

# BWS MAGAZINE



2011 – 2025

## AN ERA OF GROWTH AND CURIOSITY

A tribute to Dr. Mike Riera, who  
has led Brentwood School with  
vision, wisdom, and integrity

SPRING 2025





Brentwood School Magazine

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Brentwood School inspires every student to:  
Think critically and creatively.  
Act ethically.  
Shape a future with meaning.

Core Values: Trust, Respect, Responsibility,  
Honesty, Caring, Diversity, Community

*Above right: At Candlelighting,  
after seniors passed their candles  
to the juniors, the outgoing Head  
of School passed a candle to  
his successor.*

*Opposite page: A drone show  
above the Parents Association  
Benefit at Sony Studios*

*These photos and cover photo  
by Danny Moloshok '00*



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## A FOND FAREWELL

Dr. Mike watched Ezra Frech '23 grow from an ambitious Lower Schooler into a double gold medalist in the Paralympic Games, so he was delighted when Ezra stopped by the Parents Association Benefit to deliver a message of farewell and gratitude.

*Photo by Danny Moloshok '00*



A MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of BWS Magazine!

In this issue, you will read about alumni making an impact, a memorial tribute to a former faculty member, the school’s response to the devastating fires we recently experienced, and some Olympics-related BWS projects. In large part, however, the magazine is about the transition from one Head of School (me) to another (Dr. Timothy Cottrell).

I have been blessed with 14 years at the helm of Brentwood School. The school is stronger in so many ways since I joined in 2011, and I am much stronger as well. I have learned a lot about myself and the world in my role as head of Brentwood. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to have led this tremendous institution.

Dr. Cottrell arrives at Brentwood as a seasoned educator who has deeply held values that align with and will benefit Brentwood. I have every confidence that he will build upon what we have accomplished over the past decade and generate new and greater achievements for our school and its students. We are in good hands.

As an educator, I cannot resist this opportunity to offer one last important piece of advice when it comes to our students and families. In my 40-plus years of education, I have watched as each generation of students has worked harder and harder to “color within the lines of expectations.” This has come at a cost. I fear some of the freedom of childhood and adolescence has slipped away, as well as some of the creativity.

While all of our students and families strive for resilience and perseverance, many limit this to an intellectual exercise, without risking mistakes along the way.

In reality, we know that the only way to develop true resilience and courage is to risk failure, experience it, and recover from the misstep. Indeed, any truly creative act requires risking failure.

I remember when my son was 4 or 5 years old, and a few of us parents signed our kids up for a local aikido class. It was cute, chaotic, and often humorous. At the same time, it was instructive. The first thing taught to these young students was how to fall. And with it, in the same breath, how to get back up on their own.

As I move into the next chapter of my life I urge all of us to encourage our children to periodically risk “coloring outside the lines,” and rather than fear failure, embrace it, learn from it, and support our children in resolving their own struggles. When they are older, they will thank you.

— DR. MIKE



“We know that the only way to develop true resilience and courage is to risk failure, experience it, and recover from the misstep. Indeed, any truly creative act requires risking failure.”

Opposite page: Current and former Trustees celebrating Dr. Mike



A FAREWELL, WITH THANKS, FROM OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

From day one and throughout the past 14 years, Dr. Mike Riera has overseen tremendous positive growth at Brentwood School.

He was off and running as soon as he began in 2011, immediately initiating a 30-year master plan and a \$90 million capital campaign (the school’s largest), which would ultimately result in Dr. Mike’s most obvious, tangible legacy: the Middle School building on the East Campus and the Saltair Building on the West Campus. The new buildings changed the face of the school — literally and figuratively — and reimagined both campuses in the process.

The ambitious master plan Dr. Mike helped create and shepherd was embarked upon in the right way — actions were purposeful and carefully considered, each one part of a broader strategic vision.

Amidst the chaos of the construction — and perhaps most noteworthy among Dr.

Mike’s achievements — is the outstanding academic environment he not only maintained but also expanded. And Dr. Mike infused the school’s academic rigor with a new dimension — a focus on social-emotional wellness.

His efforts have proven that a challenging academic environment can also be nurturing, warm, and caring. By doing this, he has inspired our faculty to be better teachers, and many families say that Dr. Mike’s talks and writings have made them better parents and guardians.

Dr. Mike’s compassion and leadership were readily apparent in the school’s recent response to families who lost their homes or were displaced in the wildfires. As the school worked to connect families with lodging, clothing, and basic needs, he also made direct, one-to-one outreach a priority — meticulously assigning school leaders to that task. Recognizing the need for this personal outreach was quintessential Dr. Mike.

Around the school, Dr. Mike’s imprint can be found on projects large and small — on our lighted turf fields, the stairs that lead from the Village to the Eagle Center, five Young Women’s Conferences, the expansion of services to Veterans, Parent

University, and the Beldegrun Center for Innovative Leadership (BCIL). Dr. Mike championed the BCIL and raised funding to build this K-12 innovation center, which does outstanding work for every single student and helps distinguish Brentwood School in the Los Angeles market.

We as a board understood Dr. Mike’s love of the school and the integrity he brought to the school’s governance. Ultimately, we always trusted that his approach and ideas were framed by his deep caring for all of Brentwood’s constituents — students, families, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Dr. Mike is leaving a vibrant, successful school with unparalleled academic and extracurricular programming and a caring community — so caring that many students consider Brentwood School their second home. He transformed the school and created a legacy that will stand the test of time.

Brentwood will be successful into the future because of Mike Riera. Few people could have stewarded Brentwood School with his skill and care, and we are immensely grateful for his leadership.

— ADAM COHN ’89, CHAIR, ON BEHALF OF THE BRENTWOOD SCHOOL BOARD OF TRUSTEES





# RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY

As Dr. Mike wrote in a Letter of the Week, “Amidst the confusion, heartbreak, fear, and pain of the fires, our Brentwood community leaned into one another with care, support, and love.”

About 60 current families in our community lost their homes in the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, with additional losses among our alumni and employees. School closed for about a week. Although the West Campus was in the evacuation zone and the East Campus bordered it, the fires reached neither campus and damage was minor. Ash clean-up, however, took considerable time and care.

The community’s response was heartening as dozens stepped up with offers to help those who lost their homes,

donating spare bedrooms, homes, and ADUs. The school catalogued those with needs and those who could give and played matchmaker. A newly created BWS Ambassadors program assigned a school administrator to each affected family for more personal, one-to-one care. We collected textbooks, laptops, chargers and other supplies lost to the flames. And when the prefects held a clothing drive for fire victims, families delivered bags and bags.

The Communications Department created a robust resource page online, listing a wide array of information, from free clothing and legal services to helpful webinars and housing leads. The school also accepted several students mid-year

from public schools that were destroyed — a departure from normal restrictions on mid-year matriculation.

Then there were smaller, meaningful gestures that got less attention: the boys basketball players who bought clothing for a teammate, the Lower School teachers who offered free childcare to fire victims during the week off school, the alum who created a free therapy group for fire victims. The community showed its colors, which blended beautifully into a tapestry of warmth and care.

*Above: On the day the fires began, smoke was visible behind Brentwood’s Middle School building.*

## A Special Effort by Brentwood’s Trustees

Seeing families’ immediate need for relief, the Board of Trustees established the Brentwood School Crisis Relief Fund. With 100% trustee participation, the board raised \$400,000 to help fire victims in the community.

“The Board of Trustees understands that Brentwood is far more than an educational institution. We are defined by the warmth and caring that we extend to each other and model for our children

as they learn to think critically, find lifelong friends, and discover their paths in life,” wrote Board Chair Adam Cohn and Treasurer Dan Stern in a letter to the community. “For those affected by the fires, we recognize the unique and critical needs caused by this epic disaster and the long road to recovery that lies ahead. We are here to help.” As of May, funds had been distributed to 20 families whose homes were lost or uninhabitable.



## A Parent U Pivot

Parent University morphed from its planned program to “Brentwood School Strong,” with trauma expert Dr. William Lacey-Bisetty sharing insights for families affected by fires and the friends who support them. He discussed how to speak and listen to children in developmentally appropriate ways and stressed the importance of connecting with young children through play.

Child care was provided during the talk, and afterward families gathered for lunch, bounce houses, games — and even puppies. There was the chance to play and even more importantly, to connect with friends after a few difficult weeks.



### WHEN HEARING AIDS ARE LOST IN FIRES

When Eddie O. ’27’s family was evacuated from their Palisades home, many things were left behind in the rush. Among them: the charger to Eddie’s hearing aids. While Eddie was able to secure a charger, the close call inspired him to compile resources for other hearing-impaired people who were affected by the fires.

Eddie, whose home was damaged but not lost, worked with his audiologist and others at the Center for Hearing and Communication to compile the Palisades Fire Hearing Resource.

Have you or a loved one lost hearing aids in the fires? Visit [palisadesfirehearingresource.com](https://palisadesfirehearingresource.com) to access guidance, numerous resources, and a program to help fund replacement equipment for those in need.



### WELCOMING TEAMS WITH NOWHERE TO PRACTICE

Student-athletes from fire-affected Palisades Charter High School, Viewpoint School, Archer School for Girls, and Milken Institute joined Brentwood’s girls soccer, girls basketball, and boys lacrosse teams for practices in January. The boys lacrosse team from Pali High, which was partially destroyed in the fires, continued to use Brentwood fields throughout the season.





### Generosity Defines Clothing Drive

The prefects held a clothing drive, and volunteers organized an enormous outpouring of donations for those who lost homes in the wildfires. The school also collected textbooks and a wide array of supplies for students.



### THE EXCITING POTENTIAL OF PLAIN BROWN CARDBOARD

Over 100 Lower Schoolers participated in this year’s Cardboard Challenge, turning brown cardboard into colorful arcade games over seven weeks in the fall. They worked in the BCIL Idea Lab during recess to design, build, test, and retest cardboard renditions of claw machines, ball tosses, pinball, and other games — all made with cardboard, recycled materials, and a spirited dose of imagination. “The Cardboard Challenge brings me back to my childhood in the 70s,” said 5th grade teacher Theresa Harrington. “No computers, no iPhones, lots of time to build and create.”

### SPACE X SPEAKER KICKS OFF ROBOTICS

SpaceX engineer and honorary coach Scott Bell kicked off Brentwood’s robotics season, helping guide Middle and Upper School teams to brainstorm designs and solutions for the FIRST Tech Challenge. Scott was recruited by SpaceX while competing at a robotics tournament himself.

### SIR KENSINGTON’S SAUCY SECRETS

Scott Norton, co-founder of the Sir Kensington’s condiment company, provided a lesson in entrepreneurial tenacity to a room full of budding innovators in October, part of the BCIL Speaker Series, “Innovation Exists Offline.” Named one of *Fast Company*’s “Most Creative People in Business,” Scott shared his attempt to break into the American ketchup market, how he tested new recipes with his college friends, and the fictional Sir Kensington story that would provide the muse and mascot for the brand.



### Hands-On in Panama

Twelve students in a Summer at Brentwood BCIL elective traveled to Panama with Floating Doctors, learning about medical care, environmental conservation, and culture in a remote

setting. A weeklong course co-taught by Dr. Ben LaBrot, Floating Doctors founder and USC professor, and Laura Feucht, Upper School biology teacher and BCIL Curriculum Innovator, preceded the trip.

