Mid-Peninsula High School

# MAGAZINE :: SUMMER 2024

Creating Art Using Virtual Reality, Page 2



ust a few weeks ago one of my six godchildrenthat's right, six, though I don't have any children of my own-graduated from Georgetown with a few hundred other members of the Class of 2024. The class's time in college was remarkable because they all faced the challenges of a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, technology shifts, and social and political upheaval. Chloe started college online in the fall of 2020, and she seriously considered dropping out because she found the online instruction lacking and the overall experience (from her bedroom in New York) beyond disappointing. Her courageous choice to give it another chance when the campus reopened for students in the fall of 2021 turned out to be a great decision; she had a fantastic experience academically, socially, and personally, and the authentic confidence she has developed throughout all the ups and downs is impressive.

The students in Mid-Pen's Class of 2024 faced their own challenges when they started high school at the same time as Chloe started college. Of course, our teachers went out of their way to make the online experience as engaging as possible by building relationships, even as they and their students often struggled to find the right strategies for doing so online. Our recent graduates fondly recalled the support that Director of Admissions Randy Johnson offered as they logged in for their first high school classes and the Snapchat filters that English teacher Cory Huttenga used to disguise his face on Zoom. They also recalled their frustration and disappointment with the entire online experience, and the extent to which that led them and their families to complain. They were right to feel that way, of course-this was not the high school experience they expected.

This is why the evolution of the Class of 2024 has been so remarkable: they chose a path for themselves that would be marked by persistence and wisdom. The return to in-person learning was bumpy, and developing relationships with masked teachers and students awkward, and yet they kept showing up literally and metaphorically. Complaints were replaced by advocacy, relationships took shape and deepened, and academic and social apathy morphed into engagement and leadership.

> In early May, at our annual Senior Retreat, as the class began looking forward to graduation, all of the staffulty members in attendance were taken with how easy the students were with each other, and how equally receptive they were to planned activities and to downtime together. A few

weeks later, at the Senior Dinner, which is always a time for students to appreciate some of their most impactful teachers and classmates, the class showed themselves to be fiercely inclusive. Just about every student who spoke had something lovely to say about each one of the school's 32 staffulty members, as well as their dear friends and everyone else in the class.

Mid-Pen is rightfully famous for embracing the long game for each student in our beloved school. We understand knowing and supporting students is the foundation for everything they will learn in high school, and we resist pushing a fast-forward button on any student as they figure out who they are, what their strengths are, and how that knowledge will shape their lives. Our students are successful in myriad ways because we seek to strike the best balance between patience and progress. The collective resilience and perspective that the Class of 2024 developed during such a turbulent time is a powerful example of that philosophy, and I could not be prouder of our newest alumni for trusting us and themselves to choose this path.

#GoDragons, indeed! 🦻

Karen Eshoo

# CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS is published twice yearly for the parents, alumni, faculty, and friends of Mid-Peninsula High School.

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The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.



# **Pioneering Digital Arts Class Receives UC Certification**

id-Pen Director of Technology Anne Marie Schar had a vision to create a new kind of art class, one that introduced students to the latest computer technology.

Much like traditional studio art classes, most digital arts classes focus on two-dimensional artwork, using tools such as Illustrator, Photoshop, and Procreate. Anne Marie wanted to let her students express their creativity via virtual sculpting and other forms of three-dimensional art using virtual reality.

But there was no approved curriculum for this, so she decided to develop one herself.

"Even three-dimensional art is still done in 2-D on a computer a lot of times," said Anne Marie. "To me it's a very nuanced difference between modeling in 2-D and sculpting in 3-D, which is the focus of the Digtial Arts Mixed Reality class."

As Anne Marie describes it, sculpting is freehand and much more kinesthetic. "Modeling is more of a technical art," she explained. "You're creating with shapes and you can do it two dimensionally, but it doesn't have the same feel as actually creating something in space."

Last May, after three years of persistence, she succeeded in getting her new digial arts course A-G certified to count towards University of California requirements.

Anne Marie's interest in digital art was sparked about six years ago, when she took a class on virtual reality art. "I'm not an artist, and I had never done virtual reality, but it turns out that the guy leading the class had sculpted the Hulk using CGI (computer generated imagery) for the early Marvel movies. We're always looking for ways to move technology forward at Mid Pen, and because we have such a robust art program, I thought that would be a great way to do it. So I pitched the idea and that's how the class got started."

Anne Marie believes that sculpting in VR has a lot of advantages over 2-D modeling. It lets you interact with your creations at full scale and get the full effect of your art in real time. With software like Adobe's Substance 3D Modeler, a headset, and hand pads,



students can feel as though they are actually working with clay. "It's not just moving a mouse around. You've got your hands on it, you're twisting things, shaping things, actually sculpting—virtually—in 3-D."

When students finish their creations, sometimes having alternated between modeling in 2-D and sculpting in 3-D, they can print them, using one of the school's 3-D printers, or animate them. Viewers can experience their creations in a video, in a virtual reality world, or in augmented reality, where digital content is overlayed onto real-life environments and objects.

While the class is offered for fine arts credit, students learn a lot about computers as well. The class teaches problem-solving and how to learn new technologies as they become available in this rapidly evolving space. "It is an art class, but it is a lot more, too," said Devin Crouse '25, who is interested in being a game developer. "Even if you are not really interested in art, you can learn so much about computers by taking it."

