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The Cougar Chronicle

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Students Prepare for 34th Annual Holiday Show

By Caitlin Kukta

As the holiday season approaches, HK students are preparing for the 34th annual holiday show. The student-run telethon is an HK tradition that many know and love.

Every December the holiday show is put on and run by students here at HKHS. The show is live from the high school and always gets everyone in the holiday spirit. This year's holiday show will be Dec. 23 from 8-11 a.m.



The hosts are Callen Powers, Payton Kasperzyk, Tyson Glazier, Paige Corcoran, Andrew Melnick and Sammy Pach, along with broadcast teacher Kasha Topa-Finburg who also directs the show.

Each year the show has a different beneficiary. In past years donations from community members and supporters raised $14,000 in 2018 and $18,000 in 2021. It is hopeful that the donations will continue in the same pattern for this year's beneficiary, Rachel Webster and the Webster family. Rachel is the 10-year-old daughter of Marcy Webster, HK's choral teacher for over 18 years. Rachel was diagnosed with a rare but aggressive form of cancer in February of 2022. She has been undergoing chemotherapy and over the summer had an above-the-knee amputation.

Host Andrew Melnick said, “The cause is close to all our hearts, so it is important that everyone shows support for the show this year.”

Mrs. Webster said “It has been a real privilege to be a part of the show," adding that she never thought she would actually 'be' the holiday show but is grateful for all the help. “HK means a lot to our family,” she said, expressing gratitude to everyone involved with the show.

All proceeds from the telethon this year will go to the Webster family to pay for uncovered medical bills, handicap accessible renovations for their home, and any expenses associated with her hospital stays and other necessities.

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New Teacher Happy to Return to the Northeast

By Ryan Botteon

While walking down the halls of HK, one might stumble across a face they don't quite remember seeing. Many new teachers have arrived, hoping to create the best learning experience they can. Among these teachers is Megan Balestrieri.



Ms. Megan Balestrieri
(photo by Ryan Botteon)

Megan Balestrieri is HK's new special education teacher. Originally from New York, she traveled south to attend the College of Charleston where she studied special education with a focus on learning and emotional disabilities.

"I like working with students that might not find school to be their favorite thing, and they might struggle a little bit and I try to give them some hope and the help they need so they can succeed," she said.

She taught in Charleston for four years and lived there for 10 years. In 2017, Ms. Balestrieri and her husband moved to Higganum to be closer to family. She began working in Hamden at an alternative high school. She is currently completing her degree in advanced special education with a focus on autism at the University of Saint Joseph.

After being a part of the Higganum community for five years, Ms. Balestrieri said, "I love living here in Connecticut, Higganum in particular. It's a farm community so I love seeing the farms when I drive around, I love the peace, I love the small community aspect of everything, and I'm also closer to my family."

"I really love working with all the other teachers," she added. "I have a really great team. The students are wonderful. Getting to know everybody, there are a lot more people to get to know because my other school was smaller. I've really enjoyed it."

Math League: Using the Brain for Competition

By Andrew Melnick

HK's Math League team has been off to a shaky start this season but has been gaining momentum and is poised to have a competitive season.

Math League is a club taking place in the fall and winter seasons, in which teams from all over the Greater Middlesex area compete in different kinds of mathematics challenges to score points.

At each meet, all 11 teams compete against each other in five different rounds of individual questions and one team round where team members must cooperate to

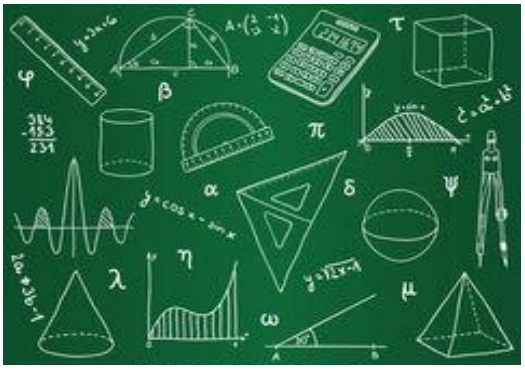
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complete five complex problems within a time limit. Both varsity and JV divisions consist of five team members, with varsity composed of upperclassmen and JV consisting of younger competitors.

