen to their teacher and digest all of those wonderful things that they’re learning,” she said.

Saul expertly expands *Bad* universe

Award-winning *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan finds equal success with his spinoff series *Better Call Saul*

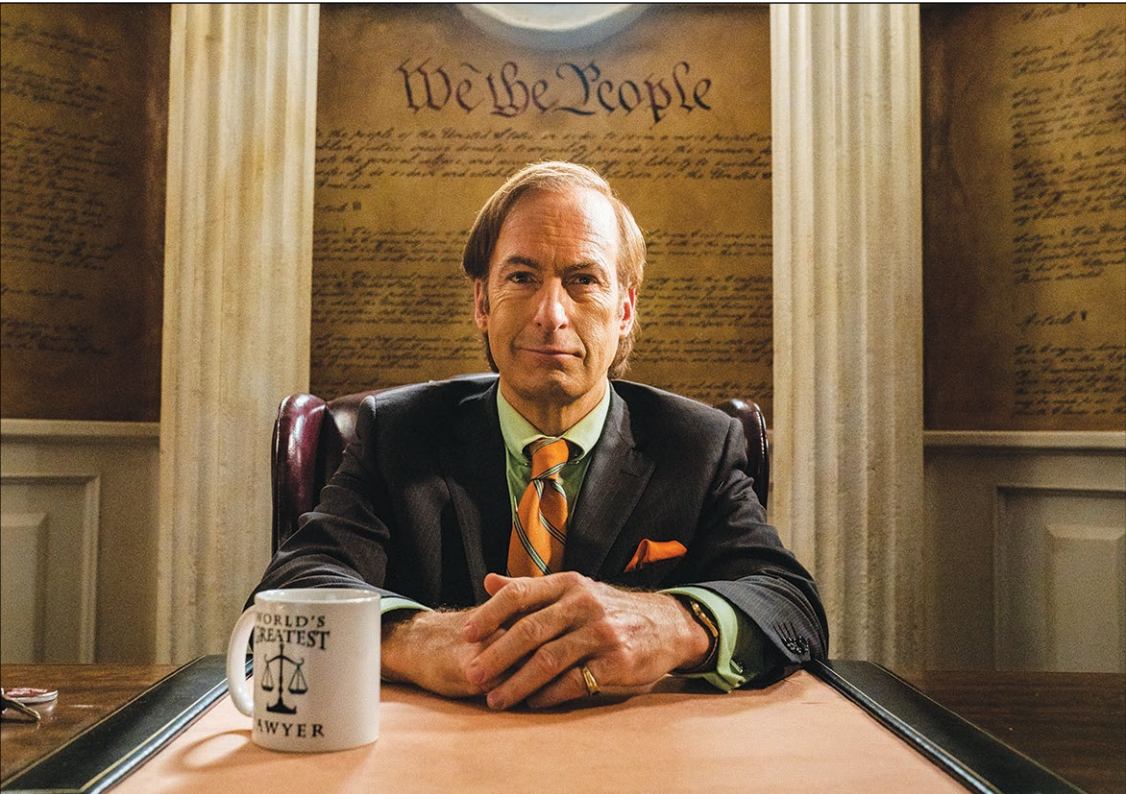


Photo by AMC

The show revolves around the origin story of the antihero lawyer eventually known as Saul Goodman.

By NOAH PLAHN
Quill staff writer

Better Call Saul is a prequel to the critically acclaimed series *Breaking Bad*. Directed by *Breaking Bad* creator Vince Gilligan, the first season of *Better Call Saul* premiered on February 8, 2015, and was met with instant praise. The series follows the story of Saul Goodman (Bob Odenkirk) prior to his days as a famous criminal lawyer. Before the events of *Breaking Bad*, Saul goes by the name of Jimmy McGill. (Eventually, he changes his name to Saul Goodman in the season five premiere of *Better Call Saul*.) *Better Call Saul* is easily the greatest spin-off show I’ve ever seen and provides a more in-depth look into the *Breaking Bad* universe and the characters it has to offer.

Better Call Saul follows the story of the recurring *Breaking Bad* character Saul Goodman, but he is not the same person in the prequel’s timeline. *Better Call Saul* takes place from 2002-2008. Throughout the first four seasons of *Better Call Saul*, Saul goes by Jimmy McGill. We see similar, base-level characteristics of Saul in Jimmy, but the story of *Better Call Saul* follows the slow burn of his unraveling story, which eventually leads to his role in the most prominent drug empire of all time during *Breaking Bad*.