Anne Marie recognizes the practical, commercial aspects of the class. "For any kind of game design, you need people to sculpt those characters," she said. "With more VR games on the market, you want things to look right in virtual reality, so there's going to be more VR sculpting there."

Anne Marie has brought commercial artists and game designers to talk with students in the class. One artist explained how he sculpts creations in VR, prints them out using a 3-D printer, then sells them on Etsy. "He makes a living on Esty by designing masks that people use for cosplay," said Anne Marie, noting that she is working with one student who is hoping to create a full suit of armor for Star Wars cosplay.

# Mid-Pen in Bloom A Spring Term Filled with Art, Adventure, and Celebration

The arrival of spring at Mid-Pen heralds a season full of excitement, creativity, and memorable experiences.

During DragonWeek in March, adventurous students explored the far corners of the world, from the historic castles of Edinburgh to the bustling streets of Manhattan, from the crystal-clear waters of Cozumel to the summit of Angel Island overlooking San Francisco Bay. Other DragonWeek adventures closer to home included opportunities to experiment with crafts like welding and glassblowing and learning how forensic science, like fingerprinting, is used to solve crimes.



After spring break, the school's Holi celebration added a splash of color to the season, with students joyfully participating in this traditional festival of colors, symbolizing unity and the joy of spring.



Students took to the stage for a weekend of performances of *Now. Here. This.*, this year's spring musical. The offbeat and endearingly goofy show follows the evolution and adventures of a group of friends on an outing at a natural history museum as—inspired by exhibits about ancient civilizations, reptiles, outer space, and more—they journey through time in an attempt to step into that elusive "present moment": the *now*, the *here*, the *this*.



MID-PENINSULA HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

his year's all-school **Prom** featured a whimsical Alice in Wonderland theme, and **Spirit Week** brought an explosion of school pride, with students and staffulty donning creative outfits and participating in lively competitions that fostered camaraderie and school spirit.











Watch our students perform at the Guild.







n May, Mid-Pen's traditional **Night of the Arts** showcased an impressive array of student talent, with paintings, sculptures, and performances transforming our hallways into a vibrant gallery. The second annual **Concert at the Guild** followed the next week, with stunning performances by our six music ensembles in a renovated former-moviepalace-turned-concert-hall with a professional sound and lighting system.







# Six Staffulty Members Mark Career Milestones

t the last staffulty meeting of the 2023-2024 school year, Head of School Karen Eshoo celebrated the work anniversaries of six dedicated staffers, honoring their remarkable contributions and unwavering commitment to Mid-Pen students.

# 5 Years

Robbie Nero-Young is "the glue that holds us all together," said Karen, in acknowledging Robbie's five years as as shuttle driver and office assistant (much of it working side-by-side with



her daughter, Stacie Foreman '15). For many students who commute to school by train, Robbie is the first Mid-Pen face they see each morning, warmly greeting them with a cheerful smile and a friendly wave. She sets a positive tone and makes everyone feel welcome and valued as they start their school day.

Raul Salazar does it all at Mid-Pen: Spanish teacher, facilities associate, tennis and soccer coach. Raul was born and raised in Perú, and after graduating from Peruvian Union University with a bachelor's degree in



education, he moved to San Jose in 1993. "For anyone who has attended any of our LatinX events," said Karen, "you know how important Raul is to our community, the kids and the families. He is always there to pitch in no matter what."

After five years as Executive Functions Coach, Ed Stern will be moving on to a new school community next year. Originally from New York, Ed arrived in California in 2010, but never lost his passion for his favorite baseball team,



the Mets. Karen credited his dedication, thoroughness, and follow-through in helping so many Mid-Pen students find academic success over the past five years.

# 10 Years

Before coming to Mid-Pen a decade ago, math teacher Ethan Weker had a remarkably varied career. He grew up outside Boston and studied mathematics and music at Bates College



in Maine, combining them for his senior thesis in mathematical music theory. Following a brief stint as a jazz pianist in comedy clubs in Boston, he worked

as a mathematician for an Internet security company, focusing on encryption. In 2001, he decided to make a big change, and moved to California to begin a teaching career. Ethan loves working with students who learn differently; his greatest thrill is the "Aha!" moment that students get when something suddenly makes sense. "He is always curious as an educator," said Karen, "about kids, about his subject, and about his pedagogy."

# Director of Admissions Randy Johnson

"has the ability to earn trust really quickly with almost anyone he meets," said Karen. "He moves through the school with deep integrity, so he cannot help but bring people together and make



them feel comfortable." Randy joined Mid-Pen in 2014 to conduct public outreach for the school and direct the Enrichment Center, which gave him the opportunity to represent the school externally and develop close working relationships with students as an academic coach and mentor. In the summer of 2017. he became Mid-Pen's Director of Admissions. Randy cherishes the opportunity to share Mid-Pen's stories with prospective families as they work to find just the right fit for their student.