### Gene-Editing Demystified

A gene-editing technology known as CRISPR has revolutionized science, and the BCIL is working to introduce it to students. As a first step, in early November Upper School science teacher Laura Feucht and BCIL Applied Science Research Coordinator Theavy So attended “Gene Editing with CRISPR,” a workshop at the Montgomery College Bioscience Education Center in Maryland. In the three-day training, the teachers learned how CRISPR — Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats — has changed gene editing.

“We were the only teachers from high school at the workshop among other researchers and scientists from all over the United States,” said Ms. Feucht. “Everyone was enthusiastic to connect



with experts, build skills, and engage with the future of biotechnology.” Ms. So was equally enthusiastic. “This is a great opportunity for training in an exciting field,” she said. “I am looking forward to incorporating this groundbreaking technology into the BCIL Applied Science Laboratory at Brentwood.” For starters, the BCIL is offering a CRISPR workshop this summer.





### LONDON H. '30 TAKES GOLD AT NATIONAL JUNIOR OLYMPICS

London H. '30 won gold at the National Junior Olympics, with her team finishing the 4x400m women's relay in 3:59:44 and London running her 400 meters in just 60 seconds!



### A WINNING ROUTINE

Congratulations to Angelina L. '25 for winning a bronze medal in Ribbon at the 32nd Rhythmic Gymnastics International Tournament in Portugal!

Angelina has been competing in rhythmic gymnastics, an Olympic sport, for 12 years, creating 90-second routines in all four rhythmic gymnastics apparatuses: Hoop, Ball, Clubs, and Ribbon. Rhythmic gymnasts perform routines set to music and are judged on difficulty, artistry, and execution. Angelina was scheduled to represent the Canadian National Team at the Canadian Championships in June.



## Campus Celebrates Ezra's Double Golds

When Ezra Frech '23 was a Lower Schooler, he gave a banner speech about overcoming challenges. The Paralympian actually talked then about his dreams to represent Team USA in track and field and win gold.

Ezra returned to the Lower School this fall as a double gold medal Paralympic champion, walking into a gymnasium filled with his biggest fans. Ezra gave students a play-by-play account of his victories at the summer Paralympic Games in Paris: how he lined up for the 100-meter final and focused on staying

calm, knowing that he had worked hard and was ready to realize his dreams.

Two months earlier, when Ezra won those gold medals, there was almost as much excitement on campus as there was in Paris. In the Upper School, the prefects showed Ezra's stunning 100m win and post-game interview on a big screen during an assembly, and students from all three divisions gathered to cheer Ezra in the high jump, chanting "Ezra! Ezra!" as he soared over the 1.94m bar and set a new Paralympic record.



## From "Pun-kins" to Puppies

Oh my gourd-ness! Can you be-leaf what an a-maizing Harvest Festival we had? A time-honored Brentwood School tradition, the event rings in the change of seasons by welcoming the entire Lower School community to a transformed Upper School field. The sunshine-filled day featured all your favorite fall staples: pumpkins, the Sweet Shoppe, a petting zoo, bounce houses, pony rides, a pudding eating contest, and puppies!

— RYAN EFUNE AND ADAM SELKOWITZ, CO-CHAIRS







## ABOVE AND BEYOND AEROSPACE CLASS SHOWCASES CAMPUS FROM THE SKY

The cool days of December generally bring such sharp visibility that you can easily see both downtown and Catalina Island from campus. As a pilot, I fly above Brentwood School when approaching Santa Monica Airport — and I get excited to share the views with students in my Aerospace and Drone Technology course.

During October, each student received a small, indoor remote-controlled helicopter, and after some hands-on

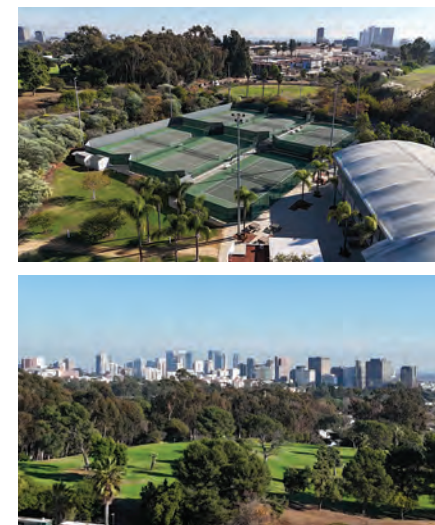
training in class, their homework was to experiment with the maneuverability and control inputs required for a successful flight. After recording a single-take video (no edits!) that displayed their ability to put the helicopter through a series of 10 maneuvers, they “graduated” to operating a full-sized DJI drone.

Throughout November, students took turns piloting the drone, first operating at low altitude over our stadium field

then progressing to longer journeys at higher altitudes. As their piloting skills progressed, they began to use the drone’s 4k camera. Their challenge: to compose and capture photographs highlighting Brentwood School.

— DAVID SVEC,  
UPPER SCHOOL MATH TEACHER

*Student photographs of campus from the Aerospace and Drone Technology class, taught by David Svec (opposite far right)*





# Splash Splash

Upper School classes battled for bragging rights — and a chance to jump in the pool — at Splash in October.

After contests all over campus, including Pictionary, musical chairs, dodgeball, ping pong, cornhole, and charades, teams headed to the Stadium Field for an obstacle course with hurdles, cartwheels, piggyback rides, leapfrog, and crab walks. The Class of 2025, victorious, jumped into the pool, and Director of Student Life Amanda Kelson and English teacher Mary Saba Tehran, the class deans (bottom right), cannonballed in to join them.



## Girls Basketball: Breaking Records

Our girls basketball team keeps making history! Captain Payton S. '25 moved into the record books this winter — she is now the all-time 3-point leader in Brentwood School history with 354 3-point shots in the net. She broke the previous record of 274 and ranks in the top 20 for 3-point shooting in California. Payton also joined the 1,000-point club, joining Lev F. '25, who achieved 1,000 points in 2024. The girls team advanced to the CIF Division 1 State Regional Playoffs this winter, capping another stellar season. Go Eagles!



**4TH GRADE EXPRESSIONISTS**

Fourth graders created Expressionist paintings inspired by the Der Blaue Reiter movement, using the horse — a recurring Blue Rider symbol of freedom and spirit.

(Above work by Avery A. '33)



## A New Director at the Middle School

Carrie Green had a seamless transition into her role as Middle School Director this year, after seven years in the same position at Kent Denver School in Colorado.

Carrie has also taught at Harvard-Westlake and in Oakwood's summer program, and worked in various Middle School leadership roles at St. John's School in Houston. Carrie replaced Jill Bergeron, who is now Associate Head of School.



**THE BARDS OF BRENTWOOD**

Chase K. '26 was first runner-up in the Los Angeles finals of the English-Speaking Union (ESU) National Shakespeare Competition, reading from *Othello* and Sonnet 116 (as seen by TV characters Gomez and Morticia Addams!). Chase was among six who advanced from the LA semifinals.

## Comic Book Vibes on South Quad Mural

Seniors Daphne L. and Zenaiyah R. decided freshman year that they wanted to paint their senior mural. They transformed the South Quad late last summer, inspired by comic books, public murals, and pop art.

"We planned on painting the mural together," said Daphne, "and we'll finish high school fulfilling that promise."





First-Ever Spirit Squad Brings Eagle Pride to the Middle School

To bridge the gap between the Lower School after-school dance team — the Drill Bits — and a thriving Upper School spirit program, the first-ever Middle School Spirit Squad was born this fall — the brainchild of a spirited group of 5th graders. With matching outfits, pom poms, and hair bows, the 20-member squad performed at Middle School football games.



A Homecoming Win

With a full crowd cheering, the Eagles dominated at Homecoming, beating Don Lugo 31-21. Nearly 100 alumni and their families attended the pregame Alumni Family BBQ.



TOM GORDON



JIMMY LUSTIG



BENJAMIN NAZARIAN



CECILIA VICTOR



LAURA GALLAGHER



KIMM AGAM



JEFF EHRENPREIS '95

Thank You to Our Outgoing Trustees

**Tom Gordon** departs the Board of Trustees after 15 years — six years when he was a parent and another nine on his recent stint, as a grandparent. He chaired the board from 1995-97. Tom has served the school on numerous committees: Advancement, Audit, Capital Campaign, Education, Finance, Governance, and Investment, with his longest service on Finance, Governance, and Investment. Tom is the school's longest-serving trustee.

**Jimmy Lustig** has served the Board of Trustees for nine years. Experienced in finance and investment, Jimmy brought his expertise to extended stretches on the Finance, Investment, and Audit committees, chairing the latter. He also served on the Advancement, Capital Campaign, Executive, and Governance committees.

**Benjamin Nazarian**, a 10-year veteran of Brentwood's Board of Trustees, brought the school his wealth of expertise in business and finance. Of his decade on

the board, he spent eight serving on the Finance committee, which he chaired. He also chaired the Long-Range Planning and Investment committees, and served on the Advancement, Capital Campaign, Executive, and Governance committees.

**Cecilia Victor** joined the board after extensive involvement as a parent — she served on the executive board of the Parents Association; chaired El Nido, the Latino Parent Association; and gave countless Admissions tours. A vibrant leader, deeply dedicated to Brentwood, Cecilia chaired the board's DEI Committee and also has served on the Advancement, Institutional Goals, and Finance committees. She leaves the board after six years.

**Laura Gallagher** has shared her insights with the Board of Trustees, gleaned through her career in the biotech/pharmaceutical industry and her service in the United States Navy. A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Laura served

with the Navy in the Middle East, Asia, and the U.S. She joined the board in 2022 and has been a member of the Advancement, DEI, Finance, and Institutional Goals committees.

**Kimm Agam**, the outgoing Parents Association Chair for East Campus, joined the board after extensive involvement in the PA, including chairing many Lower School efforts, from Teacher Outings and Gently Used Uniforms to Communications — and giving numerous tours. She has served on several board committees: Advancement, DEI, Finance, and Institutional Goals.

**Jeff Ehrenpreis '95** served the board as Alumni Association President, following terms as the association's vice president and secretary. A longtime alumni volunteer and enthusiast, he brought his legal acumen to the board's Advancement, DEI, Finance, and Institutional Goals committees.





### 10th Graders Support Veterans Through Service Retreat

The Class of 2027 had broad choices for their fall service retreat, and 28 opted to work with Veterans, holding a cooking lesson at the Domiciliary, serving lunch, leading a game of bingo, and assembling welcome kits with household essentials for Veterans moving into new apartments on the West Los Angeles VA Campus.

“You could see the students genuinely listening, asking questions, and expressing gratitude. It was heartwarming to witness such warm connections, and those moments of understanding and camaraderie really highlighted the impact they were having on each other,” said Director of Veteran Education Dr. Susie Lyons. “It was a beautiful reminder of the importance of honoring Veterans’ stories and sacrifices.”

The next day, all 28 students visited Fisher House, a temporary home for military families receiving treatment at the VA Medical Center and surrounding healthcare facilities. The students organized supplies, cleaned the kitchen, and prepped fresh produce for upcoming meals and snacks. Thursday ended with lunch shared alongside the Veterans, followed by conversations and a friendly game of softball.

“The students were absolutely terrific!” said Army Veteran Rob Hornsby. “I don’t think I’ve ever been given such respect as I was this afternoon.”

