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The Cougar Chronicle

The Student Newspaper of Haddam-Killingworth High School

Seniors Enjoy Final Days of High School

By Alexa Benson-Amarante

Seniors have enjoyed exciting events leading up to graduation, putting caps and gowns on hold until June 15.

The **Senior Prom** was held on May 13 at Waters Edge in Westbrook. The well-attended event included a buffet dinner and an “Under the Sea” theme. “I loved the atmosphere,” said senior Amanda Ketchedjian. “It was definitely a night to remember.”

The Senior Outing for the class of 2023 took place at Holiday Hill on May 26. Students enjoyed outdoor activities such as mini golf, swimming, volleyball, basketball, fishing, horseshoes, and hiking, as well as all they could eat and drink. The festivities lasted all day. Admission was free for those who paid class dues and $50 for those who had not.

Senior Scholarship Night took place on June 1 in the HK auditorium. The event was a night to celebrate seniors being awarded scholarships from local organizations.

The **Senior Breakfast** is scheduled for the day of graduation, June 15, at 8 a.m.

Commencement Exercises on June 15 are scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. and will feature the following:

- Speeches given by valedictorian Abby Jones and salutatorian Kristen Thebeau.
- Music by the HK band and chorus.
- Speeches by Superintendent Jeffery Wihbey and Principal Donna Hayward.
- A procession led by junior class officers acting as honor guard.

“I am especially excited to celebrate how far we have come as individuals, but also as a class,” said Jones, the valedictorian. She added how student involvement has stepped up while preparing for this year's graduation. “I really appreciate all of the work and planning that goes into each event that is often taken for granted.”

Baseball Wins States (p. 6)



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Students Help District Plan New Logo

By Ryan Botteon

Students of HK's Graphics Communication 2 class have been challenged with creating a new logo for their district letterhead.

"I think it's really valuable for the students at HK to have some agency and say in what the new look of the school is going to be," said Mr. Sean Gallagher, the Graphics Comm 2 teacher. "I think we have a lot to offer. Many of the students are really talented artists, and they have some really great ideas."

The reason for the sudden change is for the need of an updated District 17 logo. "I think it's a little boring; it could use a lot more color, maybe a different font. It looks like clip art and we don't like that," said Maddie Gordon, a student in the class.

"The current logo is a little outdated," said Mr. Gallagher. "It doesn't really say anything about the school, it's just a globe with a couple books that are just too universal, and it doesn't actually have any defining characteristics of RSD 17."

Students have worked many hours designing an effective logo for District 17.

"I just did some simple, official looking seal-type logos," said another student, Andrew Melnick.

"I had a multicolored cougar, which I put on a few circular backgrounds, and then used the HK logo together in one logo," added James Marchetti.

While the new logo has yet to be chosen, students are waiting patiently for the winner to be announced after the board reviews the options.

Childhood Education Teacher Joins HK Staff

From Staff Reports

Ms. Emily Babjak joined the faculty this year to teach Early Childhood Education. She came to HK from Berlin High School where she taught child development, baking, and culinary during the spring of last school year.



Hailing from Oregon, Ms. Babjak earned her undergraduate degree in psychology with a minor in dance from the University of Oregon. She moved east with her family in 2018 and earned her teaching certificate from Connecticut's Alternative Route to Teaching program.

Ms. Babjak has found her undergraduate degree in psychology beneficial as a teacher: "It helps with empathizing and understanding teens."

English Teacher Brings Passion to the Job

By Michael Reilly

HK has welcomed a vibrant addition to its faculty with the arrival of Ms. Julia MacKinnon, a passionate English teacher whose enthusiasm for English and teaching

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has made an impact.

Joining the staff at the start of this year, Ms. MacKinnon's classes are filled with energy and excitement as she introduces her students to the world of literature.



One of her students, Liam Gordon, expressed his admiration, saying, "Ms. MacKinnon has been a very informative teacher so far and has creative ways of teaching things."

