

THE HIGHLAND FLING



Art Courtesy of Derek Chen '25, Brook Xu '25

Northern Highlands Regional High School | 298 Hillside Avenue, Allendale NJ 07401 | Volume 58, Issue 010|



Photo Courtesy of Al Mugno

Class of 2022 Engineering and Architecture Students on Mr. Mugno’s “Pennant Day” on May the 4th “May the next four years be with you”.

MR. MUGNO FOR 2024 TEACHER OF THE YEAR

A look into Mr. Mugno’s recent win and his role in our school community

Elena McCrossin '26

Every year, Northern Highlands students get sent a form to nominate a teacher or educational services professional to nominate one of their most inspirational teachers for the prestigious Educator of the Year award.

Without fail, this award is annually bestowed upon a deserving teacher who inspires students and fellow teachers alike to create a strong culture both in and out of the classroom. This year’s recipient, Mr. Al Mugno of the applied tech department, is no exception to these valuable qualities.

Mugno has been teaching at the school for

thirty two years, specifically having taught CAD 1, CAD 2, Real World Engineering, Honors Architecture and Design, Honors Engineering and Design, and Woodworking 1.

In addition, Mugno founded the computer club, the STEM club, the future architects and engineering club of America, and the weather club, as well as participating in the Bright Committee which predated Career and Academic Pathways, coaching JV Basketball for three years, coaching the freshman and varsity soccer teams for over ten years, and coaching varsity track and field for seven years.

Outside of school, Mugno displays his passion for weather through his work with two professional weather organizations and his passion for science in the STEM league which he helped to found. Mungo’s greatest passions, however, lie within what he teaches in the classroom.

Mugno constantly strives to inspire students and create a welcoming environment. His teaching strategy is direct and encouraging.

“My philosophy,” he says, “is KISS: keep it simple stupid. That’s everything I do, and I see it in my students. It’s all very, very simple. Don’t

make it hard. Don’t make it complex. The more complex, the harder you make it on you, not me.”

Junior Blake Stekelenburg reflects on his experience having Mugno as a teacher, saying, “when it comes to the classroom, he keeps his class difficult, yet fair, which is what makes all of the projects so much fun.”

Despite the wide scope of criteria Mugno teaches his students, he is still able to fit in time for many light-hearted, engaging activities. Stekelenburg cites that one of his favorite fun things Mungo does is the bagel breakfasts which he hosts “for every hol-

iday, and even just does them spontaneously which all of the students love.”

Mugno fosters an environment full of creativity and curiosity. “He makes personal connections with each one of his students, is well-respected, and everyone is excited to listen whenever he talks,” says Stekelenburg.

Despite the wide scope of criteria Mugno teaches his students, he is still able to fit in time for many light-hearted, engaging activities. Stekelen

IN LIVE TIME

What are instant decision days and their pros and cons for students?

Elizabeth Ha '27

Instant Decision Day, often known as IDD, is an admissions process that allows high school seniors to receive an immediate decision on their college applications. IDDs are typically hosted by colleges and universities.

They accelerate the admissions processes, allowing students to find out if they have been admitted on the spot, frequently following an interview or examination of their application documents. This procedure is an alternative to normal college admissions, which usually involves waiting several months to hear back from the college.

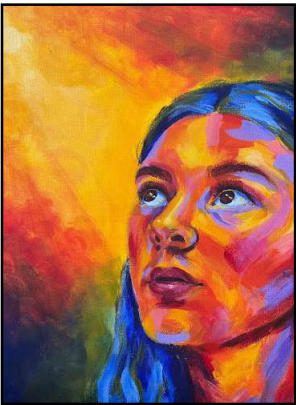
Instant Decision Day’s main goal is to speed up the admissions process, making it much more efficient for both applicants and colleges. It lets students remove the uncertainty and anxiety that can come with waiting for an acceptance letter.

Dr.LaRocca states, “It was September/October of my senior year. I went to IDD, I was accept

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Take a look at the art journey of AP Studio Artist, Ava Rome.

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Alumni booming in the music industry.

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Girls basketball is locked in for this starting season.

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WE HAVE SPIRIT OH YES WE DO

The real issue behind lack of school spirit is much larger than what we can simply explain



Gabe Tejeda '26

Photo courtesy of Reet Sachdev '27

Currently, Highlands is facing a challenging question: How can we improve our school spirit? Two months ago, I wrote an article discussing the lack of school spirit at Highlands. In that piece, I criticized the outdated nature of our spirit weeks, as the school continued to rely on the same old themes, which most students didn't participate in. Recently, the student council sent out a Google form asking students

to select their preferred themes for the next spirit week. This form offered a variety of choices, ranging from trendy options to more traditional ones. In my opinion, this is a significant step forward for Highlands. By allowing students to choose their own spirit week themes, they are more likely to feel motivated to participate. When more students take part, others will be more inclined to follow. If the 200 students who responded to the form get the themes they want, they will feel empowered to participate and encourage their friends to do the same. As more students start dressing up, others will notice and join in, creating a chain reaction of participation. To increase school spirit, someone needs to start the chain reaction. The simplest way to do this is by encouraging your

friends to dress up. This is the area where Highlands struggles the most—many students are hesitant to be the first to stand out. This is ultimately why the form was sent out. Giving students the power to choose the spirit week themes is a great way to encourage them to stand out and participate. However, that alone won't be enough to create a real wave of enthusiasm. For the student body to become truly excited about supporting our school, we need to address underlying issues that even administrators might find difficult to solve. Chief among them is the mocking of individuality. Although it may be hard to hear, many groups of students at Highlands are quite rigid and don't allow for individuality to shine. Some students may want to participate in spirit week,

but refrain out of fear of being ridiculed by their peers. To truly foster spirit throughout our school, we need to break away from these traditional cliques and view school spirit for what it really is—something cool and exciting. This is exactly why the form was sent out. By ensuring that the chosen spirit week topics are trendy, we can encourage students to venture beyond their comfort zones, despite the usual anti-school attitudes that may exist. Although I don't have access to the form responses, by the time this article is released, we will have already had a spirit week and seen what the student body picked. Hopefully, whatever themes were chosen will resonate with the students at Highlands. If they don't, don't place the blame on the school. Highlands makes

a real effort to keep us engaged and having fun. If students don't participate, despite having chosen the themes, the responsibility lies with us, the students. For those of you reading this, I urge you to think about why you don't participate. I would argue that at least 70% of the reasons boil down to, or at least touch on, peer pressure. Not peer pressure in the way we typically understand it, but in a more subtle form. Even casually joking around with friends can discourage someone from stepping out of their comfort zone, whether it's wearing a new outfit or dressing up as a teacher for spirit week. When we shut down individuality, we make Highlands a less exciting place for everyone. To make our school a more accepting place, we all need to participate in spirit week and fully embrace the chance to go all out for Highlands. This will help to make walking down the hallways feel like an enjoyable experience. Hopefully, the new system of allowing students to choose themes will help more students get involved. ■



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The views of the staff do not necessarily reflect the views of the administration. The administration has the right to review and alter an issue of the newspaper for five school days after it has been given to them by the staff. In the process of prior review, the original content of the paper may be changed or deleted. Regardless, the staff of *The Highland Fling* prides itself on delivering the most relevant and accurate reporting it can.

From the Desk of the Editors-in-Chief

This is the final issue with this staff until the June senior issue. There is so much that we want to say... Thank you to all of our hardworking staff—our section editors, copy, photo and social media— and Mr. Kaminski, Ms. BC, and Mr. Norrell for an incredible stretch of issues. We also thank Mr. Occhino and Dr. Larocca for always conferencing with us. The Fling is one of the most if not the most collaborative group at Highlands (and the most time-consuming). In order to put out our issues on time, it takes a tremendous amount of effort and time on all parts. We've gone through a lot of rough patches along the way but what really matters is getting through that. As Editors-in-chief, we can not even comprehend how proud we are of the entire staff, and ourselves, for pulling through. Both of us have been in the Fling for 4 years now and what truly leads us here is the beauty of the hard work and ideas that flow in these halls. Truly, the Fling has made us recognize what a wonderful community we have here. Lastly, a message to seniors. It was just yesterday that we were freshmen in 2021. In the blink of an eye, so many of you are already committed and off doing great things. We still have not processed how fast everything is going right now but we are proud to see what you all will do. Even in the face of rejection or deferral, remember to keep strong; it will all work out! That being said, we will see you one last time in June 2025. All seniors would be off by then... that's truly crazy but exciting to think about. Good luck to the 2025-2026 staff and I hope you all have enjoyed the issues! Wishing you all the very best.

-Editors-in-Chief Brook Xu and Nolan Rota

If you are interested in joining *The Highland Fling* or have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact fling.eic@gmail.com. If you are interested in placing an ad or subscribing, please contact the email listed above.

National Alliance on Mental Illness:
1-800-950-6264
National Suicide Prevention Hotline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255) [24/7 hotline]
(Spanish) 1-888-628-9454

GEARING UP FOR THE ROBOTICS COMPETITION

Robotics Club organizes interschool competition to challenge other schools to build fencing robots



Photo Courtesy of Lauren Bourque '25

Nolan Rota '25

Last May 31, the Robotics club held a LEGO Mindstorm Robotics competition in our courtyard where club advisor Purvik Patel invited other schools in the area to compete. For those unfamiliar with LEGO Mindstorm, it is a great introduction to the world of Robotics. With a simple coding language powering the Mindstorm brick, starting with robotics has never become easier and more accessible to students.

Last year's challenge was simple: creating a throwing mechanism to launch a ping pong ball the furthest. This one day competition took multiple weeks of planning for the club, as senior Jaret Birnbaum, Vice President of the club explains, "The club as a whole spent hours organizing all the legos piece by piece into com-

partments, coordinating which schools were gonna participate and planning out the schedule for the competition." More specifically as the President of the Robotics club senior Matt Ma states, "there are a lot of tasks the [highland team] members get assigned to like giving presentations about the basics of coding robots, physics, and challenge specific rules." The introductory slideshows that the members of the club will present will also give hints about creating a successful robot.

This year's Robotics competition howev-

robot will be titled champion and will be awarded a 3D-printed trophy made from our engineering facilities. Schools involved in the event include Lakeland, North-eastern Valley, Glen Ridge, New Providence, and our own Highlands team.

This year's competition will be hosted in the new Student Lounge as the space encourages a collaborative environment for competing robotics members. Ma states, "I'm extremely excited to compete like last year. Hopefully we can do more competitions like this in the future." With abundant

"I'm extremely excited to compete like last year. Hopefully we can do more competitions like this in the future."

Senior Matt Ma

er will have a different challenge for invited schools. The challenge will be to design a fencing robot that can battle other robots. Similar to a battle of the bots competition, the sole surviving

room for other teams and multiple flat-screen TVs to cast presentations, the newly renovated room is the ideal choice.

Farther into the future of the club, President Matt Ma looks forward



Photo Courtesy of Purvik Patel

Teams working diligently to build ping pong ball launchers in the 2024 Robotics Competition.

to advancing the club from LEGO Mindstorm basics to implementing Arduino robotics. Although more challeng-

lay the groundwork for learning to code, which many members of the robotics club have taken. By using these funda-

botics Club members are excited about. Advisor Purvik Patel welcomes anyone interested in robotics to join as the club is always looking for new members.