*Left: Students and Director of Veteran Education Dr. Susie Lyons serving lunch for residents of the Domiciliary on the VA campus*



### Brentwood Again Hosts VA Adaptive Sports Invitational

Basketball players in wheelchairs scooted across the Pavilion to swoosh a ball through the net. Baseball players with visual impairment timed their swings to the approaching ball’s beep-beep-beep.

In mid-November, Brentwood School hosted the VA Greater Los Angeles Health Care’s Adaptive Sports Invitational for the second year. Partnering with the West LA VA and its Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Services, Brentwood School welcomed participants with a wide range of skill levels, who played sports including basketball, pickleball, cornhole, baseball, fencing, and goalball, as well as other games and pastimes. They also took advantage of yoga and tai chi, and got creative with a variety of arts activities.

Adaptive sports are modified for the needs of people with disabilities — in this case, primarily Veterans injured while serving our country. Brentwood students volunteered at the event, playing Connect 4 and badminton with Veterans, welcoming and directing them, chasing balls at the Pavilion and baseball field, and serving meals.

### Partners in Fitness

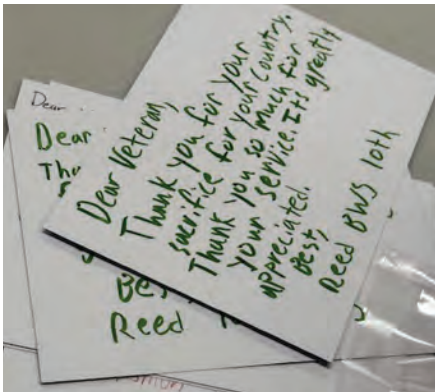
Three times weekly, Brentwood hosts Gerofit fitness classes for Veterans in the Pavilion, a VA effort with instructors from UCLA’s physical therapy program. Another example of our public-private partnership in action!



### Gratitude for Veterans

Before Veterans Day, students across all grade levels wrote heartfelt notes of gratitude to Veterans, which were distributed at Home for Heroes, the Domiciliary, the VA Hospital, housing units, and other facilities on the West Los Angeles VA Campus. Students learned about Veterans’ contributions through age-appropriate lesson plans before creating the cards.

The notes were also included in bags of food collected during the school’s Thanksgiving drive. A few years ago, one Veteran was so moved by his card that he framed it and came to school to thank administrators. Handwritten notes of appreciation have also been included in the 430 move-in kits assembled thus far by Brentwood for Veterans moving onto the West LA VA campus.





Right: Amanda always stood out, even as a 10th grader playing soccer during an alumni-student game in 2006.

# BUILDING A LEGACY, ONE GOAL AT A TIME

By Kelley Lonergan '06

**It's not easy to start an all-female soccer club in a male-dominated sports world. Just ask Amanda Lisberger '08.**

Amanda Lisberger '08 has always been in motion. From the moment her parents signed her up for sports at age four, she's been sprinting, kicking, and leading, both on and off the field. Her journey from student-athlete to co-founder of a semi-pro women's soccer team in Texas is a story of resilience — and belief in the power of what's known as the beautiful game.

Her team, Austin Rise FC, actually grew out of disillusionment. In 2022, a few years after graduating with her master's in special education from the University of Texas at Austin, Amanda and four other female soccer players got together to brainstorm. Discouraged by

their previous experiences in the world of soccer, Amanda and her co-founders wanted to create an inclusive space, forming a team where every woman would feel comfortable. And so Austin Rise, one of the only 100% female-founded soccer clubs, was born.

Starting a soccer club was not easy. Women's sports have long struggled for equal funding, and the five co-founders learned that gaining support for a female team wasn't as simple as putting together a welcoming, talented group of women. Despite the challenges and fight for sponsorships, Austin Rise has continued to grow. The team has built a loyal fan



***Discouraged by their previous experiences in the world of soccer, Amanda and her co-founders wanted to create an inclusive space, forming a team where everyone would feel comfortable.***

base, thanks to word of mouth and social media. “It’s amazing to see,” said Amanda.

With dreams of becoming professional, Austin Rise has been seeking more sponsorships, as well as practicing for the June 2025 “The Soccer Tournament” (TST) in North Carolina. “This is probably one of our biggest, most exciting journeys that we have gone on as a team,” said Amanda. “I think the future is bright for us.” The tournament’s grand prize? \$1 million.

What keeps Amanda and Austin Rise FC thriving? Empowering young female athletes. Amanda takes pride in being able to offer opportunities to other soccer players like her, showing them that there



are opportunities outside of college and professional sports. She loves creating “a positive outlook” on soccer and a community where everyone can have a role on the team.

“Co-founding Austin Rise has given me more opportunities than I ever thought I would have in a lifetime,” said Amanda. She’s thrown out the first pitch at a minor league baseball game, she’s been on the cover of Austin Woman magazine, and she’s done live interviews for local news channels. “I’ve met some incredible people on this journey, and I don’t think I would have if I weren’t a part of Austin Rise,” she said. “I am forever grateful.”

Growing up, Amanda played myriad sports (including flag football on the boys team in 7th grade at Brentwood!) She tried swimming, diving, and tennis as a child, then went on to be a tri-athlete at Brentwood’s Upper School, participating in soccer, cross country, and track and field. While she enjoyed the physical aspect of each sport, she most loved the camaraderie between her teammates on the soccer pitch.

Don’t assume Amanda’s world today revolves only around soccer. For the past eight years, she has worked as a behavioral analyst with children with autism. “I love

every bit of it,” she said. She also coaches a girls’ soccer team, and in the off season, plays for a semi-professional indoor soccer team. Not to mention spending time with her husband of five years, Chip, and their two cats, Loki and Bandit.

So how did this Eagle get to the top? Amanda gives credit to Brentwood for her many successes. “Brentwood showed me that, yes, things can get hard, but there are resources that can help you accomplish your goals,” she said. During her six years at the school, Amanda learned that even if you think something is out of reach, you can still get there through hard work and determination. “I know that sounds so cliché,” she laughs, “but it’s true!”

What advice would Amanda give to a current Eagle? “Don’t give up on your dreams, and surround yourself with people who are going to build you up and not break you down.” A self-described “super shy, introverted kid,” Amanda learned that speaking up and asking for help pays off.

“Don’t be afraid to ask questions, ask for help, ask for advice,” she said. “That’s what’s going to make you a better person.” Her parting thought? “Don’t be afraid of failure.”

*To learn more about Austin Rise, visit [austinrisefc.com](http://austinrisefc.com).*





Photo by Anna Azarov

# AT THE FOREFRONT OF A.I.

By Gail Friedman

**Tyler Hochman ’15 knows if you want to quit your job. He may know it before you do.**

This Brentwood Alum is not clairvoyant or particularly intuitive. But he’s developed a tool, using AI, that takes reams of your company’s data, along with publicly available data, and processes it into information that business leaders can use. If they can anticipate who will quit and even know why, they can take steps to improve their company’s retention.

Consider one hospital network in Florida that discovered just how ineffective its attempts to retain nurses were. When

Tyler’s company, FORE, took a hard look, it found that nurse burn-out was not due primarily to the fast pace or the live-or-die decisions nurses were making. FORE’s algorithm looked at the days nurses worked, when shifts started and ended, whether certain nurses had a disproportionate share of high-need patients, and other satisfaction influencers — analyzing data overnight that might have taken years to decipher manually.

Lo and behold, the nurses loved their jobs but hated their schedule, and the hospital stopped relying on well-intentioned meditation apps and instead adjusted scheduling to improve retention. “Hospitals were spending a ton of money on initiatives that were completely useless,” Tyler said, “but never had the data to know how useless they were.”

When Tyler started FORE three years ago, it was focused on this kind of workplace retention, but it recently widened its services, now building full data infrastructures for companies. FORE — and its algorithm — has helped a fashion company analyze customers’ personal taste to create wardrobe recommendations from an AI stylist. It dug into social media data for a client who wanted to understand what influencers were saying online. It analyzed the efficiency of a private equity firm’s portfolio companies.

“We are industry agnostic,” Tyler said. That keeps it interesting for this restless serial entrepreneur.

This is Tyler’s sixth entrepreneurial venture — if you count his gem-cutting business when he was 14. When he was in Brentwood’s Middle School, he was cutting stones for jewelry, selling them to his grandmother’s friends, and making barely enough to cover the equipment he was using. In college, he created business #2, a quantitative consulting firm. Next came Spreee, a restaurant reservation app whose technology he sold.

He’s uniquely suited to entrepreneurship: “I always had a numbness to risk that allowed me to be a good entrepreneur — not even a justified numbness,” he admitted. “Kind of an irrational numbness.”

That may stem from his confidence, which he partly attributes to Brentwood. “To be an entrepreneur you have to have a high degree of confidence in yourself that is battle-tested,” he said. “Brentwood wasn’t easy, but it was very fair. If you did the work you got the reward that work corresponded to.”

In 2023, inspired by lessons gleaned after the George Floyd murder, Tyler devised venture #4, SafeStop, a way for a cop to pull you over without getting out of the police car. “Because you didn’t have an officer peering over you with a pistol on their hip, it really deescalated the situation,” Tyler said. While SafeStop is still in the pilot stage, Tyler believes the technology will eventually become standard. “Traffic stops are an antiquated approach,” he said.

He then briefly toyed with an app called Vella, which he described as “a cross between a therapist and a life goal counselor.” Using metadata, it could create an individual’s life plan.

In short, Vella didn’t sell — at least not enough to ramp up the company as quickly as Tyler would have liked. But it was far from a loss because Tyler brought Vella’s investors to FORE.

Today FORE focuses on three components of a company or institution. First, information, or what he called “the data you ingest, such as sales, health data, stocks, anything.” Next, structuring, formatting, and storing that data. And finally AI analytics — how to get insights from the data — FORE’s original focus.

The company’s mission and client base are broad enough to keep Tyler excited. “FORE’s given me a really cool opportunity to touch a lot of industries,” he said. “I can’t sit still, but I don’t have to.”

***“I always had a numbness to risk that allowed me to be a good entrepreneur – not even a justified numbness. Kind of an irrational numbness.”***



# AN ERA OF GROWTH AND CURIOSITY

Photos By Danny Moloshok '00

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE  
BRENTWOOD SCHOOL INSPIRES EVERY STUDENT TO:  
Think critically and creatively.  
Act ethically.  
Shape a future with meaning.

*From 2011 to 2025, Dr. Mike Riera led Brentwood School with positive energy, unflagging integrity, a fearless approach to facing challenges head-on, and the determination and ability to set goals and reach them.*



# WALK, TALK, AND LISTEN



By Dawn Cunnion,  
Former Associate Head of School

*In mid-January, Dr. Mike told the community that 2024-25 would be his last as Brentwood’s Head of School.*

As the time neared for Mike’s announcement, we would sit and discuss the transition — everything from succession planning and goals still to be realized to the timing of his announcement and, of course, the celebration of his 14 years at the school.

Mike is a collaborative leader, so most of these conversations focused on the needs of the school community. However, when it came time to talk about celebrating him, the tone changed. Mike became definitive: “No traditional announcements or speeches that include a list of accomplishments.” It was SO like Mike, who deeply believes in the importance of partnership



and teamwork. But it made writing this tribute very challenging!

