



# THE CHOATE NEWS

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF CHOATE ROSEMARY HALL SINCE 1907

Choate Rosemary Hall  
333 Christian Street  
Wallingford, CT

VOL. CXVII · No. 9

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2023

THECHOATENews.CHOATE.EDU

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGE IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONFERENCE

By **Fiona Fu '25**  
Copy Editor

After two flights and a long day of bonding by proximity, 13 faculty and six students traveled from Wallingford to St. Louis, Missouri, to attend the annual three-day National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) People of Color Conference (PoCC) and Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), respectively.

The events were an opportunity for students and teachers from all over the country to meet and engage in dialogue on how to be more inclusive in school spaces.

Over a total of 8,100 people attended the two conferences, with about 6,000 educators at PoCC and 2,000 students at SDLC. As the school participants of PoCC and SDLC are chosen by lottery for equity purposes, Choate was unable to attend last year during the first post-pandemic conferences, but was lucky enough to win a spot this year.

### PoCC:

The PoCC, according to NAIS's website, is a "flagship of NAIS's commitment to equity and justice in teaching, learning, and sustainability for independent schools." The conference is held in a different city each year under unique themes. This year's theme was "Gateways to Freedom: A Confluence of Truth, Knowledge, Joy, and Power."

On November 30, Dr. Gholnecsar "Gholdy" Muhammad opened the conference with a keynote address on the importance of educational reform. Dr. Muhammad, an Associate Professor of Literacy, Language, and Culture at the University of Illinois Chicago, addressed how the current education system fails the majority of its students. She advo-



Photo courtesy of Zainab Khokha '24

SDLC participants attend in affinity groups to discuss diversity.

ated for customizing curricula to meet the unique needs of individual students, rather than forcing diverse learners into a one-size-fits-all system. Until the stories of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) genius, justice, and joy are centered in education, "we are not ready to educate all children," she said.

PoCC attendees spent the rest of the conference attending workshops centered around understanding their individual experiences as educators and uplifting students in their learning journeys. Some session topics included the experiences of women of color working in school leadership, interracial solidarity, and helping kids learn about their own identities through art.

PoCC gave faculty a unique opportunity to rethink their approach to teaching. Associate Dean of Equity and Inclusion for Faculty and Humanities teacher Ms. Cindy Okrah said, "At the end of the day, as educators, we never stop learning. We always want to improve, so any professional conference is helpful to help you really rethink how you're teaching."

For other faculty, attending the conference had a more personal impact. "[PoCC] fills my cup so that I can make it through the rest of the year," Director of Counseling Ms. Raynetta Gibbs said. "I think that it gives a sense of belonging and community that we really need and don't often get in predominantly white institutions like Choate."

### SDLC:

Although PoCC and SDLC occurred concurrently and shared an opening event, SDLC is a separate conference geared towards cultivating cross-cultural communication, networking opportunities, social justice activism, and upstander skills for students. This year's theme was "Bending the Arc Toward Justice: Radical Optimism, Transformational Joy, Resilience, and Brilliance."

Dean of Equity and Inclusion and English teacher Dr. Rachel Myers, one of the faculty chaperones on the trip, said she hopes that students who attended SDLC saw that their "experiences are not being experienced in a vacuum," and that they came back "feeling empowered to act and in-



Photo courtesy of Fiona Fu '25

Choate students connect with SDLC Keynote Speaker, Dr. Omékongo Dibinga.

spire other people with what they have learned or taken away from the conference."

SDLC opened with the long-held tradition of "Silent Movement." Facilitators read out different identifiers under the umbrellas of age, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, religion, etc., and students stood up if the identifier applied to them, allowing participants to reflect on the intersectionality of their identities and the diversity of the group.

Students broke into "family groups" of about 70 people, and then further into "home groups" of five to seven students. Family groups met for a total of ten hours over two days and did activities together, such as an "identity molecule," in which participants ranked how important certain identifiers were to them, and discussions about social activism in school communities, socioeconomic status, cancel culture, and freedom of speech.

In addition, adult facilitators shared toolkits on how to approach difficult conversations and how to write letters to school administrations advocating for change.

create a community where everybody can be celebrated and not [just] tolerated — that's what brought me here."

SDLC ended with a regional conference where students were reunited with their faculty chaperones and representatives from nearby schools to discuss their biggest takeaways.

The Choate cohort shared ideas on how to improve Community Conversations, foster more care and engagement from non-minority students, and build greater transparency between the School administration and the student body.

In particular, after positive experiences within affinity groups at SDLC, both Zainab Khokha '24 and Tristin Hurst '24 hope to bring more affinity spaces to Choate.

"I'm thinking about ways we can try to encourage younger students to create affinity groups, since there are so few of them right now," Hurst said.

At the closing ceremony, attendees expressed their gratitude for SDLC and the connections they were able to make with other like-minded students. "It was a really grounding experience. Being in a bubble like Choate, you don't really see the outside world," Khokha shared.

SDLC also inspired students to continue the valuable work of fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at Choate. "One of my biggest takeaways is just to not get discouraged," Hurst said. "It's refreshing to know that so many people care, and it's energizing me to keep going with all this stuff they do on campus."

**Fiona Fu** may be reached at [ffu25@choate.edu](mailto:ffu25@choate.edu).

## THRIFTY BOAR: SUSTAINABILITY AND STYLE

By **Jolie Zhang '26**  
Staff Reporter

Students sifted through a treasure trove of trendy yet affordable clothing pieces at the annual second-hand clothing exchange — Thrifty Boar. The chic and eco-conscious clothing sale was hosted by Choate's Conservation Proctors (C-Proctors) in the bustling Student Activity Center (SAC) on December 1.

Three long rows of tables stretched across the main area of the SAC, covered in items ranging from chunky white high heels to worn-in jeans. Community members could either buy the item for \$1 or swap it with a clothing donation of their own. The spirit of exchange amplified the event's

goal of reducing waste while encouraging a culture of reuse and sustainable style.

The dedication of the C-Proctors extended beyond organizing a successful sale; their primary focus was on promoting sustainability. C-Proctor Lily Hrazdira '24 emphasized the groups' collective vision: "Our aim was to encourage sustainable consumption practices, steering clear of supporting companies and productions that don't prioritize sustainability."

The C-Proctors hoped that by offering affordable and fashionable alternatives through a thrift sale, the community would be inspired to work towards more mindful and eco-conscious shopping habits.

To bring festive cheer to Thrifty Boar, the C-Proctors

treated shoppers to a spread of seasonal refreshments, including eggnog, apple cider, and pumpkin-spice cupcakes. In the background, the merry tunes of holiday music played, marking the beginning of the holiday season.

"The wide variety of clothes and general setup/experience made the shopping easy to navigate and enjoy," shared Eliana Li '26, who left with a warm, long-sleeved shirt. Satisfied with her purchase, she remarked, "It was very upbeat and enjoyable; everyone seemed to be having fun. The food, drinks, and music added to the overall experience."

James Frushone '24, another participant shared, "It was a great idea to trade in some old pieces and refresh my wardrobe with new ones. It makes me feel good to shop sustainably and not support fast fashion."

Thrifty Boar embodies the School's commitment to sustainability. The event offered an assortment of budget-friendly yet stylish clothing options while reminding the community of the importance of responsible consumption.

**Jolie Zhang** may be reached at [jzhang26@choate.edu](mailto:jzhang26@choate.edu).



Photo by Emily Ma '25/The Choate News

Students admire clothing items at Thrifty Boar.

## i.d. Lab Alumni Series Connects Robotics Enthusiasts

By **Deyi Meng '26**  
Reporter

Choate's i.d. Lab Alumni Series provides students who are interested in robotics with a better understanding of the various professional opportunities in the field after high school. On November 14, the School hosted alumna Ms. Kristen Andonie '17 to present at the event after its brief hiatus due to Covid-19.

Ms. Andonie spoke about working in the current tech space, shared insights into how to balance a rigorous academic schedule with a social life, and discussed the nuances of working on the forefront of robotics projects and navigating the stressful workplace environments of big tech companies in the Boston area.

To help students enhance their understanding of what current work in the field looks like, Ms. Andonie also walked through her daily experiences at Lockheed Martin and Walmart Robotics. Student and faculty attendees listened attentively as she explained the Agile and Scrum frameworks and key methodologies in today's software engineering field.

"It was fun to see photos of things that really are at the cut-



Photo courtesy of Dr. Travis Feldman

Students engage in presentation by Ms. Kristen Andonie '17.

ting edge of where robotics and design are, allowing businesses to do things that they haven't been able to do before," i.d. Lab Director Dr. Travis Feldman said.

Ms. Andonie's talent for and interest in STEM was evident during her years of schooling. At Choate, she excelled as a physics tutor and creator in the i.d. Lab. While pursuing a degree in Robotics Engineering and Computer Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, she served as Vice Chair of the Rho Beta Epsilon Robotics Engineering Honor Society. Ms. Andonie was tenured at Lockheed Martin, an aerospace company, and currently works at Walmart Advanced Systems and Robotics.

The event was organized by the Choate Makers Club and Dr. Feldman, who hoped it would help current students better understand how their coursework is reflected in real-world situations.

"You're going to math classes, you're going to science classes, you're going to art classes," he said. "The ideas of what you can do with those classes once you get out in the world are sometimes energized by the stories that people have of what they've done."

By welcoming Choate alumni back to campus, students can appreciate their work and achievements and hear their stories firsthand.

**See I. D. LAB, Page 2**

**Winterlude Wonders**  
Why Chelsea Branch '25 loves Winterlude  
**Opinions (Campus) • P4**



**Not-so-super Superfoods**  
Why superfoods are a super-SCAM!  
**Opinions (Nation/World) • P5**

**Between the Strokes**  
Master calligrapher connects cultures through art  
**Arts and Leisure • P7**



**Football Goes Undeclared**  
A recap of Choate Football's fall season  
**Sports • P8**



### What's Inside

School News.....	1-2
Local News.....	3
Opinions: Campus.....	4
Opinions: Nation/World.....	5
Features.....	6
Arts and Leisure.....	7
Sports.....	8



Read it, then recycle it.

Visuals by Junho Lee '24,  
Melody Qian '24, Emily Ma '25,  
and Ella Qu '24.





## i.d. Lab Holds Alumni Series with Ms. Kristen Andonie '17

Continued from Page 1

“There’s a diverse way of recognizing and honoring what alumni have achieved, and this is one small way to do that,” Dr. Feldman said.

The event culminated in a sprint design challenge, in which students simulated creating a new product under a time crunch, working through the processes of ideation, drafting, review, and revision.

Leanna Robie ’25 appreciated the chance to ask questions to Ms. Andonie and learn about what working in the field is really like: “The biggest takeaway was how many opportunities you have, how many job opportunities you get, and the ability that you could go from big networks, big companies, or big organizations to smaller startups,” she said.

Robie’s experience was in line with what the organizers of the

2023 i.d. Lab Alumni Series had hoped to achieve with the event.

“There are some really special ways that the interests of students, the hobbies, the projects that students are working on, find their own way of connecting to what these alumni bring and what stories they tell,” Dr. Feldman shared.

**Deyi Meng** may be reached at [dmeng26@choate.edu](mailto:dmeng26@choate.edu).

## CSAA HOSTS DIWALI CELEBRATIONS

By **Eshana Hora** ’27  
Reporter

In the soft glow of flickering candle lights and the vibrant hues of Rangoli adorning the Andrew Mellon Library Reading Room doorsteps, the Choate community gathered to eat paneer tikka masala and chicken biryani while gulping down mango lassi by the gallon before dancing to South Asian music. This is how Choate celebrates the festival of Diwali.

On campus, the Choate South Asian Association (CSAA) works to share South Asian culture with a wider audience by celebrating traditional festivals. Most recently, they hosted a school-wide Diwali event on December 8.

Because of scheduling issues, they were unable to host a large event on November 12, the official date of the holiday, but a small gathering was held in the Student Activities Center (SAC) Bay Room in acknowledgement of the day.

Students flowed in and out of the Bay Room, enticed by the smell of piping hot samosas and sweet mango lassi. Following the snacks, attendees made paper crafts resembling lit traditional



Photo courtesy of Aria Ramnath '24

Attendees make paper diyas for CSAA's small Diwali event.

oil lamps, or diya, with pink and blue craft paper.

Participant Norah Wang ’27 said, “My friend was telling me I should go, but I was hesitant because I rarely celebrate Diwali back at home. But I went, and I ate the food, which was good. And I made the little paper crafts, and it was all just really fun.”