As the robotics club is gearing up to prepare for this competition, we wish them great success. ■

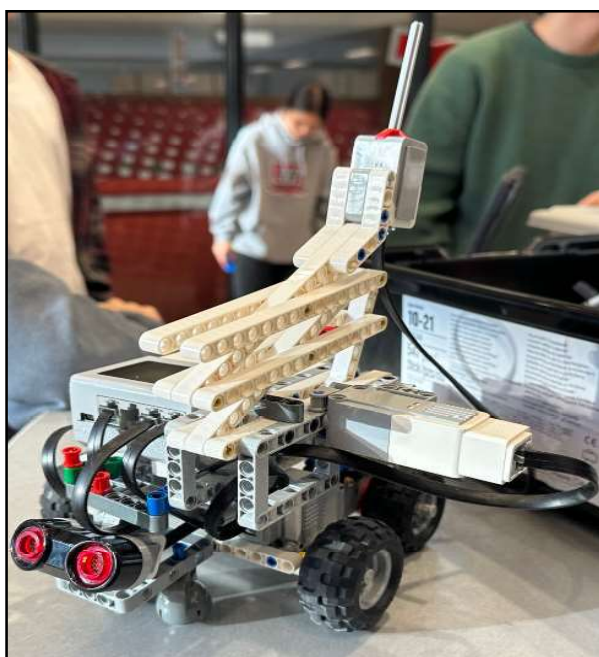


Photo Courtesy of Nolan Rota '25

Model of a fencing robot for the 2025 event

ing, our school provides a more rigorous coding courses such as AP Computer Science A and AP Computer Science Principles. These classes

mentals to learn C++, a popular coding language for many machines, they will finally be able to code Arduino boards, which many of the Ro-

A MUSICAL CONTROVERSY

What's going on with *The Prom*, and why are so many students not participating in it?



Photo courtesy of Reet Sachdev '27

Sebastian Tabakov '26

The Prom is a musical of many stories. One is of facing adversity and another is about finding love in what seems to be the most impossible situations.

To me, these are beautiful sentiments that are highly relevant to high school audiences. Good thing I think so—hopefully many others do too—because *The Prom* is the 2025 Northern Highlands Winter Musical.

In short the plot is driven by shallow Broadway stars that take a trip to Indiana to advocate for teen, lesbian, Emma, who is not permitted to go to her prom because she would like to bring a girl as her date. Along the way, the Broadway stars learn values of selflessness and humility, while the town Emma lives in learns to be more accepting of those who are different.

With such an endearing and driven plot... who wouldn't like this show? Turns out, so many people have issues with the choice. What is it that the thespian community at Highlands does not particularly love about a show such as *The Prom*?

As an active member of the "theater community" at Highlands, I have heard

many opinions. Some simply do not like the topic of homosexuality in the show. They either do not agree with the topic, think that if they participate in the show it will send a message to others about themselves, or they just do not feel connected to the show.

To the naysayers I ask, is acting not the art of pretending?

Being an actor is about losing yourself for a character when you step on to the stage. Therefore, when portraying a character, there is no message being sent about your personal beliefs—you are doing a job when performing.

This notion is not just evident in high school, it is found in the professional world as well. Professional actors get cast in various roles pertaining to many

different story lines. It is simply part of the nature of theater and being an actor.

However, some do not want to understand. They remain with a closed mind. And, this is problematic.

Surely the director of the show, Mr. Thomas Pastor knew that the show would be met with backlash upon it being announced—right? As a matter of fact, he did not.

When asked if he understood the implications of a show featuring controversial topics such as *The Prom*, he reported that he did not: "Nothing about *The Prom* is inherently inappropriate. It's just like any other show."

He was then asked why he believed many had issues with the 2025 winter musical: "I honestly don't know or understand

why. No one had any issue with *Mamma Mia* last year! Though it also is an appropriate show for high

key point Mr. Pastor presented. *The Prom* is "about selflessness and putting aside preconceived no-

"Nothing about *The Prom* is inherently inappropriate. It's just like any other show."

Thomas Pastor

school theater programs, it features countless sexual innuendos that could potentially be seen as inappropriate. On the other hand, *The Prom* does not. It's just a show about selflessness and putting aside preconceived notions."

As sad as it is, many naysayers to the current musical are missing the

tions." Without giving the show a chance, many did not dispel their fixed-minded, preconceived notions.

Despite the concerns people may have, *The Prom* is in full swing with rehearsals underway. When it opens in February, I urge everyone at Highlands to go see it. ■

EXPLORING WHAT YOUR FUTURE HOLDS

The annual Elective Exploration Day becomes a unique lasting tradition that aids



Photo courtesy of Anna Russo '27

Anna Russo '27

It's no secret that our school has plenty of electives. However, hearing basic information about the class from friends or reading the sheet and thinking "Yeah, that seems cool" may lead a student to miss the classes they would enjoy the most and get the most out of.

Many times students don't get to see what a class truly entails. Fortunately, for the past few years, the school has created the "Elective Exploration Day" to help students discover and experience classes they are interested in taking for the following year.

This event is extremely advantageous for students, even if they believe they know what they want to do.

For starters, the Elective Exploration Day not

only allows students to get a broader understanding of the elective they may choose to take, but it also may allow them to see the layout of the room and help them learn more details about the class.

That day, I entered the room and was immediately ecstatic to see four fancy kitchens. Not only did I come to understand the layout of the room, including where the kitchens were located, but that

able to cook) inspired me to rethink my previously prepared elective choices. Because of being able to learn about the elective itself, I ended up taking the course, and now I enjoy it.

Without the elec-

tive and gotten to experience what is now one of my favorite classes.

Some students may know what they want to take, however, this doesn't mean the elective exploration won't be helpful. Be-

mind about what courses I wanted to take. Reading the names of the electives on paper and getting to see and hear about the class in person are completely different things.

Students may go in knowing what they want to do and exit rethinking everything. They may also be even more motivated to take the course they already decided on.

Overall, whether a student has no clue about what they want to do or is one step away from checking the boxes of the electives they want to take, Elective Exploration Day is a helpful tool.

It provides the opportunity to learn more about the class and potentially hear more details from peers who have already completed the course. Additionally, it provides students with a valuable opportunity to see the room and layout for themselves. In my opinion, students should participate in Elective Exploration Day. They may even decide to take an elective they had no clue about before. ■



Students learning about the Photography elective at the 2023 exploration, exploring hands on crafts to learn concepts of Photography.

For example, last year I decided to check out the Foods and Nutrition course. Previously, I thought it was only about how to eat healthily and nutrients. I thought I would be given packets to fill out and lectures about calories and protein. I had no idea getting to cook and making a recipe was even involved.

was also my first time meeting the teacher. There were also other students giving their experiences of being in the course.

At first, I was worried about not being able to cook due to my lack of smell but being able to understand more about the class (and the fact that if I took the course I would be

tive exploration, I would have never taken the elec-

cause of the Exploration day, I even changed my

Because of the Exploration day, I even changed my mind about what courses I wanted to take.

TO THE MOVIES: A WICKEDLY GOOD IDEA

New blockbusters are causing students to flock to the nearest theaters...find out why



Photo courtesy of Emerson Rossi '26

Emerson Rossi '26

As the holiday season approaches, there has been an undeniable surge in movie theater attendance. Whether it's the latest blockbuster releases, the extra free time during the holidays, or the power

pletely transformed the way we consume entertainment, and most students at the school use it on a daily basis, making these channels an essential part of movie promotion. Some of the most talked-about films this fall have been *Gladiator II*, *Moana 2*, and most of all, *Wicked*.

From the moment *Wicked* was announced, social media exploded with content—brand collaborations, news stories surrounding the cast, and promotional videos. It seemed like every influencer, brand, and entertainment outlet was sharing something related to *Wicked*. In my



Photo courtesy of Google

The very much anticipated Moana 2 movie premieres with Dwayne Johnson and Auli'i Cravalho.

the timing of these big movie releases has played an equally important role. With Thanksgiving break behind us and winter break approaching, students find themselves with more free time than usual. For many, movie going has become a way to take a break from school stress and immerse themselves in something exciting. The fact that these movies are being released during the holiday season only adds to the sense of occasion.

At its core, the movie craze among students is about more than just the films themselves; it's about

the experience of going to the theater. The communal excitement of experiencing a film with others adds an element of fun and connection that makes it more than just entertainment. It's an opportunity to bond with friends, share in the collective energy of a crowd, and enjoy something outside of the usual routines. It's a form of escapism that many students look forward to during a busy and often stressful time of year.

"For me, going to the movies is one of the first things I think of when making plans with friends," says junior Suhani Shar-



Photo courtesy of Stanley

Stanley and Wicked cup collaboration released for the movie.

of social media marketing, moviegoing has become a must-do activity for students this year. But what is behind this sudden craze?

Social media has com-

own experience, it felt impossible to scroll through TikTok or Instagram without seeing a *Wicked* collaboration in my feed. These constant reminders, paired

While social media has been a major factor,



TEACHERS CORNER: MS. MAZZOCCOLI

The perfect example of career path resilience



Samantha Shuster '26

If I could use one word to describe Anna Mazzocoli, it would be resilient. This trait is evident in her remarkable pivots throughout her career. While to many she is known as their Intro To Business or Succeeding in a Global Economy teacher, she was also once was and still is a business owner. Mazzocoli has not always been a teacher and mentions that she has worked over many industries throughout her career including marketing, consulting, and recruiting. "This is my third or fourth

career, depending on how you count. I've been in marketing and I've been an entrepreneur," she says. She has owned two businesses not including her current side hustle as a life coach. I feel as though often many think that you can get trapped in a career or are bound to it once it is chosen but she proves to the public that this is as far from the truth as it gets. Impressive enough, when asked which of her



Mrs. Mazzocoli and Samantha Shuster.