How could I not mention how he made curiosity a foundation for everything that happens at the school or the conversation during his first days on campus when he wanted to create a weekly all-school newsletter? So much for applauding his work to create a powerful, yet concise Statement of Purpose, or a strategic agenda that provided flexibility to plan for the future and to “pivot” (one of his favorite words during the COVID years) as needed when challenges or opportunities arose.

Parent U, Open Mike Nights, the All-Family Celebration of Diversity, or the Young Women’s Conferences, all off the table. BCIL, nope! And how would I work

*Opposite page, Dr. Mike talking (at Parent University); this page, walking and listening with Math Department Chair Billy Kaplan ’04*

around one of the most transformational accomplishments in the school’s history — the “Brentwood, even better” campaign, which built the Middle School and Saltair buildings and renovated the Eagle Center, but most importantly allowed for the creation of a true Middle School program, a move to three classes per grade in the Lower School, an enlarged Upper School student body, and enhanced programming that benefits each student now and into the future.

So the question became: how to honor Mike while at the same time honoring his wishes?

I thought about this A LOT. I even asked a number of people to share one word to describe Mike, and while their choices were interesting, I kept coming back to these three words: Walk, Talk, and Listen.

**Walk.** When Mike first arrived during the summer of 2011 he was rarely in his office. He was walking all around the school, getting to know the people, sharing ideas, and hearing their thoughts. There were times I would hear an idea or question posed



(continued from page 27)

over and over as he engaged with different people. As I watched him I wondered, how was he going to get things done, especially after school started? I came to understand something very important about Mike — he works best when he is in motion. If he needs to make a decision, he walks; a difficult conversation, he walks; time to catch up with someone on a project or idea, he walks. It is a good thing the Lower School is a few blocks away because that gave him an excuse to walk between the campuses each day.

**Talk.** When you hand him a microphone, Mike is at home. And if you ask him to talk about the school, you can forget about setting a time limit. He has an amazing talent: he develops an outline of what he wants to say in his head, then talks extemporaneously, infusing stories to bring his message to life. Mike also prefers in-person communication. If you can't talk with him in person, then it's a call, which brings me to ...

**Listen.** Mike deeply believes in the value of conversation. I mentioned that he is a collaborative leader; he understands the power, and messiness, of groupthink and how important it is to hear others' thoughts and perspectives. "What am I missing?" "What do you think?" "I need to hear your thoughts if you disagree." All are comments Mike regularly says before carefully listening to the response.

Mike, thank you! You will be remembered for your presence, your strong leadership and enthusiastic support of the school, and your ability to hear our community. Thank you for 14 years of integrity, of compassion, and of using our Statement of Purpose as a consistent guide for wise and ethical decisions. Thank you for your unwavering principles. And thank you for 14 years of Walk, Talk, and Listen!



**BRENTWOOD,  
EVEN BETTER.**

When Dr. Mike began his tenure at Brentwood School in July of 2011, a recently approved 30-year Education Master Plan anticipated a modest Upper School building in the parking lot adjacent to Temple Hall, funded by a \$20 million capital campaign.

An enthusiastic visionary, Mike took one look at the master plan with fresh eyes and made the case to trustees that a more transformational project slated for years later should be an immediate priority. In February 2012, we made our case to the board. We carefully outlined how building a state-of-the-art Middle School building into the hillside of Barrington Place and adding a two-story classroom building on the West Campus would create an optimal learning experience for our students, K-12, allowing us to reorganize into a K-5 Lower School, 6-8 Middle School, and 9-12 Upper School. This new structure was not only developmentally appropriate, it would allow us to expand enrollment and create a 6th grade entry point attractive to public school families. With an estimated cost of about \$75 million, including a \$10 million endowment contribution, this would be the single largest undertaking in the school's history, yet we demonstrated how our loyal Brentwood School community would come through. By the end of that meeting, the board had unanimously approved the campaign that would become known as "Brentwood, even better."

For the next five years, we secured an expanded CUP, building permits, and the funds to begin construction. In spring 2017, a groundbreaking celebration on the East Campus attracted close to 1,000 guests. The event culminated with Dr. Mike getting behind the wheel of a giant excavator and knocking down a retaining wall as the crowd fired confetti cannons and shouted with glee.

By spring 2019, the field had been raised 40 feet to create parking, and the Middle School facade stood proudly at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Barrington Place, offering Brentwood School a street presence for the first time. That June, we turned our attention to the Lower School's new building and kicked things off with a kid-

centered groundbreaking during our annual Field Day. Among other activities, Lower School students delighted in being able to "graffiti" the West Campus admissions space that was slated for demolition, sit in a real Bobcat skid-steer loader, and compete in a construction-themed tug-of-war.

That summer was a race to the finish, but we opened in the fall of 2019 with grades 6-8 together for the first time in our brand new Middle School and our first K-12 opening ceremony on the Middle School field.

Construction on the West Campus Saltair Building was able to continue during the pandemic's school closure, and by the time students returned to in-person learning, the Saltair Building was ready. Dr. Mike's leadership had been integral to the successful transformation of our school through the "Brentwood, even better" campaign. I hope it will be a source of great pride every time he thinks of that first opening ceremony on the East Campus and all that we accomplished together.

In 2021, after years of skillful planning, the vision and dedication of Dr. Mike, a hardworking capital campaign team, and \$90 million from more than 350 generous donors, we wrote this to the community:

*"Words fail to express the power of this moment and cannot aptly capture the magic we have already seen unfolding in the new spaces on each campus. These spaces have done more than make possible the reorganization of the three divisions into K-5, 6-8, 9-12 entities with expanded enrollment; they have created an incubator for K-12 civic engagement and social entrepreneurship in the form of the Belldegrun Center for Innovative Leadership, built a home for our DEI work via the Multicultural Center, and have manifested remarkable showcases to expand arts and athletics as well as gather our community together. Brentwood is, indeed, even better."*

— Gennifer Yoshimaru







IT'S OUR TURN: YOUNG WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

In 2011, at the beginning Dr. Mike’s tenure, a group of enthusiastic and highly motivated Upper School girls approached him with an idea — to bring hundreds of young women from throughout Los Angeles to Brentwood School for a day of inspiration and empowerment. Moved to action by their compelling proposal, Dr. Mike quickly assembled a team to make this day a reality.

Inspired by the California Women’s Conference, hosted by former California First Lady Maria Shriver, “It’s Our Turn: Young Women’s Conference at Brentwood School” aimed to empower young women to take control of their own lives and break away from societal norms. “The YWC,” as it was known, focused on transcending popular culture’s portrayal of young women.

Above, Dr. Mike with Young Women’s Conference speaker Katherine Schwarzenegger ’08, Honorary Chair Maria Shriver, and student conference leader Jade Iovine ’12

It brought together female leaders, mentors, and performers, such as Honorary Chair Maria Shriver, Lady Gaga, Lisa Leslie, Reese Witherspoon, Geena Davis, Cleo Wade, Mary J. Blige, and Diane von Furstenberg, to address issues relevant to teenage girls.

The student planning committees dedicated countless hours to the event, collaborating with faculty and staff to refine topics, design sessions, connect with potential speakers, and develop a marketing strategy. Dr. Mike, who wholeheartedly supported their efforts, ensured that the conference was a priority for the school and emphasized what students would learn from planning and executing this major event. As he wrote in BWS Magazine, “While the outcome exceeded all expectations, it was actually the process that offered some of the most powerful and lasting lessons.”

The goal was to inspire, empower, and guide attendees, and each of the five conferences — over 10 years — attracted over 1,000 students in grades 7-12 from throughout Los Angeles. Thanks to Dr. Mike’s leadership, the conference left a lasting impact, empowering young women to take the lead in their own lives and to inspire others.

— Shirley Blake

DEEP DEDICATION TO INNOVATION

Today, many families applying to Brentwood say the BCIL — the Belldegrün Center for Innovative Leadership — is one of the things that most excites them. But seven years ago this center of innovation was an innovation itself — shepherded by the ideas and dedication of Dr. Mike.

He envisioned the BCIL not as a place, said former Associate Head of School Dawn Cunnion, but as a way of thinking. “That way it could be infused into what you did in your classroom,” she said. “The whole idea was that design thinking and learning would be able to permeate every student’s experience.”

That the program should reach even our youngest students seems obvious today, as 2nd graders offer solutions to traffic congestion on Sunset Boulevard and 5th graders prototype accessible playgrounds. By Upper School, with hands-on and abstract skills well developed, and leadership skills rein-forced through the BCIL’s peer tutoring and Eagle to Eagle programs, students are creating businesses and winning robotics tournaments. And dozens of Upper School students immerse themselves in independent studies. There’s a reason people are talking about the BCIL.

“Mike has been a true champion for BCIL, ensuring that innovation is not just for a select few,” said BCIL Director Darlene Fukuji. “His commitment to equitable student experiences has shaped a culture where every learner can engage in meaningful, real-world problem-solving.”

Early on, Dr. Mike shared the BCIL’s mission through numerous meetings and receptions. “Mike had a vision of another leadership opportunity for our students and worked alongside the Belldegrüns to spearhead funding for the initiative,” said Josh Berger ’96, the BCIL’s first director. “He never wavered in his belief that this would have a meaningful impact.”

One focus throughout has been that faculty as well as students reap benefits from the BCIL’s embrace of innovation. “I’ve seen firsthand how he empowers our faculty,” said Darlene. “His willingness to foster creativity and embrace new ideas has been instrumental in making BCIL a place where bold thinking thrives.”

“The whole idea was that design thinking and learning would be able to permeate every student’s experience.”



Top: In 2020, Teddy Miller ’95 and Raven Morgan ’14 spoke to students, part of the BCIL Speaker Series.

Bottom: JoJo F. ’26 and Eric G. ’26 won LA County Science Fair recognition for a robot that they control with their thoughts.





## THE GREAT PIVOT

The COVID-19 pandemic tested leadership across the globe, especially in school communities. For Dr. Mike, it was a critical opportunity to lead with determination and compassion, guiding a team of administrators through challenging strategic decisions while also tending to the emotional and physical needs of families, faculty, and staff.

It was a year like no other, summed up best by Dr. Mike in the 2021 issue of BWS Magazine, "This was a year in which we experienced, firsthand, how to stay resilient, flexible, and optimistic, with a fair amount of creativity thrown into the mix as well."

Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Mike demonstrated a commitment to safety first and foremost, but always with an eye toward keeping our sense of community intact. When schools were forced to pivot to remote learning almost overnight, he prioritized the continuation of learning and supported faculty in learning new technologies. But he also kept our

*Think creatively: Brentwood held its 2020 commencement in a drive-in theater; opposite page, no-contact 8th grade promotion and Halloween parade; a cautious regathering.*

community connected, with creative ideas that often included drive-through events.

Dr. Mike reveled in these opportunities to see faces — masked, but smiling — as families picked up supplies, received COVID tests, honked at their costumed teachers during the Halloween Parade, and even when they ultimately arrived on campus to get vaccinated (itself an enormous undertaking). Perhaps the most noteworthy example of creativity was the Class of 2020 Commencement ceremony at a drive-in theater in Riverside, where graduates were celebrated with honking car horns and homemade family videos on the big screen.

Dr. Mike worked tirelessly to ensure that each decision was made thoughtfully and inclusively. In weekly meetings, his COVID team was encouraged to voice concerns and propose solutions, fostering an atmosphere of collaboration and unity. In the end, when many schools made the difficult financial decision to let go of employees, Dr. Mike was deeply committed to keeping the community whole, and not one employee was laid off during that unprecedented year.

