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The Cougar Chronicle

The Student Newspaper of Haddam-Killingworth High School

Graduation Is Near: Seniors Complete Expectation Meetings

By Makayla Mancarella



The "Learning Expectation #1" meetings have been part of the HK portfolio for three years now as a way for students to demonstrate personal responsibility, character, cultural understanding, and ethical behavior. A couple of ways students can do this are through community service and talking about projects or classes that taught them about different cultures.

Most students passed their LE #1 meeting with no problem.

"We have a great student body, and this is the case every year, so most students are well equipped to get through their LE #1 without much preparation," said school counselor Alexandria Stone.

Assistant Principal Adam Apicella agreed: "All in all, they (the students) did well. Usually, we have a handful of students each year that need to come back and finish or provide more details on things. This year I had fewer students than I usually do who needed to come back and try again. So this year's senior class has done better overall than the last couple of years have."

What Mr. Apicella said he would change about the LE #1 meeting is giving students all the questions in advance to make it more like an interview. Another thing he said is that the meetings take a long time, but even if "the process is time-intensive, it's well worth it."

Both Mr. Apicella and Ms. Stone support the LE #1 meetings, with Mr. Apicella saying, "I don't know how many school administrators get to sit down with each senior for 10 or 15 minutes to hear them talk about all the good things they do."

Ms. Stone added, "I really enjoy sitting down with my seniors. It feels like a culmination meeting where I get to brag about them. So that's kind of one of my favorite things and I feel like I'm showing off my kids a little bit."

RSD17 Superintendent Takes Position in Another District

By Reagan Aronson

Superintendent Jeffrey Wihbey resigned from Regional School District 17 on Mar. 26 to become the new superintendent for the Wethersfield school system.



The RSD17 board of education assured the Haddam and Killingworth communities in a letter that the system will remain strong: "As next steps, the board will focus on naming an interim superintendent and engaging a recruiter to lead a comprehensive search process for our next district leader."

The letter recognized Mr. Wihbey's resignation and thanked him for his dedication.

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The Wethersfield board of education announced Mr. Wihbey's appointment and stated that they were impressed with his commitment to education and emphasis of leadership.

Mr. Wihbey joined RSD 17 in August of 2021 after working as an elementary school principal, a high school assistant principal, and a superintendent for eight years for the Connecticut Technical High School system, according to a *Cougar Chronicle* article in February of 2022.

Mr. Wihbey's position with the Wethersfield public schools will be effective on July 1, 2025.

HK Preparing New Phone Policy for Next School Year

By John Moyher

The topic of phone policies in schools nationwide has been a contentious issue. At HK, the policy is currently undergoing a review by a committee of teachers and administrators. As technology progresses, phones are becoming far more useful as academic tools, but phones can also add a negative factor to the class.

Assistant Principal Adam Apicella said, "We are considering anything and everything when it comes to phone policy. We want what's best for teachers, students, and the school. Some options we've discussed are a total ban for everyone, a ban only during class time, and leaving the policy as is."

As of now, the committee is finalizing a proposal which it will present to the RSD 17 board of education by early May for implementation by the beginning of the 2025-26 school year.

Some students are concerned their opinions on the phone policy won't be considered. Mr. Apicella mentioned the committee surveyed students and parents and is in the process of reviewing all surveys.

Mr. Apicella added, "Personally, it would be easier to *not* have phones. There is a lot of drama every day. I understand that phones have become a piece of everyday life. I want students to come to school to learn and not worry about their phones. But I'm not sure what is best at this point."

Mr. Kevin White, a history teacher and member of the phone committee, voiced his view on the topic: "In my experience, teaching in middle school, you do not need them. I see them as more of a distraction to academics and social well-being, more so than being a help."

Mr. White added that he has advocated for a more restrictive all-day ban, like Middletown is practicing. Additionally, Mr. White explained that he and the rest of the committee are still exploring various options.