President of CSAA Zainab Khokha ’24 stressed that all students, including those who have never attended a Diwali celebration, are welcome at CSAA events: “Our goal is to share South Asian culture with everyone at Choate, not just those who identify as South Asian.”

A few weeks later on December 8, CSAA hosted their annual large

Diwali celebration in the Reading Room. The event featured catered Indian food, henna done by local professional henna artist Ms. Adila Khan, diya painting, dandiya (a traditional folk dance), and Carrom (a tabletop game) — all common activities for celebrating South Asian holidays.

Vice President of CSAA Aria Ramnath ’24 said, “Celebrating Diwali at Choate is a lovely bonding experience for the South Asian members of the community. South Asians are definitely a minority here, so it is great to be able to come together and celebrate something we have in common.”

**Eshana Hora** may be reached at [ehora27@choate.edu](mailto:ehora27@choate.edu).

## IRIS Advocates for Immigrant and Refugee Aid

By **Thandiwe Taylor** ’26  
Reporter

Mr. Chris George, the Executive Director of New Haven’s Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), took to the stage during School Meeting on November 14 to address the Choate community on the organization’s work through an interactive skit. IRIS is a community-based non-profit organization that aids refugees’ and immigrants’ transition into their new communities by offering guidance for issues relating to housing, employment, health, legal, and education.

Having volunteered with IRIS since he was in kindergarten, Owen Sessine ’25, President of Choate Aids Immigrants and Refugees (CAIR), wanted to share his experience with IRIS with the Choate community. He has been working diligently to organize this event since meeting Mr. George last winter.

Mr. George began by handing scripts, clipboards, and hats to students in the front row. Using these props, students transformed themselves into actors in a skit showing how a refugee family would apply for citizenship in the United States.

Matt Pain ’26 played Abdullah, a refugee who went from being an esteemed baker in his town in Syria to a dishwasher at Archie Moore’s. Sofia Schmidt ’25 played his wife, Fatima, who came from a successful family of professors in Syria, who now had to do entry-level work to provide for her young daughter. Their skit highlighted the struggles of real people who are often dehumanized by statistics, blanket statements, and harmful stereotypes.

Seeing peers put themselves into the shoes of refugees made



Photo courtesy of Choate Flickr

Mr. Chris George speaks to the Choate community.

the stories that Mr. George told more personal for Leanne Parks ’25, who played a United Nations officer. She said, “I definitely thought they [the stories] were very helpful because I have to say it was much more personal. Like, here are their names, here’s their story, and I found that was really powerful.”

Mr. George then shared his own personal experiences doing humanitarian work as a Peace Corps volunteer. His most memorable account was of the hospitality a family showed him when he visited a refugee camp: “They treated me like an honored guest. They gave me a lesson in generosity and hospitality that I have never forgotten.”

One question that Mr. George often receives from audience members is: “Shouldn’t we be helping Americans in need first?” Their concern is that “there are Americans, who were born in this country, who are our friends and family, who need help, who’ve lost their jobs, who lost their homes, are waiting in line at food pantries,” he described. However, Mr. George believes we can provide aid for both.

Sessine appreciated Mr. George’s knowledgeable stance on the situation. “He values

opinion greatly because he has researched both sides of this conflict,” he said. “He’s been all over the world, so he really knows what we need to do as citizens to welcome refugees in the United States. I think that he did a great job of conveying that without creating a conflict by choosing one side over the other.”

Mr. George suggested that students interested in getting involved with the organization sign up for IRIS’s Run for Refugees in February. Other volunteer opportunities include partnering with religious centers in Wallingford, organizing a clothing drive, participating in educational World Refugee Day activities, or creating a sponsorship group that could help find and furnish an apartment for an immigrant family.

“I would hope for students to go away and talk among themselves or with their parents or with teachers about ‘Hey, what can we do to help refugees?’ I would hope that it would not only be educational, but it would be inspiring and it would inspire people to take action,” Mr. George said.

**Thandiwe Taylor** may be reached at [ttaylor26@choate.edu](mailto:ttaylor26@choate.edu).

## PAWS FOR A CAUSE RAISES MONEY FOR LOCAL SHELTER

By **Charlotte Flynn** ’25  
Reporter

Paws for a Cause, a fundraiser organized by Dana Tan ’25, aims to spread the joy that campus pets bring to Choate while also serving the local community. Tan’s love for animals and her desire to make a positive impact on the community led her to create a calendar that showcases her photos of 13 dogs and two cats on campus.

So far, she has raised over \$800 for the Meriden Humane Society, a no-kill animal shelter and rescue facility, through the calendar’s sales.

As an owner of two dogs, Tan was inspired by the joy and comfort animals brought her to create a project that could both celebrate the presence of dogs on campus and contribute to a meaningful cause — the Meriden Humane Society’s operational costs to care for their animals.

Tan felt moved to spread her love for animals to the Choate community after having volunteered at dog shelters in Singapore, which are dwindling in numbers.

Through the project, she also hoped to raise awareness for rescue animals. “Animals are often a very overlooked group. But they are all very close to our hearts, and many families around campus and students back in their own homes have animals themselves,” Tan said.



Photo by Dana Tan '25/The Choate News

The Paws for a Cause calendar features pets on Choate’s campus.

The calendar only featured campus pets who were rescued because Tan wanted to emphasize the importance of rescuing animals from shelters instead of buying them from pet shops or breeders.

Humanities teacher Mr. Wes Jenkins, whose dogs have all been rescue dogs, appreciated this aspect of the fundraiser. His dog, Loki, is also featured on the calendar. “I think a lot of people don’t always think about the unwanted animals and disregard the large number of them in shelters without a home and a family,” he said.

Organizing Paws for a Cause required meticulous planning. Tan first reached out to faculty members with dogs and requested to feature their pets in a calendar.

“It took around two months to really make this happen,” Tan said. “I had to make sure

my photography skills were good during the summer, followed by announcements to find volunteers, and then create the final product.”

After selecting her models, Tan selected scenic spots on campus for the photos and ensured the pets were comfortable throughout the process. Science teacher Dr. Selena Gell was excited about the opportunity to participate in a photoshoot with her dog, Eddie. “It was a very fun event. We took some photos in front of the Student Activity Center, and Eddie even tried on some different outfits,” she said.

The planning process not only reflected Tan’s commitment to the cause but also her deep appreciation for the unique charm each campus animal brought to the project.

**Charlotte Flynn** may be reached at [cflynn25@choate.edu](mailto:cflynn25@choate.edu).

## LIBRARY DISPLAYS BRING AWARENESS

By **Eliana Li** ’26  
Staff Reporter

“A library should never be a stagnant repository of books of information. A library should be the living, breathing, enmeshed part of the community,” said Ms. Sam Nelson, the Assistant Director of the Andrew Mellon Library. Guided by this vision, the team at Choate’s library works together with clubs and community members every month to curate displays that not only offer a rich selection of books but also serve as platforms to highlight different social and cultural issues.

This year, in October and November, the library team specifically focused on the censorship of Banned Books and the importance of preserving Native American Heritage.

In partnership with the American Library Association, libraries across the nation recognize Banned Books Week every year in October to celebrate the freedom to read and take a stand against censorship.

“The library team deeply values fighting against censorship,” Ms. Nelson said. “We believe in everybody’s freedom to read and freedom to information. By highlighting books that have been challenged or censored, not only do we bring attention to these issues, but we encourage readers to read them for themselves and to make their own conclusions about these titles.”

The library’s Banned Books Week display put several titles whose places on the library bookshelves have been repeatedly challenged throughout the years into the spotlight. Some of these books include the children’s poetry book, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, by Shel Silverstein, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, and the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling. The library team’s efforts to showcase these stories served as a reminder of the ongoing struggle against attempts to restrict access to thought-provoking literature.

The library also celebrates National Native American Heritage Month each November, offering displays as a tribute to the rich ancestry and traditions of indigenous communities.

The library team “made an attempt to find stories told by Native authors about their indigenous stories, including a wide range of platforms and mediums that highlight the extensive

range of Native experiences,” Ms. Nelson said.

Highlighted titles ranged from poetry to nonfiction to children’s books and included *The Sentence* and *The Roundhouse* by Louise Erdrich, *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom, and *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard. These books showcase not only the rich history of Native American culture but also the struggles that the group faces in light of the current and changing policies of society.

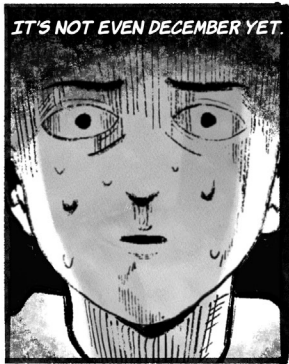
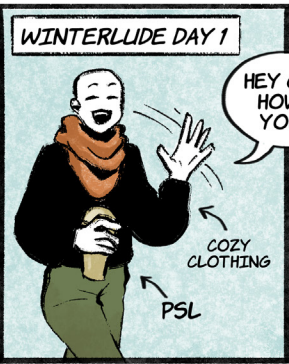
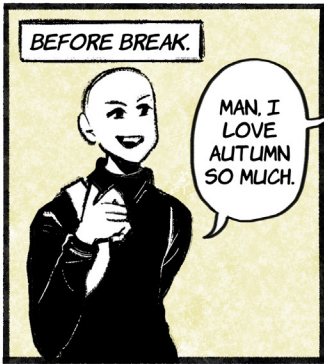
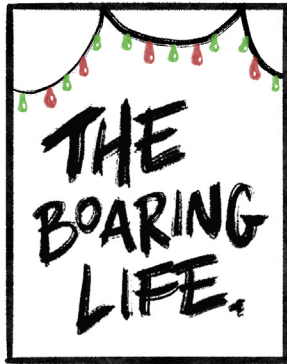
“The hope is that students not only will see themselves reflected in the stories and learn more about various topics, but also that they will be able to see a new perspective and new ways of thinking,” Ms. Nelson said. “These books can help us develop a new sense of empathy and awareness for what the world can look like beyond ourselves.”

**Eliana Li** may be reached at [eli26@choate.edu](mailto:eli26@choate.edu).



Photo by Nicha Tongdee '26/The Choate News

Books on religious and cultural holidays displayed in the library.



Graphic by Melody Qian '24/The Choate News



SOUL FRIENDS HEALS WITH THERAPY ANIMALS

By **Analy Vega '25**  
Staff Reporter

Wallingford residents drove up to 300 Church Street on “Giving Tuesday” to receive heart-warming hugs from therapy animals in a drive-through fundraiser hosted by Soul Friends.

Soul Friends is a non-profit organization serving 10,000 Connecticut families and children with its animal therapy services. The organization offers a diverse range of programs, from a free six-session equine therapy program for veteran and first responder families to an eight-session psychotherapy plan incorporating trauma and attachment principles.

Soul Friends CEO Ms. Kate Nicoll established the nonprofit 20 years ago after recovering from a spinal injury. Her organization came about as a result of seeing how animals effectively responded to her pain.

Since its inception, Soul Friends has been providing therapy sessions with dogs and other small animals in their office in Wallingford. Patients’ interactions with animals illuminate how they are responding to stress, injury, trauma, or simply a change in their environment.

Over the past 16 years, Ms. Nicoll has created five group curriculum-based programs for children that have consistently demonstrated positive benefits through outcome measures and research. These benefits include increased eye contact for children with autism and ADHD, increased hopefulness for children living with trauma, and improved peer relationships for teens.

Soul Friends received its first grant in 2021 from the Latham Foundation. Since then, the foundation has given Soul Friends another \$10,000 to fund sessions for veteran and first responder families. Despite the large sum, there is an imminent need for continued donations due to the high costs of animal maintenance, staff training, and labor.

The daily administrative tasks that Soul Friends manages can also be difficult. Matching, scheduling, and organizing appointments for animal therapy takes effort. During therapy sessions, Soul Friends must pay for two staff members on-site and the use of a barn.

NBC Connecticut predicted that Soul Friends was \$12,000 short of their annual budget in 2023, which inspired Giving Tuesday’s drive-through. Soul Friends hopes to receive additional grants in the future such as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from the town of Wallingford.

According to Ms. Nicoll, “Soul Friends has presented

at national and international conferences on the healing benefits of all kinds of therapy animals” in hopes of raising money for its services.

“Incorporating the animals, we’re able to provide an environment that is a motivating factor for kids to participate in therapy,” said Ms. Liz Caplan, an animal equestrian therapist at Soul Friends. “For a child who maybe is lacking self-esteem [and] needs some confidence boosting, we’ll have dogs do a new trick with them.”