Ms. MacKinnon has introduced various interactive activities, such as group discussions, literature circles, and group readings, allowing her students to explore their own unique voices and interpretations. Through these initiatives, she fosters an inclusive classroom environment where students feel empowered to express themselves.

School Celebrates Another Street Fest

By Ryan Botteon

Street Fest on May 31 was once again a day where students got away from their usual school schedule and instead looked forward to a day of fun in the sun. All throughout the track field and baseball court, students found the usual activities hosted by clubs and staff.

“The big returning activities were the volleyball games, the all grade kickball, and the boat race were back, and karaoke was back, and yard games, so were club events,” said Ms. Carlye Kohs, co-advisor of the Cougar Den, which planned the event.

A change to Street Fest this year was having some activities becoming more inclusive.

Co-Advisor Ann Deibert said, “The biggest anchors of Street Fest are the kickball tournament that features each class represented on the student team that played against the faculty team. The volleyball tournament was a little bit different this year. Instead of it being the football versus volleyball teams, we opened it up a little bit for more pool play.”



Mr. Ladas, Mr. Czarkowski, and Mr. Apicella take one for the team.

News Analysis:

Can Anyone Afford to Pay for College Now?

By Caitlin Kukta

Having an advanced education can be very important to a future job. A college degree is often the final factor when comparing two candidates for a position. However, with the average college tuition rising, achieving that education becomes difficult, if not impossible, for many.

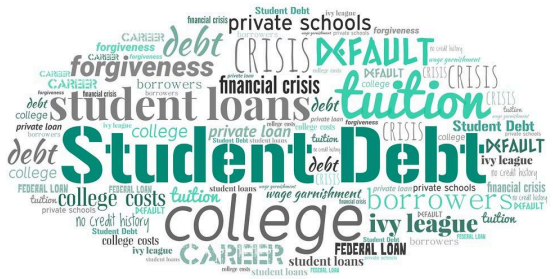
Over the past 30 years, tuition has continued to grow exponentially for a variety of reasons, including state funding cuts, expanding administrative staff, and increased facility costs. As a result, graduates are left with considerable debt at the end of their college careers.

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According to State Representative Gregg Haddad of Mansfield, “It’s essential that we prioritize higher education this legislative session. When we invest in institutions like UConn, we’re investing in our state’s future. Investments will ensure students can thrive and also promote the success of Connecticut as a whole.”

Most of these tuition increases are due to government funding slowing down. Currently, most Connecticut colleges rely on state funding especially after Covid-19, but some say that the funding was used unwisely and some schools' financial troubles are not entirely a result of fewer government funds. UConn has allegedly used more money than they bring in for their athletics programs in addition to having a top-heavy administrative staff.



According to the Connecticut Board of Regents, the tuition increase “aims to balance student affordability with increasing university costs driven by inflation, existing labor agreements and declining enrollment.” However, college enrollment has dropped more than 8% between 2019-22 nationwide, and with inflation, that percentage is estimated to grow.

Even with the rise in tuition, there are still many ways for students to go to college and come out with minimal debt. Completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), for example, is a very helpful process for students who otherwise wouldn't have means of attending a university.

Financial aid is crucial for many to be able to avoid steep debt when they finish their education, but even if someone applies for FAFSA, they may not be qualified for it.

Scholarships are another way many students try to avoid debt, but again, there is not always enough money to make a large difference when looking at tuition for four or more years. Thus, although there are ways to try and lessen the load of college tuition, they are not always guaranteed, meaning many aren't able to get the higher education they need for the profession they wish to pursue.

As prices continue to increase in the coming years, more students will struggle with choosing their college since many families will have to choose a college based on affordability. Without more ways to ease the burden of tuition, many people will be left unable to attend college.

Music Review:

The Best Choices in Current Metal Music

By Andrew Melnick

Metal is a divisive genre for a people – some find it too harsh, some find the lyrical content to be offensive, and still others just don’t like the sound. For those few who fall down the sonic rabbit hole to the truly alternative heavy music, they come to enjoy it. The last few years have been an interesting time to be a fan. Two bands have caught my attention, and I think they should have yours, too.