# 20 Years

Athletic Director Kurt Lange first came to Mid-Pen in 1989. He left six years later, but returned in 2004 because he



"just couldn't stay away." On the 20th anniversary of his return, Karen commended Kurt for being "patient and generous with every kid" and for creating "an athletic program that gives even non-athletes the opportunity to be a part of a team and get to know themselves, both physically and mentally, through athletics." Kurt's philosophy is not just about winning; he values personal accountability, sportsmanship, tolerance for individual differences, and improving physical fitness. As a PE instructor, he believes it is most important to provide a safe learning environment where students are not afraid to express themselves in the physical world. 🦻



MID-PENINSULA HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

# Friends and Family Celebrate Class of 2024 at 44th Commencement Ceremony

nder a cloudy sky that began to clear just as they were called to the stage to receive their diplomas, the 28 members of the Mid-Pen Class of 2024 proudly graduated in a memorable outdoor ceremony on the school's field. The event, filled with joy and anticipation, marked the culmination of four years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance.



As Head of School Karen Eshoo noted in her opening remarks, this was the class that began their freshman year on Zoom at the height of the COVID pandemic. The ceremony not only highlighted the academic achievements of the graduates but also reflected their resilience and growth, setting the stage for the exciting new chapters that await each of them.

As has been a school tradition for the past four years, the seniors were presented for graduation by their Core teachers, who offered thoughtful and personal tributes to each student prior to presenting them with their diplomas. In another Mid-Pen tradition, four student speakers delivered inspiring messages of hope, gratitude, and perseverance.

Sharing her efforts to develop selfconfidence, **Tanisha Gundubogula** emphasized that believing in yourself is essential for growth. In middle school, she said, despite



feeling capable, her learning differences led to selfdoubt and she struggled without proper guidance. She humorously recounted how she decided to learn to play the flute, but lacking supportive instruction, spent the entire year in band class watching the other kids play and trying to mimic what they did. At the end of the year, when the band performed the Star Wars theme song in front of the entire school, she said she could hardly play a note. "I should have been given an Oscar for that performance, because I still can't play the flute!"

Her perspective changed when she arrived at Mid-Pen in 9th grade, where she found a supportive environment and inspiring teachers who helped her overcome her doubts and discover her passions, particularly in music (drums, not flute) and science.

"The teachers here inspired me," said Tanisha, who will be attending NYU in the fall. "Each and every



# **GRADUATION 2024**

one of them embraced my differences and gave me their patience, motivation, and appreciation. Climate change is definitely real because my ocean of selfdoubt has evaporated."



Ileana Wood recalled her nervousness during freshman orientation on Zoom and reflected on the challenges faced during the pandemic, from making friends through private chats and

breakout rooms to navigating in-person classes with masks and social distancing. Despite these difficulties, the class found ways to connect by playing games under the gazebo and chatting while waiting for weekly COVID tests. Ileana expressed pride in her classmates' growth and resilience, emphasizing how they supported each other through successes and challenges.

"I know that this class has not had the easiest of journeys, but I am thankful for it all," she said, expressing gratitude for Mid-Pen providing a safe space for her and her classmates to learn and grow over the past four years. "It would be the place in which we could cry, laugh, and feel connected. It is lucky that we ended up in such a special place during a global pandemic." Ileana will be attending Cal Poly SLO in the fall.



Katie Gonzalez expressed the mix of emotions all the graduates were feeling that morning—happiness for graduating, sadness for leaving friends and teachers, anxiety about starting a new school, and

eagerness for the future. She highlighted the sense of belonging and community at Mid-Pen, attributing her success to five key individuals: Registrar Stacie Foreman, Spanish teacher Raul Salazar, Director of Operations Gavin Harris, and English teachers Laurie Miller and Tara Theobald-Anderson.

Katie praised Stacie for encouraging her to be her best self and helping her focus on goals. Raul was described as a supportive figure, almost like a father, who checked on her grades and shared lunch with her, instilling in her the belief that she could achieve anything. Gavin, though new to the school just this year, inspired her with his energy and work ethic, teaching her to always do her best and smile. Laurie, with her strong and joyful personality, helped Katie come out of her shell, use her voice, and embrace mistakes. And Tara, who openly shared their ADHD experience, encouraged Katie to be her authentic self and helped her rediscover a love for school.





"I want to thank every one of the staffulty for all the hard work and dedication you have given each student," she said. "Not only is it our day to celebrate, it's your day to be proud of yourselves." The first in her family to attend college, Katie will be a freshman at San Jose State in the fall.



Abby Wee began her graduation speech by quoting from The Bell Jar, in which the author, Sylvia Plath, seeing her life branching out before her like a green fig tree, describes the paralyzing

indecision faced when choosing among so many desirable options. Abby related this metaphor to her own experience choosing between colleges, feeling overwhelmed by the need to decide who she wanted to become in a short time. Returning to Mid-Pen after her college visits, Abby reflected on the numerous choices she made throughout high school, starting as a shy freshman during the 2020 pandemic lockdown.

Beginning in sophomore year, determined to overcome her shyness, Abby joined every sports team and club she could, pushing herself out of her comfort zone. She embraced every opportunity, such as attending the Student Diversity Leadership Conference in St. Louis and becoming captain of this year's undefeated Girls' Varsity Volleyball team. Through these experiences, she transformed from forcing herself to try new things to genuinely enjoying and seeking out new opportunities.