Ms. Nicoll said that when times get challenging, she reminds herself of the organization’s mission statement, “to provide innovative clinical and educational programs that promote the healing benefits of the human-animal bond and nature for children, families, young adults, veterans, and first responders.”

Soul Friends sees value in animals’ connection to humans and the experiences these connections can provide. The organization believes that animals can help families with emotional health and mental health struggles in a way that humans cannot. One can find more about the organization’s cause at <https://soul-friends.org/blog/>.

**Analy Vega** may be reached at [avega25@choate.edu](mailto:avega25@choate.edu).



Graphic by Izzy Cook '27/The Choate News

Wallingford Celebrates with 14th Annual Holiday Stroll



Photo by Rachel Fan '27/The Choate News

Wallingfordians gather at Mr. D’s for the Holiday Stroll.

By **Rachel Fan '27**  
Reporter

During the night of December 1, Wallingford residents were bundled up in Santa hats, cozy knits, and Grinch costumes to walk the shops and restaurants on North Main Street and Center Street. From 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., festive lights and candles lit up the sidewalk, and a sound truck played cheerful tunes for pedestrians to enjoy.

According to Mrs. Liz Davis of the Wallingford Center Inc. (WCI), co-host of the event with Wallingford Park and Rec, the Holiday Stroll began 14 years ago after a group of retailers came together wanting to create an event for the Christmas season. She explained it was originally aimed to benefit and promote small businesses downtown, but since then, has “morphed into something more.”

This year, the stroll hosted over 70 merchants across town, comprising both small

businesses and restaurants. Some vendors offered items unique to this event, such as pumpkin-chai-scented candles and peppermint matcha cake, while others had special holiday discounts, such as 10% off of merchandise.

A fan-favorite of the Holiday Stroll was the raffle. According to Mrs. Davis, visitors could buy a raffle ticket for a vendor to get a certain amount off of retail price at their store and a chance to win a prize box filled with gift cards worth \$400, \$600, or \$1000. The Wallingford Rotary Club also held a fundraising raffle, of which the generated profits went into supporting the local community. “Around 300 people have participated in this raffle so far,” the manager at the club’s booth said.

Mrs. Davis explained that the goal of the Holiday Stroll, “is to get people into their business, to shop, and to patronize it.” It also gives new businesses the chance to introduce themselves to the community.

The Library Wine Bar and Bistro is one of the newer participants of this event, joining the Holiday Stroll in 2022. This year, they crafted a signature holiday drink and invited a jazz group to play acoustic music for customers.

Another booth participating in the event for their second year was a scented candle shop with a booth situated in Mr. D’s. While they sell candles at seven different places all across Wallingford all year, the vendor said the Holiday Stroll has been “a great place to get attention from residents” across town.

Mrs. Davis hopes that this Wallingfordian tradition continues to grow in the future. The WCI has been meeting with various merchants for discussions about expanding the mission of Holiday Stroll into other seasons besides just Christmas. “We have ideas floating around, and it’s just a question of making those ideas into reality,” she said.

**Rachel Fan** may be reached at [rfan27@choate.edu](mailto:rfan27@choate.edu).

BREAKING BARRIERS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY: SCOW’S INITIATIVES

By **Portia Chung '24**  
Reporter

In the early 1970s, local business was booming for the Ulbrich Stainless Steel and Special Metals company, which prompted an influx of workers from Mexico and Ecuador to Wallingford. While men worked in the factory, female immigrants gathered in groups, socializing and providing services for other families in the area. Thus, the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW) was born.

SCOW, as the sole Hispanic and Latine social service agency in the area, specializes in helping new immigrants overcome language and cultural barriers in the United States. While their programs are open to all residents of Wallingford, Meriden, and surrounding towns, many of their clients are Hispanic or Latine and are predominantly Spanish speakers. According to Assistant Executive Director at SCOW Ms. Lizandra Mejías-Salinas, “Every one of our staff members is bilingual and bicultural and can communicate with clients in either Spanish or English.”

One way SCOW helps its clients overcome language barriers is by providing phone interpretation services with officials in essential fields such as education, healthcare, and law. The organization also hosts bilingual information and education workshops throughout the year and organizes cultural events in collaboration with partner agencies to fulfill its mission of “enabling Latinos to maintain and share their rich varied cultures with the broader community.”

For over five decades, the organization has prioritized the needs of its Latine and Hispanic clients by utilizing feedback to shape its services. The organization places great importance on constant communication and follow-ups with clients to ensure the ongoing success of



Graphic courtesy of the Spanish Community of Wallingford website

their initiatives. “We determine the current needs of the community and the programs and services we should offer at the agency through the feedback and information received from one-on-one conversations with clients, client surveys, and during provider meetings with our community partners,” Ms. Mejías-Salinas said.

In response to the shifting landscape brought about by the pandemic, SCOW has refocused its efforts on addressing the employment, social, and emotional needs of the community. SCOW launched the PowerUp Program in association with the United Way of Meriden and Wallingford. This initiative supports individuals in their pursuit of upskilling opportunities to secure better-paying jobs and enhance their ability to provide for their families.

In recognizing the increasing social and emotional needs within the community, SCOW has also partnered with Sacred Heart University’s Social Work Internship Program and the Wallingford Department of Youth and Social Services. “[We] provide educational mental health workshops that address the mental health issues currently affecting our Hispanic [and] Latino community,” Ms. Mejías-Salinas said.

As members of the Wallingford community, Choate

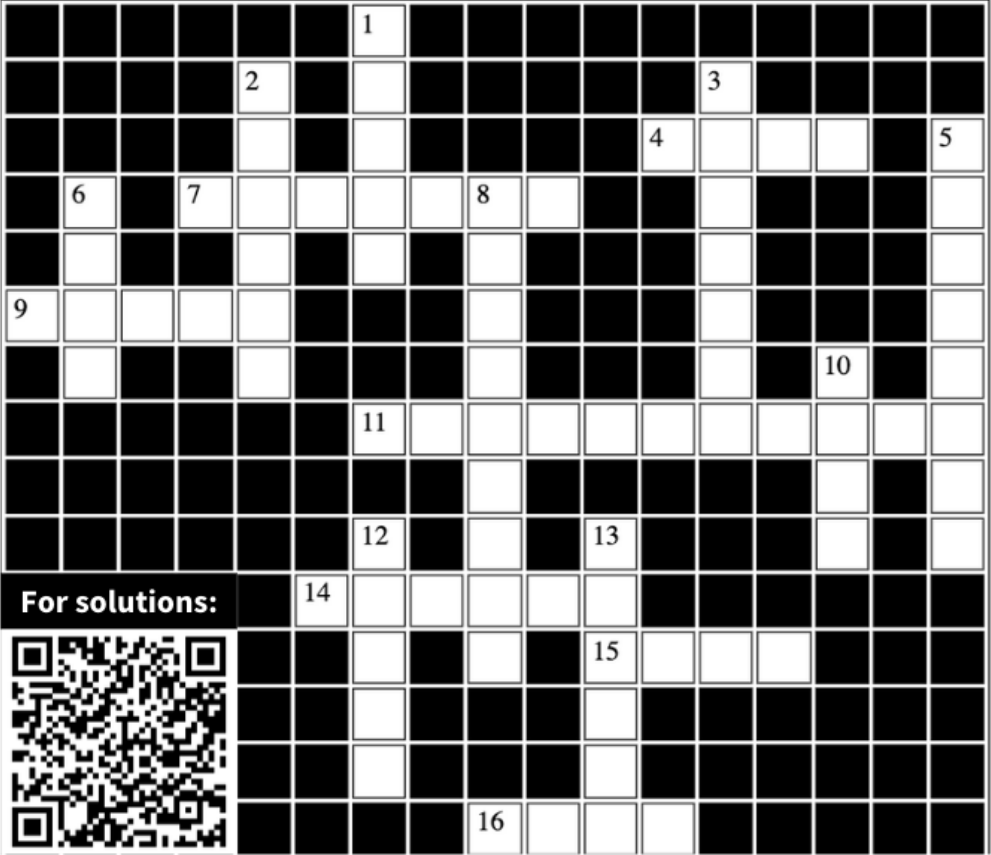
students have engaged with SCOW through various courses of action to support and uplift members of this community who face hidden obstacles. The School collaborates with SCOW through initiatives like Teach Music and Art Pod, which provide children at SCOW with access to Choate’s resources for additional educational opportunities in the arts.

A Community Service Seminar led by Director of Community Service Ms. Melissa Koomson is open to students interested in working with SCOW. The project involves visiting SCOW twice a week to work with elementary school students.

SCOW is not only a hub for social services but a cultural bridge ensuring that the diverse needs of the Spanish-speaking community are met with sensitivity and effectiveness as well. More than 50 years since its founding, the organization continues to be a vital force in promoting the well-being and prosperity of the individuals and families it serves.

*As a member of the Global Engagement Program, Chung wrote this article for her project, “The Choate News x GEP Project Workforce Navigators at SCOW,” to spread SCOW’s mission.*

**Portia Chung** may be reached at [pchung24@choate.edu](mailto:pchung24@choate.edu).



Across

4. Light ‘em up on November 12  
7. Your amigos  
9. “\_\_\_\_\_dance” performed by technique class students for SCS  
11. Has deals better than Black Friday  
14. “Remember this feeling, don’t let it happen again.” is an example of a...  
15. Coach with 400+ volleyball wins  
16. HC driver and also the #1 New Haven bagel shop

By **Zainab Khokha '24**

Down

1. Takes only a moment lasts forever (digitally)  
2. It’s tiiiiiiiiimmmmmmeeee!!!!  
3. (Banned) book stash locale  
5. “Put lipstick on a pig”  
6. Hol Ball fairy godmother who saved you \$12  
8. D in SDLC  
10. With 7 Across; pawstive vibes only nonprofit  
12. She’s shooting hoops across the globe  
13. Say “As \_\_\_\_\_ alaikum,” meaning “peace be unto you,” to Mr. Haji Noor Deen Mi Guangjiang

Clues from the crossword are related to articles published in this issue.



# THE CHOATE NEWS



117<sup>TH</sup> MASTHEAD

VOL. CXVII  
NO. 9

Lauren H. Kee '24  
Editor-in-Chief

Jacqueline Z. Yan '24  
Managing Editor

### School News

Erin Li '24  
Helen Ryan '24

### Local News

Eva Li '24  
Anissa Wang '24

### Opinions

Stan Cho '25  
Amelia Sipkin '25

### Features

Yoyo Zhang '24

### Arts & Leisure

Laya Raj '24

### Sports

Lauren Hsu '24

### Photography

Toffy Prakittiphoom '24  
Emily Ma '25

### Graphics

Melody Qian '24

### Layout

Junho Lee '24

### Copy Editors

Fiona Fu '25  
Grace LaPlaca '25

Sophia Liao '25  
Arjun Pathy '25  
Eva Swanson '25

Adrian Torres '25  
Reinah Lee '26

### Advisers

Ms. Cahaley Markman  
Ms. Janet De León

### Layout Team

Sarina Fernandez-Grinshpun '25  
Lindsay Hong '25  
Sundari von Wentzel '25  
Brendan Beng '26  
Jason Chang '26  
Annie Coady '26

### Outreach Team

James Chen '24  
Grace Walters '24\*  
Lilli Goldman '25  
Virginia Nelson '25  
Teniola Obayomi '25  
Dana Tan '25\*  
Rella Wang '26

\*Head of Team

### Staff Contributors

Mwendwa Daisley '24  
Calvin Moon '24  
Grace Walters '24  
Zoe Dieringer '25  
Sarina Fernandez-Grinshpun '25

Nilan Kathir '25  
Teniola Obayomi '25  
Ellie Porter '25  
Anyah Shah '25  
Analay Vega '25  
Brendan Beng '26

Francesca Howard '26  
Eliana Li '26  
Hannah Quan '26  
Ada Tianworn '26  
Jolie Zhang '26  
Steven Kee '27



@choatenews



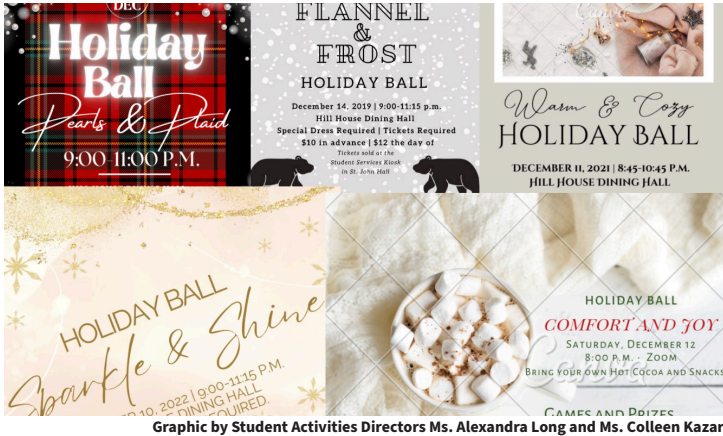
@choatenews



@choatenews

Email us: thechoatenews@choate.edu || Call us: (203) 697-2070 || Find us: thechoatenews.choate.edu

## Ranking Every Hol Ball Theme



Graphic by Student Activities Directors Ms. Alexandra Long and Ms. Colleen Kazar

By **Arushi Krishnan '27**

Opinions Writer

When taking on the post five years ago, Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long decided to create catchy, wintery themes for every Holiday Ball (Hol Ball). “I love themes and think they make events more fun,” she said. I completely agree with Ms. Long; themes elevate events, allowing creativity and individuality to shine. All the past Hol Ball themes have been creative and wonderful. However, if I had to rank them from great to greatest, here is how my ranking would go:

### Number 5: Comfort and Joy (2020)

2020’s Hol Ball, notoriously, was hosted on Zoom as the pandemic deprived students of an in-person dance. Students dressed in their coziest winter attire and participated in light-hearted games, competitions, and crafts from the comfort of their homes. “Everyone was dancing to holiday music up and down in their little zoom cells,” said Carter Foster '24. While there is nothing explicitly negative about “Comfort and Joy,” it defaults to fifth place because the other themes took place in a big, beautiful dining hall – not a box on a screen.