Sleep Token

Sleep Token is an anomaly in not only the heavy music world, but in music as a whole. Their sound refuses to be categorized, with heavy riffs trading off with stripped back

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electronic production, before changing again altogether into a softer, more contemplative operatic sound. Combining elements from classic metal, metalcore, EDM, and more experimental or avant-garde styles, the band crafts a truly unique but absolutely captivating sonic experience.

Throughout their discography, 808s (drums) and impressive vocals give way to distorted rhythm guitar and soaring leads, and this sound has been concentrated in their new album, *Take Me Back to Eden.* Any complaints I may have had with them before fade from my mind, as this album is packed with absolutely transcendent sounds and hard-hitting emotional moments that redefine what music is for me.

Tracks like the opening "Chokehold" have powerful heavy rhythm without the oppressive atmosphere that turns many away from albums, while other tracks like "Aqua Regia" show off the impressive production in a more subdued and emotional way. The vocals on this record are stunning, with incredible range and tone that complement the instrumentals and production in the perfect way.

Spiritbox

Spiritbox is a group born from the desire for musical freedom, with guitarist Mike Stringer and lead vocalist Courtney LaPlante, a husband and wife duo, leaving their previous band to pursue artistic liberty. When they came together with bassist Bill Crook (who has since left the band) and drummer Zev Rose, their initial album release would shake the metal scene as one of the most impressive freshman records in the genre's history. 2021's *Eternal Blue* was that album.

The album has a very distinct but definitive heavy-metal sound. The use of distorted bass and synth elements add an element of gravitas to an otherwise vanilla composition, giving the music a layer of depth and complexity that is often lacking in the metal scene. LaPlante's melodic, almost psychedelic vocal style combines with the more aggressive, less clear backing vocals to give a strong feeling and contrast to each track. Rose backs it all with heavily syncopated, almost breakbeat style percussion intermixed with the classic metal 'machine gun' fills.



Tracks like "Holy Roller" and "Sun Killer" have that strong, heavy-guitar and pounding-percussion sound that metal fans have grown to love, while other tracks such as "Secret Garden" rely more heavily on the synthetic and progressive elements, with this track in particular incorporating clean but heavy fingerstyle bass on the verse. The combination of the truly unique vocal style with very precise production provides a very different kind of feeling that I think will be refreshing for all music fans.

There are too many exceptional records to list, but I'll go through a few more quickly. I recommend checking out Northlane's *Alien* for another different kind of experience, with more harmonic guitar and breakbeat drums. Thornhill's *Butterfly* has an almost psychedelic feeling with highly distorted vocals and complex, technical guitars.

Finally, there's the Architects' *For Those That Wish to Exist*, which has a spectacular thematic style and exceptionally clean composition.

Baseball Wins States; Spring Sports Excel

By Sophia Schoen-Newsome

Mark Brookes, the only coach HK baseball has ever had, won his first state championship in his 46th year as the Cougars defeated Coventry, 6-2, on June 9 to take the Class S title.

The team (22-5 overall) was led by Callen Powers who struck out 10 batters to get the win and Luke Mauri who powered a two-run double, enabling the team to overcome an early 2-0 deficit.



"It's good for the school, it's good for the kids," said Coach Brookes. "It's nice to be in this final again and to win it is exceptional. I'm very happy for them first and all the kids that went before."

HK earned the trip to the championship game with a 4-0 semi-final win over Lyman Memorial, as Liam Gordon threw a one-hitter and struck out 13.

Softball

The softball team upset Old Lyme, 6-2, in the semi-finals of the Shoreline Conference – the 44th time in 45 years in which the team qualified for the tournament. The team lost in the finals to North Branford. In addition, Head coach Jeff Talbott earned his 350th win this season.

A highlight of the season was Kaleigh Bodak pitching an 11-inning shutout and hitting a solo HR in the 11th inning to beat Coginchaug, 1-0. The team was ranked 13th in Class M and beat Rocky Hill and East Hampton in the tournament, but lost 2-0 to Mercy in the quarterfinals.