"Start a side hustle, fail, pick up your pieces and start again, follow your interests, and keep an open mind so you can be nimble."

careers has been her favorite, she optimistically states, "My next one, probably." I wasn't lying when I mentioned she was

one, each career gave me new skills and gave me different perspectives." Many students, including myself, often stress

that is just right for us and that will make us money, leave us fulfilled, and give us purpose during daily life. It can be learned through Mazzocoli's past experiences that there isn't just one major, path, or career that is right for anyone. It is normal to change careers even if it seems scary, which is my biggest concern as I am someone who doesn't take kindly to change and never has. "There's always an adjustment period, but I don't remember each transition as being bad. I was

always looking forward to something new." Her outlook of always "looking for thrill" as she says, seems to be one of the most helpful traits that has taken her as far as she has come throughout her journey. She elaborates that each of her switches in career paths was, "maybe because of a family decision. Or an opportunity to learn new skills, an opportunity to try a different industry." Changing careers could happen for the simplest reason as you no longer want to pursue this field. Immediately after hearing about all of these careers my first question was if she regretted any of them, a thought that occurs to me after many if not all decisions I am faced with. "Oh, gosh. No. Never." She continues on to explain that all the choices she has made has led her to where she is and who she is today. Each job teaches a different skill but the variance between jobs teaches a kind of re-

sourcefulness that can only be obtained through experience. "Unless it's your eye color or your height, everything else can be learned." If you take anything away from this, it shouldn't be that Anna Mazzocoli is a career path chameleon (okay maybe that's one of the lessons you should take away), it's that you are never stuck in one career path. It is easy to get caught up in the overwhelming idea that there is a "perfect" major or a "best" career for someone but Mazzocoli recommends to all Highlanders that are worried about their futures to, "Learn as much as you can even if that means 'I thought I would like this subject, but I hate it.' That's still learning. You learned something about yourself." ■

JUNIOR YEAR ISN'T PERFECT

Listen to this juniors one year update and retrospective after completing semester one



Henry Roberts '26

It's been about 4 months since the school year started, and the year has been going pretty well so far. Junior year was foretold to be the worst and most miserable year of my high school career,

like Highlands it wouldn't be right to not begin a discussion about my school experience with anything but my class experience. Classes are definitely harder. Like, a lot harder. But that's not comprehensive or helpful to any reader. My classes this year have obviously gotten more rigorous since last year as that's the nature of High School. The second year of the semester one cumulative exams has been an object of fear for me. I think it has quickly become one of the most dreaded tests for Highlanders. The cumulatives are

"Classes are definitely harder. Like a lot harder."

also that could be a blessing in disguise as I will have more resources to pull from now then I did back then. Despite all of that I would like to think the cumulatives won't be bad, even though my classes are harder. That may just be wishful thinking though. The freedom to choose most of my classes has been easily my favorite aspect of this year academically. Being able to take close to as many writing focused courses as possible has been a great experience and as someone super heavily english centric (OMG THE FLING WRITER LIKES ENGLISH?) That's been super helpful. The freedom I've been given is sort of a double edged sword, though, as it led me to take a lot of hard classes that are hard to bal-

ance with each other, and even harder to balance with all my extracurriculars. Speaking of extracurriculars (see what I did

sical, being a member of Highlands Voices, or just being around the music scene here at Highlands. Getting the opportunity to really spend all of my time around the arts has been one of the most fun and humbling experiences of my high school career. It has allowed me to be around some of the most talented individuals my age, and also allows me to make new

ple in the same class as I am. It's a bizarre feeling when you meet someone new and you so obviously click with them, but you hadn't met them until now. It's the type of experience that I wish for every Highlander to experience because it's really cool. Even though my Junior year has basically just started, I can't help but think about college. I'm having the all too relatable experience of seeing the people I've known for just about three years committing to colleges and getting ready to up and leave. Even though it's a melancholy feeling, it makes me look towards the future. Hopefully my experience so far has been either insightful, interesting, or at the very least my rambling somewhat entertaining. I hope to all the readers that your semester is going just as well as mine has. ■



Junior Henry Roberts and his Friends after a football game.

"The second year of semester one cumulative exams, also known as midterms, has been an object of fear for me."

but I would like to dispel some of those myths and hopefully accurately portray my experiences so far. In a prestigious school

scary because any specific topic I didn't particularly enjoy will come back to haunt me (I'm talking to you Trig Identities), but

The freedom I've been given is sort of a double edged sword, though, as it led me to take a lot of hard classes that are hard to bal-

there?) I have been doing a bunch of extracurriculars this year. Most everything arts related is in my repertoire, whether it be the play, the newly cast mu-

friends with people with the same interests as me. The weirdest thing about Junior year so far is that I am still meeting new people. To be more specific, I am meeting new peo-

LEARNING AROUND THE WORLD

A look into CIEE trips around the world with our students from over the past summer

Ellie Shrier '27

Studying abroad is your chance to go on an enriching experience. It offers students many opportunities to

million in scholarships annually, specifically for summer programs. Everyone will have the chance to choose to visit a significant 35+ locations including Australia, France, Italy, Moroc-

also a past informational session at Northern Highlands in the auditorium. This session talked about internship opportunities and the benefits of the CIEE programs. Exploring new

challenges students to be out of their comfort zone. Learning to adapt to a new environment is helpful for future encounters. These adventures foster independence, self-reliance, and responsibility.

The academic benefits of studying abroad are equally significant. CIEE offers many programs, varying from Arts & Culture, STEM, languages, Fashion, and International Affairs, to Creative Writing. This variety allows students to find a program that may align with their academic interests and future goals. It also allows students to participate in programs they want to learn about or discover their interests. Studying in a different educational system exposes students

to multiple perspectives and learning methods. These students can visit world-renowned museums and historical sights throughout Italy. This program opportunity is available on the CIEE website. Participating in these programs is very beneficial to your well-being: "It is exposure and having the opportunity to travel the world. You can see different cultures and how others live life" are just some benefits mentioned by Mr. Occhino. Furthermore, it allows students to research, foster practical skills, and secure future internships and employment. Overall, studying abroad is a transformative experience. Students are provided with an unlimited range of benefits. It

enriches academics and practical experiences. It also helps to promote a global perspective and responsibility. This encourages students to keep advocating for positive changes. Participating in this program is a crucial and virtually important decision. or assignments can have academic consequences, so students should be mindful of their responsibilities.

Despite these considerations, Senior Skip Day remains a popular tradition at Northern Highlands Regional High School. It's a day that symbolizes the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. For many students, it's a chance to reflect on their high school years and appreciate the friendships and experiences they've gained. The memories of this day often become some of the most cherished of their high school careers.

Senior Skip Day at Northern Highlands Regional High School is more than a day off. It's a celebration of the journey that students have taken together and a way to mark the transition to the next phase of their lives. As the tradition continues, it remains a highlight of the senior year, emphasizing the togetherness that defines the high school experience. ■



Photo Courtesy of Reet Sadev '27

Senior Sophia Bacalzo (left) with her abroad friends in Germany

learn new cultures, visit many countries, and make lifelong friends. These programs take place during summertime. The timeframes of the program range from 3-8 weeks long for our students. Studying abroad is an opportunity that many others may not have. It is a privilege to expand your knowledge throughout a vacation-like exploration.

These programs are accessible to everyone. Scholarships are offered to many participating students due to the nature of the trips. Financial aid is available for those who need extra support. CIEE offers over \$7

co, Portugal, and Spain. Within these locations, there are many different educational connections. Each educational opportunity comes with distinctive moments. For our students, "There is a wide range of countries students can choose from. CIEE sends out information about different travel and country opportunities. Our students can pick where they would like to go," as stated by Mr. Occhino. Firsthand, it is extremely easy to discover these programs. All of our students are supplied with this information, helping expand their knowledge of the programs. There was

opportunities can broaden your understanding of the world: "The programs include students from around the globe. If you join a CIEE trip, you may meet students from various countries," Mr. Occhino explains. Amazingly, you can meet and spend time with people from different countries. This enhances your experiences further. CIEE provides an opportunity to immerse yourself in a new location while developing valuable life skills and academic enrichment. Many are compelled to study abroad for these reasons. The prospect of living in a foreign location



Photo Courtesy of Reet Sadev '27

Junior Gabe Tejeda (fourth from left) with his friends abroad.

AN OPPORTUNITY GIVEN ON THE SPOT

A look into the Instant Decision Day college application process and how it effects students

Elizabeth Ha'27

Continued from page 1

"...And my college search was over. The weight that was lifted after the stress of Junior year to be afforded that opportunity was incredible."

Students can submit their applications which include things like test scores, transcripts, and essays, and then meet with an admissions officer or college representative for an interview. Immediately after the interview or meeting the applicant is told whether or not they've been accepted.

One of the key advan-

tages of IDD is the fast feedback and closure it offers. Many high school seniors feel overwhelmed and nervous about their application process, and the time between submitting applications and discovering the results can be stressful. IDD gives students a quick and concise understanding of where they stand with the college which helps relieve some anxiety.

Furthermore, some colleges offer something called conditional admissions. Students can receive an offer dependent on the completion of certain requirements, such as final high school grades

or other documentation. Conditional admission is generally offered to academically qualified international applicants whose English abilities are lower than what's required by their schools for regular or unconditional admission.

Instant Decision Day can be an effective recruitment tool for some colleges and universities. Schools that offer quick alternatives can attract more applicants, even those who were hesitant or unsure about applying. It enables admission workers to interact directly with students, adding a human touch to an otherwise imperson-

al admissions process.

Mr. Occhino says, "The representative gets to meet you and see your personality compared to reading through 1000 recommendation letters saying the same thing over and over again not knowing one thing about the student other than what they're reading."

IDD helps colleges assess applicants in a more holistic manner, taking their personality as well as academic records into account.

Instant Decision Days still include some challenges. While IDD offers quick results, it might not be the best option for every student. Some students might

not feel very comfortable done. I didn't go through



The New Jersey Institute of Technology's Campus.

socializing and being interviewed and would prefer to wait compared to facing the decision head-on. There's also the challenge of not being accepted to the college you applied for and being told so to your face.

Dr. LaRocca says, "It was awesome, then again I got accepted and then I was

the process for the guy to stare across the table at me and then say no. So I think that would be tough, that would be brutal."

Instant Decision day may not be for everyone, but it is a great alternative option to the traditional college admissions process. ■

A WIN IN THE APPLIED TECH DEPARTMENT

Mr. Mugno from the Applied Technology Department wins Govenor's Educator of the Year award

Elena McCrossin'26

...Continued from page 1

...favorite fun things Mungo does is the bagel breakfasts which he hosts "for every holiday, and even just does them spontaneously which all of the students love."

Mugno fosters an environment full of creativity and curiosity. "He makes personal connec-

tions with each one of his students, is well-respected, and everyone is excited to listen whenever he talks," says Stekelenburg.

Mugno's supportive approach to all of his students is what makes him stand out. Every student is able to feel seen in his classroom.

With a classroom full of previous student's college pennants, Mugno's influence extends to students far beyond their

"He makes personal connections with each one of his students, is well-respected, and everyone is excited to listen whenever he talks."

Blake Stekelenburg

highschool years. Mugno says that one of his favorite things is when past students reach out to him to let them know how they're doing and share their gratitude.

For example, one of the activities that STEM club does are NJ STEM League competitions. In past years when Highlands hosted the competition, Mr. Mugno has alumni from over

the past 20 years to join.

Memories from the annual Regatta hosted by Mugno's Honors Engineering class still persist. This event still serves as one of the most anticipated Highland's traditional events.

Mugno's students still have a profound memory of him even many years after they have graduated and entered the field.

Some students have come back to Highlands to be guest speakers or participate at school events.

Mugno is also a club advisor of the Future Engineers and Architects Club. Over the years, many students in his classes have found the club popular. Indeed, this makes Mugno one of teachers with the most club advised in the school.

When asked to reflect on his time at Highlands, Mugno cites his greatest

school accomplishment as winning the Educator of the Year award. "It's a tremendous honor and something I will always cherish," he says. "I just think that the recognition is one thing, but hearing it from the kids is a whole nother level."

The impact Mugno has had on the Northern Highlands community has been extensive, and this award serves as one highlight of an incredible career. ■



Mr. Mugno with class of 2024 students at their senior prom.