### Number 4: Flannel and Frost (2019)

“Flannel and Frost” was extremely imaginative and season-appropriate, but I believe it would have been more fitting for an event at an ice skating rink or a café. I think of flannel and frost as a daytime, outdoor winter aesthetic. However, it provided a chance for creative decoration and was a very original idea.

### Number 3: Pearls and Plaid (2023)

This year’s theme was a nod to 2019’s “Flannel and Frost,” but with a bit more extravagance. Although most students did not wear plaid clothing, plaid decoration gave the dance a very cozy, wintery feel – similar to that of flannel. Many students accessorized with pearl jewelry, which elevated their looks and matched the decor.

### Number 2: Warm and Cozy (2021)

Unfortunately, this Hol Ball was canceled due to a Covid-19 outbreak, but I imagine it would have been a night to remember. “Warm and Cozy” is a theme that perfectly captures the comforting essence of the holidays, yet does not take away from the fashionable outfits and atmosphere. The warm and cozy decor would’ve been extremely welcoming and comfortable, and students could have easily gotten creative with layering cute cardigans and sweaters over their formalwear or wearing long sleeves.

### Number 1: Sparkle and Shine (2022)

The gorgeous glittery decorations of the 2022 Hol Ball definitely transformed the event into a glamorous party. Students wore their “sparkliest” outfits at this dance, as it was a great opportunity for students to dress according to the theme in sequin dresses and shiny accessories. “Last Hol Ball, I wore a white jacket with a suede lapel. Like the theme, my shoes were super-duper shiny,” said Jordan Dodd '25. Since it was the first in-person Hol Ball since 2019, the night had so much energy and fun. “I had so much fun. It was a great experience dancing with all my friends,” said Cawthra Burns '25.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first Hol Ball and cannot wait to experience three more themed winter dances during my time at Choate. Now, it’s time for us all to don some pearls and start celebrating.

**Arushi Krishnan** is a third-former from Cromwell, CT. She may be reached at [akrishnan27@choate.edu](mailto:akrishnan27@choate.edu).

## WHAT’S NOT TO LOVE: WHY THE WINTERLUDE BLUES?

By **Chelsea Branch '25**

Opinion Writer

The air is getting crisper, and the trees are shedding their last leaves. People are taking out their puffer coats and chunky scarves that were gathering dust under the bed. Winterlude is finally here. Depending on who you ask, these two-and-a-half weeks between fall and winter break are either the most dreaded or anticipated time of the school year.

Winterlude is one of Choate’s most heavily debated phenomena. Is the shift to the New England winter a sign of holiday joys or the start of a brutal season of frostbitten fingers? Or, perhaps, Winterlude is a time for teachers to go easy on the course load, or not; depending on who you have, they might just pack an entire unit in 17 days.

No matter who you ask, they will undoubtedly agree that this is a *unique* part of the year. As for me though, it is the very best part.

Fall term is egregiously long, spring term always flies by faster than we want it to, and the latter end of winter term is so dreary and dark that all I want to do is sleep. But Winterlude is just right! Two-and-a-half weeks feels doable and, most importantly, dividable. Rather than viewing it as a dreaded stretch of school and classes, I like to think of it as just two weekends or two School Meetings away from a much-needed winter break.

With the realization of Winterlude’s transience comes a



Photo courtesy of Junho Lee '24

The Choate campus during Winterlude in December 2021.

mindset change. Since the interlude is so short, I always intend to make the most of it. I spend more time with friends knowing I won’t see them until after the new year. I wear my favorite clothes because soon enough, my outfits will be hidden under my heaviest coat. I even feel more motivated to do my work, reminding myself that I’m only one test or project away from uninterrupted tranquility.

Many students’ aversion towards Winterlude is rooted in the schoolwork associated with it. It’s an odd amount of time, so teachers tend to swing to either extreme with their curriculum. Either you are knee-deep in research for a terribly difficult project or cruising through the simplest assignments you’ve seen in your Choate career. But, no matter what, Winterlude is fleeting. If there is a struggle, it does not last long; the finish line is in sight! You can’t say that for any other part of the school year.

In addition, the Winterlude Student Activities Center (SAC) events never disappoint. Our two weekends here are jam-packed with fun. Events like the Student Choreographers’ Showcase, the Holiday Shopping Trip in New York City, the Diwali celebration, the Wallingford Holiday Stroll, and more make up for the potentially heavy workload. The most widely anticipated among these is the Holiday Ball (Hol Ball). I love Hol Ball because it is one of the few times that our whole student body, from the freshmen to the seniors and post-graduates, comes together for an evening of dancing and fun.

Some of my fondest Choate memories have taken place during Winterlude. The first time I recall feeling at home here was during my freshman Winterlude. It was 2021, and a much-feared Covid-19 outbreak resulted in a schoolwide quarantine. Though the grab-and-go meals, Zoom classes, and

confinement to our rooms were certainly not ideal, I made my own fun with my dormmates. We spent hours watching movies, going on walks, and learning more about each other, leading to three years’ worth of imperishable friendships.

So, for anyone with a case of Winterlude blues, the next few weeks are entirely what you make of them. Bask in the warmth of the library as you do your work. Wear all of the fuzzy pajamas and cozy sweaters that you’ve been looking forward to rocking. Make a warm cup of cocoa, turn up some holiday music, and get in the mood for the season. There’s so much you can do to make Winterlude the greatest time of year. And if you can’t help but hate it, don’t worry: it’s only two-and-a-half weeks.

**Chelsea Branch** is a fifth-former from Phillipsburg, NJ. She may be reached at [cbranch25@choate.edu](mailto:cbranch25@choate.edu).

## CHOATE EMBRACES SECULAR HOLIDAY TRADITIONS AS INCLUSIVITY GROWS

By **Nilan Kathir '25**

Opinions Staff Writer

As winter break approaches, the air at Choate has filled with holiday spirit from Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and more. These holidays are very important to their respective religious communities, but in recent years, the nature of these holidays has changed. By moving away from religious or culture-based origins, holidays can be celebrated among larger communities while more religious traditions can be saved for familial settings. The modern way of celebrating has created a more inclusive environment and fostered connections between people across all backgrounds.

At Choate, we see this secularization with events such as Tiz the Season – a gathering outside Lanphier Center with holiday music, hot cocoa, and other treats – and the Holiday Ball. Another example is the paths lined with string lights and green wreaths that we are bound to see when walking outside in Wallingford in December.

The festive season is filled with holidays that are rooted in reli-

gious tradition, which is a beautiful facet that must be preserved; however, in a large community with students, faculty, and staff from all walks of life, it is important to be inclusive. Choate’s secularized celebrations enable connection between those from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Commercialization accomplishes this feat by removing the religious and cultural aspects of holiday traditions in public settings. For example, during the holiday sing-along in Colony Hall, we sing songs such as “Frosty the Snowman” and “Jingle Bells,” which are both relatively secular. We do not sing songs such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” or “Angels We Have Heard on High” because these may be uncomfortable for non-Christian community members to sing. More “commercial” music at events like these ensure that we can all sing and celebrate together as a diverse community.

Furthermore, society’s capitalization of holidays – our cultural obsession with making holiday purchases – allows for community-building at Choate. The holiday



Graphic by Kate Park '27/The Choate News

season has evolved to become just as much about gift-giving, decorations, and friendly gatherings as about its religious practices. People who do not share similarities in religious background are exchanging gifts, setting up lights, singing carols, and enjoying the holiday season as a whole rather than performing religious rites.

However, the commercialization of holidays does not detract from the “true meaning” of them either. It simply reserves the underlying traditions of the festivities to smaller settings with family and close friends. Choate students, faculty, and staff who seek to celebrate the

original meanings of holidays still can do so when they go home or even on campus through religious and cultural gatherings and events, such as Lessons and Carols or candle-lighting ceremonies hosted by Hillel.

Societal standards have evolved to celebrate holidays more secularly in public settings, and the application of these standards to Choate has proven beneficial; it is not a dilution of tradition, but rather a catalyst to promote inclusivity and a stronger sense of community.

**Nilan Kathir** is a fifth-former from Cheshire, CT. He may be reached at [nkathir25@choate.edu](mailto:nkathir25@choate.edu).

## NICHOLS’S HOLIDAY PLAYLIST

By **Ava Hult-Falk '27**

Opinions Writer

Since my return to campus from fall break, I have been pleased to hear holiday carols constantly ringing in the hallways of Nichols dormitory. Inspired by this melodic backdrop and my own holiday spirit, I, along with my Nichols dormmates, have created a Christmas playlist with our top four favorite Christmas songs.

First on our festive playlist is the insultingly underrated “Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer” by Elmo & Patsy. This Christmas classic narrates a hilariously memorable farce about Santa’s interac-

tion with a grandma celebrating Christmas with her family. I can still vividly recall the first time I heard it as a wide-eyed child, howling with laughter and disbelief that Santa Claus and his reindeer would not stop and assist an elderly woman. I spent the next few weeks convincing everyone I knew that Santa belonged on the naughty list! “Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer” may be unknown to many, but it has earned a rightful spot on our Nichols playlist for its comedic relief.

Track two in our playlist is none other than “Drummer Boy” by Justin Bieber featuring Busta Rhymes. While Christmas classics

will always hold a special place in my heart, this contemporary rendition of “Drummer Boy” is much closer to what we hear on a day-to-day basis. Busta Rhymes’s rap segments are my favorite part as they provide listeners with a welcome departure from the familiar tunes that have been echoed for years. The mixture of old and new in “Drummer Boy” makes it a personal favorite of mine.

Claiming the next spot is the perennial favorite, “Last Christmas” by WHAM. While its lively melody projects a lighthearted mood, a closer examination of the lyrics reveals surprising depth. The song recounts a commonly relatable scenario: a lonely individual, who recently ended a long-term relationship, struggles to find as much joy in the holidays as they did before. We Nichols residents appreciate that “Last Christmas” acknowledges the complex emotions that may arise during this time of year.

And now, the final song on Nichols’s holiday playlist is, not surprisingly, the one and only ... Mariah Carey’s “All I Want For Christmas Is You.” This track rightfully outshines all the rest. Its presence is ubiquitous during the holidays, permeating social media, stores, dorm hallways, and beyond. While some would strongly disagree, I believe that this song’s holiday charm never wanes. “All I Want For Christmas Is You” is the epitome of love, kindness, cheer, and connection.

These four holiday songs, carefully chosen by Nichols residents, capture a wide range of emotions that define our experiences during this festive, beloved season. Holiday music truly connects us all through its exploration of themes of love, loss, joy, and so much more.