Not Too Early for Those Prom Preparations

By Chloe Oboma

With prom right around the corner, excitement is building. Many are planning where to get their nails, spray tans, and hair done, but the ultimate question is where to purchase the perfect dress. After interviewing several juniors about a few popular local shops, I learned that some of the go-to boutiques are Red Door, Windsor, and Atianas.



Atianas Boutique in Milford
(photo by Chloe Oboma)

Atianas Boutique is located in Milford, Connecticut. This shop is dedicated to teen proms and bringing fashion to another level. The reason it's so popular is its familiarity. This video makes shoppers feel comfortable and encourages them to return time and again. For many years, girls from HK have been going there for both junior and senior prom. It's the go-to spot for many, as it offers a mix of stylish pieces.

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One of the unique aspects of the store is its consistency in making sure everyone has a different type of dress. No matter what, there is always a range of different styles. Junior Lily Austin says, “It’s very organized there, so many dresses.”

Junior Sarah Munz said, “They had so many dresses and different styles. I'm not really sure where else I’d go.”

Junior Sydney Wrinn found her unique blue dress at Red Door Boutique. This shop is located in East Hampton. It has a variety of clothing, offering a unique blend of styles. Specializing in dresses, each piece is designed to stand out. If your goal is to stand out, these dresses sure will do the trick. From elegant evening gowns to casual day dresses, Red Door Boutique ensures there is something for everyone.

It is the perfect destination for any junior looking for individuality with their prom dress. Sydney said, “The Boutique had lots of different options to choose from. Many different styles – if you want to find a range of styles, it’s the place to go."

Windsor in Higganum offers a fantastic budget-friendly alternative for those who want a stylish prom dress without having to break the bank. Not everyone necessarily has the money to spend that much on one dress. No one should feel guilty for not being able to spend a lot on a prom dress – everyone deserves to feel special and confident. With these affordable options that don't sacrifice style or quality, Windsor ensures that every student can find a dress that fits their budget while still looking and feeling like their most confident self.

HK Drama To Present "The Drowsy Chaperone"

By Emma Castiglioni

The HK Drama club will present on May 2-3 the astounding musical *The Drowsy Chaperone!* Directed by Ms. Marcy Webster and choreographed by Ms. Maggie Maselli, this fun musical highlights themes of misunderstanding and chaos. Roughly 50 HK students are featured both on and offstage, including many talented actors and actresses.

The story is set in the apartment of a quirky, theater-loving narrator – known as the “Woman in Chair” (played by Maggie DiNapoli) – who puts on her favorite cast album. Predictably, this cast album is the score of *The Drowsy Chaperone*. This is a flashy 1920s musical that comes to life right in the Woman’s apartment.



The story begins at a wedding of the glamorous bride Janet Van De Graff (Ava Loughlin) and Robert Martin (Gabriel Blair). Many other characters, including the Drowsy Chaperone (Trillian Havens), are key to this whimsical and fantastic story. The show includes a famous bride, her chaperone, her funny groom, his best man, an old lady with a fancy dress, her servant, a determined producer, an aspiring actress, two gangsters disguised as pastry chefs, a European ladies’ man, and an aviatrix.

Seniors featured in the musical include Ava Loughlin, Havens, Sarah Pierce, Chase Lenart, Jayani Bennett, and Skylar Hale. Seniors working in the crew include Molly O’Neal, Saige Merwin, and Ayiana Maikowski.

This show conveys the powerful message of love and its tricks. The musical shows us how in reality, most of us just “stumble along,” in reference to one of the powerful songs sung by the Drowsy Chaperone and the ensemble.

According to Ms. Webster, “*The Drowsy Chaperone* is a hilarious and heartfelt tribute to musical theater.” Packed with catchy songs, big extravagant dance numbers, and plenty of

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laughs, *The Drowsy Chaperone* is a love letter to classic musicals, perfect for anyone looking for a fun night.

This show is appropriate for ages 10 and up and the run time is approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes with no intermission. Tickets can be bought online using a web link and are also available at the door.