Topics for the meets include complex problems from many different math subjects, including geometry, algebra, statistics, and calculus.

The team, led by captain Alex Engler and coach Zachary Cropper-Alt, has been off to an unsteady start this year, placing in the middle of the pack.

During the first meet at Daniel Hand High School in Madison, HK's varsity team placed 5th, and at Mercy placed sixth, led by strong performances from seniors Alex Engler and Kristen Thebeau.



The varsity team currently sits with the season in their hands. Strong showings over the remaining meets could lead to a podium finish for the team, something that has not happened in years at HK.

Members of the team are working hard to make this season a good one. "Although we're only two meets into the season, I can sense a lot of passion throughout the Varsity team," said Engler. "I hope that we can turn around and start excelling once again." This sentiment is shared by many of the team's members.

Junior varsity sits in a more precarious spot, placing in the back half of teams with more than half of their season over. High placings at the final meet could lead to a comeback for the team, but only time will tell.

Journalism Students Tour WFSB's TV Studio

By Michael Reilly

Students from HK's Broadcast Journalism and Event Broadcasting classes toured WFSB's TV studio in Rocky Hill on Nov. 3 to discover real-world applications of their class content.

Students were given the opportunity to discuss the variety of jobs found at a local TV news station, including audio mixers, editors, social-media specialists, and on-air talent, among others.

"It allowed me to bridge the gap between what we do at HK and what happens at a professional TV station," said senior Andrew Melnick, a student in the Broadcast Journalism class. "We saw the step-up in quality between amateurs and professional journalists."

The students toured the entire news facility, including the graphics room, the camera room, and the news desk. Each of these places opened up new opportunities to students and possibly even future career paths.

There were a variety of different places and things to do in the news station, but one of the students' favorites was the news desk. Students were able to see a WFSB broadcast live and up-close in the same room as the news reporters.

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The newsroom had many pieces of equipment, but there was nobody in the room operating cameras or any technology. All of the people controlling the cameras and background editors were in different rooms in order to operate with fewer people in the studio with the news anchors.



Paraprofessional Ms. Berkun meets "Scott Haney."

Some other places the students went to were the other news desks and the garage where there were two news vans with custom wraps and satellites on the top for recording anything newsworthy anywhere around the area. The inside of the vans included computers and chairs for optimal news recording.

The other news desks were in a custom-made kitchen for cooking segments and another with a couch and table for talk shows. This room included lots of screens with the Channel 3 logo in the background.

The employees gave good tours to our students and kept them well informed on all of the equipment and positions that our tourists worked for the news station to the students of HK.

MUSIC REVIEW

Discussing Taylor Swift's New Album "Midnights"

By Grace Quilliam

Perhaps there's no HK faculty member more qualified to discuss Taylor Swift's latest release "Midnights" than English teacher and Swifty expert Ann Deibert, so I took the opportunity to ask her several questions:

Quilliam: What are your thoughts on Taylor Swift's new album “Midnights”?

Deibert: The premise departs from any of her previous albums and it builds on her narrative that she pulls songs from the "vault" and highlights the song-writer identity she has shifted to. She's always been a songwriter, but now she's owning that "version" of Taylor, if you will.

Q: What song/songs on the album are your favorite?

D: "Maroon," "You're on Your Own, Kid," and "AntiHero."

Q: Taylor released seven additional songs, calling them “Midnights, (3 a.m. edition)." What are your thoughts on them?

D: 3 a.m. – I don't get it. Well, I understand the promotional and business angle she was manipulating. But I did not like any of the additional songs. They felt like afterthoughts instead of a bonus.

Q: How do you think “Midnights” compares to her other albums? Which is the best in your opinion?

D: As Mr. Czarkowski likes to say, "All of *Folklore* and half of *Evermore"* are her best bodies of work.

Q: What is your opinion on the music videos released for “Anti-Hero” and

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"Bejeweled"? How do they compare to her previous videos?