Photo Courtesy of Al Mugno

A DILEMMA WITH TEACHER'S PAY

Are teachers at Highlands being paid enough? Looking into the divide between salaries and work

Prisha Prajapati'27

Without a doubt, teacher salaries are extremely controversial. Teachers and instructors shape young minds every day and provide a fundamental service all around the country. In theory, their salaries should reflect the work they put into their careers

ganization of each class period reflects thoughtfulness and planning.

At Highlands, teachers are experts in their fields. They provide support for our students, come to school prepared with objectives each day, and implement proper teaching procedures and strategies.

Teachers are respon-

dent on different factors.

Bergen County tends to be quite an affluent place, with the average annual household income at \$123,715, according to the US Census Bureau, many making more in USR, Alendale, Saddle River, and Ho-Ho-Kus, as these towns are some of the highest-paying boroughs in the county. While not every teacher at Highlands lives in the area, the average salary across departments at Northern Highlands is \$91,664, according to GovSalaries.

When asked, Mr. Occhino categorized the starting salaries of our teachers as "a little bit more on the higher side," but some schools do not have this luxury. The average starting salary for teachers in the United States is \$42,000, which is lower than many other professions that require a college degree.

The fact of the matter is, this low pay has many consequences. Teachers can have trouble paying off student loans, experience burnout, and in some cases,

see a decline in the quality of education. It is not uncommon for educators to feel unmotivated when they know that there is not substantial financial compensation for all of the hard work they put into every day at school. Also, in many states, their salaries do not keep up with the cost of liv-

ductivity and attraction of new employees, the salary is not a big factor in picking jobs for teachers; it's all about passion.

Mr. Occhino added, "I think Northern Highlands attracts teachers not just on salary... This district attracts people on a couple of fronts... they look at

teaching is something that they enjoy. Educators enjoy inspiring students and sharing their knowledge with them, and doing so can be highly rewarding, even if their salary is not commensurate with other professions. They want to make a difference in their society and contrib-

Teachers are a huge part of every community and are always needed, but unfortunately, their salaries do not mirror their hard work.

but this is not the case.

Teachers are often regarded as underpaid, which can lead to a loss of productivity in some schools. However, at Highlands, students find that the or-

sible for the safety and education of our students, but the job comes with more than just that. Teaching is a profession that is taken home, and each teacher's salary is depen-

Educators often work for more than their contracted hours, creating lesson plans, grading papers, and completing many other tasks on their to-do lists, without any additional pay.

ing, which can cause some teachers to pick up second jobs and summer jobs.

Educators often work for more than their contracted hours, creating lesson plans, grading papers, and completing many other tasks on their to-do lists, without any additional pay.

When it comes to pro-

the facilities, they look at the students that are here, they look at the resources that are available, the class sizes. That attracts teachers to come here."

Teachers go into education knowing that teaching is an underpaid profession, but continue to come to school every day because

ute to a brighter future.

Teachers are a huge part of every community and are always needed, but unfortunately, their salaries do not mirror their hard work. ■

CLUBS INSPIRING FUTURE STUDENTS

Highlands Heroes and A capaella make trips to down to the local middle schools

Bella Zrebiec ‘26

Our school is full of many clubs that allow for the expression of various interests. Some clubs are able to pass these interests on to the middle schoolers in the district. Representatives from Highlands clubs are sent to middle schools in the district to spread awareness of their goals and showcase their talents. Some clubs currently engaging in this initiative include Highlands Heroes, the band, and A capella. These trips are not made just for fun; they are designed with a specific purpose in mind. In explaining how representation at middle schools would benefit the club and

future high school students, Principal Joseph Occhino states how it gives the middle schoolers “insight on things Northern Highlands has to offer” and “forms connections and relationships with the students here at Highlands.” These trips allow students to perform their abilities and interact with younger students, which can not be achieved without the time dedicated to visiting the schools. It benefits both the club involved and the middle schoolers. It fosters a sense of community and belonging with the kids. Occhino says that sending representatives is also done to “get kids interested” and help them feel welcome to join these clubs once they reach

High School. These students may feel more comfortable in knowing there is something that will interest them at Highlands for when they get there. The band, for instance, is one club that sends representatives to middle schools. They go to Upper Saddle River, HoHoKus, and Alendale Middle schools to perform concerts for the middle schoolers. For the musically inclined middle school students, these performances will inspire and encourage them to get involved at the High School level. The concerts from our high school’s band include a yearly holiday concert to embrace the spirit of the season while also showcasing their skills. A capella

is another club that goes to middle schools. Farrah Dellorusso is a senior involved in A cappella who was the representative for the club. The purpose of sending her to the middle schools was, as she explained, “to get more students involved in the art program” when they reach high school. Dellorusso likes how she can “display [her and her club members’] selective group” because it gives the middle schoolers the opportunity to see something they’ve never seen before. She also noted how it would be a fun experience for them “to see a different style of music” because the students are mostly accustomed to the classical feel of the choir during concerts. But, A ca-

pella provides a new pop feel to music that might resonate and connect more with some of the students. Many other club members of A capella, and also other clubs, feel like this opportunity is very beneficial for the school, the club, and the middle school students. Not all clubs can send representatives to middle schools, though. For example, the chess club wouldn’t go to middle schools to play chess with students because it doesn’t provide the same benefits to students. Only clubs that would engage and build a sense of connection with students would be clubs that can send representatives. If it is believed that a club could benefit from

sending representatives to middle schools, the matter can be discussed with Mr. Occhino Dr. LaRocca to be approved. The clubs that send Highlands students to middle schools feel much more involved in the community, see improvements in their performances, and inspire younger students to express themselves in the same ways. These benefits will be seen especially in the years to come when the middle schoolers reach high school and make their own impact on many clubs. ■

BEHIND THE CRUMBL CRAZE

A look at how students truly feel about the cookies at this billion dollar franchise

Abby Skripak ‘28

Crumbl Cookie—the current obsession. The talk of every free period, bus ride, private story, and quiet moment. But why is Crumbl so popular

Their rotating menu is also a topic of discussion when it comes to Crumbl’s quick rise to fame. “I think the weekly menus are what made it so popular, and then it started going online, which

“I think the weekly menus are what made it so popular, and then it started going online, which was when it really took off.”

Maddie Nisch ‘28

in the first place? And do people even truly like it? Since their opening in 2017, Crumbl’s popularity has skyrocketed, mainly thanks to social media platforms like TikTok. “Crumbl got big on TikTok and social media. When people see things on social media, they want to try it. They want to be a part of it,” Clair Mario shared.

was when it really took off,” Maddie Nisch added. Crumbl quickly became famous for their large, uniquely flavored cookies and iconic pink box, with their journey to fame being tremendously uplifted by positive reviews online. Now, Crumbl offers a weekly rotating menu, featuring eight different

cookies each week. They sell over 1 million desserts every day, and have 1071 locations worldwide. These are staggering numbers for a business that opened so recently. But do people actually like Crumbl? Many students love Crumbl, obsessing over the flavors of the week, or commenting on their unique desserts. But, although tons of people—including many students at Highlands—love Crumbl, many others have been disappointed by the brand they had such high expectations for. Especially with the new Crumbl location in Montvale recently opening, more and more students have been going to try the popular dessert - and more and



Photo of the outside entrance of Crumbl in Montvale, New Jersey

criticizing the brand. “I’ve tried Crumbl a couple of times, and every time I try it, the insides of the cookies are raw, and none of them taste particularly good any-

not waiting in this line,” Occhino commented. With Crumbl gaining more and more attention, it seems that the positive spotlight is slowly fading, and the voices of critics are only getting louder. This leaves one final question—will Crumbl be a dessert staple for years to come, or will this billion

dollar franchise crumbl be under the pressure? ■

“When people see things on social media, they want to try it. They want to be a part of it.”

Clair Mario ‘28

more people have been disappointed by the outcome. “I don’t really see where the hype is about Crumbl. I’ve tried it once or twice, and honestly it wasn’t that bad, but I feel like it could be better. I feel like it’s nice to have it once or twice, but I see people buying it all the time, and I don’t know if they’re worth it,” Emi Granada stated. Other students seem to agree with this take, further

way,” Will Skripak shared. With so many unsatisfied customers, will the company really last? Principal Occhino doesn’t seem to think so, connecting this brand to a similar situation from the recent past. “When Krispy Kreme opened up, there were lines down [Route] 17, you couldn’t get in. After a while, it just goes away. People say, ‘it’s not a big deal, I’m



The Cookies & Cream Cookie from Crumbl week of 12/14/24.



The Raspberry Butter Cake Cookie from Crumbl week of 12/14/24.

Photo Courtesy of Reet Sacdev '27

Photo Courtesy of crumblcookies.com

SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER, NOT GAMBLING

Canon Chiu and Sanjna Limaye deck the halls with their DECA project promoting gambling awareness.



A bulletin in the business hallway featuring some fast facts about gambling.



Canon Chiu '25 (left) and Sanjna Limaye (right) presenting their gambling project.



One of the many posters around the school promoting gambling awareness.

Photo Courtesy of Reet Sacdev '27

Gabe Tejeda '26

If you've walked the hallways at any point in the past month, you have likely seen the posters calling on students to understand the risks of gambling. As part of a DECA project, students Canon Chiu and Sanjna Limaye have made it their mission to raise awareness about the dangers of gambling through shocking statistics, eye-catching posters, and other events, such as reaching out to underclassmen in their classes and setting up a booth at the Upper Saddle River Thanksgiving 5K Run.

The posters around the school feature statistics aimed at achieving the ultimate goal, which Limaye explains: "The goal isn't to stop gambling, but to bring more awareness to the implications of gambling at a young age." Gambling at a young age can have a last-

ing impact on one's future, and lead them to irresponsibly handle their money, which inspired their slogan: "No Bets, Bright Futures."

This project is a part of DECA's social awareness campaign, and they will be competing against students from all around the state. The idea was sparked when both Chiu and Limaye noticed high schoolers frequently talking about gambling, especially during football season. They became curious about what was driving such a high percentage of student gamblers, and the answer was simple: online gambling.

With the rise of online gambling "sweepstakes" apps, no ID is required to participate in sports betting—only an email is needed. When they tested if it worked with a school email, it did. This shows how easy it is for children to gamble, no matter the

age. They also play games like poker or blackjack. However, the most harm occurs when students use real betting apps such as BetMGM or Draftkings with the

a week adds up, so Limaye and Chiu created this project to spread awareness of these facts among High-landers and achieve their ultimate goal of making High-



help o f s o m e - one over 21.

As a result, 40-60% of high school students have gambled, and 4-6% are addicted to gambling—a shocking but real statistic. Even spending ten dollars

ing habits" and to teach them "the implications of gambling." To achieve this, they visited multiple classrooms and spoke to un-

derclassmen, aiming to teach them about the risks of gambling at a younger age and to instill the belief that gambling should only happen once you're of legal age. They also set up a booth at the Thanksgiving 5K Run, where they spoke with parents, explaining the process of online gambling and its effects on high school students, as well as teaching them about the risks.

One of the most memorable moments of the project, Chiu recalls, happened during Upper Saddle River's 5K run. A father approached their booth and shared that his "mother is a gambling addict" and that she "spends \$25,000 per year gambling." He then thanked them for their efforts and expressed hope that their work would help influence the next generation. This encouraged them to try even harder, and

make sure that the word spread to every student.