Abby returned to the metaphor of the fig tree to describe her journey at Mid-Pen, both metaphorically and literally. Pointing to Mid-Pen's own fig tree a short distance from the stage, she compared her high school experience to climbing the tree and savoring its fruits, noting that each decision leads to new opportunities, every choice creating new possibilities.

"Every decision you make is inherently valuable the moment you make it," she said. "Making one choice doesn't mean the death of another but rather the creation of a thousand more. Each fig plants a seed that will grow and form a new fig tree of exciting futures and experiences. The figs will come again, and so will opportunities."

# AWARDS

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

Katie Gonzalez and Cherilyn Rodriguez-Valladares received the Douglas C. Thompson Award for Inspired Growth, given to a senior who has achieved the greatest personal and/or academic growth during their time at Mid-Pen.

The Leonard W. Ely Community Award, given for the greatest contribution to the well-being of the school and/or outside community, was shared this year by Calvin Healy and Olivia Baker.

**Ileana Wood** and **Charlie Woods** both received the Senior Award for high academic achievement.



Abby, who declined an offer of admission at Plath's alma mater, Smith College, to attend Wesleyan University in the fall, concluded her speech by encouraging her classmates and the audience to embrace the blessing of having choices. She reminded them that they are not defined by their decisions but by what they make of them. She urged everyone to "go pick the figs," symbolizing the act of making choices and exploring new opportunities.

MID-PENINSULA HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

# FEATURE

# Mid-Pen College Advising Program De-Stresses the Application Process

### by Anne-Marie Strohman

ollege applications are not like when we did them years ago," said Mid-Pen parent Jennifa Gosling.

In contrast to the relatively simple process that she undertook without much guidance as a college senior, Jennifa's son, Calvin Healy '24, had all sorts of decisions to weigh, from whether to take standardized tests to how to create a balanced college list. Add the cultural narrative that students must mold themselves into perfect applicants to get into a "top" school—a view that's hard to escape in Silicon Valley—and the college process can be a recipe for stress and anxiety. Mid-Pen's studentcentered approach, however, ensures that it isn't.

For College Advisor Shelley Willig, "The narrative around trying to look a certain way for this hopefully positive or desirable outcome—that's exactly what I *don't* want to do." Shelley is building a college advising program using a different approach, one that emphasizes Mid-Pen's values of knowing students deeply and supporting each student's individual journey.

When Shelley was hired two years ago as Mid-Pen's first full-time college advisor, bringing with her a decade of experience as an independent college counselor, she aimed to continue the excellent guidance and care students had been receiving in their junior and senior years and expand the program to all four years of high school. "It seems a little counterintuitive," she noted, "but if we start the program earlier, I actually think it's a stress alleviator."

For freshmen and sophomores, the curriculum, which will roll out over the next two years, will guide them to be the best students and community members they can be. Shelley hopes that sessions designed to help students discover their interests, develop intrinsic motivation, and practice self-reflection will help them discover the post-secondary path that is right for them. While some Mid-Pen grads take gap years, join the military, or attend trade schools, a large



Calvin Healy '24, with parents Jennifa and Aragorn, developed a "right fit" college list that included 10 schools.

majority—approximately 80%—go immediately to four- or two-year colleges.

For those who want to attend college directly after Mid-Pen, investing in their interests and becoming engaged in their learning and community sets them up to be great candidates. When it comes time to look for colleges, students will have a better sense of which schools match their values and interests. Instead of relying on "best of" lists, Shelley's goal is to help students create "best for me" lists.

With Shelley's help, Calvin Healy whittled his college list down to ten schools, far more than his mom applied to when she was a high school senior. Belmont University, where he will be matriculating in the fall, originally wasn't on Calvin's radar at all, but after getting to know him, Shelley suggested he take a look.

After a visit to Belmont's Nashville campus, the school became his top choice, even once all ten of his applications turned into acceptances. According to his mom, developing a "right fit" list with Shelley's guidance "helped de-stress the situation, because we were really comfortable with the choices."

Mid-Pen mom Cindy Lee was equally impressed with the support Mid-Pen provided her daughter, Abby Wee '24. In the family's initial meeting with Shelley in January of Abby's junior year, Shelley introduced MaiaLearning, an online platform that tracks the





Senior Abby Wee says the school's college advising program provided both freedom and support.

entire application process, from creating a college list through deciding where to commit. The clear sense of organization gave Cindy confidence.

"Everything was mapped out on a calendar," she said. "Shelley had a mechanism for reaching out to the students. They had timetables and deadlines to meet. That gave me a lot of confidence and trust."

Abby, who will be attending Wesleyan University in the fall, found that she had both freedom and support in the process, from Mid-Pen's College Essay Writing class the summer after junior year to informal meetings with Shelley throughout senior year.

"If you needed any help at all, you could just walk into Shelly's office and she would help you with absolutely anything and everything," Abby recalled. "I had freedom to figure things out on my own when I wanted to and make decisions on my own. But then when I needed help, which was often, she was always there."

Shelley hopes that in the future Mid-Pen alumni will play a greater role in the college advising process. "Alumni set the stage for a healthy attitude about college admission and attendance," she observed. "I want to connect with Mid-Pen alumni to share their paths with our seniors. What have the last 12 years looked like for our alumni?"

Whether alums talk with individual students about their college choices or speak on panels at college advising events, she hopes that hearing what Mid-Pen grads have done after high school will inspire students as they search for the path that is right for them.