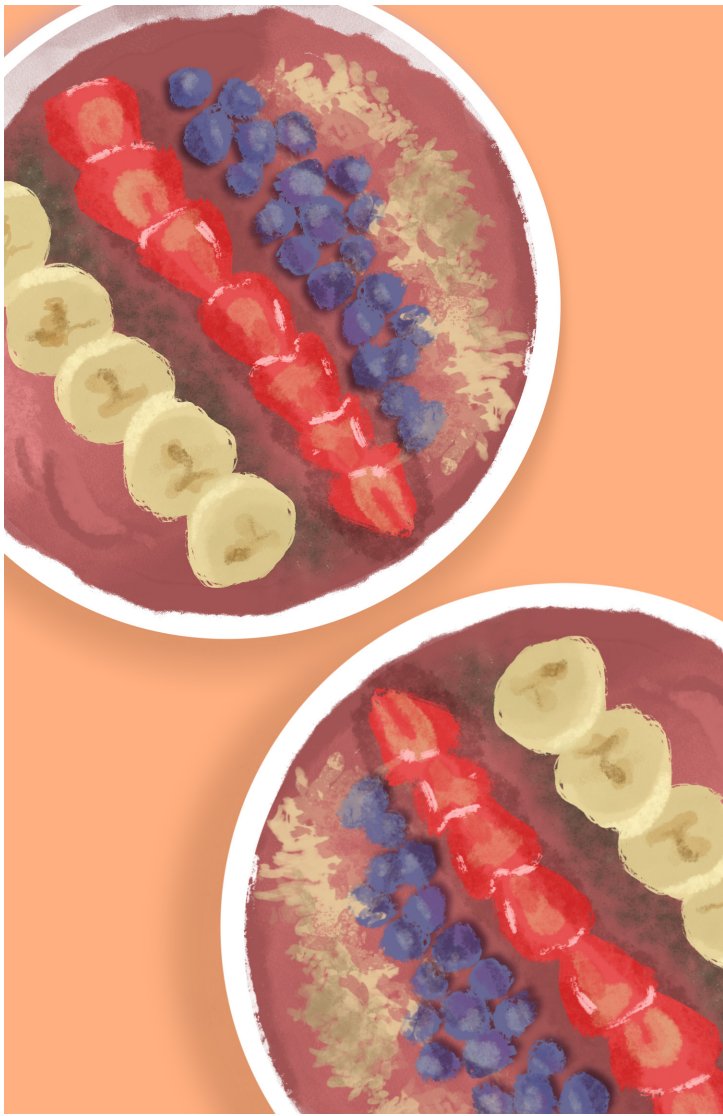
**Ava Hult-Falk** is a third-former from San Francisco, CA. She may be reached at [ahultfalk27@choate.edu](mailto:ahultfalk27@choate.edu).



Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/The Choate News



## SUPERFOOD OR SUPERSCAM?



Graphic by Melody Qian '24/The Choate News

By **Sophia Liao '25**  
Copy Editor

Superfoods. Think expensive, exotic grains, powders, and berries extracted from the finest grounds and flown in from halfway around the world. They line the walls of nearly every grocery store and have blown up on social media in the last couple of decades with radical claims of fighting illness, preventing aging, and even mitigating cancer.

However, superfoods are not as glamorous as they sound. Since their inception, they have been glorified by social media, enabling companies to manipulate health-eager consumers. Despite being thought to improve and enrich diets, they pose the risk of harming people's diets. Yet, regardless of the downsides, in 2022, the global superfood industry was valued at an astounding \$162.6 billion, which begs the question: how did we get here?

The easy answer is market manipulation. The term "superfood" was coined in the early 20th century as part of a food marketing campaign for bananas by the United Fruit Company. At the time, bananas were advertised as a cheap, safely packaged, and easily digestible food that could be integrated into everyday diets. However, their popularity only soared in 1924, when medical journals inaccurately cited bananas as a treatment for celiac disease.

Similarly, acai bowls became popular for its main ingredient — the acai berry — which was portrayed as a superfood on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2009. A relatively new superfood, the acai berry only rose to fame in the U.S. after Dr. Mehmet Oz, a cardiothoracic surgeon and popular television figure, said on the show that acai improves skin health, fights against aging, and aids in weight loss. Today, acai bowls are a trendy, savored, delicious frozen treat marketed as "healthy" by its mere association with the acai berry superfood. The cases of bananas and acai berries have paved the way for the appeal of modern superfoods to be their supposed illness-treating abilities and superior nutrition.

However, this enticing perception of superfoods is flawed. For one, superfoods alone cannot cure disease. Balance, variety, and adequacy in diet are what will ultimately lead superfood consumers to achieve their desired health and wellness.

Second, the notion that superfoods are "better" than other foods is misleading. The "super" in "superfood" indicates that these foods are superiorly nutritious; however, the modern societal definition of a superfood lacks a scientific or FDA-regulated benchmark of what

foods can or cannot be classified as "super." Without a universally accepted standard for what constitutes a superfood, the term "superfood" becomes virtually meaningless. Companies invented this term as a way to advertise certain foods as remedies for health issues, not to convey true nutritional value. Thus, since the term is used loosely, companies can easily exaggerate the meaning or effects of superfoods through catchy campaigns targeted at health-conscious consumers. Not surprisingly, foods perceived as healthy show the greatest sales, which explains the superfood industry's incredible success.

Third, many of the nutrients in superfoods can be found in other more common and often more affordable fruits and vegetables. Thus, when people choose to purchase a bag of rare goji berries picked and flown in from China versus a large red apple from the local supermarket with the same health benefits, they're buying into a market facade. This notion that superfoods are exceptionally beneficial also has the potential to limit consumers' exposure to other equally nutritious but less popularized food options. Oftentimes, superfoods are temporary fads, with the next big trend right around the corner. Consequently, due to our rapidly changing trend-focused diet culture, consumers often incorporate individual superfoods into their diets as they come and go in the market. This emphasis on individual superfoods, however, overshadows the importance of cultivating a balanced and well-rounded palate. Eating a diverse range of proteins, fruits, vegetables, and grains is most important to maintain optimal health.

The market glorifies superfoods as highly nutritious foods that can act as a panacea for various health issues — but do not fall prey to these marketing schemes. It is crucial for consumers to recognize that superfoods are not standalone treatments for disease and that there is nothing particularly superior about their nutritional values, which are often comparable to other, less-marketed foods. Historically, the ones who advertise superfoods are blogs, television shows, and celebrities — not scientists, dietitians, or nutritionists. The term was developed as a marketing tactic and has no scientific or medical credentials. The very nature of our diet culture pushes us to keep up with food trends, but these fast-paced fads cause consumers to fixate on everchanging superfoods-driven diets and lose sight of developing a well-rounded, nutritionally balanced plate.

**Sophia Liao** is a fifth-former from Acton, MA. She may be reached at [sliao25@choate.edu](mailto:sliao25@choate.edu).

## How Ghostwriting Corrupts The Writing Industry

By **Francesca Howard '26**  
Opinions Staff Writer

The core issue of ghostwriting can be summarized in one word: dishonesty. Paying someone else to pass off their words as your own without giving proper credit is dishonest. Ghostwriting misleads audiences about who created the content they consume, and this is especially problematic when these figures hold positions of power.

Celebrities often use ghostwriters for autobiographies or speeches, which creates a false impression of their abilities. Most notably, Former President Donald Trump P'oo's critically acclaimed autobiography, *The Art of the Deal*, was written American journalist Tony Schwartz.

Schwartz later expressed remorse for crafting the public persona of the business mogul. He candidly admitted to embellishing Trump's achievements. "I put lipstick on a pig," he said. "I feel a deep sense of remorse that I contributed to presenting Trump in a way that brought him wider attention and made him more appealing than he is."

Schwartz took a man and made him into a magnate.

Yet, more important than Schwartz's regret is the influence his ghostwriting had. *The Art of the Deal* provided Trump with decades of undeserved praise, whether that be in bolstering his businesses throughout the '90s or appealing to potential voters during his presidential campaigns.

How can citizens make informed decisions when they cannot trust their so-called "leaders" to even write their own speeches? Trump passed an inauthentic depiction of himself as the introspective truth, tricking millions for his selfish benefit.

But this sort of borrowed brilliance is not an anomaly; it's ubiquitous in celebrity memoirs, political speechwriting, academia, and the music industry. Many popular book series like *Goosebumps*, the *Nancy Drew* series, and *The Babysitter's Club* are all ghostwritten. In all these cases, ghostwriting is detrimental because it compromises trust, swindles writers, and diminishes the value of the work.

Although ghostwriters might leap at the opportunity to make

some money and work with a famous subject, they only do a disservice to themselves in the end. These writers pour their skill, expertise, and time into creating works that climb bestseller lists and shape public sentiment.

However, professionals usually don't receive credit or acknowledgment for their work. Ghostwriters often sign contracts with clauses that their identity will remain confidential. This anonymity can impede their professional growth and prevent them from garnering recognition. They are deprived of the career opportunities and accolades that should accompany their successful work.

Additionally, the ghostwriting industry tends to offer lower-paying opportunities relative to other writing jobs, thus devaluing the profession and making it more challenging for writers to secure fair compensation. In short, ghostwriting is nothing more than exploitation. The rich and powerful benefit off the backs and labor of those less fortunate.

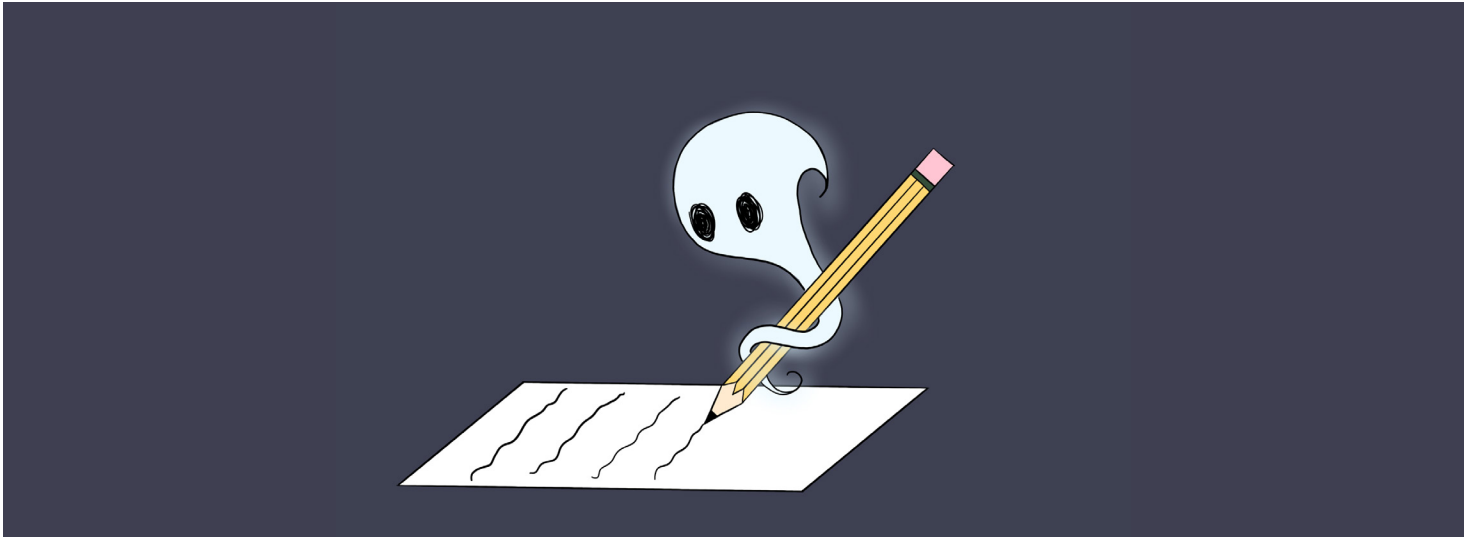
More importantly, the influence that ghostwriting has on its audience is dubious at best and detrimental at worst. This hidden

collaboration between the nominal author and the actual writer not only misleads the audience but also diminishes originality.

As with Schwartz, ghostwriters may have conflicting opinions on their subject. This noticeable disparity can affect the audience's perception of the work. Readers, who believe they are getting a sneak peek into the minds of figures like Trump, are unaware that the words they devour are not written by the person they believe. Upon this realization, some may feel a sense of disappointment or betrayal.

Ghostwriting benefits only those whose name is on the cover. They can enhance their image without ever picking up a pen. On the other hand, the writers themselves remain, as the name suggests, ghosts. While the practice is legal, that does not mean it's ethical. Ghostwriting is a misleading facade to the public, a product of exploitation, and a dilution of the authenticity of the work.

**Francesca Howard** is a fourth-former from New York, NY. She may be reached at [fhoward26@choate.edu](mailto:fhoward26@choate.edu).