Their current goal is to reach 1,200 impressions on their project, so go help them out by interacting with whatever they send out, and checking your email to see if you completed their google form survey. This project is an amazing opportunity for Chiu and Limaye to make a change within the Highlands community and open the eyes of many students who may have struggled with gambling before. ■

SNOW, STORIES, AND SEASONAL TRADITIONS

A closer look at some of the most popular holiday traditions celebrated by students.

Tess Han '27

At Highlands, we have a diversity of traditions for the holiday season. Christmas, Hanukkah, or more, Highlands is filled with both students and faculty enjoying the joyous season. With this year's long break, this gives people time to celebrate and spend time with loved ones. Either following traditions or creating new ones, the holiday season is one of the best to enjoy time with family and friends.



Photo courtesy of Canva.

Just one example of the Feast of Seven Fishes.

One of the many people to celebrate Christmas at Highlands is beloved Chemistry teacher, Mrs. Zushma. Coming from an Italian family, she has many fun traditions she participates in. For Mrs. Zushma, Christmas Eve seems to be the highlight of the festive season. She eats the 'Feast of the Seven Fishes' with her in-laws - an Italian tradition where families gather seven different dishes and incorporate them into one delicious meal.

Not only does she partake in a festive meal on Christmas Eve, she opens all the Christmas presents with family at her in-law's house. She said, "Usually, we go to Disney World for Christmas, so we open presents at the in law's on Christmas Eve. But this year, we decided to stay at home, and celebrate Christmas just as a family".



Photo courtesy of Canva.

A house decorated and prepped for Hanukkah celebrations.

Junior Jenna Finkelshteyn celebrates Hanukkah with her family during the joyous season. Jenna said, "Usually, I go to my grandma's for Hanukkah, but this year I'm going away, so I'm going to bring the gifts and presents to keep the tradition going". Jenna loves to spend time with family, so she enjoys the break to commence traditions and come together with others.

Not only is lighting the menorah part of the custom, but giving presents to her family is a strong part of her holiday tradition. Jenna described, "I give around 8 gifts for the family; 1-2 big gifts and around 6 smaller ones for the holiday."



Photo courtesy of Canva.

A picture of the Wright Brothers in their plane.

Breaking the trend of Christmas and Hanukkah, sophomore Katie Lee enjoys celebrating the Wright Brother's day. As a fan of the phenomenal engineers, she enjoys building planes and commemorating the creative invention that changed the transportation industry. Ever since she was 9 years old, Katie always admired the engineers. As a small way to commemorate the brothers, she decided to celebrate this special day and create her own traditions that she can enjoy.

Katie loves to watch documentaries about the Wright Brothers. Her tradition is to sit down with a bag of gummy planes, and eat them while watching a series of documentaries about the planes. She also reads the 'Who Were the Wright Brothers' book every year, to remind her that the world wouldn't be the same without the extraordinary vision the two brothers shared. ■

Soundtrack of the Year: Our School's 2024 Spotify Wrapped

Students took a survey to figure out what our school's top songs, artists, and genres of the year were

Cameron Waller '26

Average minutes listened by a Highlander

33,976

The most minutes listened by a student was
172,249

That's 119 days!

Top Genres

Pop
Indie pop/alt.
Country
R&B
Rap



Students' Top Songs

1



I Remember Everything
Zach Bryan

2



Good Luck Babe
Chappell Roan

3



Hot to Go
Chappell Roan

4



You're Gonna Go Far
Noah Kahan

5



Lunch
Billie Eilish

Students' Top Artists

1



Zach Bryan

2



Taylor Swift

3



Drake

4



SZA

5



Tyler the Creator

Top Artists

Zach Bryan
Taylor Swift
Drake
SZA
Tyler The Creator

Top Songs

I Remember Everything
Good Luck babe
Hot To Go
You're Gonna Go Far
Lunch

Top Genre

Pop

Minutes Listened

33,976

OUR OWN PERSONAL DA VINCI

A Deeper Look Into Senior Ava Rome's Amazing Artistry

Ben Sherlock '26

Highlands is luckily home to all different kinds of students. We have athletes sprinting on the field, actors

about her passion. "For as long as I can remember, I've been captivated by color... I've always sought out more color in the world around me. Art

expectations of others with my own needs, a theme reinforced by the decision to pursue fine arts as an expression of personal growth and self-fulfillment."

One piece that many Highlanders may be familiar with is the hallway mural that Rome painted, which is located near the foods classes on the second floor.

When asked about this piece in particular, Rome voiced that, "Creating a mural for my school has been the most rewarding experience for me. This mural portrays an astronaut

of fun with this piece since I love pickles!"

However, when asked about her favorite piece, Rome says that, "It's hard to choose just one piece to be [her] favorite cause it always changes and [she] likes different aspects about many pieces." However, she finds herself particularly gravitated towards "the sibling portrait [she] painted of [her] brother and [herself], named Interlinked."

Rome goes on to explain further, stating that, "I always loved this silly photo of us from when I was three. The puzzle pieces symbolize the unique experiences we've shared, highlighting how our individual journeys intertwine. Despite our differences, this artwork captures how we remain connected through shared experiences and can always rely on each other."

Highlands is a school with a large variety of unique and

more in love with art, experiment and opened [her] up to new opportunities."

ommends "consistent practice, as improvement comes with time. Remember, art is about

"Art has no boundaries and through color, medium, composition and texture, I am able to fully express whatever is in my mind."

pouring their heart on stage, singers belting their hearts out, and so much more. One group, however, is often overlooked in the eyes of students.

The artists of Highlands are commonly glossed over, despite their major impact on the school. From bringing imagination to reality, to giving life to the hallways, artists always find a way to make a change.

Senior Ava Rome is among these dazzling artists. Over the years, she has dedicated much time and effort to her craft, growing into the extremely proficient artist that she is today.

"I love art because it allows me to communicate deep, personal emotions and ideas that words can't express, while also giving me the freedom to see and appreciate the world in new ways," Rome claimed when asked

Senior Ava Rome

has no boundaries and through color, medium, composition and texture, I am able to fully express whatever is in my mind."



A space mural in the hallway from the Art to the English wing.

Over the years, Rome has refined her craft, and she certainly has the pieces to prove it. One of these many illustrations is dubbed Sunlight, and is a self-portrait.

"Sunlight was inspired and painted while I was studying art abroad in Prague through CIEE," states Rome. "The artwork represents my journey toward balancing the

watering flowers as a metaphor for teachers nurturing students."

She found not only her imagination coming to life as the most gratifying part, but instead "creating a lasting impact at the school." She goes on to explain that "to liven up the hallways was [her] way of making a difference and contributing to the community."

Another piece that Rome has shared is In a Pickle. Rome claims that this piece "explores the challenge of difficult decisions, depicted through a young girl surrounded by pickles, symbolizing being consumed by tough choices."

Explaining the fascinating piece some more, Rome says that, "Her greenish-yellow skin suggests she's transforming into a pickle herself, while the closed jar represents her isolation and cycle of indecision. Despite the dark undertones, I had a lot



Art by Ava Rome '25

Piece named "interlinked" cleverly painted on jigsaw puzzle pieces

Rome has spent many years with her passion. On the contrary, some people have only just started to experiment with this challenging hobby. When it comes to starting out as an artist, Rome has lots of advice.

personal enjoyment and self-expression, so have fun with it and don't be too hard on yourself. Each mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow!"

Rome is truly a master of her craft. With years of experience and great advice for others, it is clear that she is a talented artist. ■

Remember, art is about personal enjoyment and self-expression, so have fun with it and don't be too hard on yourself. Each mistake is an opportunity to learn and grow.

gratifying opportunities, and the arts are definitely not left out of that list. Highlands offers many classes and clubs that are all about art and creativity.

When Rome was asked about these programs, she reports that she has "taken art experiences, honors drawing and painting, AP art, and ceramics," going on to state that, "I have met some of my closest friends, it is such a fun environment and a relaxing break from the busy day."

Rome finds the art teachers in particular to be great. She finds that, "A great teacher really makes the difference and made [her] fall

Senior Ava Rome

"My advice to someone just starting art would be to keep going, even if you don't think something is perfect." Rome rec-



Art by Ava Rome '25

Painting entitled "Sunlight"



Art by Ava Rome '25

Piece titled "In a Pickle"

WHAT'S UP WITH THE ARTS?

Looking back on the Arts Department's work this past semester

Henry Roberts '26

Highlands, in recent memory, has always had a solid reputation for its arts department, with interesting programs always going on and insanely talented people making up those programs.

This year, so far, has been a great one for the arts, with big things happening everywhere in the arts department. People have such a connection with the arts here at Highlands, and the events and projects that students get to be a part of are a huge reason for that.

Voices and Belles were the competitions. Those were a fun time, waiting to see how we placed larger. I also got a competition solo." Student Actress

I will definitely join next year because the school theater department is not just an after school activity, but it has also become my family. Everyone is so supportive, talented, and fun.

Junior Lilah Wainland

and Junior Lilah Wainland spoke on how "some big events that happened were getting a part that fit [her] so well and working hard on [her] character." She added that, "I

and getting to perform in front of a bigger audience." With all of those fun events taking place, it takes a deeper dig to further figure out what's so fun about the arts.

Tejeda answered this question when he shared that, "Being a part of voices is amazing. Everyone is so insanely talented and it's a joy to spend time with a bunch of friends and get to sing together." Additionally, "My favorite part about acapella is spending time with friends and creating beautiful harmonies with them."

Wainland shared a similar sentiment, explaining that, "It was so fun being a part of this show! The cast became so

close and welcoming; you couldn't help but love it!" She also stated that, "My favorite part of the process was dress rehearsal week when everyone was stuck at school late and tired together. We all were pulling through for a common goal and we did it!"

All of those heartwarming sentiments shared by Wainland and Tejeda are contrasted by the more nuanced experience Strandes shared. He reported that, "It was

really fun! I'll admit it took some getting used to but by the end of the year I was all about it; I had a good time."

He added that, "It did take some work and there were definitely some lows, but I feel like that's to be expected when you do anything." His favorite part was "just meeting new people and just getting to play music more."

With all of the positive experiences that were shared by students in the arts this year, they must want to do it next year, right? Maybe they also think more people should join their respective programs.

Well that thinking is right on the money. When asked, Wainland shared that, "Yes, I will definitely join next year because the school theater department is not just an after school activity, but

courage everyone to join acapella. It's an amazing community and filled with great talented people." Stranded echoed

many people flock to join every year. Through interviewing people that have many different interests from each



Artwork created by Addison Pavone

Art by Addison Pavone '25



Photo Courtesy Reet Sachdev '27

Student drawing in an art class

In order to learn about the things that happened this year in the arts department, students from across multiple different arts were interviewed.

When asked about what big things happened in their department, many students had different personal experiences to share. Junior Gabe Tejeda, a member of the acapella group Highlands Voices, shared that, "This year the acapella program got rid of Harmonics and made

was faced with a difficult decision on the last night of the show because I was sick and lost my voice and needed to give up my part to an understudy. I was disappointed but happy that the swing actor had a chance to perform."