Boys' Lacrosse

The HK boys' lacrosse team dominated the Shoreline Conference in the regular season once again. Alex Phipps, Braren, Jack Insalaco, and Aiden Griswold, have scored over 30 goals.

The team lost to North Branford twice in the regular season, but defeated the T-Birds, 7-4, in the conference championship game. Ranked No. 10 in Class S, they lost to Stonington, 12-11, in the state tourney.

Girls' Lacrosse

The girls' lacrosse team had "height, speed, strength, patience, scrappiness, and most importantly, teamwork," said Jenna Whitmer, co-captain. The girls had a solid season, beating North Branford for the first time in five years and finishing 8-8. The team lost to NW Catholic, 10-9, in states.

Boys' and Girls' Tennis

Singles player Kami Narducci qualified for the Shoreline Conference Tournament where she lost in the first round. Captain Elanna Tousignant was injured and could not compete in Shorelines. Overall, the team finished the season with a record of 1-14.

Bryce Leiberman (11-3 individual record), Eddie White (9-4), and Joe Wessinger (9-3) received seeds in the Shoreline Tournament for the boys. In doubles Gus Luzietti and Cav Napoletano (7-5) were also seeded. The team was ranked 19th in the state tournament where it lost in the first round to Stonington, finishing the season with a 8-8 record.

Golf

The HK Golf team finished a successful season, finishing in third place at the annual Shoreline Conference Tournament behind champion Portland and runner-up Cromwell. Coach Josh Hagewood was named Shoreline Coach of the Year, while Andrew Crayton and Declan Kessler were named to the Second All-Conference Team.

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Boys' and Girls' Track

The HK boys' track team finished in second place at Shoreline Championships, and the girls placed fifth.

Top performers for the boys were Alex Lara (1st, 880m); Jack Cozean and Dan McCourt (3rd and 4th, 3200m); and John Panzera (3rd, 300m hurdles and 2nd, high jump).

Top performers for the girls were Mariella Fulcher (2nd, 200m); Isabel Berardino (3rd, 1600m); Grace Mitchell (3rd, 3200m); Jayani Bennett (3rd, 100m); and Leah Chester (2nd, triple jump and 3rd, long jump).

The teams competed in the Class M meet on May 30. John Panzera earned 2nd place in the high jump, and Alex Lara finished 4th in the 400m.

Former HK Teacher Now Coaches in the Majors

By Sophia Schoen-Newsome

Three years ago, he was an English teacher at HK. Today, he's the co-hitting coach for the Baltimore Orioles. As he likes to say, "I'm just living the dream."

Before Ryan Fuller was a hitting coach in the major leagues, he was a financial advisor, a college baseball coach, a lifeguard, and even played a season of minor league baseball for the Arizona Diamondbacks. Then, he went back to school to earn a masters degree in teaching and in 2015 became a full-time English teacher and assistant baseball coach at HK.

Although it sounds like a vast change in careers, Fuller said that he creates PowerPoint presentations for the players and they are given homework that some do and others don't.

"Without the skills I learned as a teacher, I wouldn't be here today," he told Mr. Keck's journalism students during a Google Meet in April.

It was a big decision to leave his four-year teaching career to become a coach, but Fuller described it as an "opportunity I had to take." He is now the co-hitting coach with Matt Borgschulte.

When Fuller first arrived at the major leagues, he said he was "a little intimidated at first because it feels like they already know everything. But they're just like anyone else I've coached – they just want to get better."

He has also connected on another level. Because he's close in age to many of the players, he works out in the gym with them and throws batting practice to them.

While it's quite luxurious being a major league baseball coach flying first class and staying in five-star hotels, Fuller said "it's best to be home."

Still, there are many perks to being in this profession: "The travel is better, the pay is way better, you get to be on TV every night, and the stadiums are cathedrals."