When Bob Odenkirk appears

on screen for the first time in *Better Call Saul*, you expect the loud, braggadocios sensation that is Saul Goodman. Instead, you are met with this mysterious Jimmy character. Jimmy grows up in Cicero, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. He has been given the name Slippin’ Jimmy for the low-level conman tactics he uses to make money. Not surprisingly given this nickname, Jimmy is the black sheep of his family and he constantly lives in the shadow of his older brother, Chuck McGill.

After years of disappointment, Jimmy decides to turn his life around and move with his brother to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Much to the secret dismay of his brother, Jimmy decides to become a lawyer and follow his family legacy. At this point, Chuck’s reputation has spread around the state of New Mexico, and he has become a reputable lawyer. Over the next six seasons, Jimmy’s heartbreaking fall from grace provides new insight into who he truly is behind the Saul Goodman facade.

After the final episode of *Breaking Bad* more than 10 years ago, Vince Gilligan uses *Better Call Saul* to amplify his writing and directing talents. Gilligan delivers a jaw-dropping story in *Better Call Saul* that keeps you on the edge of your seat for six seasons straight. *Breaking Bad* often created subplots that would tie together in the final

episodes for a grand finale. If you enjoyed this storytelling style, you will be happy to hear it returns in *Better Call Saul*. However, the prequel series also negates the overly and, at times, overwhelmingly fast pace of *Breaking Bad*.

Patience is critical in *Better Call Saul*. The show’s slow pace allows for further development of characters previously seen in *Breaking Bad* and connects you to numerous new characters. Sometimes, in the early seasons of *Better Call Saul*, you will question certain storylines, but as the story progresses, you will soon realize these minor subplots are vital to the story of all the characters. Vince Gilligan beautifully orchestrates deep and expansive characters that are given much-needed depth that was sometimes missing from *Breaking Bad*.

While many characters return from the original series, *Better Call Saul* properly introduces and nurtures the development of new characters. The combination of compelling writing and spectacular acting breeds a new cast of characters for fans to love. Fans looking to learn more about the initial crew from *Breaking Bad* will quickly find themselves heavily invested in the new characters despite their love for the original group from *Breaking Bad*. Of course, existing characters are still important to the plot of *Better Call Saul*, and the audience is

given new depth to their lives before the events of *Breaking Bad*. However, it is the new characters that help elevate *Better Call Saul*.

Regardless of whether they are playing new or old characters, all the actors on *Better Call Saul* deliver stellar performances that stretch over the entire series. The acting range of the main protagonists allows for the show to explore a variety of emotions surrounding the characters and guide how we as an audience interpret them. As the show bounces from drama to comedy and even other genres, the actors fall in line and deliver their performances masterfully.

A prime focus of the show’s creators is to be unique, particularly with their camera work. Bored with modern-day cinematography and the simplicity of a constant copy-and-paste system, Vince Gilligan puts a major emphasis on giving *Better Call Saul* a singular style. Each season utilizes a new camera, and with that, the camera work of each season allows for a constant breath of fresh air with different ways of filming the show. The creativity of the series’ camera work can be seen through its creative use of different angles, with scenes being shot from the vantage point of cup holders, mailboxes and transparent tables and walls.

Although Gilligan constantly looks for new and enticing ways to spice up his camera usage, he does not shy away from former tactics used in *Breaking Bad*. Gilligan often uses the size of surrounding objects to enhance or minimize the feelings of characters and is unafraid to shift the view of the audience from the top of buildings to beneath the ground. These constant changes in perspectives allow for more focus on the dialogue and make each scene feel unique. *Better Call Saul*’s cinematography is second to none.

Better Call Saul delivers an in-depth extension to an already vast series that compels you all the way through. It’s a perfect prequel to arguably the greatest television show of all time. *Better Call Saul* should not be seen as just a spinoff to *Breaking Bad*, but as a standalone series that allows an even larger demographic of fans to join in on all that comes from this expansive universe. With incredible ratings like 98 percent on Rotten Tomatoes and a nine out of 10 on IMDB, it is a no-brainer that I give *Better Call Saul* five out of five stars.

Resident Evil 4 remake improves on original game

Released nearly two decades after its predecessor, the new take on *Resident Evil 4* won multiple gaming awards in 2023

By LEO PEREZ
Quill staff writer

Resident Evil 4 is an action/horror game originally produced by Capcom Co. back in 2005. The continuing popularity of the series and this particular game led to it being remade and rereleased in 2023. The remake brings back the classic story of rookie-cop-turned-special-agent Leon S. Kennedy as he attempts to save the president’s daughter by fighting through infected villagers, giant monster fish and big bad military men. The story is action-packed and very movie-like with one liners and cinematic moments. It is a wonderful game if you are into third-person action/horror games and there are many reasons you should play it.