Marching band guitarist and band member Junior Peter Strandes said that, "Honestly, a lot of it was a really interesting experience and unlike anything I'd ever tried. I guess the biggest things



Photo Courtesy Reet Sachdev '27

Dress rehearsal bows of the fall play Arsenic and Old Lace, featuring seniors in the center, from left to right: Ellie Marino, Nick Franchi, Nina Misantonis, Riley Nolan, and Ash Kim

it has also become my family! Everyone is so supportive, talented, and fun!"

Tejeda agreed with this statement and added more, stating that, "I will one hundred percent do acapella next year." When asked if others should join the Acapella program, he said, "Yes! I en-

music at all, marching band and band as a whole is definitely something you should check out."

The arts community at highlands is evidently one of the best, most welcoming communities. With all of the exciting things happening every semester, it's obvious why so

other, you come to learn that Highlands offers programs and clubs for people of every artistic interest and skill level. Hopefully after hearing what some arts students had to share, you are more interested in the arts. The arts department here at Northern Highlands welcomes you with open arms to either join in on the fun or to celebrate the work and achievements of your peers. ■

SPOTIFY WRAPPED IS OUT

“What ruled your listening this year?”

Anya Poddar ‘26

It’s that time of year again! Your 2024 Spotify Wrapped is out and full of colors. Don’t miss out on the chance to look back on all the different artists and songs you listened to this year.

Spotify Wrap is an incredibly creative marketing strategy by the music streaming service. By collecting all user data annually, Spotify reveals the top artists and songs based on its approximately 250 million subscribers. Not only that, but each subscriber gets a personalized breakdown of what they listened to this year. People have really come to love and look forward to their yearly insights. Junior Ben-

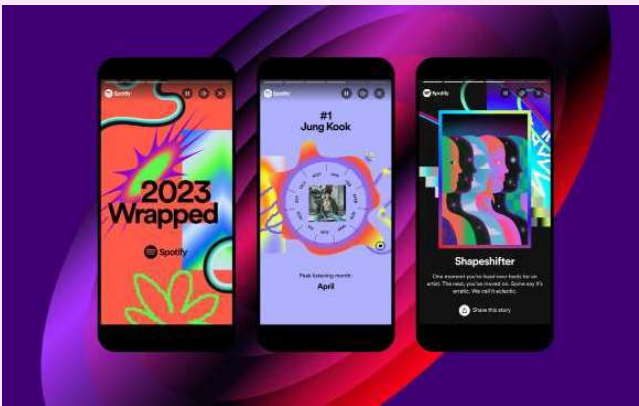
jamin Sherlock added, “It’s allowed [him] to find more kinds of art- wrapped isn’t some- thing [he] ideally looks forward to.” He does

People have really come to love and look forward to their yearly insights

ists who make a sim- ilar kind of music.” In addition to stating, “[he loves] finding out what other people’s wrapped look like. It’s always fun to really see what songs [his] friends, family, and even teach- ers listen to.” It’s over- all a super fun experi- ence that enhances something as simple as listening to music. A thing that many of us enjoy. Junior Henry Rob- erts disagreed with Sherlock’s perspective, saying, “[his] Spotify acknowledge that “it’s a fun thing to be able to share with your friends and get a complete list at the end of the year.” In addition to pro- viding information to its users, Spotify gener- ates a personalized playlist for each indi- vidual. This playlist is composed of the top 100 songs from the year. People can then rediscover songs they may have forgotten about. “I personally think it’s really cool that [Spotify] does this be-

cause sometimes I go through the playlist and find a song I ha- ven’t heard in a long time,” insisted Junior Lilah Wainland, “This makes the whole Spoti- fy Wrapped experience feel more personalized for me rather than just statistics.” Wainland’s take on the matter shows how Spotify has created a new, unique way for users to expe- rience things. However, this is not a new tradition for Spotify. For years, Spo-

tify has been wrapping up people’s years and giving them a hands-on listening experience. Through this, students have found that their music taste and listen- ing have not stayed consistent throughout the years. “My Spotify Wrapped was very different compared to years before.” Claimed Sherlock, “This year, I listened to many dif- ferent genres and ex- panded my music taste, eventually landing on indie pop and bossa nova/jazz. However, at the same time, I did not listen to much music as a whole. I had listened to a lot fewer minutes than I did last year, which does not surprise me much.” Sherlock is not alone in this sentiment. “I listened to less music because I had less time on my hands,” Rob- erts agrees. My music was a lot more focused this year.” Students like Roberts have been able to utilize Spotify to learn more about them- selves. Hopefully, in the coming years, Spotify will continue to keep its tradition alive. Don’t forget to check out your 2024 Spotify wrapped. You never know what you may find. ■



SPRING STARS

A look at this year’s spring musical cast!

- Dee Dee Allen – Willow Farquhar
- Barry Glickman – Henry Roberts
- Angie Dickinson – CJ Einhorn
- Shelly Saperstein – Salma Tari
- Trent Oliver – Ben Sherwood
- Emma Nolan – Ash Kim
- Mrs. Greene – Zari Veres Royal
- Mr. Hawkins – Max Punla
- Kaylee – Lexi Grinney
- Shelby – Annabelle MacLaren
- Coach B. – Jaden Mamangon
- Alyssa Greene – Ellie Marino
- Nick – Zander Zimmerman
- Kevin – Sam Hoffert
- Motel Clerk – Addison Pavone
- Monster Truck Announcer – Lilah Wainland

Ensemble

(In Alphabetical Order) The Ensemble will consist of Opening Night Attendees, PTA Member, Cast of Godspell, High School Students, Unruly Heart Viewers
All Ensemble Members will have a line in the show!

- Michael Abbate, Abby Acer, Anna Bang, Gabby Beyer, Sofia Brusco, Olivia Eftimiu, Madison Ferraioli, Lexi Grinney, Sam Hoffert, Charlotte Kao, Julie Levine, Annabelle MacLaren, Jaden Mamangon, Addison Menzella, Tatum Moses, Maddie Nisch, Addison Pavone, Anya Poddar, Lucy Roberts, Krithi Vedam, Lilah Wainland, Zander Zimmerman

FROM CLASSROOMS TO CONCERTS

Spotlight on some alumni in the music industry

Gabe Tejeda '26

In the years since graduation, certain alumni, such as Dylan Lotus, CABRA, and Funhouse Mirrors' Jackson Gray (they/them), are venturing into the path of music. Each artist takes their own distinctive style, which shows the wide range of opportunities and personalities at Highlands.

To really learn more about these superstars, I interviewed each alumni in order to know more about how they went from students to artists.

Dylan Lotus, a class of 2023 alum and internet micro-celebrity with over 40,000 monthly listeners on Spotify, can be found on any streaming service. He began to make music in eighth grade, but his career began in his sophomore year at Highlands.

Lotus attributed his inspiration for making

music to the songwriting aspect, saying that, "Music is the best way to get my emotions out."

In his songs, he wears his feelings on his sleeve. Many of his lyrics talk about sensitive topics, but ones that are true to his



Jackson Gray '24 and the Funhouse Mirrors live onstage.

heart and thoughts. He used to take inspiration from Juice Wrld, but now he takes more inspiration

from artists like Deftones. He recently signed a 1-year contract with 257 Records, which is an independent record label in California, where he goes to college. His career grows more every day, and he's on the way to big things.

Next, I interviewed CABRA, a class of 2023 alum and house musician who started making

music during quarantine and discovered his passion. Since then, he's been able to play for crowds of 3,000 in New York City. Recently, he was performing at a show called CIRCO, which featured his biggest crowd yet of 3,000. The best part of it, according to CABRA, was, "seeing that many people enjoy my [his] music in one room."

House music is made to be performed, and CABRA stays loyal to that purpose. His favorite aspect of performing lies in the, "smiles and people singing and dancing."

However, he wasn't always performing for rooms full of people. Once, he was in Highlands, where he was supported by the teachers who felt like fans, the students who showed support, and the, "highlands community as a whole."

Overall, CABRA is on the way to success as each crowd gets larger and

the support for him and his music rises. His music is available on all platforms, and best in person.

perform at the Mercury Lounge, a famous New York City music venue known for fostering up-and-



CABRA '23 performing at a party.

Finally, Funhouse Mirrors takes the fun and injects it into all of their music, creating amazing progressive rock melodies. Three out of four members didn't go to Highlands, but Jackson Gray, the bassist, was able to spend their junior and senior year promoting the band as part of the graduating class of 2022. They were able to

coming artists that turned into stars, such as Radiohead, Lana Del Rey, Lady Gaga, and Katy Perry. ■

FROSTY TUNES AND WARM HEARTS

An exclusive behind the scenes look at the winter concert!

Henry Roberts '26

Every year the Northern Highlands choir and band have a combined concert where they can show their amazing artistic talent and performance skill.

This year, the concert took place on Thursday, December 12. In preparation for this concert, the Highlands music department

semble will play a little bit at the beginning, and then we'll have Highlands belles, then the string ensemble, and then the symphonic band, and then the wind ensemble, then the two bands will do a combined sleigh ride because everyone loves sleigh ride."

With all those talented band ensembles performing along with our amazing

it's a class which is really fun. I am a part of the jazz ensemble which is an after

on how the band process works. Altman detailed that, "We warm up each

tion of the work. Hogue, who is in "concert band, concert choir, Highlands Voices, and jazz band," said that, "it's a lot of repetition, a lot of practice, and a lot of work."

Both Hogue and Altman noted that playing with their friends was a huge part of the concert experience that they loved. Altman specifically noted, though, that "Reading the

is called "Mt. Everest, it's a really cool contemporary tune and there's some really fun instrumentation and cool switch ups, it's everything I love in a song," shared Altman.

With all of the fantastic people in the arts, should other people join as well?

Hogue gave an astounding yes when he shared that, "I would always recommend people to



The Highlands Belles preparing for the upcoming concert



Bradley Hogue '26 playing his saxophone in a concert from last year

school commitment, and we just play jazz standards and right now we're doing some Christmas tunes for the concert, so it's really

day and just go through the songs, pick out specific parts, go section by section sometimes, we drill it until it's sounding good."

"It's a lot of repetition, a lot of practice, and a lot of work."

Bradley Hogue '26

exciting." With his repertoire of bands he is in he gave me a great insight

Choir and Band student Bradley Hogue (2026) gave a similar descrip-



The Highlands Voices preparing for the upcoming concert

music for the first time, so sight reading. Which means they hand you the music, you've never seen it before, you listen to it once and you just kinda go. That's always really fun, especially on the jazz front. It's hard, but it's always fun getting a feel for the tunes."

Those tunes that Altman mentioned are an integral part to a concert. After all, what would a musician be without music to play? The fan favorite song being performed by the band

has been working tirelessly to give their audience the best performance possible.

In order to get a sense of who was performing for this concert, I interviewed the Choir and Band directors, Mr. Paster and Ms. Rehe respectively.

When asked Paster said that, "The vocal ensembles are the concert choir and our two acapella groups."

Ms. Rehe had a little bit more to say when she shared that, "The jazz en-

vocal groups we are sure in for a snowstorm of talent!