At its core, Mid-Pen's college advising program centers students. For a successful college application experience, Shelley said, "You want to know the students deeply, you want them to be known deeply by others, and you want them to know themselves deeply." This is true even for alumni. If alums choose to take time off from school and want to apply to college a few years after graduation, Shelley is there to help. "We fold them in and support them," she said.

As a newly minted alum, Abby speaks to the success of the program. "Shelley provided so much support and she really made college seem like this thing that's going to happen and you're going to get there," she said. "When you reach the finish line, it's like the best feeling ever. And you had Mid-Pen to support you all the way."

# **Calling Mid-Pen Alums!**

Want to help students plan for life after Mid-Pen? Got experience to share that they'd benefit from hearing? Sign up to be a part of Mid-Pen's Alumni-Student Connect program.

Whether you attended college straight after Mid-Pen, joined the military, or forged your own path, we want to hear from you—and so do our students. We can connect you with them individually or you can serve on a panel at one of our Life After Mid-Pen events during the school year. You can volunteer as little as 30 minutes of your time, and if you don't live in the area, we can set you up to talk with students on Zoom.

All alums, particularly young alums who graduated after 2010, are invited to help.

Scan the QR code to sign up or contact College Advisor Shelley Willig at shelley@mid-pen.org.



# **Record Signups Lead to Winning Track and Field Season**

By Kurt Lange, Athletic Director

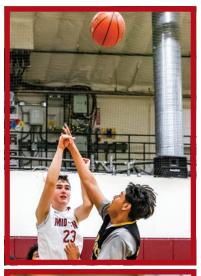
he winter and spring sports seasons saw a mix of challenges and successes, with a particularly strong season for our track and field team.

# **BOYS BASKETBALL**

Coaches: Erin Whittaker '93 and Aragorn Healy P'24

The boys basketball team played 20 games this year and though it finished with only two wins, there were some very exciting matches, including three league games lost by a combined total of only eight points. It was a young team, so experience and depth were definitely issues, as reflected by the fact that we were very competitive in the first half of most games but tended to run out of gas and sometimes players as we moved into the second half.

We are sorry to lose two graduating seniors, Henry Chant and Calvin Healy. Henry transferred to Mid-Pen as a junior last year and has been a fine post player for us over the last two seasons. A great rebounder





Mike Latour '26 and Henry Chant '24 provided strong offence.

and shot-blocker, Henry was also a focal point on offense as we ran a lot of plays through him. Cal completed his fourth season of basketball at Mid-Pen. He was the last remaining player that played on the 2021 "Covid Team" that won our division and qualified for CCS. Always a great three-point shooter, Cal turned himself into a quality wing defender and ball handler.

Many thanks to Aragorn Healy P'24, who has volunteered as assistant coach for the past four years, and to head coach Erin Whittaker '93 for all of their hard work and patience this season.

# **GIRLS BASKETBALL**

Coach: Colleen Carter

Our girls basketball team continued to build on its successes from last season, with a 5-12 record. Like the boys team, the girls were more competitive on the court than they appeared on paper, with five of their losses by a combined total of just 20 points.







Meeru Singhal '27 was named second team all-league in just her first year playing competitive basketball.

Departing seniors include second team all-league recipient Cherilyn Rodriguez, a very fine high post player and three-year starter, as well as Abby Wee and Kaavya Chavan. A special thanks goes to coach Colleen Carter for her amazing commitment to this program and her passion for coaching basketball.

# **COED TENNIS**

### Coaches: Raul Salazar and Kurt Heise

We had a strong turnout for tennis this season, with 14 players ranging from beginner to elite. Led by Oliver Carpenter '27, a nationally ranked player who won all of his matches this season in dominating fashion, the team made strong showings in all five of its matches. Junior James Carpenter was another top player, especially in doubles competition.

Thanks to coaches Raul Salazar and Kurt Heise, who devised great practices that served all of our players, regardless of ability, extremely well.

# **BOYS VOLLEYBALL**

Coaches: Alec and Franc Salazar

The boys volleyball team had a great turnout this

season, with 18 players on the roster. Because the sport is still very new to our league, matches were often hard to schedule, with only seven completed. As the sport continues to grow in popularity, we are hopeful that our match schedule will increase and that more schools will be able to offer junior varsity programs as well.

Even though we were not victorious this season, we saw a lot of player improvement and the future looks bright. We are losing only one graduating senior, Marco Alcalde. We expect a strong season next year, with six returning juniors, six sophomores, and five freshman. Thanks again to the brothers Salazar, Alec and Franc, for their continued dedication to both girls and boys volleyball at Mid-Pen.

# COED TRACK AND FIELD

Coach: Alan Cameron and Carrie Dungan

Under the direction of head coach Alan Cameron and assistant coach Carrie Dungan, the track and field team took another leap forward this year. With another huge signup (21 participants) we were able to compete at a high level in a variety of events, including sprints, middle distance, long jump, shot put, triple jump, hurdles, and relays. Track and field is often about "strength in numbers" and we had both this season, which helped us finish in the top seven out of 20 schools in all three of our league meets.