The pandemic revealed the strength of Dr. Mike's leadership — the ability to assemble a team of people who would combine intellect with heart to make difficult decisions. His stewardship of that team ensured that the community not only survived the crisis but emerged stronger, more united, and deeply appreciative of the value of our everyday, shared interactions.

— Shirley Blake



## FOR THOSE WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY

The school's commitment to Veterans is crystal clear, thanks in part to the extensive growth in Brentwood School's programming for Veterans under Dr. Mike's leadership.

Since Dr. Mike began in 2011, programs for Veterans have expanded exponentially and, in 2016, the Veterans Center for Recreation and Education (VCRE) was created. Dr. Mike empowered Assistant Head of School Gennifer Yoshimaru to expand the school's Veteran services, knowing that she was a dedicated advocate for Veterans and their well-being.

Thanks to Dr. Mike and Gen's leadership, the school now offers a range of classes for Veterans, from cooking to financial literacy, from computer skills to yoga and creative writing; job training, for example in forklift operation and guard certification; a daily shuttle around the West LA VA complex; a full athletic facility with trainers; thousands of meals; toiletries and clothing; kits filled with household basics for Veterans moving into new housing on the West LA VA campus; and scholarships to camp and school for children of Veterans. Brentwood School also hosts the VA Stand Down and the VA Adaptive Sports Invitational, two enormous events that welcome Veterans from throughout the Los Angeles area.

"Opportunities for entertainment, connection, physical fitness, and personal growth are integral to a thriving Veteran community," said Gen. "Dr. Mike has been an avid supporter of making sure Brentwood School offers ample resources in all of these areas for the Veterans living on the West LA VA Campus and in the surrounding area."

*Above, Dr. Mike and Brentwood School volunteers serve BBQ, a tradition at the Stand Down each year.*



Q&A WITH DR. MIKE

# PARTING THOUGHTS



Left, Dr. Mike (at the 2023 West Campus Field Day) has written about the importance of play in engaging young learners.

*Dr. Mike spoke with BWS Magazine, reflecting on his 14 years leading the school.*

**Among the long list of tangible accomplishments, what are some of your biggest points of pride?**

It might be a strange thing to say, but I think I brought in additional elements of playfulness, fun, and pride in the school. That is important to me. A student recently ran out of class and stopped me and said, “Would you be in our video?” So I went into her class and played the assistant principal in a modern version of *Macbeth*. I love that the students felt comfortable spontaneously coming and grabbing me to do it.

Another point of pride is our learning environment. During the campaign to build the Middle School and Saltair Building, we always said, “It’s not about the buildings; it’s



“It might be a strange thing to say, but I think I brought in additional elements of playfulness, fun, and pride in the school.”





about what happens in the buildings.” We have fabulous teachers here. And we support them in their ambitions to be the best possible teachers. We support innovation, and we care for our teachers. One teacher recently said to me, “I’ve been here five years and I know why people stay for 20, 25 years. This is a pretty unique and special place.” So I’m proud that we were able to do that.

**How would you define academic excellence?**

I think everyone looks at it differently. For some, it’s getting into a great college — however you define great. For others, it’s high test scores or grades. To me, it means that students can tolerate frustration in

the name of learning. That getting confused doesn’t frighten them. That they know how to work with confusion, because on the other side of confusion is clarity.

Piaget said it well: children are born naturally curious. But school can unintentionally beat the curiosity out of them. This is not much different than what Denise Pope at Stanford said about her program Challenge Success, that students learn to “do” school, but they’re not engaged with it. One of my goals all along has been to have students more engaged in school. That’s one of the reasons we started the BCIL. The whole approach there is to grab students right where they are, K-12. And there’s no prescriptive way to do this: there’s no, “Oh, go study for this test,” or “Memorize this and you’ll have an answer.”

As an example, we have 60-plus students doing independent studies in the Upper School on topics that they have chosen and that matter to them. Most of these come out of the BCIL. Nearly all of these students are doing these studies in the name of curiosity and excellence.

*Opposite page: Dr. Mike pitching at a softball game*

*Below: Lower School students touring the East Campus construction site, their future home in the Middle School*

**What else makes you feel proud?**

A few years back we did this fast and essential campaign to raise the money for the Stadium Field. When we installed the new field we also added lights. Approximately 10 families made this happen and overnight created our own BWS version of “Friday Night Lights,” which has been a huge success and community-builder.

I think we’ve done a great job with our athletic program. [He points to a basketball on his shelf signed by longtime Duke University Coach Mike Krzyzewski.] I always thought of Brentwood as a K-12 version of Duke University, that we could have top caliber students who are also top caliber athletes and artists. We don’t have to sacrifice. I feel like we’ve done a good job of this.

**Can you describe some of the challenges you’ve faced?**

Well, the first challenge was in the vision of the school, the physical school. Gen Yoshimaru (Assistant Head of School, who joined Brentwood the same year as me), and my wife Megan, who is an architect, were studying the existing master plans to build a building in the upper lot by Temple Hall. We all looked at each other and said, “Why are we doing that building and not the Middle School building and the building on the West Campus?” which were planned for much later. We were confident we could raise the necessary funds. Six months after reviewing the master plan and looking at the research,

“One of my goals all along has been to have students more engaged in school.”





the board voted unanimously to move forward with this much more ambitious building project.

After the murder of George Floyd and in the midst of COVID was by far one of the most challenging of times during my years at Brentwood. From meeting twice a week over the summer with No Blackout Brentwood alums to better understand their experiences and perspectives, we learned how to move the school forward in more equitable and inclusive ways. There were some tough moments during these Zoom meetings, but what kept us all moving forward — alums, board members, administrators — was the belief in Brentwood and all that we could accomplish, working together, which we have done.

Of course, the VA has been an ongoing challenge, though we have grown the partnership into a robust program of courses and services for Vets as well as shared facilities.

I fondly remember walking our campus with then Secretary of Veteran Affairs Robert A. McDonald, who said, quite simply and elegantly: “Brentwood needs to become essential to the well-being of our Vets.”

I immediately asked our Assistant Head of School, Gennifer Yoshimaru, to create and head up a program to work with the Vets. Gen has built the program from the ground up, including robust Veteran educational programs. We have more Vets using the facility than ever before and many that have turned their lives around for the better.

**Let’s talk about social-emotional intelligence. Your focus on this distinguishes you among heads of school.**

Yes, it’s always been important to me. In fact, in the first strategic agenda, we

focused on the essential integration of academic excellence, emotional intelligence, and character development. For seven years, we looked at how these three intertwine, when they do, how they do, where they miss. We asked ourselves: “We know how to bring in more character development, but how do we bring more emotional intelligence into the equation?”

To this end, the PA sponsored a three-day workshop for 40 faculty and staff with the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, here on campus over the summer. I knew that if we spent seven years thinking about it, we would deepen our understanding in significant ways, which I think we did. It still lives in the ethos of the school and distinguishes us from other schools. And we are always working on it!

**Why was this focus so important to you?**  
I think it’s somewhat innate. My mom died when I was 16, unexpectedly. I was in a public school in Plainville, CT, a small New England town where the ethos was, basically, don’t cry over spilt milk. You just had to get on, and nobody (students, teachers, and coaches) really understood or knew what to say to me, so they tended to keep their distance or be careful not to raise the subject.

At every school where I've worked, I have always included a focus on emotional intelligence. This is one of the reasons we created Parent University at Brentwood. We wanted the opportunity for parents and guardians to be together to deepen their parenting skills and to raise the level of emotional intelligence within our greater community.

Most importantly, when a focus on social-emotional intelligence is added to the mix, it actually raises the level of academic excellence. That is, when emotional intelligence is lifted, academic understanding deepens.

**“I wanted to demystify the role of Head of School.”**

**Finally, why do we call you Dr. Mike, not Dr. Riera?**  
I wanted to demystify the role of Head of School. I came from a school where all the teachers used their first names with the students, including me. When I got here, I was told the tradition is that people would call you Dr. Riera. I immediately pushed back. That is when we came up with Dr. Mike. It’s got the Dr. part that people need to hear, but the Mike keeps it playful. Or as my psychology students said about me in my role as teacher, “Psych with Mike.”

**Every Object Tells a Story**

Dr. Mike's office bookshelf provides a glimpse of his Brentwood journey and what matters most to him.

**A**

*A tai chi instructor: Dr. Mike has studied tai chi for 35 years and does it every morning and evening.*

**B**

*A bobblehead of the longtime head of John Thomas Dye School, Ray Michaud, whom Dr. Mike respected*

**C**

*A hard hat worn during the Middle School construction*

**D**

*Everyone on the Brentwood Leadership Team received this toy phone to remind them to talk rather than email extensively.*

**E**

*Dr. Mike and his mother*



**F**

*A photo of a bunker, a remnant from the Urban Military Academy, that was built into the ground that became the Middle School*

**G**

*Basketball signed by UCLA coach John Wooden — Dr. Mike is a dedicated basketball player and fan. To its right: Who knew? Dr. Mike can juggle.*

**H**

*A boomerang used during graduation to demonstrate how acts of kindness come back to you; a ball by Kehinde Wiley that Dr. Mike says reminds him that basketball and leadership are art.*

**I**

*An encaustic painting by Dr. Mike's wife, Megan Riera*

**J**

*Dr. Mike's children, Lucia '14 and Sam '20*





*Left: Brentwood's incoming Head of School, Dr. Timothy Cottrell, and his wife Hiroko, at the Parents Association's winter-themed benefit in March*

# GETTING TO KNOW DR. COTTRELL

*To our incoming Head of School, a community that lives its values is the ultimate gift to students.*

Growing up, Dr. Timothy Cottrell, Brentwood's next head of school, worked in his father's standardbred horse racing stable and on his mother's family farm. Two to three dozen horses, tens of thousands of chickens, and about 1,000 acres were more of a focus than school-work — so much more that the absences and tardies he accumulated in his senior year required a faculty vote to let him receive a diploma.

Needless to say, things changed when he arrived at college, with the work ethic learned on the farm transferred to study. When Dr. Cottrell says that an educational path can be “super nonlinear,” he is not sharing an abstract philosophy. He is speaking about experiences that have helped frame a compassionate and

empathetic perspective about today's students' highly organized and, at times, over-subscribed lives.

Despite relaxed expectations, the academic lightbulb shone many times in high school, but it became a beacon at Syracuse University, where Dr. Cottrell discovered that learning excited and energized him. It still does. Just ask him what he does for fun, and he may confess that for Dr. Cottrell, education — his own and others' — is his favorite pastime.

Considerable teaching prowess showed up early: he was a natural, and at Princeton, where he earned a master's and PhD in chemical engineering, Dr. Cottrell received the Excellence in Teaching Award three times as well as the university-wide Association of

Princeton Graduate Alumni Teaching Award. His first career move, however, was not to a school. Blending interest in education and an entrepreneurial streak, he founded Princeton Teaching Associates Software in 1994, focusing on educational software. From the multimedia *I Ching* to SAT preparation software, he and his team received many industry awards.