Graphic by Carolyn Chen '25/The Choate News

## FUNDING FALSEHOODS: SUPER PACS' EFFECT ON POLITICS

By **Arjun Pathy '25**  
Copy Editor

Democracy will continue to be up for sale as long as we fail to recognize the corporate-centric nature of campaign contributions. Despite stringent regulations on individuals' political contributions, the regulatory structure for money funneled through Super PACS (Political Action Committees) is, at best, inadequate. In a country where media coverage and advertisements can dictate election outcomes, our current democratic system is unapologetically preferential to wealthy entities keen to avoid accountability.

In the 13 years since the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (FEC), the average American's political power has been dangerously reduced. This 2010 ruling, which held that corporate spending on elections was free speech, opened the floodgates to court challenges that led to the authorization of "Independent Expenditure Committees," commonly known as Super PACs. Moreover, the existing provisions

of the 1971 Federal Election Campaign Act limited campaign donations based on a set of criteria (detailed on the FEC website) and ordered them to be made public along with the donor's name, employer, and quantity contributed.

This level of transparency was unsettlingly personal but helped to uphold democratic practices by improving corporate accountability. The aforementioned court rulings didn't destroy this structure; rather, they modified it to include a secondary, much less egalitarian avenue for funding. Newly created Super PACs could receive unlimited donations from individuals, unions, corporations, or non-profits. Despite requiring Super PACs to disclose their donors, updated laws lack provisions to prevent individuals interested in anonymity from funneling their donations through non-profits.

The emergence of these PACs has resulted in unprecedented increases in political spending. Now, congressional and presidential candidates raise billions of dollars every election cycle, making previously unaffordable and wide-reaching advertising campaigns ubiquitous.

If candidates all agreed on the same facts, this spread of information would improve the democratic process; however, such is not the case. With enough money, you can control political narratives and, in doing so, unfairly influence an election's results.

Perhaps the most frustrating part of modern political fundraising is how the average voter is left behind. Donations of \$100 or even \$1,000 are inconsequential against Super PACs with tens of millions of dollars at their disposal.

Additionally, the regulatory structures function in complete opposition to their intended purpose of transparency. Some of today's largest funding sources are non-descript organizations that don't disclose their donors. Instead of amplifying the individual voter's voice and managing the influence of wealthy entities, our government is empowering powerful corporations interested in profit, not democracy.

Unfortunately, the Supreme Court rarely reverses its decisions, and as of late, its overrulings have been along party lines. The current court has proven itself to be over-

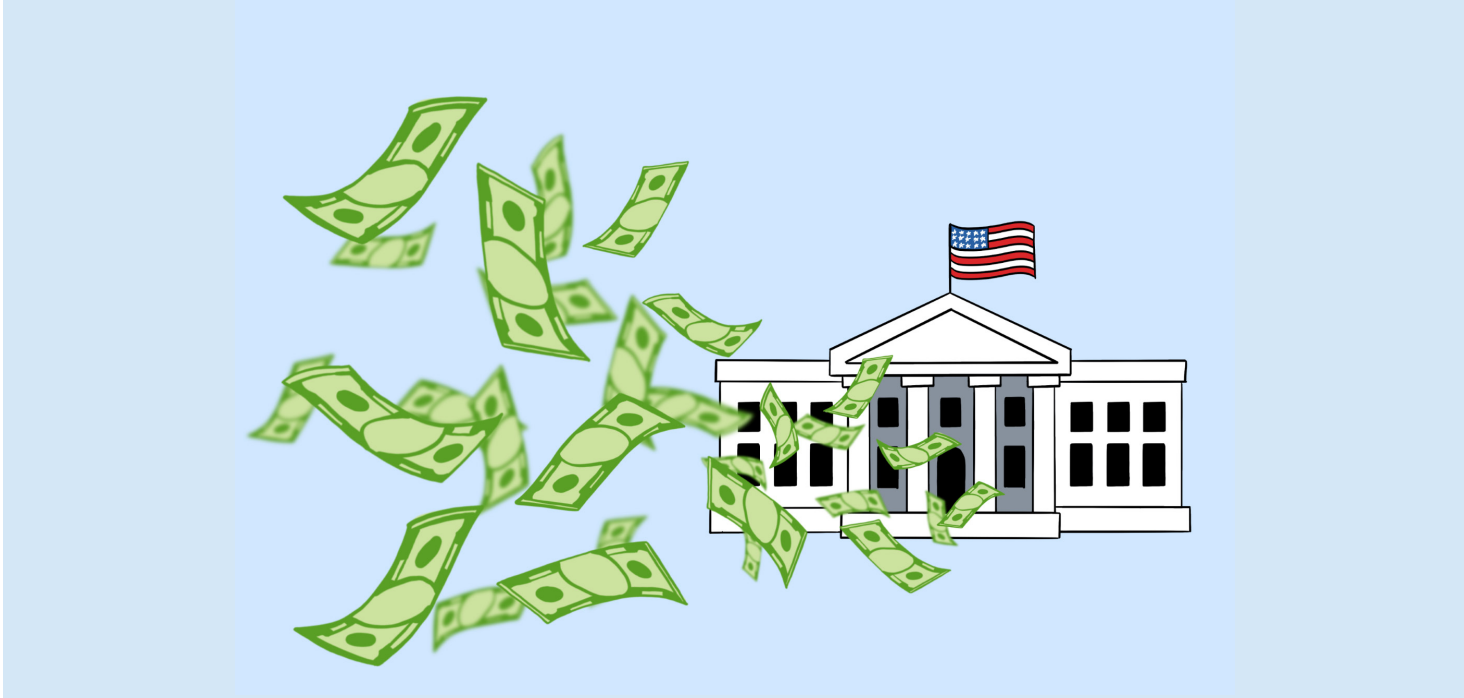
whelmingly conservative, often acting in opposition to popular opinion. As it turns out, the conflict over the regulation of campaign contributions is highly partisan, with conservatives typically opposing regulation.

This roadblock has not stopped past presidents from executing their agendas. Taking such action sets a dangerous precedent. However, considering the gravity of the issue at hand, the ends could very well justify the means.

Yet, no solution is possible without the consent of legislators, who rely on donations to fund reelection efforts. This conflict of interest means that even if an avenue for abolishing Super PACs opens up, it is unlikely to be pursued.

As a result, it may be a while until we see fair campaign contribution laws. But for now, thankfully, votes cannot be bought, and democratic participation remains the most effective way to set forth change.

**Arjun Pathy** is a fifth-former from Denver, CO. He may be reached at [apathy25@choate.edu](mailto:apathy25@choate.edu).



Graphic by Carolyn Chen '25/The Choate News



## A HISTORY OF HOLIDAY BALL

By **Reinah Lee '26**  
Copy Editor

The twinkling of the tree illuminates the dining hall as students pile in wearing their themed attire. The sound of chocolate pouring from the fountain and the rapid-fire clicks of a camera shutter going off are drowned out by the DJ's tunes. This is the biggest all-school dance of the year — Holiday Ball.

The Holiday Ball, commonly referred to as “Hol Ball,” is a special-dress dance that occurs annually on the second Saturday of the winter term in the dining hall. This year, the dance took place on December 9, and the theme was “Plaid and Pearls.”

Coming a long way since 1984, the beloved event has a rich history of tradition, inclusion, and fun. The faces behind the invention of Hol Ball are former Student Activity Center Directors Mr. Jim Yanelli and Ms. Mary Pashley. Recognizing the need for a formal social open to the entire student body, they decided that the festive and upbeat holiday season would make for a most fitting time.

Students have always enjoyed preparing for the dance, displaying their enthusiasm in past issues of *The Choate News*. In a 2001 article titled “Holiday Ball Dresses: Running the Gauntlet” by Madeline Abrams '04 and Laura Schaefer '04, the search for the perfect dress took different students to multiple stores, across the internet, and even inspired them to sew their own. Two years later, Bryan Ko '05 was pictured in a 2003 issue counting down the days until the event on a calendar.

Though the dance has always been held in the dining hall, the planning committee has experimented with a variety of different



Photo courtesy of Mrs. Stephanie Gold

A photo of students at Holiday Ball from the 1993 yearbook *The Brief*. activities. For example, a Polaroid picture station was at one point popular for students to create personal keepsakes. However, some traditions have remained; ever since the first Hol Ball, a mistletoe has been hung on the taxidermy Moose head above the main entrance to the dining hall.

In recent years, Director of Student Activities Ms. Alexandra Long has been joined by Assistant Director of Student Activities Ms. Colleen Kazar and the ABM management team to continue the long-lasting tradition of the dance. While the earliest Hol Balls had themes like *The Nutcracker* and different colors, themes had stopped being incorporated into the dance until Ms. Long revived it in 2019.

Some of the themes Ms. Long has come up with include “Flannel and Frost” and “Sparkle and Shine.” “Comfort and Joy,” and “Warm and Cozy” were the themes for the 2020 and 2021 Hol Balls respectively, the first of which was held on Zoom because of the pandemic and the second of which was cancelled due to a Covid-19 outbreak on campus.

While ensuring these catchy, slogan-like themes added another layer of fun and helped with the decorative process, Ms. Long also

felt it necessary to keep a neutral holiday theme. “I don’t want our themes to be too Christmas-y because it’s all about holidays and wintery,” she said.

Along with this, Ms. Long made a substantial change in the form of equity and inclusion. Previously, entrance to the dance cost up to \$12, depending on the time of purchase, and went directly to funding things such as decorations and food. Seeing an issue for students unable to afford the fee, Ms. Long found strategies to fit a free entrance into the budget. “I feel it’s really important that students just be able to come to events without having to worry about a fee,” she said.

One policy that has been implemented is the recycling of Hol Ball decorations every four years to reduce costs and double as an environmentally healthy option. “We can use that [previous year’s] buffalo plaid and come up with another theme,” she said.

With another Hol Ball in the books, students can anticipate the same festive spirit in the balls to come. According to Ms. Long, next year has more surprises to come!

**Reinah Lee** may be reached at [rlee26@choate.edu](mailto:rlee26@choate.edu).

## DECK THE “HALL”!



Photo by Nicha Tongdee '26/The Choate News

Hall, a girls’ dorm for sophomores and juniors, has embraced the seasonal spirit with festive decoration.

## LIFE THROUGH LENSES: STUDENT VIDEOGRAPHERS

By **Brendan Beng '26**  
Staff Reporter

In today’s age of influencer mania, more people than ever before are picking up videography. Even with Choate students’ consistently busy schedules, there are a few who find joy in making memories into digital keepsakes. Four such individuals are Arissa Lee '25, Aria Ramnath '24, Kara Wang '24, and Tariq El Mammann '24.

### Arissa Lee '25

Lee posts monthly short-form content on Instagram recapping everyday moments, such as videos or pictures of her friends. “I’ll post videos of everything that happened, I’ll add in every picture of the month of September, or I’ll take small snippets of videos from the dance concert last year,” she said. “I wanted to have memories that I could show other people. Memories to share with my friends that I had them with.”

Lee’s favorite moments sprout from simple joys. “I visited a friend’s house. We went outside having a little picnic, and we painted watercolors,” she said. “I remember I got a clip of a bumblebee just landing on my friend’s finger. Just like very homey things like that, nothing extreme or flashy.”

Occasionally, Lee faces internal conflicts over her reasons for taking up videography. She said, “When I’m filming, sometimes I ask myself whether I’m living in the moment. Am I taking away from what I’m doing in the moment, or being rude, or making sure that people don’t mind that I’m filming them?” Balancing between producing a record of the memories and fully living in the moment proved to be a key consideration for Lee.

One important takeaway that Lee gained from being an amateur videographer was the importance of authenticity. “I love having this kind of video diary of sorts, but I shouldn’t be making these to impress others. I really want to do this for me,” she said.

### Aria Ramnath '24

Ramnath takes a unique approach with her “Seconds of the



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

Day” series, a video collection of one second of each day of her senior year at Choate.

“I think about what will be the most camera-like photogenic moment, or what looks best in the video, or what was the most fun thing I’m doing that day,” she said. “I got the idea from Lauren [Kee '24]. She did it a while back, and I thought I would copy her for my senior year.”

One obstacle that Ramnath faced was forgetting to record. “That’s a challenge for sure. I forgot to do Saturday and Sunday, and I had to forge clips for those days. So I recorded random things and plugged them in because I want to have something for every day,” she said. “I don’t want to skip days.”

For Ramnath, videography is not just a hobby, but a way to gain new perspectives on life. “I have started to look for the good in every day,” she said. “It’s actually quite a positive experience because of that.”

### Kara Wang '24

Wang shares her life with the world through YouTube vlogs. For her, creating videos also captures memories she can look back on when she graduates from Choate. “I really like writing, so I felt like creating videos was also pretty fun,” she said.