Senior Bryce Lawson had another great season, winning both the 100 meters and the long jump at the league championships, which allowed him to compete at the CCS semi-finals in Gilroy. Junior Ruth Schar also made the trip to Gilroy by finishing second in the 100-meter hurdles. They both received all-league awards from our league (PSAL).



# ALUMNI UPDATES

# **YOLANDA BERRY**'83 Overcoming the Feeling of Failure

his year's graduation alumni speaker was Yolanda Berry, who recounted to the audience of nearly 400 students, staffulty, parents, and friends her own journey as a 1983 alumna of Mid-Peninsula High School. In a speech that resonated with many of the graduates and their families, she shared her initial struggles with dyslexia, which went undiagnosed for years, leading her to believe she was a failure. At Mid-Pen, she learned the importance of being seen and supported, which helped her get into UC San Diego despite a low score on the SAT.

"Growing up in a house filled with smart and prolific readers, I felt both dumb and lazy because I didn't read," she said. "This was compounded by the fact that I could read words, just not understand sentences. I mean I could read a menu at a restaurant and the back of cereal boxes, but reading for content was beyond me."

She faced further challenges at UCSD, where she first learned about dyslexia in a psychology class. Without adequate support, she failed out of UCSD but eventually succeeded at San Francisco State University, from which she graduated exactly four years after her Mid-Pen commencement by learning how to study effectively and leveraging her strengths as a communicator and listener.

While she had hoped to pursue an advanced degree like many in her family, she was convinced that she would do as poorly on the GRE as she had on the SAT, so she shelved that dream. Despite her early academic setbacks, however, Yolanda had a successful career in the tech industry during the dot-com boom of the 90s, where her communication skills and technological understanding led to leadership positions on tech support teams. She was a key member of the support team at Wind River Systems, a leading provider of real-time embedded operating systems. As head of the escalations team, she was the person everyone turned to when customers "were really pissed off" or had particularly challenging problems. One of her notable achievements was supporting the Mars Pathfinder mission. "When it landed," Yolanda

recalled, "there was a problem with a nested interrupt, so they called me, thus making me the first person to take a support call from another planet. Yes, this is my biggest claim to fame."

Now married and living in the United Kingdom, Yolanda eventually earned a Master's in Psychology from the University of Derby in 2015 after technological advancements made reading easier for her. As a behavioral economist, her work currently focuses on human behavior and the environment. She works with local governments, community organizations, and environmental groups, focusing primarily on the area of recycling and sustainability. As Yolanda tells it, there are many different factors which influence people's actions, not all of them rational; she helps organizations improve their effectiveness by helping them design and implement modest changes to their messaging and materials, the effects of which can be potentially enormous.

At 58, Yolanda is finally pursuing a PhD. She concluded her graduation speech by encouraging the Class of 2024 to embrace change, persist through failures, and always push forward. She noted that failure is just "the plans have changed" spelled backwards.

"Hey, I told you I'm dyslexic!" she joked. 🤿



Clockwise from top left: Stefan Minkowski '22, Noah Takatsuno '22, and Taylor Young '21 with soccer coach Raul Salazar. Natalie Santoro '23 and Yuri Cass '23. Tripp Lyons '22, Alex Cai '22, Ethan Slafsky '21, and Wim Castellano '23. Former Academic Director and College Advisor Dave Richardson with Yvonne Anderson '85. Quinten Suppes '15, Sarah Foad '12, Charlotte Johnson '14, with Director of Technology Anne Marie Schar. Christina Jaimes '23, Uly Cruz '23, Juan Pablo Nava '23, Mayrin Ceja '23, and Matthew Evans '23.

id-Pen's first full alumni reunion in more than a decade, for graduates from the classes of 1980 to 2019, was a resounding success, bringing together around 30 alums at Bare Bottle Brewing Company in Menlo Park on May 17. The evening was filled with nostalgia and camaraderie as alums and teachers reconnected over craft beers, perused old

Kathleen Baker Westafer '87 is a Pre-K to Grade 5 Montessori Science teacher with the St. Paul (MN) Public Schools. A graduate of the University of the Pacific with a BA in Speech Pathology as well as an MEd, she still fondly recalls winning the Founder's Award at her Mid-Pen graduation: "Mid Pen got me back on track when nobody else believed I could do it."

Our condolences to the family of Anne Capitant '07, who called to let us know that Anne passed away in 2023.

Hannah Griggs '07, who attended Smith College after Mid-Pen, writes, "I moved to Seattle in 2022 to earn my MD at University of Washington School of Medicine. I'm currently finishing up my second year of medical school and am interested in pursuing oncology, gastroenterology, pediatrics, or some combination of those fields. I have a sweet rescue pittie named Stevie and am enjoying all the hikes, coffee shops, and bookstores in Seattle!"

Congratulations to Maggie Maroney Quickert '08, who writes that she is living in Tracy, CA, got married to Keith Quickert last year, and is expecting a baby boy in October. After Mid-Pen, Maggie earned two bachelors degrees, one from Denver College of Nursing and the other from CSU Chico, where she received a BS in Health Sciences with an option in Gerontology. She is currently an ER nurse with Stanford Health Care.

From Aidan Lloyd Tucker '18: "It's a bit late but I graduated Williams College in 2022 Magna Cum Laude with highest honors in Economics and Computer Science; inducted into Phi Beta Kappa."