D: Didn't watch the music videos. I only watched the "All Too Well" video once, if I'm being totally honest. I focus a lot more on her lyrics and the songs themselves and less on all of the promotional aspects she sells.



Taylor Swift's new album
(photo courtesy Eonline.com)

Q: What are your overall thoughts on Taylor Swift as a musician, lyricist, singer, writer, director, and producer?

D: She is one of the most influential female musicians and lyricists of our time. Love her or hate her, you have an opinion. And most who hate her have not actually listened to her music. That being said, Swift's music isn't for everyone. She is a polarizing figure. "Figure" being the operative word. That is my biggest issue with her: the business/figurehead aspect to her success. She has morphed into this larger than life idea as opposed to an artist.

Q: Will you be seeing her on "The Eras Tour"?

D: Ms. Stone and I will be seeing Taylor on tour this spring--I'm very excited!

SPORTS

2nd Annual Cougar Bowl Once Again Successful

By Sophia Schoen-Newsome

The HK Cougar Den sponsored the second-ever Cougar Bowl, formerly known as Powder Puff, on Nov. 19. A crowd of 300 attended last year, so the school was thrilled to continue the tradition. After the one-point loss against the class of '22, the class of '23 was hoping to win the trophy for themselves.

Unfortunately, that wasn't to be. The class of '24 took the trophy, led by Coaches Orion Inkle and Kevin Gamache. The juniors won, 7-0, with a touchdown pass thrown by Keira Czarkowskic and caught by Reese Timothy in the first quarter.

Czarkowski was the MVP for the juniors, while Keslie Piela took the honors for the seniors.

The name 'Powder Puff' originates from the cosmetics brush that women would use to powder their faces in the 1940's, according to Alex Erdekien, a student journalist at Wayland Student Press Network.

"The name in itself perpetuates the stereotype that females are fragile and incapable of causing damage on the field," wrote Erdekien. One look at the girls on the Cougar Bowl teams proves that myth wrong.

According to Ann Deibert, co-advisor for The Den and one of the organizers of the event, the idea for the game came from

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“senior football players last year who were really interested in coaching the game. The senior class showed up last year and got everyone excited.”

Carlye Kohs, co-advisor of The Den, said, "The coaches did a tremendous job organizing practices and motivating their players. They are very dedicated and it's great to see. As for the players, they looked very motivated [before the game].”



The juniors pose for a photo following their 7-0 victory in the Cougar Bowl.
(photo courtesy Ann Deibert)

When both advisors were asked before the game about whom they believed had the better chance of winning, their opinions differed.

Deibert said, “The Seniors. Coach Fraser, Coach Callender, and Coach Phipps are doing a great job at getting the team ready.”

Kohs, meanwhile, said, "Right now, I think the teams are still evenly matched. Whoever is more motivated will pull out the win.”

Fall Sports Wrap Up; Girls' XC Wins States

By Kelsie Piela and Madalynn Catalano

Here's a summary of another successful fall sports season at HK:

Girls' Cross Country

The girls had a very dominant season that ended with a Class SS State Championship, following their sixth Shoreline Conference championship in eight years.

Freshman Grace Mitchell led the team, finishing in second at the Shoreline Finals. Right behind her in 4th place and 6th place, respectively, were senior Isabel Beradino and junior Sydney Adelberg. Also finishing in the top 20 were freshman Delaney Aronson at 11th and sophomore Keira Sehl-Albert in 16th.

Boys' Soccer

Boys' soccer started the season strong by four games in a row. They slowed down that pace and finished with a 7-8-1 overall record, qualifying for states where they lost a first-round game to Bolton, 5-2.

Girls' Volleyball

Volleyball finished the season with a 14-9 record and a 10-7 record in the Shoreline Conference, receiving strong performances from many players this season.

Senior Payton Yazmer earned first team All-Shoreline, junior Reese Timothy and senior Audra Yazmer earned second

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team All-Shoreline, and senior Kaleigh Bodak earned honorable mention.

Girls' Soccer

Girls' soccer had a strong season finishing 10-6-2. They ended the regular season by qualifying for Shorelines and States. Despite a 5-0 first round win and a hard-fought game, the girls lost in the second round of states to Lewis Mills, 2-1, to end their season.