With the help of YouTube, Wang learned an invaluable lesson of confidence. “It takes a lot of self-confidence to put yourself out there because a lot of times when I’m recording myself, it’s like, ‘Why am I doing this?’ It feels really awkward, but then after a couple

[of] videos, I kind of got used to it,” she said.

One of Wang’s favorite vlogs was one of her firsts: a candid review of dining hall meals. “It was very chaotic,” she said. “But as my first video, I feel like I just have some sort of attachment to it.”

### Tariq El Mammann '24

El Mammann elevates sports videos to the next level. He began making edits for different shows and movies he liked during the pandemic. “And then once quarantine ended, I expanded my horizon and started to edit that stuff into what you see today in my montages,” he said.

For El Mammann, the biggest hurdle was juggling videography and his demanding schedule. “You obviously have to make sacrifices to make time to create videos,” he said. “It is a tedious process that takes time. Last year, I made a hockey mixtape, which took two months to put together.”

El Mammann credits other editors, including alumnus Saif Nazer '23 and QN Productions, as inspirations for his work. “What motivates me to make videos is those who have inspired people,” he said.

From spending time on the field to hanging out with friends, Choate students use videography to capture precious moments and little joys in life. With such enthusiastic student videographers, who knows who the next Choate vlogger star will be.

**Brendan Beng** may be reached at [bbeng26@choate.edu](mailto:bbeng26@choate.edu).

## Highway Stars: A Glimpse Into the Lives of Health Center Drivers

By **Deyi Meng '26**  
Reporter

Mile by mile, the Health Center’s busy day-to-day arrangements are supported by two unsung heroes, who sit behind the wheel of vans and cars to ensure that Choate students receive the necessary treatment.

Mrs. Ixel Olmo and Mrs. Sanaa Sofiane perform the critical task of transporting students to specialist appointments that the Choate Health Center cannot provide. Beyond their service as designated drivers, their lives also stretch into interesting avenues both within the Choate community and beyond.

### Mrs. Ilzel Olmo

Mrs. Olmo started working at Choate eight years ago. Living on campus with her husband, Math teacher Mr. Jorge Olmo, she found a lot of free time and decided that she wanted to “get to know more students ... and become a more active part of the community.”

Mrs. Olmo’s first role on campus was as a shuttle driver for boarding students who needed transportation to the airport at the beginning of vacations. Mrs. Olmo also served as a chaperone

for dances and other student activities. Later on, Mrs. Olmo facilitated transportation at the Kohler Environmental Center, shuttling students to and from the main campus, a role that she continued for a few years before transitioning to Choate’s Health Center.

Currently, Mrs. Olmo serves as a designated driver at the Health Center but also performs other tasks for the medical team. She works at the front desk, handles insurance and billing, and supports students during appointments by communicating information to parents and the Health Center staff.

As a mother herself, Mrs. Olmo brings compassion into her work when she assists Choate students with difficult situations, especially since she knows that many boarding students live far from home. Outside of Choate, Mrs. Olmo aids families who are not proficient in English by acting as Spanish translator during doctor appointments.

Mrs. Olmo said that she enjoys working with her colleagues and supporting students on campus in the collaborative and supportive environment. “I know how the community comes together to help each other out,” she said. “I love it.”



Photo by Emily Ma '25/The Choate News

Mrs. Sanaa Sofiane serves a variety of roles at the Health Center.

### Mrs. Sanaa Sofiane

Mrs. Sofiane started her employment at the Health Center in 2017 and has since held a variety of positions at Choate. She works as a driver, a medical receptionist, and a laundry aide, leading to a demanding daily schedule.

Mrs. Sofiane first immigrated to the United States in 1999. She began her journey in medicine in 2005 by working as an intern at a medical assistance program. She then held an internship at the Joslin Diabetes Center in Boston, Massachusetts, before giving birth to her first child and deciding to become a stay-at-home mom.

Subsequently, Mrs. Sofiane worked as a translator for the Department of Children and Families, as well as in hospitals and schools. Eventually, she landed a job at the Choate Health Center.

Like Mrs. Olmo, Mrs. Sofiane’s passion for her work is powered by her love for the Choate community. Her favorite part of the job is seeing the students every day, and she loves speaking with students from all over the world. Amid her busy schedule, Mrs. Sofiane turns to walking in nature and going to the gym as ways to de-stress.

As a mother of three teenagers, Mrs. Sofiane understands the critical role of love and support, especially for children far away from their parents. “It can be stressful and hectic some days, but overall, I really love it and enjoy it every day,” she said.

Medical Director Dr. Miriam Cohen describes both Mrs. Olmo and Mrs. Sofiane as “wonderful individuals that support our students.” Beyond accompanying students to potentially daunting appointments, Mrs. Olmo and Mrs. Sofiane are “there to hold their hand or to wipe their tears or to give them a hug or whatever it is that students actually need,” Dr. Cohen said.

**Deyi Meng** may be reached at [dmeng26@choate.edu](mailto:dmeng26@choate.edu).



## Student Choreographers Showcase Introduces a Novel Twist

By **Gopika Sheth '27**  
*Reporter*

Every year, the Choate Dance Department hosts the Student Choreographers' Showcase (SCS), featuring original student works. This year, a novel twist was introduced to the lineup: dance faculty choreographed works for students enrolled in technique classes, who were invited to perform as well.

SCS is Choate's version of an open studio, mirroring professional dance workshops where artists showcase evolving works. From traditional Chinese dance to contemporary group dance, SCS showcased a diverse array of performances. Members of the Choate community witnessed the artistry of student choreographers and dancers up close on December 2 and 3 in the Colony Hall Dance Studio.

Besides students in Dance Composition class and other student choreographers who typically perform at SCS, students enrolled in afternoon technique classes presented works choreographed by their teachers at SCS for the first time this year.

Contemporary dance teacher Ms. Angharad Davies, who choreographed for SCS, said, "I think it can help possibly to grow the program by getting people that wouldn't necessarily consider themselves as being interested in dance to see what it is."

Ms. Davies's Multi-level Contemporary Dance class presented a piece that drew upon the techniques and movement phrases they learned throughout the fall term. The performance, titled "Instadance," was a testament to the generosity and vulnerability exhibited by the class members towards one another.

"The students that were in the class last term were really sensitive to one another, and there is something in the way that it was built that shares that," Ms. Davies said.

Students in the Upper-level Contemporary and Ballet classes, as well as the West African Dance and Hip Hop classes, also presented the pieces they worked on during the fall term, elevating the event's cultural richness and diversity of style.

In the mixed program, students shared pieces they worked on throughout the Dance Composition class. Ms. Pamela Newell, their teacher and the head of the Choate Dance Program, assigned them the task of choreographing a



Photo by Emily Ma '25/The Choate News  
Chloe Crowell '25 and Libby Dai '25 perform a self-choreographed duet.



Photo by Toffy Prakittiphoom '24/The Choate News  
Dancers in Ms. Laurel Lynch's technique class perform ballet.



Photo by Toffy Prakittiphoom '24/The Choate News  
Mr. Seny Camara performs with students in his West African dance class.

piece inspired by the style and dance movements of a contemporary dance choreographer.

Aggie McPartland '27 and Maelle Davenport '27 performed a duet inspired by renowned choreographer Bill T. Jones to "Swipe Right," a contemporary poem. Through their performance, they hope to evoke in audiences a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diversity of individuals and their identities.

In their piece, the McPartland and Davenport performed complementary movements and repeated each other's choreography. This group dynamic demonstrated how influencers can impact the actions of others. "[The piece] is also about how teenagers are growing up with so much influence from social media, how they view themselves, and how it affects who they are," McPartland said.

Ms. Newell emphasized the importance of the showcase's casual setting in the dance studio. This decision, driven by a desire for informality and experimen-

tation, aligns with SCS's mission to serve as a platform for showcasing pieces without the pressure of creating polished works. Ms. Newell said that the unique setting helped create a conducive atmosphere for exploration, receiving feedback, and pushing students' creative boundaries.

Ms. Newell expressed her excitement about the diversity of voices and styles presented during SCS, which showcased the myriad of ways dance can be interpreted and performed. "When I watch the dance, I see the person," she said. "I don't just see the steps that they're doing or put together, but I see into individuals' experience of movement and life, and I think that's what's important."

In the setting of the dance studio, SCS emerges as a canvas for authentic self-expression, free from the constraints of polished performances, and embodies the vibrant and diverse dance community at Choate.

**Gopika Sheth** may be reached at [gsheth27@choate.edu](mailto:gsheth27@choate.edu).

## STUDENTS SHARE FESTIVE FILM FAVORITES

By **Lucy Domingo '26**  
*Reporter*

As the holiday season continues in full force, the allure of classic holiday movies becomes irresistible, casting a magical spell on individuals eager to indulge in nostalgic films. For many, immersing themselves in the enchanting world of holiday classics is not just an entertaining pastime, but an essential part of their festive traditions.

Alison Giebler '24 cherishes the memory of her earliest encounter with her favorite holiday flick, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* (2000), dating back to an age too early to recall. Since that first viewing, she estimated that she has "watched it over a hundred times because it's [her] favorite movie." This annual tradition in the Giebler household has evolved into a source of comfort. She particularly revels in the scene where the Grinch descends from his cliff to receive awards from the Whos. "Since this movie has always been a Christmas tradition for me, it always gets me in a Christmas mood," Giebler said.

Liya Nichols '26, on the other hand, professed her love for the 2018 rendition of *The*

*Grinch*. Having immersed herself in the comedic film over 30 times, Nichols appreciates not only the joy it brings her but also the unifying effect it has on her entire family. When asked about her favorite character from the movie, Nichols insisted that the only correct answer was the Grinch himself. To her, the film is not merely a source of entertainment; it's synonymous with silliness and unbridled happiness.

For Jill Capasso '27, Matt Pain '26, and Michael Papaspyros '25, their holiday staple is *Elf* (2003). Capasso, who was introduced to the film at the tender age of five, associates it with an overwhelming "happiness for Christmas." The iconic breakfast moment where Buddy, played by Will Ferrell, drenches his spaghetti in maple syrup, remains etched in her memory as her favorite scene. Pain, who first watched *Elf* when he was six years old, finds joy in its lighthearted comedy and particularly enjoys the scene where Buddy wrestles with a raccoon. Papaspyros resonated with the "good Christmas vibes" and the whimsical character of the elf, finding both joy and a touch of sadness in the humorous Buddy and Miles altercation.

While classic family films continue to dominate the preferences of many, some students, such as Chloe Crowell '25, deviate towards edgier holiday movies like *Die Hard* (1988). Describing it as "really intense but really funny," Crowell discovered it only last year. She appreciated how the movie provides a refreshing and different perspective on the Christmas genre.

"It's honestly nicer to be able to do these things with my family [several years] later because we can all understand it better," she said. Crowell's experience highlights how holiday movie choices can transform over time to align more closely with a family's collective understanding and evolving tastes.

As students embrace the festive season, it becomes clear that holiday movies hold a cherished and unique place in their hearts. From timeless classics like *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* to action films like *Die Hard*, each movie creates enduring memories and evokes a diverse spectrum of emotions. Ultimately, these holiday films are not just entertainment; they are essential in capturing the essence of the holiday spirit.

**Lucy Domingo** may be reached at [ldomingo26@choate.edu](mailto:ldomingo26@choate.edu).



Graphic by Evelyn Kim '25/The Choate News

## CONNECTING CULTURES THROUGH CALLIGRAPHY

By **Kaylin Lam '27**  
*Reporter*

Calligraphy is an ancient, traditional art form famed throughout the world, especially in Asia. From its precise but flowing brush strokes to the construction of the brush itself, there is much to be learned and appreciated. On the evening of December 1, the Choate community gathered in the Andrew Mellon Library Reading Room and witness the artistry of master calligrapher Mr. Haji Noor Deen Mi Guang-jiang, who demonstrated his unique art form that brings Chinese and Arabic cultures together on one canvas.

Fluent in both Chinese and Arabic, Mr. Mi began the session by telling his story, with Chinese teacher Ms. Dan Zhao and Arabic teacher Mr. Yassine Benzinane translating. He started learning calligraphy when he was 17 years old and has never looked back since. Scarlett Park '27, who attended the session, said, "It really shows how he took the time to craft his art and what it took to get where he is now."