The transition to independent schools began with the Lawrenceville School in New Jersey, where he was Chief Communication and Information Officer

**When Dr. Cottrell says that an educational path can be “super nonlinear,” he is not sharing an abstract philosophy.**



Right: Dr. Cottrell speaking with Sophia S. '29 at the BCIL Innovation Challenge

Opposite page: Dr. Cottrell (with Board of Trustees Vice Chair Laura Dudley) greeting a parent at Brentwood Strong, the Parent University event focused on trauma support after the LA wildfires

and taught science. He split time between Lawrenceville and Silicon Valley, but schools — and students — captured his heart and fed his desire for a mission-driven life. Indeed, the teaching that earned recognition at Princeton would become a lifelong focus — and remains a favorite aspect of his career. In his current role as head of ‘Iolani School, he has taught physics, differential equations, leadership, renewable energy systems, and climate change. Once at Brentwood, he’ll teach in the Upper School. He can’t imagine not teaching.

In recent years, Dr. Cottrell has led two very different schools, demonstrating that principles of good leadership can straddle widely varying goals, populations, and philosophies. For six years, he led the Harley School in Rochester, New York, a progressive pre-K-12 school with about 500 students. It is a nonsectarian school with, among other distinctions, a center for mindfulness and empathy education created as a result of Dr. Cottrell’s first Edward E. Ford Foundation Educational Leadership Grant.

For the last 13 years, he has led ‘Iolani School in Honolulu, a K-12 school with 2,200 students, grounded in the Episcopal tradition and regularly heralded as the best private school in Hawai‘i. He helped fortify ‘Iolani’s reputation as a center of innovation and excellence that nurtures students who are both academically



talented and morally grounded. For Dr. Cottrell, community and values go hand in hand with rigor. “Genuinely caring about each other is the essential bond throughout any high-achieving school,” he said. “It allows a highly competitive, outward-facing experience to be coupled with a highly supportive and nurturing inward-facing experience.”

At ‘Iolani, Dr. Cottrell furthered his commitment to independent schools acting in service to their community. His second Educational Leadership Grant from the EE Ford Foundation created ‘Aina Informatics Network, an initiative to expand modern genomics education throughout Hawai‘i. With ‘Iolani as the hub from which to teach teachers and deploy laboratory equipment, ‘Aina

Informatics has become a network of nearly 50 public and independent schools that annually undertake statewide community science experiments and individual student research projects, which have won awards at the world’s most prestigious science competitions.

Dr. Cottrell envisions outreach initiatives here at Brentwood, too. “Brentwood’s commitment to the VA and many service partnerships is a strong basis from which to create new, outwardly facing programs that make a tangible, positive impact on the LA community,” he said.

It is an understatement to say that Dr. Cottrell enjoys his work. His interests include Buddhist psychology, deep-sea fishing, and a love of horses (“I’ll be the



#1 fan of the equestrian team,” he said). But first and foremost, his favorite activity is learning something new. He recently picked up a new programming language to learn bioinformatics (for fun), but learning on the job qualifies as entertainment too, in Dr. Cottrell’s world.

There was plenty to learn when he moved to Honolulu from Rochester, and understanding the unique culture of Hawai‘i and ‘Iolani School has been key to his success. The experience enormously influenced this East Coast native and the evolution of his leadership style.

“By and large, leadership on the continent has a tenor of ‘prove what you know, and then an organization will show that it cares,’ whereas leadership in Hawai‘i is grounded in ‘we will care about what you

know, when you show that you care,” Dr. Cottrell said. This, coupled with Hawaiian values such as aloha and kuleana (accountability for one’s actions and the well-being of the community) and an Eastern focus on collectivism and achieving with humility and gratitude, has shaped his core leadership priorities: caring and responsibility toward others, community above self, and the power of teamwork.

**For Dr. Cottrell, community and values go hand in hand with rigor.**

Now he and his wife Hiroko are ready to embrace and gain understanding of Brentwood’s culture and its place in

LA. They will be watching carefully and listening. “Leadership,” Dr. Cottrell said, “requires self-awareness and the ability to step back, listen, and learn.”

Don’t be surprised if some of the values and perspectives he’s come to live and lead by during his time in Hawai‘i are openly shared and evangelized. Said Dr. Cottrell: “Community, culture, and how they are expressed by the values with which we treat each other provide the most authentic social and emotional learning a school can offer, and also often the most valuable lifetime gift students take away from their educational experience.

“We hope to share some of what Hawai‘i has taught me,” he added. “Goodness knows, our world could use more aloha.” — GAIL FRIEDMAN



# A NTICIPATING THE OLYMPICS

The 2028 Olympics will be right here in Los Angeles, and Brentwood is excited. Lower Schoolers created As for the LA28 logo, and Upper School artists imagined that they were assigned a *New Yorker* cover about the epic event.

The 2028 Olympic Committee invited artists to contribute an illustrated “A” to the LA28 logo to represent the city’s breadth of perspectives and experiences. In a BCIL challenge, Lower School students designed their own As featuring something they love about their hometown. From animals to favorite foods, each design showcases the diverse interests and experiences of our young Angelenos.

“It was really amazing to see our students thinking hard about what is special about the city they live in,” said 3rd grade teacher Grace Dawson, “and what they would want to showcase to the rest of the world in 2028.”

— MEREDITH STORRS

Upper-level Drawing and Composition students met virtually with Till Lauer, an artist who has created many *New Yorker* magazine covers. He shared insights into his artistic journey and the process behind his *New Yorker* cover about the LA wildfires. Inspired by his presentation, students brainstormed concepts and composed initial designs for their own cover illustrations, based on the broad theme of the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. They then learned to use Procreate on iPad, a digital tool that allowed them to refine and bring their ideas to life. This hands-on experience provided students with the chance to blend traditional design techniques with modern digital tools, enhancing their creative process and their final work.

— ALYSSA CHAMPAGNE

*Above, left: An Olympic A by Sydney P. '32*

*Right: An A by Callie C. '32*







**THE MEANING BEHIND THE LOGO**

According to [la28.org](https://la28.org), the LA28 logo, unveiled in 2020, features a dynamic, interchangeable “A” to represent the city’s diverse and evolving character, making it the first ever-changing mark in Olympic history.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Olympic As by Aurelia L. '34, Vivian P. '34, Arjun H. '34, and Charlotte F. '34

This page, clockwise from top left: As by Sylvie A. '33, Olivia L. '36, and Blake W. '32





(Top row) Artists Brook D. '28, Eden H. '27, and Sebastian L. '27; (center row) Tara M. '25, Chloe Y. '28, and Cyrus C. '27; (bottom row) Owen G. '26, and Lily W. '28

(Top row) Artists Dean C. '28, Jayme P. '27, and Kruz J. '28; (center row) Roman L. '28, Nuri A. '28, and Isabella N. '27; (bottom row) JJ L. '28 and Lauryn F. '27





# X GAMES BRENTWOOD

**Hundreds gathered at Sony Studios in March for X Games Brentwood, the All-School Benefit — a snowy night full of music, food, and fun.**

“Wow, that drone light show was pretty amazing. I never thought I’d see Dr. Mike’s face made out of drones.”

Kimm Agam, outgoing co-chair of the Parents Association, wasn’t kidding. The

Parents Association Benefit, X Games Brentwood, brought a snowy wonderland to Sony Studios in March, and a special drone show lit up the sky with the school name, the Eagle, and Dr. Mike, peering over the crowd like a starry constellation.

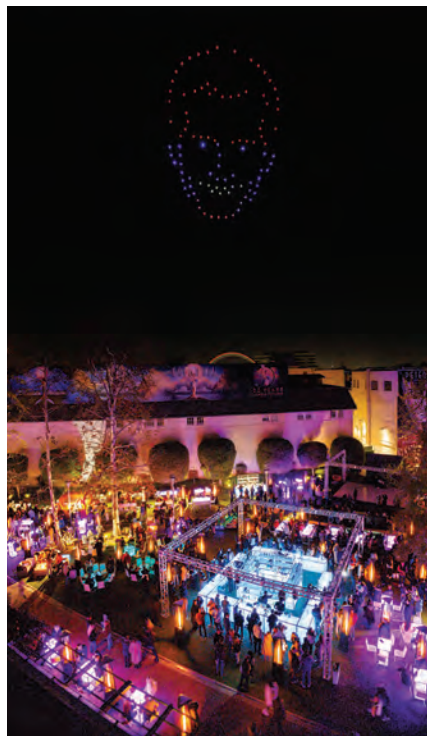
“Well it seems appropriate since he has been all of our guiding light at Brentwood these past 14 years,” deadpanned co-chair Ashley Cassir.

During the benefit, Kimm and Ashley honored Dr. Mike, first by bringing almost all the PA chairs he has worked with to the stage: Cece Karz, Laura Dudley, Kelly Griffin, and Allison Schwartz. Then they brought up Brentwood’s very own Paralympian, two-time gold medalist Ezra Frech ’23, who lauded Dr. Mike’s leadership and care for the community.

Thanks abound for the benefit and for the PA leadership in general — to Kimm for her leadership and dedication as the East Campus PA co-chair over the last two years, and to Ashley, the returning West Campus leader, who will shepherd the PA next year with East Campus co-chair Allison Schwartz.

Special thanks go to the people who planned X Games Brentwood: Head of Benefit Hayley Haefele and Benefit Chairs Tony Chu, Dana Nussbaum, and Ellie Javaheri; Head of Auction Dina Cohen; Auction Chairs Kira Bahat, Amanda Eberstein, Roya Melamed, Samantha Roman, and Claudine Shokouhi; and dozens of generous underwriting donors.

It was an Xtremely good time!



*Opposite page: Kimm Agam, Dana Nussbaum, Tony Chu, Ashley Cassir, Hayley Haefele, and Ellie Javaheri — the planners behind X Games Brentwood*

*Top right: Donna Bullock, Yaniece Elzien, and Leslie Borders*

*Middle: Sali and Thomas Swalla; in background, Marc and Aely Ullrich*

*Bottom left: Middle School math faculty Mike Kalan, Susan Dickinson, and Mike’s wife Debra*

## THANK YOU TO OUR UNDERWRITERS

### OUT OF BOUNDS

Alexis & Tim Byk Family Foundation

### CHUTES

Anonymous, Nanna & Dan Stern

### HALF-PIPE

Alison & Sasha ’91 Palevsky, Leah & Steven Yari

### SLOPESTYLE

Katie & Steve Avery, Kavitha & Sunny Bhatia, Aimee & Faisal Gill, Shireen Lee & Ezra Perlman, Hillary & Lance ’94 Milken, Sabina & David ’94 Nathanson, Shannon Mabrey Rotenberg & Michael Rotenberg, Hedy & Benjamin Nazarian, and Nicole & Spencer Silna

### SPIN OUT

Sheryl & Tom Amster, Pooja & Anish Aswani, Brinah & Roy Bank, Sunny & Jonathan Barach, Marina & Adam ’89 Cohn, The Falzetta Family, Angela & Daniel Feiner, Charlene Choi Garcia & Daniel Garcia, Kelly & Justin Griffin, Ellie & Simon Javaheri, Leah & Jason Karlov, Eden & Steven Romick, Betsy Katz Sandler & Scott ’92 Sandler, Laurie & Adam Selkowitz, Brett ’96 & Jake Smith, Douglas & Margaret Spencer, Obaida & Scott Watt, and Hila & Jeremy Wenokur