In wanting to know a little bit more about the actual preparation process for the concert, I interviewed some band and choir students in order to get a better understanding of the work the students are putting into the concert effort. Junior Matt Altman spoke on his experience noting that he is a part of "the honors wind ensemble during the school day, period three we meet,

Photo Courtesy of Jake Buchbaum '23

Photo Courtesy of Bradley Hogue '26

Photo Courtesy of Nina Misantoni '25

Photo Courtesy of Irene Laehr

HOOPS AND HARMONY: THE VIBE OF REC

More students have been exploring the fun, teamwork, and community in rec basketball.

Gabriella Ragazzo ‘26

Recreational basketball outside of school has seen a significant surge in popularity. This trend can be attributed to several factors, including the desire for continuous physical activity, the social aspects of team sports, and the increasing recognition of the benefits of extracurricular engagements.

Chelsea Barker states, “When I was younger I played rec basketball and it was always so much fun because everyone played and all of the teams were mixed with so many different people. It was always fun to play with all of your friends even if some of them didn’t play basketball outside of rec basketball.” One of the primary reasons for the growing commitment to recreational basketball is the emphasis on maintaining physical health. Students are increasingly aware of the importance of staying active beyond the confines of mandatory physical education classes. Recreational basketball offers a fun and

engaging way to keep fit, providing cardiovascular exercise, improving coordination, and building muscle strength.

Moreover, the social benefits of recreational basketball cannot be overstated. It offers a platform for students to bond outside the academic environment, fostering friendships and a sense of community. In a time where digital interactions often overshadow face-to-face communication, basketball provides a refreshing break, encouraging teamwork and collaboration. The camaraderie built on the court often translates to stronger relationships off the court, enhancing the overall high school experience.

The structure of recreational leagues plays a role in their popularity. Unlike high school varsity teams, which can be highly competitive and demanding, recreational leagues are more inclusive and flexible. This inclusivity allows students of varying skill levels to participate, reducing the pressure to perform and making the sport more

enjoyable. The recreational basketball scene with Ho-Ho-Kus, Allendale, and USR is thriving due to this welcoming atmosphere, where the focus is on fun personal improvement rather than competition.

Additionally, the support from the community and school administration has been instrumental. Northern Highlands has recognized the value of these activities and has facilitated the growth of recreational basketball by providing resources and promoting events. Local businesses and organizations in Allendale have also shown support by sponsoring teams and tournaments, further embedding the sport into the community fabric.

Barker states, “One of the best things about rec was that it wasn’t too serious. It was more about having fun and playing with your friends. The commitment was not very strict and it was very flexible.” Students are aware that college takes favorably upon applicants who are well-rounded and engaged in their communities. Par-



Image of the varsity girls and coaches after a game last season.

Photo Courtesy to Northern Highlands Regional High School.

ticipation in recreational basketball demonstrates qualities such as leadership, teamwork, and time management, which are highly valued by higher education institutions. The impact of recreational basketball extends beyond physical health and social interactions. The sport provides a constructive outlet for stress and anxiety, which are common among high school students. For many students at Northern Highlands, play-

ing basketball is a way to unwind and recharge, contributing positively to their mental health. Barker explains, “I don’t think rec necessarily helps someone for varsity-level competition because the commitment isn’t very strict/serious and sometimes people who play rec usually play other sports so the competition is not a lot like varsity basketball.” The experience of working towards a common goal with teammates

teaches valuable life lessons that extend far beyond the game. This trend is driven by a combination of health benefits, social interactions, inclusive league structures, community support, and the recognition of extracurricular activities’ importance. It is likely to continue its rise in popularity, enriching the high school experience and fostering a vibrant active community.■

GAME ON: VARSITY GIRLS BASKETBALL

The girls are ready and prepared to dominate the court this season with a fresh start.

Gabriella Ragazzo ‘26

The varsity girls’ basketball team at Highlands is gearing up for an exciting and promising season this year. With a strong roster of talented players and a dedicated coaching staff, the team is poised to make significant strides and achieve great success on the court.

This year’s team is led by a group of experienced seniors who have been playing together for several years. Their chemistry and understanding of each other’s playing styles are expected to be key factors in the team’s performance. Among the standout players are the team captain, who is known for her leadership and scoring ability, and the starting point guard, who excels in ball handling and playmaking. These players along with a deep bench of skilled athletes, give Northern Highlands a well-rounded and formidable lineup.

The coaching staff has been working tirelessly to prepare the team for the challenges ahead. They focus on developing a strong defensive strategy, emphasizing the importance of communication and team-

work. Offensively, the team has been honoring their shooting skills and working on fast-break plays to capitalize on their speed and agility. The coaches are confident that their efforts will pay off, and they have set high expectations for the season.

The schedule for the upcoming season is packed with competitive matchups against some of the top teams in the region. Northern Highlands will face off against their traditional rivals, including Ramapo High School, in what are sure to be thrilling and closely contested games. Chelsea Barker states, “I think that by looking at our schedule we have a few opponents and games that we know will be tough and good games but ultimately everyone on the team is confident in how we play and we know that we have a chance to win every game. I think overall this season we will be successful.” Additionally, the team will participate in several high-profile tournaments, providing them with opportunities to showcase their talent on a larger stage and gain valuable experience.

One of the key factors

contributing to the anticipated success of the team is the strong sense of camaraderie and support among the players. They have built a close-knit community, both on and off the court, which has fostered a positive and motivating environment. The players are dedicated to pushing each other to improve and are committed to achieving their collective goals. This unity and determination are expected to be crucial in overcoming any obstacles they may face throughout the season.

The community’s support also plays a significant role in the team’s success. Parents, teachers, and fellow students are enthusiastic about attending games and cheering on the team. This encouragement not only boosts the players’ morale but also creates an electrifying atmosphere at home games, making Northern Highlands a challenging place for visiting teams to compete.

Looking ahead, the team has set its sights on making a deep run in the state playoffs. With their combination of talent, hard work, and strategic planning, they are confident in



Image of the varsity girls and coaches after a game.

Photo courtesy to Northern Highlands Regional High School.

their ability to compete at a high level and bring home a championship. The players are focused on taking it one game at a time, but they are also driven by the ultimate goal of achieving postseason success. The varsity girls’ basketball team is poised for an exciting and successful season. Barker states, “I think our team will be very successful this

year. Everyone on the team is very close and we all love basketball so we are looking forward to this year’s schedule.” With a strong roster of skilled players, a dedicated coaching staff, and unwavering support from the community, the team is ready to take on the challenges ahead and achieve their goals. As they

embark on this journey, the players are motivated by their shared commitment to excellence and their desire to make the school and community proud. This season promises to be one of growth, achievement, and memorable moments for the girls’ basketball team.■

SIGNING OFF FROM A STRONG SEASON

Season highlights from the varsity girls soccer team and their unforgettable experience.

Clair Mario '28

The Northern Highlands Girls Varsity Soccer season just ended, and the girls had an incredibly strong season, finishing with a record of 18 wins-4 losses and winning the State Sectionals game. While the team ultimately lost in the Final Round 3-0 to Shawnee, it was still a successful season all around.

When asked about how the team's coach, Tara Madigan, helped the girls prepare throughout the season, Senior Julia Buono explained "Our coach prepared us for games with film sessions and scouting reports. This would include our game plan, key players to watch, weak points, formation, and so much more. We would also go over our game plan during practices to make sure no one had any questions about their job on game day."

The season went off to a great start, with the girls winning their first three games before losing a close heartbreaker 3-2 to Ramapo. After winning their next four games, they

unfortunately lost another close game to their Ramapo

revenge during the Semifinal, beating Ramapo 5-2 to

"The feeling was ecstatic when we made the state final, and everybody was very excited but also feeling prepared and ready."

Charlotte Ohnegian '26

rivals. However, Highlands won six out of their next seven games, heading into the NJSIAA Tournament with the wind at their back.

Along the way, the girls put in so much hard work and effort. Junior Charlotte Ohnegian explained, "We would have practices focused on the opponent that we would be soon facing and we also prepared by watching film and doing a lot of team bonding to unite our team even more."

The NJSIAA State Tournament started strong, with the girls' team beating Bergenfield 5-0 and then Old Tappan 4-0. Then, Highlands finally got their

move on to the Sectionals Final Round. Senior Forward Lyla Geller's three goals and Senior Goalie Avery Hirsch's saves powered the team to a 3-0 Sectionals victory over Morris Knolls.

Highlands then beat Chatham to move on to the State Finals against Shawnee. When asked about how she felt when the team reached the State Final, Charlotte Ohnegian said "The feeling was ecstatic when we made the state final, and everybody was very excited but also feeling prepared and ready."

Shawnee turned out to be too tough an opponent,



Image of varsity girls soccer team celebrating.

Photo Courtesy to Northern Highlands Regional High School.

with our girl's team ultimately losing 3-0. Despite this finish, the girls had an overall strong season

would do it all over again in a heartbeat, and I would not change a thing. It truly was such a special season

the field but also created so many memories off the field that I will cherish forever."

This season turned the girls on the team into a family, and they should be proud of how they played. They ended up becoming two-time State Sectional champions and had a great season. They will remember the memories they created on and off the field for a long time, and made Northern Highlands even more proud of its students.■

"I would do it all over again in a heartbeat, and I would not change a thing. It truly was such a special season."

Julia Buono '25

and would change nothing about their experience.

Julia Buono shared "I

and I'm so grateful I got to be a part of this team. We accomplished so much on

BARD UNIVERSITY MEETS ELLIOT PERNA

Elliot Perna will continue his academic and lacrosse career at Bard University.

Gabriel Tejeda '26

In his junior year, Elliot Perna was given the amazing opportunity to commit to Bard College for lacrosse. When presented with an offer at the school's showcase, he jumped at the chance to become a raptor.

Perna was able to catch the eye of Bard with the help of his outside-of-highlands coach "My coach on my club team [Mad Dog NJ], Sue, really helped me get here."

He emphasizes her impact on the recruiting process, his playing, and his confidence throughout the years of lacrosse.

He wouldn't have committed had he not fallen in love with the school. Something very important to him in the college search process that he found at Bard was, "great emphasis on the importance of being a student before an athlete."

Bard was one of the only schools he visited with that mentality, which drew him heavily to the outdoorsy paradise.

However, that wasn't all that drew Perna to decide on Bard. He also felt as though the "coach was very nice," and that the "team was extremely welcoming." In all sports at Highlands, team bonding is incredibly important and cannot be skipped. He was drawn to the Highlands-like environment at Bard.

You may be wondering— how did Perna commit to a college in his junior year?

Typically, committing to college happens in your senior year. But Perna, and other juniors, will commit through verbal agreement of his acceptance the fol-

You can go back on verbal agreements, but it is generally seen as disrespectful. He has yet to sign a National Letter of Intent, which commits to attend Bard, but is sure he's going to Bard.

At Highlands, he has to thank his freshman-year coach, Natasha Collova, for inspiring him to continue with sports until higher education. Despite all of his coaches leaving last year, Collova and his club were able to keep his passion for lacrosse going.

When he arrives at Bard, he hopes to get better at playing lacrosse, "improve their [Bard's]



Elliot Perna playing offense in a game.