Anouk Butler '20 writes, "In June 2024, I graduated from the University of Oregon with a BA in Linguistics and a BA in Popular Music Studies, receiving Departmental Honors for yearbooks, and reminisced about their school days.

For their part, 25 young alums from the classes of 2020 to 2023 enjoyed a relaxed gathering on the school's patio on June 3. The evening featured a traditional Mid-Pen barbecue, with burgers, hot dogs, and all the fixin's, with the familiar backdrop of the school bringing back fond memories.

Linguistics upon the completion of my undergraduate thesis. My summer plans consist of working with first-graders in a summer school program focused on reading comprehension, and I will resume my current Educational Assistant position in September in Eugene, OR. For the future, I will be taking a gap year to focus on applying to graduate school and to continue my research experience with a Linguistics lab at the University of Oregon."

**Colder Li '20** graduated from UC Santa Cruz in June and will be attending Georgetown University for his master's degree in computer science. He said he was very sorry to miss the Young Alum Reunion. "Hopefully I can join u guys next year!"

Juan Pablo Lara-Nava '23 has been hard at work on his associate degree in biology at Foothill College and is looking forward to pursuing a bachelor's in biochemistry. "My goal is to transfer to Stanford University in the Fall of 2025. This summer I will be working at Stanford University in the Department of Structural Biology, researching and studying chromosome condensation and de-condensation. This fall I plan to begin my transfer process and am going to start applying to universities."

This past spring, Henry Tucker NG'24, who left Mid-Pen at the end of his junior year to attend school in Norway, reached out to Director of Admission Randy Johnson with an update: "I miss you and Mid-Pen in general, as it was home to the best high school experience. It was really emotionally challenging coming out of the pandemic. I don't know what it was about the school—maybe that the Admissions Director sang in a really good hardcore band back in the day—but definitely having such an awesome person to talk to helped me feel at home more. Mid-Pen was and still is a special place to me, and I don't want to forget about the people that made me who I am."

# **REPORT ON GIVING**



From the Chair of the Board of Trustees



The Roman philosopher Cicero once said, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others." When we feel grateful, we're more likely to be generous, kind, patient, and forgiving. It helps us appreciate what we have, fosters a sense of interconnectedness and community, and encourages empathy and altruism. Gratitude reminds us not to take anything for granted and to remain inspired.

This year's Report on Giving is all about gratitude. It recognizes our community's commitment to creating a place where everyone feels they belong. It celebrates your support for our students, whose kindness, acceptance, and sense of responsibility core values of our school—prepare them for a lifetime of helping others. It shows our collective appreciation for all the ways our community supports the school.

We're excited to recognize the more than 220 individuals, families, and organizations who contributed nearly \$3 million to Mid-Pen this year. This total includes gifts to the Mid-Pen DragonFund, contributions to DragonFest, restricted gifts for various initiatives, and donations to the Think Big Be Bold Campaign, which will soon revitalize our Willow Road home with a fantastic 9,000 squarefoot addition to our campus. Every contribution counts, matters, and makes a difference.

The Mid-Pen DragonFund is the cornerstone of our annual fundraising efforts and is vital to our school's financial strength. It supports almost every area of school operations, from educational programs and staff salaries to campus maintenance and flexible tuition for students. The DragonFund also allows us to seize new opportunities across all aspects of programming and operations. With approximately 85% of current families and all of our dedicated staffulty participating, this year's DragonFund raised a record \$668,196, with every dollar directly impacting our students and teachers. This year's **DragonFest** was truly special. Staying true to the school's focus on inclusion and belonging, it was an informal evening of bowling and bocce at Pinstripes in San Mateo. With all the fun and very little of the usual fundraising fuss, it was a great opportunity for the entire Mid-Pen adult community to come together and have a blast, as the pictures on this and the following pages attest.

Under the tireless leadership of Mike Gordon P'22, our **Think Big Be Bold Campaign** raised an additional \$2.2 million in gifts and pledges for the renovation and expansion of our Willow Road campus, bringing total gifts and pledges to over \$6 million. We are hopeful that we will be able to share detailed plans for the new building with the entire community very soon.

The success of our fundraising efforts is thanks to the sustained and thoughtful work of many individuals. Members of the Board of Trustees, school administrators, and parent volunteers dedicate countless hours to help Mid-Pen achieve its goals. They provide invaluable guidance and act as liaisons within our community. We are deeply grateful to everyone who volunteered their time and talent this past year, especially DragonFund Chair Jackey Garcia P '26, Parent Association President Heather Hoffman P '25, and all our PA volunteers. Thank you for being part of our students' journey and investing in their futures.

Thank you for another incredible year of giving to Mid-Pen. Your unwavering support, enthusiasm for the Mid-Pen mission, commitment to our students and staff, and generous contributions make all of this possible. For this, we are truly grateful.