The story begins with special agent Leon S. Kennedy as he goes to Spain to find the kidnapped daughter of the president of the United States. Kennedy enters a small town after he finds a clue that the president’s daughter is being kept there. We soon learn that an evil cult has taken the young woman for nefarious purposes and agent Kennedy must now find and retrieve her.

As he is on the mission, Kennedy will meet some new people who will help him and reunite with an old friend who will try to kill him. What is more, he will have to battle hordes of enemies who have been infected with a mind-controlling parasite. It is up to you whether he is able to save the day and bring home the girl.

The gameplay in the original



Photo by CAPCOM

Resident Evil 4 is a survival game focused on character Leon S. Kennedy.

Resident Evil 4 was considered revolutionary in the industry and it gets a major upgrade in the remake. The new release features updated mechanics, realistic damage to enemies and fresh animations.

One aspect I love in the original game is that it includes special moves. This feature comes back in the new game in an even more refined way. The special moves are simple: the player merely needs to make one shot to the head or legs and press a button to pull off the move. The game developers also add a block and parry mechanic that increases the ways through which a player can get an enemy into a staggered state.

Item management is a big part of the new game. The space in which you can store your items is limited to a briefcase, which acts as your

inventory. When deciding whether or not to take items, you need to be mindful of the impact that decision will have on you later. For instance, you may need to decide whether you want to hold healing herbs in your inventory to survive big fights or keep grenades and ammo to clear out multiple enemies. The strategy involved in item management is one aspect that makes the gameplay top notch and worth checking out.

Characters are a major component to any game and the voice actors need to be believable in order to make these fictional people come to life. When it comes to the *Resident Evil 4* remake, the casting of Leon, the protagonist, is excellent. The character used to be a rookie cop that was inexperienced but lucky during prior zombie events. Now, he is a hardened special agent with

witty one liners and new confidence.

Next up is the character of Ashley, the president’s daughter. She is a naive young woman who uses her head to get out of dangerous situations. She is the number one priority for the player and the voice acting for the character helps make that come across in the game.

Another good character is Major Jack Krauser, who is a big bad in the game. This character is someone from Leon’s past, a soldier who has set his mind on becoming the strongest person there is. To that end, he infects himself with the parasite that controls the zombies, ruining his own body in hopes of becoming the ultimate predator.

Joining Krauser in the bad guy category is Osmund Saddler, the head honcho of the cult that kidnaps Ashley. He is an insane man who believes the Las Plagas parasite is the next step in human evolution. He wants the world to become infected, which he thinks will bring him closer to being a god. His intent is to use Ashley as a sleeper agent that will bring the parasite back to the United States, where it will grow in her and take over the government.

All in all, the revamped *Resident Evil 4* is a major upgrade from the original. Even if you have never played a game in this franchise, the new release is a masterpiece that will serve as a great introduction to what the series is all about. This game earns five out of five stars. It is worth buying at the full price of \$59.99.

Senior named to All-State Team

Hawks quarterback Kam Fox received the honor after the close of the 2023 season



Photo by MARQUITA FOX

Kam Fox was honored along with the other chosen athletes before the December 24, 2023 Vikings game.

By EMILY CARRILLO ACEVEDO
Quill staff writer

Kameron Fox (12) was named to the 2023 Minnesota All-State Football Team during a ceremony that took place on December 24, 2023 at U.S. Bank Stadium before a Minnesota Vikings football game. “It was a blessing to see all the people in the whole stadium cheering for me. They didn’t even know me but they were still showing love,” Fox said. The All-State Football Team program, which started in 2002, is an annual opportunity through which high school football coaches from around the state can nominate players who they think are deserving of special recognition. According to Hawks football coach Mr. Patterson, Fox was especially qualified for the honor.

“The Minnesota Vikings reach out to coaches around the state, who are asked to nominate players that they think are deserving of the award. I nominated Kameron because of his accomplishments on the football field and in the classroom. He had a great senior season and that was indicated by the many post-season awards that he obtained. He was able to dominate on the field while carrying a 3.3 GPA,” Patterson said. Fox said he was surprised to hear Patterson nominated him for the state-wide award.