### OLLIE

Kimm & Nathan ’95 Agam, Anonymous, Arda & Craig Berberian, Ashley & Jon Cassir, Nancy & Baldwin Chin, Brynn & Ryan Efune, Catherine Gopaulsingh & Scott Friedman, Allison & Rusty Hill, Kate & Tim Ivers, Sara & Alim Kassam, Deanna & Eric Kripke, Jenny ’03 Lee & Randy Moser, Carla & Rodney Liber, Lindsay & Steven Lilien, Jodi & Bradley ’97 Meadow, Dana & Brian ’97 Nussbaum, Namrita & Dennis Puri, Rebecca & Matthew ’98 Rich, The Riera Family, Allison ’97 & Matt Schwartz, Sarvenaz & Farhad Sigari, The Smith-Davis Family, and Thea & Jay Wolf

### APRES ALL DAY

Anonymous, Valerie & Patrick Callaghan, Melanie & Tony Chu, Dina & Noel Cohen, Ann & Kris Cueva, Laura & Randy Dudley, Brooke & Jeffrey ’95 Ehrenpreis, Elizabeth ’92 Elson-Birnbach & Michael Birnbach, Karin & Alex Evans, Lauren & Josh Fein, Haley & Adam Fisher, Vivian & Lawrence Grafstein, Ryan & Josh Gutierrez, Hayley & Ben Haefele, Tamara Horwich & Gerry Lipshutz, Linda & Kyle Hoshide, Jennifer & Andy ’94 Howard, Dori & Jordan Katz, Jeffrey & Jane Kikuta, Carmel & Manuel Lastra, The Mack Family, The Mintzer Family, Jill & Eric Olofson, Sandy ’98 Sabet Pirnazar & David Pirnazar, Carrie & Evan Rifkin, Ashley ’97 Liu Ristau & Rob Ristau, The Salem Family, The Sharma Family, Brooke & George Spanos, Sali & Thomas Swalla, Tal & Matt Taylor, Aely & Marc Ullrich, Melita Viegas, Julie & Rusty Weiss, Lauren ’01 & Robert Windom, Tracy & Sam Yadegar, and Sandy Yep & John Orlando





# HELLO FROM THE ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT OFFICE

2025 marks a new chapter for many of us at Brentwood School. When the Palisades and Altadena fires happened in January, it brought us together in ways we could not have imagined.

Amongst everything lost, we were touched by the countless stories of people helping one another: a group of alums replicating a beloved lost guitar collection for a classmate, another alum working with his son to restore over 90 collections of kids' baseball cards. We are so grateful to those who offered resources, from cozy blankets and brand new jeans to therapy sessions and actual living space in their homes. We also received hundreds of requests for Brentwood School yearbooks, diplomas, and other Eagle treasures, and our community stepped up to help. You name it, Brentwood can do it.

I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Jeff Ehrenpreis '95 for his two years of

service as Alumni Association President, to our Alumni Engagement Office team of Flor M. Cruz and Angela Song, and to our entire Alumni Executive Committee. We also extend a special thank you to Dr. Mike Riera for his 14 years as Head of Brentwood School.

As I celebrate my 20th anniversary working here, one Chaka Khan song keeps replaying in my head: "Through the fire, through whatever, come what may... Right down to the wire, even through the fire..." the Brentwood community remains strong. To our alumni community, we appreciate that you take the time to read this magazine and to connect with our alma mater.

— EMILY MANNING ELLIS '94,  
DIRECTOR OF ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

From the Alumni Engagement Office:  
Flor M. Cruz, Angela Song, and  
Emily Manning Ellis '94 at the Alumni  
Association's Texas Hold'em Poker  
Tournament for Wildfire Relief

## ALUMNI ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2024-25

**Jeffrey Ehrenpreis '95**  
President

**Shakira Gagnier '97**  
President Elect

**Diana Gonzalez '14**  
Co-Chair, Alumni Diversity Committee

**Danielle Taylor '07**  
Co-Chair, Alumni Diversity Committee

**Nathan Ament '04**  
Co-Chair, Professional Connections  
Committee

**Jared Cohen '94**  
Co-Chair, Professional Connections  
Committee

**Mike Goldfarb '03**  
Chair, Alumni Community Service  
Committee

**Bryan Hudson '09**  
Past President

Friday, March 7, 2025 | Middle School Commons

## Poker Night for Wildfire Relief

Sponsored by the Alumni Community Service Committee



Over 70 players packed into the Middle School cafeteria for tacos, good cheer, and Texas Hold'em, a pre-pandemic event favorite reintroduced by the Alumni Association. Together, our alumni and parents brought the tournament to a new level, raising over \$10,000 for wildfire relief. We loved joining forces as a community!

1. Tournament champion Rob Evans with 2nd place winner Payam Daneshrad
2. Andrew Wolfberg '88 makes a big play against Danny Levene '98 and Scott Borenstein '96.
3. Parent of alumni Maya Jones wins a big hand.
4. Final table of winners: Top row, Danny Demsky '95, Marc Berkman '96, Ronnie Dail, Rob Evans, Alex Rubalcava '98, and Payam Daneshrad; bottom row, David Pirnazar, Jordan Hamburger, poker dealer, Brian Cavanaugh, and Scott Borenstein '96
5. Perrin Disner '98, Sara Ardehali '15, and Leila Ardehali '14



Thursday, November 7, 2024 | The Gathering Spot in West Adams

Cocktails & Conversations

Featuring a fireside chat with showrunner Raamla Mohamed '99  
Sponsored by the Alumni Diversity Committee



1. Guest speaker Raamla Mohamed '99, Shakira Gagnier '97, and Cherie Harris '03



2. Albert Acosta '16, Selah Shackelford '15, and Cameron Hickman '14



3. Diversity Committee Co-Chair Diana Gonzalez '14 interviewed Raamla Mohamed '99.

4. Diversity Committee Co-Chair Danielle Taylor '07 introduced the event to the crowd.

5. Alexis Melbourne '17 and Lee Melbourne

6. Faculty member Saehee Kim, Nicole Glantz Kagan '11, and BCIL Director Darlene Fukuji



Thursday, November 14, 2024 | The Library at the Public

New York City Alumni Reception

7. Zach Udko '98, Emily Ellis '94, Emeritus Dave Velasquez, and Steven Leckart '98

8. Alumni gathered at the Library at the Public.



Saturday, December 7, 2024 | Santa Monica, CA

Alumni Association Beach Clean-Up

Sponsored by the Alumni Community Service Committee

9. Over 20 alumni, family members, and friends joined forces for our first community service gathering, led by Mike Goldfarb '03. We came together to keep our shores clean while reconnecting with each other and our shared commitment to service.





Wednesday, April 23, 2025 | Hillcrest Country Club

Brentwood Connect



1. Nigel Lifsey '02 and Mike Goldfarb '03  
2. From the Class of 2000: Matthew O'Hanlon, Molly Mandel, Hillary Hersch, Cameron Wald, and Danny Moloshok  
3. Danielle Taylor '07, Shakira Gagnier '97, Alumni Association President Jeff Ehrenpreis '95, and Diana Gonzalez '14  
4. Brentwood Connect Chair Jared Cohen '94

Friday, May 2, 2025 | Upper School Theater

Brentwood Dance Company Reunion

5. These brave alumni, ranging in class years from 1991 to 2000, joined Brentwood Dance Company students on stage this spring. In the audience: their former BWS dance teacher, Bonnie Lavin-Hughes. Special thanks to Upper School Performing Arts Chair and Dance Director Lauren Hall for inviting former company members to be part of a throwback tribute to Janet Jackson.

At right: Jessica Lang Scott '00, Emily Manning Ellis '94, Geneice Christian '99, Bonnie Lavin-Hughes, Tiffany Siart '92, Judy Lu '91, and Jessie Lyons-Miles '91



Monday, January 6, 2025 | Upper School Lot

Young Alumni Luncheon



6. Lev Feiman '25, Avery Degus '24, Madeleine Geibelson '24, Danielle Mellon '24, and Daisy Culligan '25  
7. Students enjoyed In-N-Out during the 34th Young Alumni Luncheon.  
8. Nate Dudley '24, Max Rice '24, Xander Rosen '24, Julia Russakoff '24, and Viggo Zeitlian '24  
9. Alumni and seniors from the Class of 2025 gather for the Young Alumni Luncheon.  
10. Evan Hanning '22, Rob Michaelson, Josh Daneshrad '22, Jacob Galant '22, and Jackson Strauss '22



We welcome updates from our fellow Eagles. Please submit news to [alumni@bwscampus.com](mailto:alumni@bwscampus.com).



# EMERITI

**Keep up with faculty and staff who served 15 years or more at Brentwood.**

**NICOLE BALI** has been living in central Mexico for the past five years. She continues to relish slow life on the shores of the largest lake in Mexico, Lake Chapala, in the state of Jalisco, enjoying its gracious people, its exuberant wildlife and luxuriant vegetation. Traveling through Mexico and visiting many of its cities has been an enchantment. The diversity of landscapes is astounding, from deserts to jungles, from deep canyons to volcanoes, to the white sand beaches one can only imagine as tropical paradise. Watching the flight of millions of monarch butterflies in the state of Michoacan was a profoundly moving experience. Visiting archeological sites such as Chichén Itzá, Uxmal and Teotihuacan was like a journey through time, and an occasion to learn about ancient, pre-Hispanic civilizations. When not traveling, Nicole devotes her time to gardening, hiking, knitting clothes for the needy children of the area, (to functioning daily en Español, heavily mixed in this area with the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs, definitely quite a challenge!), and of course, to reading! She still spends a little time reading Latin poetry every day, such a lovely reminder of the time spent with students upstairs in the BCR. She does not return to California often, but certainly hopes to see former colleagues and students when she does. She is grateful for all the Brentwood memories, but also feels that she still has so much to learn!

**DENNIS CASTAÑARES** and his wife Jana are happy at the foot of Mt. Hood in Oregon, living with their two kitties in the middle of an amazing garden Jana made, in a town of 300 people, while Dennis is notorious in Hood River and nearby towns in the Columbia Gorge, performing as “Alonzo Garbanzo” with bunches of other musicians in bunches of venues. “Alonzo” is also now up to 750 videos and 327,000 subscribers on YouTube if anyone wants to pay a visit!

**GAIL COOMBS** (Brentwood English faculty, 1992-2011) is still living in Portland, Oregon and loving the changing seasons, but struggling with the winter this year. She misses her husband of 52 years, who was a longtime teacher at Harvard-Westlake and died in June 2024.

**SUSAN DEELEY WELLS** moved to Cambridge, MA with her husband in April 2024 after 35 years in LA. She had a typical New England winter shoveling snow and chopping away the ice in the driveway! She loved waking up to the quiet beauty of the snow. Judith Lyons visited in early October 2024 on her way up to Maine; they had lots of laughs and shared memories. Later that October, Susan had lunch in Harvard Square with Judy Adler and **BERNHARDT ’21**, catching up on all the latest BWS news. Susan has been taking a weekly class in Chinese brush painting at the Museum of Fine Arts and takes the T (subway) instead of driving — which she doesn’t miss. Being able to walk everywhere has been great and an enjoyable way to explore her neighborhood and beyond. She says to please give her a shout if you’re in the area and she’ll meet you in the square!