With gratitude,

Phil Abrahamson Chair, Board of Trustees



# **DRAGONFUND GIFTS**

### INDIVIDUALS

Anonymous (4) Phil Abrahamson & Dana Shelley 🚯 Sue Alvarez Eric & Jennifer Amdursky Kendall Anderson '12 🚯 Lee & Anne Anderson Christopher & Kerry Andrasick Jill Andre 🚯 Mark Ankenman & Amanda Edmonds Alexandra Arguello Jon Austin 🚯 Sebastian Bachmann & Laura Haunschild Majd Bakar & Carla Hindie Jeff Baker & Shaula Kumaishi Joseph & Lucia Baldwin Meenu Baloda 🚯 Elaine Barry David Barter & Jessica Barter David & Emily Beach Ronald & Mikhal Bouganim Steve & Gabriella Bowling 🐽 Shawn & Emily Burns Ryan & Catriona Cairns Angelica Camacho Alan Cameron 🐽 Jonathan Carpenter & Caroline Nolan MaryBeth Carter Armando Castellano & Andrea de Wit 📀



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# REPORT ON GIVING



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# **DESIGNATED GIFTS**

The following donors requested that a portion of their gifts be designated for specific purposes.

### Athletics

Joseph & Lucia Baldwin Kirk & Lise Latour Philip Wollman '21 Lester & Ava Wollman

Equity and Inclusion

Stacie Foreman '15

### Staffulty Support

Merrilee Harris Stuart Sussman & Hannah Frost Yaneth Madrigal Ceja & Roberto Duenas

### The Academic Experience

Benjamin Chung & Tandy Aye Shari DelCarlo & Ron Johnson Majd Bakar & Carla Hindie Thomas & Maureen Dollente

### The Arts

Anonymous (2) MaryBeth Carter Christopher Kummerer & Emilie Blase Sherri & Carlos Plaza Tom & Victoria Quertermous Mark Shaw & Allison Kluger





Theodore Shen & Fan Zhang Leo Tenenblat & Ingrid Cotoros Christopher Kaprielian & Petra Pino

# **RESTRICTED GIFTS**

The following donors requested that a portion of their gifts be restricted for specific purposes.

### The Douglas C. Thompson **Fund for Class Trips**

Karen Eshoo Insperity Laurie Miller

# Flexible Tuition

The Eucalyptus Foundation

Music Program Sharie Kumaishi & David Quinn

### Technology

Ryan & Catriona Cairns

# THINK BIG BE BOLD CAMPAIGN

The most significant fundraising initiative in the school's history, the Think Big Be Bold Campaign will transform our Willow Road home, with the renovation of our current classrooms and the addition of a new building housing classrooms and a new performance space. Thank you to the following supporters whose generous gifts, pledges, and pledge payments received in 2022-2024 have helped bring our campus renovation and expansion a big step closer to reality! Anonymous (2) Jill Andre

The An Jie Foundation The Benevity Community Impact Fund

Steve & Gabriella Bowling

# THE JOHNSTON SOCIETY

Beloved science teacher Larry Johnston dedicated more than 35 years to Mid-Pen, teaching almost right up until his death in 2015. Over the years, he inspired hundreds of Mid-Pen students, who often imitated his distinctive style.

Larry loved his Mid-Pen students, and he loved to

travel. When he died, he left a bequest to help ensure that all students, regardless of financial need, are able to participate in Mid-Pen's travel program, which takes students to places as far afield as Perú to learn Spanish or Great Britain to study British history.

satisfaction derived from making a lasting contribution to Mid-Peninsula High School's long-term prosperity.

Lisa & Detlef Braun Jonathan Carpenter & Caroline Nolan

Dean & Wilma Chu Shari DelCarlo & Ron Johnson Steve Dowling & Petra Wright Cathleen & Michael Foster Mike & KT Foust Edward & Jacqueline García Michael & Loren Gordon Merrilee Harris William & Cristina Harris l inkedIn The Marek Family Christopher Maxcy & Daniele Levy Adam Miller & Shelley Knowlton John Northway & Lisa Grote Josh Stein Andrea & Charles Thurber Henry Trevor & Elizabeth Werter Debbie & Gary Vielbaum

- 5 or more years of consecutive annual giving
- 10 or more years of consecutive annual giving
- 15 or more years of consecutive annual giving

The list of donors includes gifts received between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024. We have made every attempt to ensure the accuracy of this report. We sincerely apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions. Please contact the Development Office at henry@mid-pen.org with any corrections.

Jing Wang & Hongjun Zhu Anna Waring

# HONOR AND MEMORIAL GIFTS

In honor of John Northway & Lisa Grote

J.D. Northway

In honor of Maya Mulleneaux '17

Gary Mulleneaux & Amy Christen

In honor of Shelley Willig & Jorge Rodriguez

Stuart Sussman & Hannah Frost

In memory of Toby Dybbs Michael Dybbs &

Elizabeth Kitchens In memory of Dominic Vogel '20

# **GIFTS IN KIND**

The Marek Family

Jeff Birkeland & Charlene Prince Birkeland



At the time, Larry's was the first bequest the school had ever received. The Johnston Society was established in his memory to recognize those donors who have named Mid-Pen as a beneficiary of a planned gift. Such gifts might include a bequest, gifts of life insurance, naming the school as a beneficiary of a retirement or other account. Planned gifts of any amount qualify and membership is purely honorary, meaning there are no dues, obligations, or solicitations. The greatest benefit of joining the Johnston Society is the

# JOHNSTON SOCIETY MEMBERS

Matthew James '87 Lawrence P. Johnston\* Merrilee Harris

Dolly Paterson Anne Marie Schar

deceased

VIID-PENINSULA HIGH SCHOOL CONNECTIONS



# CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

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





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