“I was really happy and kind of surprised because I felt that I personally could have done way more, but I guess all the coaches noticed what I did this year and thought I was worthy of being in All-State. I was proud of myself that I was noticed by other people because I was hard on myself,” Fox said. Prior to becoming quarterback for the Cooper football team, Fox had a long history in the sport. In fact, Fox said he started playing football back in second grade. “The first time I ever played football was at a flag football tour-

chance to gain many types of recognition beyond the All-State award. “I have gotten nominated for Mr. Football, All-District and All-Area Team, and I got an academic scholarship through football,” he said. Cheering on Fox and his accomplishments are his Hawks football teammates. Marlow Oliver (10) said he first heard about the All-State honor through a social media post from the Cooper football team. “I found out through Twitter because our team has an account and they posted about him sometime in November [2023],” Oliver said. Oliver explained that Fox is deserving of the recognition because he is “a very versatile quarterback and a huge team player.” Oliver added that Fox put in a lot of work during the

"I nominated Kameron because of his accomplishments on the football field and in the classroom. He had a great senior season and that was indicated by the many post-season awards that he obtained. He was able to dominate on the field while carrying a 3.3 GPA," Mr. Patterson said.

namment in Robbinsdale at Robbinsdale Middle School,” he said. Fox explained that his love of football stemmed from his desire to be active and explore new sports. Eventually, he said he developed an interest in being a leader, which contributed to his high school success. “When I started football, especially quarterback, it was fun to have that leadership role, having control of each play,” Fox said. Having played football for a while now, Fox said he has had the

offseason and the official season to improve his skills as a player. “We were happy to have someone like him on our team. We were happy that one of our teammates was chosen to represent us,” he said. Another one of Fox’s teammates, Lowell Grosslein (12), said the All-State award made sense given the other honors Fox has received. “He got All-District MVP, ALL-STATE continues on page 10

ROGER RABBIT MIXES LIVE ACTION WITH ANIMATION continued from page 7

This character’s makeup is also subtly different, making him look unnaturally pasty. This combination of dark and light colors, combined with the actor’s eccentric facial features, subtly set him apart from the rest of the characters. All of this makes the viewer automatically feel like there is something off about Judge Doom. Judge Doom’s clothing is a conscious choice that communicates his evil personality to the audience. The next filmmaking element that is critical to the film is special effects. Viewers will be impressed at how well integrated the animated elements feel with the real-life footage. In one scene, Detective Valiant puts away his real gun, switching it out for a cartoon gun. First, we see a close up of his hand holding the animated gun and then a wide shot of him walking down an alley with the gun in his hand. In the close up, we see a 2-D animated gun, but for the wide shot,

it is switched to a plastic replica. You do not notice it because of the lighting and the way the shot is framed, but it makes it feel more realistic to the viewer. In a lot of movies where actors have to interact with things that are going to be added in later through special effects, it can feel off, but using props to give the actors something feasible to interact with makes the scene feel a lot more natural in this movie. Animation as a genre is often disregarded as being for only children. The colorful and versatile nature of animated films often results in them not getting taken seriously. This correlates a lot with the main message of *Roger Rabbit*. In the film, the main character, Eddie Valiant, used to be in a successful detective duo with his brother. They were a fun-loving team seeking out justice for toons, until Eddie’s brother tragically loses his life at the hands of a murderous

cartoon character. This hits Eddie hard. As a result, he starts hating toons and he falls in with a crowd of joyless adults, which leads him to a drab new reality. After his experiences with *Roger Rabbit*, however, Valiant finds that embracing the toons’ humorous attitude is advantageous and he gains a newfound respect for their playful philosophy, leaving his pessimistic lifestyle behind. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is a movie that brings a level of creativity that is usually preserved for children’s movies to an often serious, adult-friendly storyline, which results in a unique film for all ages. I think the tone of the movie is perfect, with the over-the-top humor balancing perfectly with the more serious moments of the movie. All the actors do a great job portraying their characters, human and toon alike. I give *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and enthusiastic five out of five stars. themes to explore the power of falling in love. I think this is one of the greatest romance movies I have ever watched. While it may not end in the happy fashion a viewer might wish for, that just makes the movie more realistic and adds to its impact. *Call Me By Your Name* deserves five out of five stars.