Link for tickets : https://gofan.co/app/school/CT17399

Jazz Band Travels to Haddam Senior Center

By Eleanor Barry

The Haddam-Killingworth Jazz Band traveled to the Haddam Senior Center on March 17 to play an assortment of pieces for a meeting with the superintendent.

RSD 17 Superintendent Jeffrey Wihbey scheduled a meeting about the school budget at the Senior Center on that date, and he thought it would be a nice addition to have a music group attending to perform for them. In past years, choral teacher Marcy Webster has taken the choir to sing, but this year Mallory Legman took her jazz band group, allowing a great opportunity for those in the jazz band.

A wide variety of instruments were played, including the alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, bass, and drums. The students in the jazz band attending this trip were Julia Bermingham, alto saxophone; Ian King and Bruce Peese, trumpet; Jeffery Thebeau, drums; Joseph Jacobs, bass; and Maxim Bergman, tenor saxophone.

This ensemble of students played three selections: "Mr. PC," which is a jazz piece composed in 1959 by John Coltrane; "Girl From Ipanema," a Brazilian jazz song written by Antônio Carlos Jobim and Vinícius de Moraes in 1962; and "Cold Duck Time," another jazz piece written by Eddie Harris and Les McCann released in 1961.

Junior Wins Annual Mr. HK Talent Contest

By Reagan Aronson

Junior Jeffrey Schull was named "Mr. HK" during the school's annual talent showcase on Mar. 13. Other contestants included seniors Joey Jacobs and Will Lirot; junior Zach Goldfarb; sophomore Paul Birkmeyer; and freshman Nick Stegman.



2025 Mr. HK Winner
(photo courtesy The Cougar Den)

The night started with a dance number performed by the contestants, joined by co-host Lindsay Blade. The boys sported Hawaiian shirts dressed for the beach and Lindsay wore a gown of her own.

Next was the judge's introduction with co-host Gabby Lopez. Teachers Barth Keck, Maggie Maselli, and Amanda Baldwin sat on stage ready to thoroughly judge each act. The individual talent performances followed.

A quick intermission took place as contestants changed into their formal attire ready to line the stage with their escorts. Judges then asked each individual, “Why do you want to be Mr. HK?” After answers were given, the judges headed backstage for deliberation.

Mr. HK is known for the variety of themes every year. This year the show performed using music, colors, and decoration from the disney movie “Rio,” bringing the carnival and birds of Brazil to life.

Students, staff, and family members filled the auditorium cheering everyone on. HKTV students were scattered throughout the auditorium, stage, and control room, filming and producing the show.

Broadcast and Journalism Students Visit Quinnipiac

By Reagan Aronson

HKTV's broadcast and journalism students visited Quinnipiac University on Mar. 28 to explore various programs within the School of Communication, gaining hands-on experience in the media field.

The field trip offered students the opportunity to engage with multiple communication professors to learn more about what Quinnipiac's Communications School has to offer. The students participated in activities that gave insight into what college students do and learn in class day to day.

Students engaged in three different workshops: Creating Personalized Motion Graphics, Developing Unique Podcast Episodes, and Producing a "Prop Room Gang Commercial." Each activity allowed the students to learn and ask questions about various media pathways as well as enjoy and have fun while creating media.

"It was a really cool experience and I really enjoyed learning about podcasts," said Myra Cortes. Cortes, Chloe Obama, and Jeffrey Schull created a podcast called *The Alphas* using skills that Professor DesRoches taught regarding the process of podcast production.



Paul Birkmeyer and Tim Hickman create a podcast during the Quinnipiac field trip. (photo by Reagan Aronson)

Associate Dean Terry Bloom walked the students around campus highlighting the student-run radio station and newspaper. Students also had the opportunity to view the open air studio.

Restaurant Review: Texas Roadhouse Passes Taste Test

By Liam Rauscher

Texas Roadhouse is an infamous American cuisine and steak restaurant. Boasting an extensive and fulfilling menu with plenty of variation, I decided it was necessary to check out and review a new location in Cromwell to determine whether it was a worthy choice. I can tell you this from my own personal experience: It is worth the drive and the bill.