Throughout the workshop, Mr. Mi drew all kinds of intricate words and characters. He focused on the word "peace" — "sa-



Photo courtesy of Steven Kee '27  
Mr. Mi's work depicting the Arabic (سالم) and Chinese "寧" words for peace.

laam (سالم) in Arabic. He used the word in his designs, including various bird shapes. Then, he combined the Arabic word with the Chinese character for peace, "宁" (in simplified Chinese) or "寧" (in traditional Chinese).

Four student volunteers had the opportunity to try their hand at Arabic calligraphy. They were tasked with drawing a letter that seemed like a simple straight line at first glance. In reality, however, there were many intricate details that mattered, such as the angle of the tilt at the top,



Photo by Emily Ma '25/The Choate News  
Mr. Mi demonstrated his take on traditional calligraphy during his presentation.

the curvature, and the length of the line. This exercise demonstrated how complex the art of calligraphy is.

Then, Mr. Mi drew the names of two volunteers in Arabic in the shape of a flower. "That was a highlight from the entire workshop," Norah Wang '27 said. "I learned from Mr. Mi that calligraphy is not just drawing lines on paper, but [that] there [are] actually quite a lot of other things involved."

In addition to his multiple demonstrations, Mr. Mi also

talked about the history of calligraphy. He explained that while the oldest traditional forms of Arabic calligraphy are precise, angular, and followed strict rules, the fusion with Chinese calligraphy shifted the style to be more art-based and free-flowing with Chinese additions, like seals.

This workshop, a collaboration between the Chinese Department, Arabic Department, and the Andrew Mellon Library (AML), drew awe from students and teachers. During his four-day visit to Walling-

ford, Mr. Mi also visited the Chinese and Arabic classes.

To Dr. Carol Chen-Lin, who heads the Chinese Department at Choate, this visit from Mr. Mi represented much more than just calligraphy. "In the realm of art, Teacher Mi exemplifies the idea that boundaries dissolve," she said. "Through the eloquent strokes of his brush, we had the privilege of bearing witness to the harmonious exchange and fusion of these diverse cultural elements."

Mr. Benzinane, the head of the Arabic and Middle Eastern

Studies signature program, also shared how Mr. Mi's work builds bridges between people. "This is a time of polarization in our country and around the world. Beautiful art that bridges cultures, hearts, and minds has a healing power to it," he said. "It can bring down walls and boundaries of misconception and unite people around their most basic humanity."

Although Park has some experience with Chinese calligraphy, this was her first experience with Arabic calligraphy. "How [Mr. Mi] made [calligraphy] personal to himself was really interesting to me, and I think it's great that Choate is able to bring these types of people that I can learn from," she said.

Mr. Benzinane, Dr. Chen-Lin, and AML Director Dr. Sherry Newman have all expressed hope to have more workshops that, in Mr. Benzinane's words, "will showcase the intersection of storytelling, poetry, music, politics, and activism." Through demonstrating this blend of art forms, the event urged students to appreciate how all cultures are connected in one way or another.

**Kaylin Lam** may be reached at [klam27@choate.edu](mailto:klam27@choate.edu).



FIELD  
REPORT

Choate Winter Record  
12 - 7 - 1

Varsity Games

Girls' Squash (2-0)  
vs. Taft, 5-2

Girls' Basketball (1-0)  
vs. Greenwich, 64-19

Boys' Basketball (1-2)  
vs. Hun School, 77-67

Girls' Ice Hockey (2-0)  
vs. Greenwich, 4-0

Boys' Ice Hockey (0-2)  
vs. Westminster, 4-7

Boys' Squash (1-1)  
vs. Kent, 3-4

J.V. Games

Girls' Basketball (2-0)  
vs. Kingswood, 38-24

Boys' Basketball (1-0)  
vs. Taft, 47-35

Girls' Squash (1-0)  
vs. Taft, 5-2

Boys' Ice Hockey (0-1-1)  
vs. Westminster, 2-3

Girls' Ice Hockey (0-1)  
vs. Rumsey Hall, 1-8

Boys' Squash (0-1)  
vs. Kent, 4-7

Camaraderie and Confidence: Football's Path To Victory

By Grace LaPlaca '25  
Copy Editor

Choate Football went undefeated in the 2023 season with a 9-0 record, winning the Founders League Champion and New England Preparatory School Athletic Council (NEPSAC) Champion titles. The team's hard work, focus, and camaraderie contributed to their immense success.

One of the team's main goals was to win the Leon Modeste Bowl game and go undefeated. "We got that done by focusing on ourselves and our team and what we can control — putting in the work, and executing it in the game," Co-Captain Pearson Hill '24 said.

The group also strove to bond as a team, and Blaize Cameron '24 believes they succeeded. "After our third or fourth game, we really started clicking," he said. "Once we hit that point, the mindset was, 'Okay, we're taking this all the way.'"

Team building began early before preseason with training at Camp Awosting in Morris, Connecticut. The sleepaway camp included workouts throughout the day, as well as traditional camp bonding activities.

"Some of my best friends are sophomores who happened to be in the same bunk as me," said Liam Donagher '24, a postgraduate student. "I feel like that speaks to what the program is about and how much of a family it is."



Photo courtesy of Ella Qu '24

Choate played The Loomis Chaffee School on October 28, 2023.

Carter Vaughn '25 felt similarly about the training camp as a new junior this year. "It truly brought us all together," he said. "I really felt welcomed when we came back to campus."

After a devastating loss to Brunswick School last year in the championship game, one of the team's mantras was, "Remember this feeling. Don't let it happen again." Working as a team was critical in achieving this. "My favorite mantra for this year was, 'Forget about me, I love you,'" Mac Dumont '24 said. "It's not about doing everything for yourself, but for your teammates and brothers on that team."

The team's training regimen was demanding and required

hard work, and above all, team work. Cameron said, "If you want to get through practice, lifts, film study, and everything that makes you a part of the team, you have to have that sense of camaraderie."

During practice, Varsity and Junior Varsity (JV) players trained together in various drills, which contributed to the sense of team unity while also providing more experience for JV players.

The Choate community witnessed this hard work come to life in the team's game against Avon Old Farms School on November 4, a blackout themed Saturday-night game at home. "Our win against Avon was one of the most fun games I've ever played in," Wyatt Morgan '24 said. "The

student section was showing out, everyone was making plays, and it was overall a great experience."

When Dumont was injured and unable to play in the Avon game, Marc Cappuccitti-Gutierrez '25 took his place, scoring the game-winning field goal and delivering a close 17-14 victory. "He's been the little brother I never had," said Dumont. "Every game, he had the opportunity to succeed, and he did. That just meant the world to me — it made me so happy."

The 44-14 victory on Deerfield Day stood out to Hill, who enjoyed performing in front of a big crowd against their rivals and winning. The stands were positioned close to the team's sideline, bringing together players and fans. After the

team won, at both Deerfield Day and the game against Avon Old Farms, students rushed the field. "It was really cool to see," Co-Captain Matt Diaz '24 said. "I didn't realize how many people were there until that happened."

Diaz also noted the shift in the team's attitude this season compared to last. "We were very serious this year and were able to be successful," Diaz said. "But I saw a lot more people having fun playing football together and interacting with one another off the field compared to last season."

"Coach Spinnato has done a great job building a culture of family and inclusivity on this team," Morgan said. "I appreciate that — coming here as a new sophomore and being in a completely different environment."

An undefeated season is an impressive feat. Regardless of their record, however, the team's focus and camaraderie were constant. "We're going to be who we are, whether we win or lose," Hill said. "Being undefeated doesn't have an impact."

Football Coach Mr. LJ Spinnato was recently awarded Coach of the Year by the New Haven Football Officials Association. He credits the award to the culture of the program and the players. "Thank you to the team," Mr. Spinnato said. "It's the best job I've ever had."

Grace LaPlaca may be reached at [gplaca25@choate.edu](mailto:gplaca25@choate.edu).

AROUND THE WORLD WITH  
PAIKA VAN DER MAAS '24



Photos courtesy of Paika van der Maas '24

Paika van der Maas '24 represents the Dutch National Team.

By Rowan Aggarwal '25  
Reporter

When she's not scoring on Choate's basketball courts, Girls' Varsity Basketball forward Paika van der Maas '24 travels the world representing the Netherlands at international competitions.

This past summer, van der Maas represented the U18 Dutch National Team, a team of athletes selected to compete at the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) U18 Women's European Championship 2023 Division B in Sofia, Bulgaria. Prior to the competition, van der Maas and her teammates spent a month training together in Amsterdam.

Van der Maas's love for basketball started at age 10 while growing up in Australia. Her local community center launched a program called Pink Ball to introduce girls to basketball as an alternative to the hugely popular Australian netball, which is similar to basketball.

At first, it was challenging for van der Maas to integrate herself into the team, because when she joined, the other members of the U18 Dutch National Team had already been training together for three years. Many lived together in apartments as part of the Orange Lions Academy, the national training institute for top Dutch basketball players.

However, traveling as a team helped van der Maas become closer to her teammates. After games, the team would get ice

cream together, and van der Maas connected with her roommate through those trips.

As one of the strongest English speakers on the Dutch team, van der Maas also helped the team communicate with other countries' players, who all stayed at the same hotel.

"It was very cool to be able to talk to them and meet all these different players from abroad," she said.

Members of the different national teams became fast friends by trading gear. "On the last day, everyone swapped gear with each other," van der Maas said. "That was my favorite part. I have a bunch of stuff from countries like Denmark and Norway."

Van der Maas is proud to represent the Netherlands internationally and plans to continue playing in college. "Wearing the 'Nederlands' on the front of my jersey was something I was very proud of," she said. "How far I have come in the recruiting process and the opportunities I've created for myself have been good, so I can pick where I want to go for my future," she said.

Looking forward to the winter basketball season, van der Maas cited her off-season prep competing on Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) summer teams and participating in the Peak Conditioning fall afternoon activity as readying her for her final basketball season at Choate.

Rowan Aggarwal may be reached at [ragnarwal25@choate.edu](mailto:ragnarwal25@choate.edu).

COACH LOEB IMPACTS  
VOLLEYS AND VICTORIES

By Grace Walters '24  
Reporter

With 37 years of coaching at Choate under his belt, Girls' Varsity Volleyball Head Coach David Loeb has been a significant part of the team's history.

Coach Loeb began with Girls' Thirds Volleyball in 1986. "I loved being the Thirds coach — I didn't imagine I would be anything but the Thirds coach, and that was fine. I'm still in touch with players who were on that team my first year," he said.

Five years later, Coach Loeb switched to coaching Girls' JV Volleyball. Then, in the fall of 2008, Coach Loeb became Head Coach of Girls' Varsity Volleyball.

Coach Loeb observed that in the past decade, it has become increasingly important to have athletes who are primarily focused on volleyball in order to win against other teams.

However, some things have remained unchanged on the varsity team since Coach Loeb joined. For example, the team still does a secret cheer before matches, a tradition started by his predecessor, Coach Gary Dormandy.

Coach Loeb admits to knowing little about the team's other clandestine pre-game rituals. "Before every match, the girls disappear while the other team has the court. I've been coaching for a long time, and I still don't know where they go or what they do."



Photo by Emily Ma '25/The Choate News

Girls' Varsity Volleyball Head Coach David Loeb smiles for the camera.

One notable victory happened against Andover in 2012. The year before, Choate was undefeated until the team lost to Andover in the championship finals. The next year, the tables turned — Andover was undefeated until Choate beat them in the semifinals and continued on to win the championship. "That was as satisfying a victory as I could imagine," Coach Loeb said.

In 2014, he earned his 400th win across his time coaching Girls' Thirds, JV, and Varsity Volleyball.

Coach Loeb inspires the team in challenging moments. "He knows how to move the team from difficult times, and he has such emotional intelligence that not many coaches have," Fernanda Opazo Aravena '25 said.

Piper Cameron '25 felt similarly: "He'll motivate us and tell us things straight in practice, but when it comes to games, he's gonna be there to uplift us and bring

us up. He's very good with his words and motivating the team when we're in a rut."

Even off the courts, Coach Loeb is always ready to extend his kindness and support to his team. "It's always nice to see him on campus outside of volleyball because he's always there to say hi to us and always wanting to talk to us and ask us about our lives," Ava Sklar '24 said.

Coach Loeb's impact is long-lasting. "The kids I've coached in volleyball over the years are people whose weddings I've gone to, whose babies I've held. These are kids that I'm still in touch with from 10, 20, 30, 35 years [ago]," he said. "I've spent a lot of time doing this, and it's fun to look backwards and see all the different journeys."

Grace Walters may be reached at [gwalters24@choate.edu](mailto:gwalters24@choate.edu).



Photo courtesy of Mr. Joey Avana

Congratulations on Signing Day, athletes!