CALL ME BY YOUR NAME IS A THOUGHTFUL ROMANCE continued from page 7

Cooper Competitors

The story of the athletes who strive for success in Cooper sports

Jan-Carlo Duron

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Jan-Carlo Duron (12) is a member of the Hawks wrestling team. Duron first joined the team as a sophomore. “I started wrestling since my cousin wrestled and he enticed me to join the wrestling team,” he said. Keeping Duron committed to the squad is the fact that he likes the team aspect of wrestling. “I have enjoyed being on a team and working together to win at a meet,” Duron said. As he looks back on his three years in the sport, Duron cited the routine of daily practice as a highlight. “My favorite memory from wrestling is just going to practice every day and working hard to get better as an athlete,” he said.

Thanks to his years of hard work, Duron was named a team captain for the squad this season. “It has been going well so far,” he said. “I love working with my teammates.” When it comes to school, Duron’s love of wrestling intersects with his favorite class of the day. “I enjoy my Weight Training class. Taking this class allows my to lift during the school day,” he said. Outside of school and sport, Duron said that weight lifting, playing video games and buying shoes are his chief hobbies. Next fall, Duron is going to the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Although he does not have specific plans to continue with wrestling at college, he said he is open to doing so if the chance comes up.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Zachary Allen

By SAMARIA'H SHABAZZ
Quill staff writer

Zachary Allen (12) is a Hawk athlete who is on the Armstrong-Cooper hockey squad in the winter. He is involved in the school’s ultimate Frisbee and lacrosse teams. “I’ve played hockey for 13 years,” he said. “My uncle and grandpa played hockey and they got me started.” The friendships he has developed over the years has been one aspect of hockey he has enjoyed, as has the chance to compete. “I’ve enjoyed making friends and having fun at tournaments with the teams I’ve been on,” he said. Another highlight of hockey for Allen was his work with a specific coach. “My favorite memory from hockey is when I played in youth for my

favorite coach, Coach Mika. That year was super fun,” Allen said. Prior to hockey, Allen spent his fall playing ultimate Frisbee. “The whole team is a family and I will miss it once I graduate,” he said. After his hockey season is done, Allen will play lacrosse. “I’m one of the captains for the 2024 season and I am very excited to lead these guys to some wins,” he said. In addition to his focus on sports, Allen also takes his school work seriously. He said his two favorite classes are Economics and Clay because “both classes have fun teachers and are interesting.” During his free time, Allen likes to hang out with friends, play board games, watch TV and make model houses. After graduating, Allen is interested in a career related to physical fitness and kinesiology.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Owen Holle

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Owen Holle (12) is on the wrestling team in the winter and the lacrosse team in spring. He is also considering taking part in ultimate Frisbee as well. Holle has been wrestling since 10th grade. “I chose to wrestle because I did Brazilian Jujitsu for six years before joining the wrestling team,” he said. “I enjoy getting in shape and spending time with my teammates and coaches during the season.” One of Holle’s favorite memories during his time on the team is when he got first place during a JV tournament last year. “It gave me a boost of confidence that I needed,” he said. In the weeks leading up to the current season, Holle helped run the cap-

tains’ practices for the wrestling team and helped teach some of the newer wrestlers the proper technique. “It went alright,” he said. After wrestling is over, Holle said he will play lacrosse during the spring. He said he is looking forward to being involved with the sport. Outside of athletics, Holle is involved in music. One music-related activity he did during the fall this year was Marching Band, which he said “went very well.” When it comes to school, Holle said his favorite class is weight training because it gives him “a chance to lift consistently.” As for his hobbies, Holle said he enjoys photography, biking and going to car shows. Next fall, Holle plans to go to St. Thomas or North Dakota State University and major in something related to electrical engineering.



Photo by N. PLAHN

Maleena Saengchantha

By BETHZY ARIAS-PLIEGO
Quill staff writer

Maleena Saengchantha (12) did cheerleading this fall and is taking part in competitive dance this winter. Saengchantha joined dance in her junior year because she has had a passion for dance since she was young. Something that Saengchantha said she has enjoyed most about being in dance is the “endless emotional support that everyone has.” Saengchantha also said that everyone on the team is unique and they made her feel welcome when she joined. “The people on the team are so friendly and caring, and so are the coaches. I absolutely love them because of their caring and the support they show for each and every one of us,” she said. Saengchantha said one of her fa-

vorite memories from dance is learning new dance techniques and skills. “Accomplishing a goal that you have been working on for a while feels really good and relieving. You set so many goals for this sport and to finally show others your accomplishments that you have achieved is rewarding. The work pays off when you perform and it definitely shows in your character,” she said. As for school, Saengchantha’s favorite class is Weight Training because she likes learning new workouts and getting stronger, which benefits her in cheerleading and dancing. Outside of school, she enjoys longboarding, hanging out with friends and making bracelets. Saengchantha’s plan for college is to go to Concordia, St. Paul or the University of Minnesota to major in psychology.