Although the Old Lyme native experiences fame, fortune, and gets to see new places, he said he does miss teaching the students at Haddam-Killingworth and the relationships he made along the way.



So where does Fuller go from here? "I hope I'm still doing the same thing," he said. "I can see becoming a manager as a natural evolution." He is only 33 years old, he explained, while most managers are in their 40's and 50's, but he's determined to move through the ranks.

Ryan Fuller turned his life-long dreams into reality, showing that no matter where you start in life – maybe even as an English teacher at a small high school in Connecticut – you can always carve out new paths and hit some home runs.

Where Are HK Seniors Headed after Graduation?

Compiled by Kelsie Piela

Kaylee Arnold - University of Connecticut
Brooklyn Bailey - Quinnipiac University
Isabel Berardino - Bryant University
Kyle Barton - Work
Sasha Berardino - Marist College
Kaleigh Bodak - Haverford College
Ryan Botteon - Middlesex Community College
Seamus Boots - Saint Anslem College
Nolan Braren - University of Vermont
Georgia Brown - University of Hartford
Tate Callender - Middlesex Community College
Georgia Cancroft - University of Delaware
Sam Carter - Virginia Tech
Leah Chester - Quinnipiac University
Caroline Coleman - University of New Haven
Caroline Conte - Lehigh University
Paige Corcoran - Villanova University
Lorin Danaher - Bay Path University
Caleb Dias - Middlesex Community College
Logan DiCicco - Capital Community College
Alexander Engler - Drexel University
Julia Favalora - Providence College
Nicholas Frasco - Roger Williams University
Maddi Fraser - University of Alabama
Ellery Freeman - Franklin Pierce University
Ellie Frith - Nova Southeastern University
Jordan Garibay - Middlesex Community College
Ella Geissler - Eastern Connecticut State Univ.
Joe Giaccone - Western New England University
Colin Griswold - Electric Boat
Dylan Gross - Middlesex Community College
Colin Goldblatt - Rutgers University
Maddie Gordon - Pennsylvania State University
Emma Hansted - University of Saint Joseph
Catie Haas - University of Connecticut
Luke Haase - Western Dakota Technical College
Liam Hoddinott - Middlesex Community College
Jack Insalaco - Clark University
Abby Jones - Brown University
Larissa Kauffman - Central Conn. State Univ.
Caleb Kent - University of Maine
Zenon Kolcio - Bryant University
Jenna LaMontagne - Central Conn. State Univ.
Alex Lara - Wesleyan University
Panagiotis Lavelle - Wentworth Institute of Tech.
Christian Lena - Stonehill College
Jonah Lowrey - Curry College
Jacob Maier - Bryant University
Erin Marica - Middlesex Community College
Grace McKenzie - Bryant University
Aaron McLeod - Lincoln Tech
Gillian Miller - University of Vermont
Sage Murray - University of New Hampshire
Kira O'Brien - University of Massachusetts
Katherine Overchuk - University of Connecticut
Addie Packtor - Union College
Arianna Panzera - Quinnipiac University
Katie Pavlou - University of Conn, Avery Point
Charles Petrie - State Univ of NY, New Paltz
Sarah Petrie - University of Delaware
Toby Prue - Lincoln Tech
Grace Quilliam - Roger Williams University
Sophie Ramino - Eastern Conn. State Univ.
Connor Schipritt - Middlesex Community College
Sophia Schoen-Newsome - University of Conn.
Luis Sepulveda - Naugatuck Valley CC
Evie Shakun - Gap Year (law-firm internship)
Neal Sheppach - Bryant University
Emma Sirignano - Middlesex Comm. College
Laura Strick - Middlesex Comm. College
Kristen Thebeau - Worcester Polytechnic Inst.
Olivia Tucker - University of Massachusetts
Colton Whiteley - Bryant University
Joe Whiteside - Norwich University
Jenna Whitmer - College of Charleston
Ryan Wiese - State Univ. of NY, Morrisville
Audrey Wrinn - East Carolina University
Wilhelmina Wurzbach - Savannah College of Art & Design

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