During my trip to the Texas Roadhouse, I put myself on the waiting list online, so when I got to the actual restaurant, I only had to wait a few minutes to be seated. Once I was seated, the waiter brought me and my company some bread rolls. When I tried those bread rolls for the first time, I could not get enough. I truly believe that Texas Roadhouse bread rolls are the biggest staple of their restaurant; they are flavorful, soft, and delicious. Combined with complimentary butter, cinnamon or regular topping of your choosing, you have an excellent starter to get you in the mood for more.

When it came time to order, I did not hold back, requesting an eight-ounce filet mignon with a side of fries, cooked medium rare – the perfect and only truly valid way to cook a steak – and Coca-Cola for my drink. The waiter was very polite and professional. Once we ordered, it took about 15 minutes for our food to arrive, which wasn't bad at all, seeing as we had plenty of rolls to tide us over in the meantime. The basket they come in holds four rolls, and each of them are a bit bigger than your closed fist.

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When the food finally arrived, I knew it was going to be good. My filet looked excellent and mouth-watering with a pleasant scent of cooked meat smoothing off of my plate. I took my utensils and cut into it and was pleasantly surprised to see a perfect warm pink center with a tender outside, an exemplary medium rare. I could taste the flavor melting over my tongue as I ate. Even after consuming a copious amount of bread rolls, I found myself enjoying the filet mignon all the more.

After devouring most of the juicy filet, I turned my attention to my untouched side. The fries were tender on the outside and soft on the inside; they couldn't exactly live up to the euphoric taste of the rolls and filet, but they exceptionally complemented them. The cola was also a nice complement between bites. I finished up the rest of my meal, drank my drink, and waited for everyone else at my table to eat. The filet with sides cost about $25, which I think was absolutely worth it for that rejuvenating meal.

All in all, I would recommend this restaurant. With excellent service, delicious food, and an inviting atmosphere, Texas Roadhouse is the perfect place to visit with friends or family.

Hollywood's Biggest Night: Recap of the 2025 Oscars

By Maxwell Selmer

The 97th Academy Awards took place on Mar. 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood. As usual, this event celebrated a year of cinematic excellence and achievements. The Oscars this year were hosted by Conan O'Brien.

Unsurprisingly, the film *Anora*, which is about an exotic dancer from Brooklyn who unexpectedly marries a Russian oligarch's son, emerged as the night's biggest winner. The film secured five Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Editing, and Best Actress for Mikey Madison. The director of *Anora*, Sean Baker, made history by tying Walt Disney for most Oscars won by an individual in one night.

In addition, Adrien Brody won Best Actor for his role in *The Brutalist*, which in my opinion, lives up to its name, as it was brutal to watch. Brody is also now the new record holder in the longest Oscar acceptance speech which lasted five minutes and 40 seconds. Zoe Saldana won Best Supporting Actress for *Emilia Perez*, becoming the first American of Dominican origin to receive an Oscar. Kieran Culkin took home Best Supporting Actor for his performance in *A Real Pain*.



We must not skimp on the highly anticipated musical *Wicked*, which won two Oscars for Best Costume Design and Best Production Design. I would recommend watching this musical, as it offers amazing visuals and a great soundtrack.

The ceremony featured heartfelt tributes to Maggie Smith, who portrayed Professor McGonagall in the world-famous *Harry Potter* films, and Gene Hackman, who starred in the 1992 film *Unforgiven* among many others. Musical performances from Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo further added to the night's entertainment.

SPORTS

HK Wrestler Makes History as State Champion

By Jeffrey Schull

Amelia Petersen, HK senior wrestler, made history on Mar. 1 winning her last match of the day and taking the state championship in the girls' 138-pound weight class bracket.

Coach Josh Cofield said, "First, she was a captain and lots of people on the team looked

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up to her and did everything right on and off the mat." Cofield added, “Amelia did not like to lose and she wrestled in the off season and prepared herself.”