Photo by N. PLAHN

WILLY WONKA

continued from page 7

ka-related films do thanks to their use of CGI. There are times in the original *Willy Wonka* when the sets and special effects do not have consistent scale and detail. For example, the giant candy garden and the candy testing room would benefit from more modern effects. Despite these two examples, this movie as a whole does a lot right with its sets and special effects. It is all so beautiful.

The best thing about many movies is the music, and that is certainly the case with *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. This movie features some of the most memorable tunes in history and almost everybody knows a song from the original *Willy Wonka* even if they do not know the actual name of the song. The music in this movie is meant to leave you with a feeling of childlike wonder. It is music that brings out the younger version of yourself, or if you have younger siblings, it brings out in them a feeling of amazement. I would say that this is pure music, and it is helped by the fact that everyone you hear singing in this movie is actually singing. There is no lip syncing or anything like that. Instead, it is all recorded at the moment of the shot. Hearing Gene Wilder sing brings out emotions I cannot explain other than to say it is genuine and real.

Overall, *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* is the movie to watch if you want to experience childhood again. It is a film that takes viewers back to a time when they were not scared of the future, a time when one's imagination is theirs to use in any way they want. This movie would get five out of five stars if it were not for the limitations of some sets and special effects, which can take modern viewers out of the movie. Therefore, I give the film four out of five stars.

COLLEGE CHOICES

continued from page 4

roommate, but what if you do not get along? Another option is rooming alone, which could make school more expensive and make it harder to find friends. The list of concerns goes on and on.

In order to help you make your choice, it is obviously important to tour the schools you like and to do as much research as you can so you know for sure that is where you want to spend the next two-to-four years. In fact, it could be even more years if you plan on pursuing a graduate education. The more information you can gather along the way, the easier it will be to answer many of these interrelated questions.

Ultimately, it is important to keep an open mind when picking a college. Do not let the stress get you down because, in the end, it will all work out. If you pick a college that you do not enjoy, there is always the option of transferring. However, be sure to give the school a chance before giving up, and be sure to embrace the current decision-making process because it will pay off.

ALL-STATE

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All-Conference and Team MVP. He pretty much got any award he could get," Grosslein said. "It was pretty much suspected that he was going to make the All-Star game."

Although Grosslein was not there in person to watch Fox being honored at the Vikings game, he said he was able to watch it on TV.

According to Patterson, he hopes to continue seeing Hawks football players honored as part of the All-State program. He added that he is proud of how Fox handled receiving the recognition this season.

"I was excited for him because I knew all of the hard work that he put in to get to that moment. It was an awesome experience for Kam and his family. He represented Cooper and his family well," Patterson said.

SPEECH TEAM

continued from page 3

with other activities in life. For instance, Plahn recommends speech for writers.

"If you like writing essays or articles, this activity is built for you to succeed in it," Plahn said.

The speech team is still looking for new members. Interested students are encouraged to stop by room 241 after school on Tuesdays or Thursdays for more information.

Step Team enjoys chances to perform

Members of the 2023-2024 squad cite a strong sense of community as a main reason why the team continues to excel



Photo by TALONS

The performance at the 2023 homecoming week pepfest was one highlight of the squad's current season.

By AKEYA EASLEY

Quill staff writer

In the heart of Cooper, a rhythmic beat erupts, not from textbooks but from the synchronized steps of the school's Step Team. This group of Cooper students shifts the ordinary into the extraordinary. Imagine a space where every stomp and clap becomes a paint stroke in a living canvas of expression.

The coach for the Step Team is Cooper bookkeeper Ms. Rucker, who has been working with the team for more than 15 years. It all started when her daughter danced on a Step Team during fourth grade. Over her 15-year journey, Rucker has been a guiding force behind the Cooper squad, shaping the teams' steps and the character that defines the team's members.

According to Rucker, a typical Step Team practice starts with the students doing their runs and stretches. They then go through the commands and routines that they have learned previously. In addition, the team also works on learning new routines and steps. Rucker said that the members of Cooper's team come up with their routines themselves, which is not always the case with teams at other schools.

"That's one thing about Cooper High School: it's very unique," Rucker said.

Given all that happens during practice, members of the team said that being exhausted at the end of the workout is a badge of honor.