Photo Courtesy to Bard College Athletics.

lowing year. This type of agreement places him in the running for a spot on the roster.

record, and meet new people." This goes to show that he emphasizes learning and being a student



Image of Elliot Perna playing at Bard University.

Photo creds to Bard College Athletics.

over being an athlete.

Bard is a Division III college located in Annandale-on-Hudson in New York known for its exceptional arts programs and beautiful, historical campus. After college, Perna plans to become a veterinarian.

He has been playing lacrosse since he was five years old when his mom "introduced it despite knowing nothing about it." Since then, lacrosse has become a part of him, as he has grown an attachment to the sport. His

commitment to Bard is a major step in his lacrosse career.

Collegiate sports have never been a question. He expressed, "I don't know what I would do if I wasn't playing lacrosse." This goes to show how personal and important lacrosse is to him, and how a sport he accidentally began to learn transformed into one he wishes to pursue and continue with in his higher education.

Congratulations to Elliot Perna for committing to Bard College for

lacrosse.

Years of hard work and dedication, hours of practice, and a love for the sport have allowed him to reach this moment, where he's able to celebrate the effort and bask in the freedom of commitment.■

WAGNER BATS HIS WAY TO OLD DOMINION

Jake Wagner will continue his baseball career as a Monarch

Eric Koo 26'

Junior Jake Wagner decided to commit to Old Dominion University thanks to his remarkable talent, passion, and dedication to baseball. Last season, Wagner was second-team All-League, slugging .512 with a batting average of almost .349 with 17 RBIS, while also the only non-senior to hit a home run for the Highlanders.

Wagner's decision to commit to Old Dominion was for many reasons. When asked about it, Wagner replied, "I decided to commit to Old Dominion because I felt like I could grow as

a person and player in their program. Old Dominion has had a long history of draft picks, they have had a total of 82 draft picks but since the year 2000, they have had 33 draft picks. With Old Dominion's development, I believe I could be one of their next drafted players. When I stepped foot on campus for my visit, I knew that it was the place for me. I had a great time meeting the coaches and players and I felt like it was a great environment for me to be in. I do believe that Old Dominion has created a name for themselves in the college baseball world and I do believe

that they are building a championship-winning program in Norfolk."

When asked about the recruiting process for his commitment, Wagner explained the time-consuming process it took to eventually pick one, as he stated, "The recruiting process for me was quick but very jam-packed. I was able to connect and talk with over a dozen coaches around the Northeast and in some Southern states. Through my process, I had a bunch of calls with coaches and some visits with the schools that were interested in me the most. I learned that in this process you have

to become your agent because they want you to market yourself in the best way possible whether that's posting videos on your social media accounts or personally talking to the coaches either over the phone or in person."

Wagner's way to college-level baseball wasn't entirely on his own, however. When asked about who had helped him reach his goals, Wagner explained that his parents and sister helped him achieve his goals. Specifically, Wagner explained "They were always very supportive and were willing to do anything to help me get to where I needed

to be, whether that was flying to Florida, California, and Georgia to play in front of college coaches or staying up late to drive me to my baseball training so that I could get better. I would also like to thank my coaches and teammates for always helping me get better each day and leading me in the right direction whether that was being a better baseball player or person."

As a junior, Wagner still has two seasons of High School baseball to play with his classmates and friends. While his far future is set, the boy's baseball season is around the corner, and Wagner plans on

helping the Highlanders to the best of his ability, as he says, "I want to hopefully help the team win a county championship and to also make a deep run in the state tournament. I believe that we have all of the tools we need to accomplish these goals this upcoming season"

With an amazing opportunity at a Division One school like Old Dominion, Northern Highlands would like to wish Jake Wagner good luck in his baseball career. ■

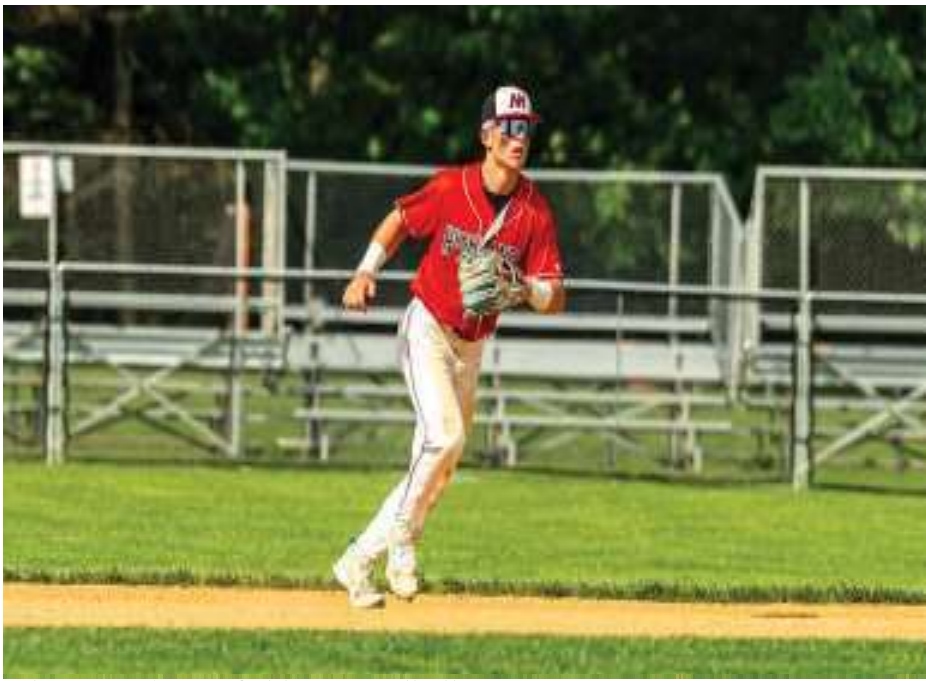


Photo Credits: Raya Baghal & Reet Sachdev

Jake preparing to field a groundball



Photo Credits: Raya Baghal & Reet Sachdev

Jake's commitment picture for baseball at Old Dominion



FARRAH DELLO RUSSO BECOMES A LEOPARDS

Dello Russo commits to Lafayette College for Cross Country

Gabriel Tejeda 26'

As commitments begin to roll in, Farrah Dello Russo has decided to become a Leopards and join Lafayette College for cross country.

Her decision lies not only in the staff, as the “coaching staff is supportive and communicative.” but also in the team, which is a “great community.” She was able to stay overnight at Lafayette and get to know the girls that she gets to run with next year upon committing.

Dello Russo was drawn to Lafayette from the start, and never really doubted that

she wanted to go there. The debate for her was between whether or not to pursue collegiate athletics. However, upon visiting Lafayette, she determined that continuing her athletic career was the right way.

She reached out to the college’s coaching staff, and they were able to set up a call. On that call, she realized that her goals aligned perfectly with the team’s and that they were ready for the next step, which was visiting the campus. This was when she was able to stay overnight, and it only helped to encourage her to commit.

The force behind



Photo Credits: Raya Baghal & Reet Sachdev

Farrah in a group picture with friends after finishing their races in cross country.



Photo Credits: Raya Baghal & Reet Sachdev

Farrah taking a picture showing off her new commitment

her running comes from both her coaches and highschool teammates, who, “fostered a great team environment and showed me the fun in running.”

However, her love for track didn’t start in high school. As a child, she enjoyed doing fun runs such as 5Ks. But it doesn’t stop there, as, “running has always been a part of my family,” since her grandfather ran, “52 marathons in his lifetime.” This is what ultimately encouraged her to join the track, and now she does it year-round.

Academically, she plans to venture into neuroscience and have the more specialized learning that college provides. Lafayette offers an amazing neuroscience program, which pairs perfectly with her love for their track and field program.

Next year, focus on track and field is a must. Dello Russo says that she will put all effort into, “improving with college-level coaches.”

At the same time, she plans to make friends with all the girls on the team and is excited to run with them.

To younger students, Dello Russo gives the advice, “Don’t be stressed if you don’t know what you want... you will have a lot of people helping you make these decisions.” Up until visiting Lafayette, she didn’t know whether or not she wished to pursue college sports. Now, she is more than excited to represent Lafayette College as a Leopards, moving on from Highlands and up to more exciting, bigger things.■

NEW YEAR, NEW ME

A glimpse into both past and present New Year's traditions, along with tips for setting goals for the new year.

By Olivia Benyola, '28

Whether it's achieving higher grades, reading more, exercising, or starting a new hobby, New Year's resolutions are an extremely popular tradition many people participate in. A New Year's Resolution is a goal set at the beginning of a new year, with the hope that you will achieve this goal within the next year. But where do New Year's Resolutions come



A depiction of the Babylonians celebrating Akitu.

Photo courtesy of Wordpress.com.



A coin featuring the two-headed Janus, the God of beginnings.



The modern tradition of launching fireworks on New Year's Eve.

4,000 years ago:

The first records of New Year's Resolutions began 4,000 years ago with the Babylonians. During this time, the year started when crops started to grow, in mid-March.

The Babylonians held Akitu, a 12 day festival, where they would either inaugurate a new king or celebrate the current one. During this festival, the Babylonians would make pledges to the gods, promising that they would return debts and borrowed items. It was believed that if they kept these promises, their gods would grant them good fortune.

2,000 years ago:

In ancient Rome, Julius Caesar created the Julian calendar, which made January, or as it was known then, Janus, the new beginning of the year. Romans believed that Janus watched over the past and future. In order to honor this god, Romans would make commitments to performing good behavior throughout the year.

300 years ago - today:

Additionally, in the 1700s, Christians used New Year's Day to reflect on past failures and set goals to succeed and improve behavior in the future. In the present day, Christians spend New Year's Eve praying and setting goals for the new year at night services held by churches.

Today, New Year's resolutions are not a religious practice and they are rooted in self-improvement. New Year's resolutions are notorious for being given up and unachieved, but this tradition is going anywhere, as many people still practice it.



One popular Japanese New Year's Tradition is the making of kagami mochi.



Photo courtesy of ABC News.

One New Year's Eve tradition in Spain and Cuba is to eat 12 grapes for good luck.

Many cultures around the world participate in creating New Year's Resolutions. For example, in Eastern cultures, families, friends, and communities emphasize creating group goals, instead of resolutions that focus on one's self. Japanese people will visit temples to wish for good luck and fortune in the new year. Latin Americans also partake in setting resolutions for the new year. New Year's resolutions are most popular among Americans.

Among current high school students, popular New Year's resolutions include improving grades, lowering screen time, reading more books, progressing in a sport, picking up a new hobby, or improving their health through food or exercise. New Year's resolutions are a beneficial way to gain motivation to accomplish a goal. However, drastically setting very ambitious, broad goals without expecting challenges and obstacles usually leads to motivation simmering out. It is important to set goals that are suited to how you accomplish something and specify on a certain, achievable endpoint, that way you will not lose sight of what you are working towards. It is important to feel passionate about your goal, instead of jumping into something with an all-or-nothing mindset.

New Year's resolutions have a long history and a place in many cultures. It is a tradition that encourages people to improve themselves, so use this upcoming year to start and strive towards achieving goals, whether you've had them in the back of your mind or they are a new ambition. Good luck, Highlanders!