Cofield was ecstatic about Petersen's championship, saying, "It was truly amazing to see Amelia wrestle" and that she is "a true inspiration of new wrestlers and ones currently in 8th grade," paving the way for all new wrestlers interested in the sport.



Amelia Petersen, State Champion

Cougar B-ball Teams Finish Productive Seasons

By Jacob Lamarre

The HK boys’ basketball team concluded their season with a balanced regular-season record of 10-10, showcasing their determination and resilience on the court. Despite facing tough competition, the team showed growth throughout the season.

Senior Andrew Crayton said, “I think the team has improved exponentially from the beginning of the season until now. At the beginning of the season we were not winning games that we should have and at the end of the season we were playing as a team, unlike the beginning of the season.”

The team lost in the first round of the Shoreline Conference, 70-67, to East Hampton. The boys qualified as the No. 17 seed in the Div. 5 state tournament where they lost, 89-65, to eventual champion Shepaug Valley.

The HK girls' basketball team wrapped up their season with a solid regular season record of 12-8, demonstrating impressive teamwork on the court. Despite facing tough competition, the team showed significant growth throughout the season.

Senior Margret Robinson said, "I am very impressed with how we did this year. We were able to endure much adversity, especially as a younger team. We also did a great job with achieving our goal of making Shorelines and states.”

The girls lost in the second round of the Shoreline Conference tournament to North Branford, and qualified for the state tournament where they lost to Windham.

Girls' Hockey Co-op Grinds Through Challenging Season

From Staff Reports

The girls' Hand hockey co-op ended their season on Feb. 21 after a first-round loss in the SSC Conference tournament. The three-month-long season was played with a bench of 10 players and one goalie. Despite the challenges that came from playing with a shorthanded roster, the team spent a lot of time bonding and working hard at practices to make



themselves viable competitors.

HK's Maggie DiNapoli, team captain, said, "I think that we made a lot of progress by the end of the season, but it was super hard to

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play against stacked teams with a bench as short as ours was this season. Despite that, you would never have watched our games and thought 'that's a team that gets beat 7-1 every game.' We worked really hard but just didn't have the players."

DiNapoli said she and the other non-graduating members are looking forward to next year when hopefully their numbers will be up and they will be back on the ice with confidence.

The co-op is made up of junior captain DiNapoli; senior captain Alexa Spaniotis and junior Danella Spaniotis from Cromwell; captain Hannah Rich, junior Chloe Monaghan, freshman Olivia Albino, and senior Julia Gallo from Hand; freshmen Ana Milne and Savannah Johnson, and senior Mia Viera from Branford; junior Brooke Ouellette and freshman Riley Donovan from Westbrook; and sophomore MaiLi Quale from Valley.

HK Boys' Hockey Joins New Co-op with North Branford

By Jeff Thebeau

The HK boys' hockey co-op faced a change of scene this season. For the past couple of years, the school has been teamed up with the Rocky Hill Terriers. This year, however, the school's contract expired, affording the opportunity to sign with the higher division North Branford Thunderbirds, a team that lost ten seniors after last season.

"The constant adversity was immense, but it didn't stop the boys from enjoying their season."

As expected, the team members from HK faced countless challenges as a new co-op, trying to integrate themselves into the North Branford community while living at least 30 minutes away. Led by seniors Jeff Thebeau and Will James, the HK boys put forth their best efforts in creating a successful season.

The boys' season concluded with a 4-15-1 record, but not without a fight. In addition to the challenges of joining a new team, the season was riddled with injury after injury, forcing the team to fight for every inch of the game. Even after a teammate was in a traumatic car accident, the team rallied around his recovery to make the most of their remaining games. The constant confrontation of adversity was immense, but it didn't stop the boys from enjoying the remainder of their season.

Although the season didn't live up to what some had hoped, the program is hopeful for a successful future. Junior Matt Singer and sophomore Braylon Rodriguez have hockey and leadership potential for this team. In the coming years, the North Branford Thunderbirds hockey team is hopeful for success, and rightfully so. Joining a new team can be challenging, but over time, that difficulty fades.

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