"[Practice] can be tiring, but that just shows that you're getting down for real," team member Aijah Jones (10) said.

The Step Team performs at any event they can. Included among the locations and events at which the team has performed this year are Cooper pepfests, assemblies at other Robbinsdale schools, district cultural events and Cooper family night events.

When taking part in these events, the team arrives an hour before the event starts, and then they run through the routine they plan on showcasing at the event so they are ready for the actual performance.

Of the many events they have appeared at this year, Rucker said that one she especially enjoyed was a youth rally at the Minnesota state capitol. Since stepping requires stomping and loud noises, the team's performance attracted the people around the capitol to stop and listen to what the youth

were saying.

"They got to talk to the legislators about why they need after-school programs," Rucker said.

Another performance the team will take part in this year is the Black History Expo. According to team member Sanij Roberts (11), the group's performance at this event is important from a cultural perspective.

"The Black History Expo performance is important because stepping has a history behind it. Stepping is what the freed slaves brought with them in regards to one of their traditions from Africa. Stepping at the Black Expo performance will be a way to express something that has been a long tradition in African and black communities," Roberts said.

Thanks to the group's ability to take part in such events, Rucker views the Step Team as a transformative outlet that gives students who may struggle in other aspects of school a constructive path for their energy.

"After-school activities turn and save kids' lives," Rucker said.

In addition, the members of the team said they enjoy the united spirit that the team brings.

"Everyone is understanding and fun to work with," Folake Olusesi (10) said.

Echoing this sentiment is Roberts.

"I like how the team cooperates with each other and is patient with one another. It's a really fun environment," Roberts said.

Those students who want to join the team are still welcome to do so. Rucker encourages interested students to see her in the main office.

"Everyone is welcome," she said. "There's no bad energy on the Step Team because we stay away from that."

ARKNIGHTS MAY BE BEST STRATEGY GAME EVER

continued from page 7

Theresis, and many other members of Babel deserted, starting a revolutionary movement called The Reunion Army, which is one of the antagonistic factions in *Arknights*.

The Reunion Army is a paramilitary terrorist organization made up of The Infected. This group is retaliating against the Teran societies and it hopes to end all persecution, oppression and discrimination against those affected by Oripathy. Perplexed by why you were involved with such complicated people, you continue searching for clues to your past.

Eventually, you meet a Sarkaz mercenary named W on Rhodes Island and discover that they too are from Babel. Additionally, you discover that they trained in Kazdel, the origin homeland of the Sarkaz. This mercenary has connections to the Military Commissions of Kazdel, another one of the antagonistic factions of *Arknights*. This group is composed of Sarkaz mercenaries and soldiers that once occupied the Victorian capital of the superpower nation Londinium. Their goal was to deliver Sarkaz vengeance on the entirety of Terra.

As you learn more about yourself through each of these many clues, you start to wonder who you really were before you lost your memory. Were your allies truly your allies or were they just pawns to you? Did the people you are meeting used to respect you or did they just listen to you out of fear? Were you really trying to save the world or not?

It is with this complex story that the context of *Arknights* is established for the player. In contrast to its massive backstory, *Arknights* itself is simply a tower defense game. There is a base point you must defend from a wave of enemies coming from an enemy spawn point. You play the game as a war tactician in an effort to uphold The Doctor's legacy.

As you play the game, you must upgrade and improve your own squad of operators and defeat the waves of enemy units on each level. Each squad can hold up to 12 operators, and each operator has their own roles in combat. Every operator that you deploy requires deployment points (DP), which are used as energy in order to deploy a certain operator. The higher ranked the operator, the higher their costs are. However, their rank and cost does not mean they are stronger or more efficient.

There are three types of damage one will encounter in the game: physical,

arts and true. Physical damage harms enemies but can be countered by the enemy's defense capabilities. Next, arts damage can counter defense. Arts are the powers harnessed from Oripathy. Many operators can harness this power and use it during combat. Finally, true damage can ignore all defense.

There are eight roles of operators in *Arknights*: guard, vanguard, supporter, medic, defender, specialist, sniper and caster. In addition, operators will have different classes and tags related to each specialty they possess in their field of profession. Operators will also have different traits and positions, which are archetypes that guide what that specific operator can do.

Within the game, guard operators prioritize offense, vanguard operators prioritize generating DP, supporter operators prioritize buffing, medic operators prioritize healing, defender operators prioritize defense, specialist operators prioritize versatility, sniper operators prioritize range and caster operators prioritize arts.