Players from all four grades showed up for the team this year with seniors Julia Favalora and Leah Chester earning second team All-Shoreline honors, and junior Emmy Kehlenbach earning honorable mention. The girls' assistant coach, Anthony Shea, also won assistant coach of the year.

Boys' Cross Country

The cross country teams continued their dominance over Shoreline opponents this season, although the boys' conference win streak was broken.

Alex Lara finished 3rd in the Shoreline Race with a dominant time of 16:42:30. Behind him, Jack Cozean, Luke Hedges, and Daniel McCourt all finished in the top 18. The boys look to reclaim their seat at the top next season.

Field Hockey

The field hockey team continued to improve with a 6-8 record for this fall '22 season with returning coach, Dee Stephan. This is the most victories in a season the team has accomplished since the passing of legendary coach Patsy Kamercia in 2017.

This season also marked the first year the girls made it into states since 2017 when the team took a 1-0 overtime loss in the preliminary round against Westbrook.

This year, the team had three players earn All-Shoreline honors: junior Jaimey DiNapoli, first team; sophomore Madalynn Catalano, second team; and junior Téa Norman, honorable mention.

Seniors and captains Brooklyn Bailey, Kelsie Piela, Audrey Wrinn, and Sophie Ramino will be moving onto graduation, with Winn and Piela awarded the Patsy Kamercia Award for their contributions to the team as well as their sportsmanship.

Football

The Cougars football team lost the annual Principal's Cup game to the Valley Regional/Old Lyme co-op team on Nov. 22, 28-8. The loss officially eliminated the team from the playoffs, as North Branford – a team the Cougars defeated earlier in the season and who finished with the same 6-4 record – hopped over HK for the final playoff spot with more power points.

The team nonetheless demonstrated a marked improvement from last year's 2-8 record. In addition, Tate Callender twice earned Walter Camp player of the week honors as well as GameTimeCT's athlete of the week for the entire state.



2022's senior football players
(photo courtesy Tyler Wilcox)

Girls' Swim Team Has Dominant Season

By Jonah Lowrey

The girls' swim team just wrapped up another dominant season at States where seven swimmers competed in individual events and relays. Sophomore Liv Macaluso reached state finals in the 100-yard butterfly and 100-yard backstroke.

By the end of the regular season, the girls' record was 6-3, doubly impressive due to the lack of divers on the roster, which meant automatically conceding points to any team that did have them. We caught up with Head Coach Alison Karam for an interview after the season:

Jonah: How has the season gone?

Coach Karam: I'm beyond proud of our girls swim season. It's quite an accomplishment for a team of 12 swimmers to end the dual meet season 6-3 overall. Some teams we competed against were more than double our size and several of our away meets had diving, which we don't, so those are automatic points for the other team. For me as coach, success is when a swimmer moves to the next level of their own competitive ability, and every swimmer has done that this season.

J: How has the team grown throughout the season?

CK: In three months our swimmers got stronger, faster and improved their stroke technique. We've grown into a swimming family and our team captains – Kristen Thebeau, Jo Houska, and Erin Marica – deserve a ton of credit for all the fun activities they planned. I've also seen a significant growth in confidence from overcoming obstacles, breaking time barriers, reaching goals and setting new ones. Every time a swimmer practiced when they didn't feel like it or swam an event they didn't think they could do, they psyched themselves up. And that's the kind of growth that positions them to succeed not just in the pool, but out of the pool.

J: Which moment from the season are you most proud of?

CK: My proudest moment was a compliment that came from a team we'd just beaten in an away meet. One of their timers walked over to tell me how impressed she was with our team's sportsmanship and camaraderie. She loved how our girls supported each other and even cheered for Ledyard swimmers as well. She said, "You have a wonderful group of girls. I wish all the teams were like yours." Wow! That made my heart sing!

J: What is one message you have for your graduating seniors?

CK: My message to our graduating seniors is to live the rest of your life with the confidence, discipline, and can-do mindset you gained from swimming. You have what it takes to dare to dream big and go for it!

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