Meanwhile, the tags in the game include area of effect, crowd control, debuff, defense, DP recovery, damage per second, fast-redeploy, healing, nuker, shift, slow, summon, support and survival. These are specific specialties that operators can have in their class, though operators are only allowed to have three tags maximum.

With respect to positions, the two options are melee and ranged. These are simply what position the operator is meant for and which opponents they are effective against.

What is more, each specific operator has attributes and talents that you can improve as you progressively upgrade them. These attributes consist of: Hp, which is how much health they have before defeat; Atk, which is how much damage they will deal; Def, which is how much damage they will absorb from damage; Res, which is how much damage they can endure; Rdpoly time, which is the cost of deployment after retreating or being defeated; DP cost, which is the cost of deployment; Blk cnt, which is how many enemy units they can block from passing them; and Atk itvl, which is attack speed.

Next up are talents and skill points. Talents consist of who the operator is and what their hobbies and interests are. Meanwhile, skill points are accumulated through a gauge. When the operator's

gauge is full, they will be able to activate their skill. Each operator's gauge will vary according to their role on the field of combat. Skill types consist of offensive recovery, defensive recovery, automatic, manual or passive. For example, a guard unit that specializes in offense with tags such as damage per second or nuker will most likely have a skill that also specializes in offense automatic or offensive passive.

Ranks in the game can range from one to six. The highest rank is six, while the lowest rank is one. Ranked-one operators most likely will not have skills, while ranked-six operators can have up to three skills. However, it is important for the player to keep in mind that only one skill can be equipped into combat, so it is important to choose wisely.

While you are playing the game, there are many kinds of enemy units you may encounter. Before you engage on a stage, you are given an opportunity to see the map layout, what recommended level it is and how many different types of enemies you will be engaging. At times *Arknights* is like a game of chess, and if you can predict the enemy's moves, you will achieve victory. Enemies can have ranged units, close combat units, rush units, artillery units, global units, mages, arts dealer and tanks.

Arknights also features enemy bosses. Some bosses can have two phases, which allows them to resurrect after their first death and become more lethal in their second phase. Some bosses can fly and bombard your operators from unreachable distances, while others can deal global damage, which targets all operators on the field. Meanwhile, some bosses can be the map or stage level itself, forcing limited deployment tiles from which your operators can be positioned. What is more, some bosses can be unblockable, forcing you to deal as much damage as you can before they invade past your base point. There are some bosses that can even ignore and dodge certain types of damage, while others can even summon smaller enemy units, increasing the wave's population.

Although *Arknights* is a tower defense game, some stages will be more than just defending. There are times when you will have to escort civilians, defend cargo, and even just make sure only a certain unit passes through the enemy spawn point. If you do not complete

this task, you will still fail the mission even if you defeat the wave.

As you continue to play the game and seek new challenges, there are different gamemodes to try. Contingency Contract is a gamemode in which you must clear the stage under certain conditions and handicaps. For example, you might limit the number of operators you can deploy, the class of operators you can deploy, the weakened buffs to your squad, the buffs to the enemy waves, the amount of health points your base point has and what enemy boss units will be deployed.

Annihilation is another gamemode in which the waves can last up to 400 enemy units. Deployment points do not generate overtime in this game mode unlike many others and can only be obtained through defeating enemy units or vanguards generating DP. As a result, the longer the battle takes, the stronger and more dangerous the enemies will become. Given the fact that each 100-enemy unit is considered one phase, the next phase will progressively get more challenging.

If you are interested in the stories of other nations outside of Rhodes Island, Intermezzi is a gamemode that allows you to focus on the storytelling aspect of the game. One story is the tale of the young mercenary W venturing through life and death on the battlefield. Another options is the tale of a young Dr. Kal'tsit as she experiences the despair caused by the physical and mental effects of Oripathy. Next is the tale of the hunter Skadi, who, while searching for her two allies, eventually encounters her true bloodline. Finally, there is the tale of a therapist, Lumen, who wishes to restore his nation Iberia but finds himself lost.

If I had to give *Arknights* a traditional rating, it would be five out of five stars. However, I cannot really rate *Arknights* on any scale, mainly because it is such a different game compared to most other modern releases. It is not a game I would consider fun because it is extremely stressful at times. It is a game that does not pull any punches, nor is it one that leads you by the hand. Through sheer repetition, the game forces you to learn how to be better. Perhaps that is why I love it. The story, the characters, the gameplay, the stress and the satisfaction of improving on refining a skill make *Arknights* the best strategy video game ever released.