Since retiring from BWS in 2021, **BETSY HALL** has driven across the country (Betsy’s husband, Roger — who works full-time, flies) six times with the family dog, Tucker, and highly recommends

it. And, “thanks” to 7:30 a.m. meetings, getting up early and hitting the road isn’t a problem. Seeing the sunrise in Fishlake National Forest is something special. The Halls are currently enjoying Los Angeles winters and the shoulder seasons on the coast of Maine. Having the time to explore new interests, connect with East Coast friends and family, and hike one of the ninety Lincoln County local trails has been rewarding. Waking up to the sound of lobster boats and having coffee on the deck overlooking the water is very special. Getting our mail and the newspaper requires a trip to the South Bristol post office which can be delayed by the drawbridge at “The Gut.” It’s not really an inconvenience, rather a pleasant delay. For a Mainer not so much, “that bridge spends more time up than down.” When in Los Angeles, Betsy enjoys working out at Sports Club LA (thank you BWS — joined 28 years ago), long walks with Tucker, the LA Phil and other great music, spending time with longtime friends/colleagues, and cheering on the Varsity Girls Basketball in the Eagledome. An added perk of retiring has been extensive traveling which includes seeing her children **GRIFFIN ’16** and Caroline (Pali ’18) whenever and wherever possible. “Oh, the places they go!” Sending love to all impacted by the January ’25 fires. #LASTRONG! bhall@bwscampus.com

**JUDITH BEERMAN O’HANLON** continues to enjoy retirement, spending more time with her grandchildren, reading, and traveling. This summer, in celebration of her 50th wedding anniversary, she and her husband will be going to Africa. For the third year in a row, she has been meeting once a month at school with interested students for “Literary Lunches,” discussing poetry, language, and doing some creative writing. She would love to hear from her former students! (johanlon@bwscampus.com).



1. Judith O’Hanlon—enjoying retirement; missing her students!



2. The former “Mr. C” serenading the Oregon sky

3. Judith Lyons and Susan Deeley Wells at Logan Airport in October 2024

4. Roger and Betsy Hall enjoying a very late season sail, with the Rockland Breakwater Lighthouse in the background — friends with sailboats, perks!

5. Nicole Bali is having a chat with a papier-mâché Frida Kahlo.





# 1980s

**1980**  
In August of 2024, **GLENN COATES** officially retired from medicine after 30 years. He was recently honored with a lifetime achievement award for 2025 presented by the *Triangle Business Journal* in Raleigh, NC. He and his wife (Karen) have moved to Asheville, NC, and are building their mountain retirement home, hoping to move into it in October of 2025.

**1981**  
The Class of 1981, whose members live in a lot of different areas, was challenged by **MEL POWELL** to participate by just chiming in with where they live. But along with that (from more than one-third of the class), they also have four real, happy class notes.

**PETER LAWRENCE** (living in West Hollywood, CA) got married in October of 2024; he and Marie enjoyed a beautiful ceremony in Malibu.

**MANNING MANN** tells us, “My wife, Vicki, and I own a home with million-dollar views of the Sangre de Cristo mountain range in Westcliffe, Colorado (Custer County). Our second home is located in Lafayette, Colorado (Boulder County). We are loving life together as empty nesters. I work remotely for AECOM, a federal contractor, as a Senior Contracts Manager. My son, Manning James Mann, is a commercial pilot, flying for a federal contractor company that conducts data gathering — intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR) missions. As a

commercial pilot, my son is travelling all over the world, living the dream.”

**ARMINEH SHAGHZO**, living in Van Nuys, CA, is an independent cat rescuer who climbs over walls and under buildings (and Mel Powell, collector of these Class Notes and a “cat person,” regrets being unable to convince her to wear a superhero outfit with the cape).

**STANLEY STALFORD** and Ruth Stalford live in Los Angeles. Stanley runs a real estate investment fund and Ruth is the founder of Make Good Inc., an LA nonprofit. Their son, **JACK ’25**, served as a Head Prefect at Brentwood School this past year.

**DEBBIE STOGEL**, living in Los Angeles, checked in: “I have owned my own business, Be Safe Baby Proofers, for the last ten years and I do baby proofing and child safety. I am now a grandmother of a 6-month-old little girl.”

Finally, Mel happily presents all of these classmates who took a moment to respond: **BROOKE ANDERSON** lives in Bozeman, MT. **JULIE ARINSBERG** lives in Colorado Springs, CO. **ERIC BAIN** lives in St. Louis, MO. **KATHERINE LANE CROUSE** lives in Darien, CT. **LINDA (SHEFSKY) DAVID** lives in Los Angeles, CA. **LESLEY MARTIN FORD** is currently based in London, UK and Montmorillon, France. **LARRY GALIZIO** lives in Sacramento, CA. **SHERIE GRANT** lives in Malibu, CA. **DOUG JOHNS** lives in Mesa, AZ. **JENNIFER LINDEN** lives in “exotic” Burbank, CA (her word, don’t blame the collector). **JOANNE PATMAN POGUE** lives in Redondo Beach, CA. Mel Powell lives in Sherman Oaks, CA. **JEFF SHELDON** lives in Newport Beach, CA. **PETER SHERR** lives in Greenwich, CT. **GERRY TSENG-GILL** lives in Palm Springs,

CA. **STEF WOLFSON** lives in Manhattan Beach, CA. This time around for the BWS Magazine, the Class of ’81 is in the house!

**1983**  
**TONY PAUKER** and his wife Kristee have been living in La Jolla for the past 28 years. He works at Brookfield Residential leading land acquisition for residential development in Southern California. Kristee recently retired from her clinical psychology practice. They have three sons, Hunter, Shane, and Grant. Hunter just finished his PhD in chemical engineering from UCI and moved back to La Jolla. Shane lives in the Bay Area and works at a precision diagnostics company. Grant will graduate from UCLA in June 2025 and then start a PhD in electrical engineering/computer science. Tony and Kristee went to New York in December 2024 and caught up with **RAMSAY LEWIS**, also class of 1983.

**1984**  
**PETER CORRIGAN, PAUL HADDAD, JEFF KABOT, ANDREW LEVEY, and ADAM RESNICK** met for dinner and drinks at Taylor’s Steak House, maintaining a yearly ritual of getting together over winter break. Adam was visiting from his home in the damp, verdant coastal paradise of Bellingham, WA. Peter made the drive up from sunny San Diego. The rest of the group lives in Los Angeles. Paul talked about his upcoming author events, related to his books on Los Angeles history. Jeff and Andrew shared stories about their families, and everyone reminisced about their favorite Brentwood faculty members (**ESTEBAN CACIDECO, BRUCE BELT, and FRANK MAZZI** topped the list). The group is usually joined by fellow ’84 alumni **DAVIDS FINK AND TAUB**. Both had conflicts and could not attend, but were properly roasted in absentia. The evening closed

with talk of cherishing old friends, and with glasses raised to ’84 classmates who are no longer with us. All in attendance looked forward to repeating next year.

**1986**  
**SCOTT KRAVITZ** recently moved to Guild Mortgage to be their CA Loan Officer, specializing in conventional residential and FHA loans: <https://branches.guildmortgage.com/az/chandler/scott-kravitz-361-hpskr.html>

**1989**  
It’s been an exciting few months in Washington, DC for **ARON SCHWARTZ**. After 25 years in private equity, Aron left the industry to become a full-time independent director for public and private companies, which has been really quite interesting. The new career also lets him spend more time with his family—something that is a rapidly fleeting luxury given the second of his three sons is off to Vandy in the fall—as well as more time traveling which many of you know is his true passion. 2025 should bring his 4,000,000th mile traveled and 100th country. And as you can see, his year started with a jump from 18,000 feet! He hopes each of you are finding ways to make every day count!

**DANELLE FISHER** is a pediatrician in the Playa Vista area of Los Angeles. She and her husband, Marshall, just celebrated the bar mitzvah of their son Joseph. **JANE ARRASMITH ’89** was also in attendance. Danelle is thrilled to still have close friendships with many friends from her years at Brentwood!



1. Peter Corrigan, Paul Haddad, Jeff Kabot, Adam Resnick, and Andrew Levey (all Class of 1984) enjoyed their yearly December get-together, this time at Taylor’s Steak House.  
2. Marie and Peter ’81 Lawrence at Moonshadows in Malibu for their October 2024 wedding reception.  
3. Tony Pauker ’83 and Ramsay Lewis ’83 in Central Park  
4. Aron Schwartz ’89 enjoying the view high above New Zealand  
5. Glenn Coates ’80 receiving a lifetime achievement award in Raleigh  
6. Danelle Fisher ’89 and her son Joseph



# 1990s

**1992**  
30+ years after their first road trip, **KIRK WILLIAM** and **JOHN STIEGER** explored Sri Lanka in a tuk tuk in October 2024. Kind of like the Cannonball Run but much, much slower. They got lost in the jungle, broke down, hung out with elephants, and had an amazing time! John is still in Cincinnati, where he continues to run unopposed for the Presidency of the Brentwood Alumni Club of Cincinnati. They have 100% turnout for all of their gatherings, a very close-knit group.

**1993**  
**ELIZABETH KIVOWITZ’S** heart goes out to everyone impacted by the fires and hopes all are moving forward as best as possible given the huge losses and instability caused. As far as her update—first one in a very long time—among other efforts at UCLA where she has worked in strategic communications for over 17 years, she works with journalists to connect with research and expertise from the university. She feels she is doing her part to help the public sift through the onslaught of information we are faced with every day, helping to separate fact from fiction. Speaking of fiction, she is proud to have supported her mom Alexandra Kivowitz in completing and publishing her first novel, *Eavesdropper*. One writer called it “A tender exploration of...growing up in the tumultuous era of McCarthyism.” Liz encourages everyone to buy the book. It is a good read for adolescents and adults, and relevant given the political climate of today. Liz is the proud mother of three kids/young

adults, ages 20, 18 and 13. She is also happy to have a special someone in her life, Brentwood alumnus **COLIN GARRITY ’90**. She spends her free time reading, doing pro bono publicity for her friends’ projects and businesses, and swimming in the ocean. She has also been connecting with friends from high school, college and other areas of life for everyone’s big 5-0 celebrations!

**1994**  
**JOHN STALBERG** produced & directed the second installment of his Muzzle film franchise starring Aaron Eckhart. Entitled *City of Wolves*, the film is expected to be released on Veteran’s Day weekend 2025 in theaters worldwide.

**1995**  
After several years in Maine, **JEN WELLES** returned to Southern California, where she married Allan Hallis and semi-retired from caregiving. They live in the Palm Springs area with two cats and two dogs.

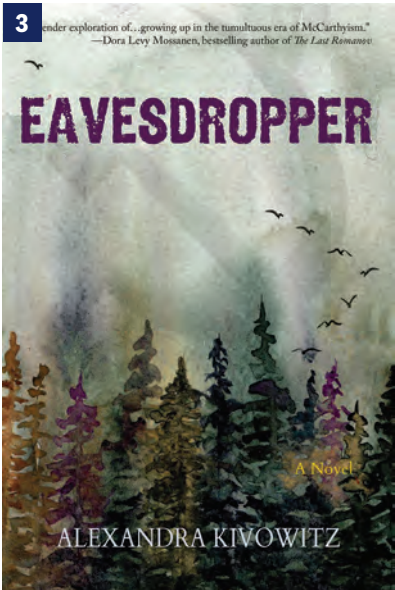
**1996**  
This fun group of Class of 1996 alumni was the tip of the iceberg on who wanted to catch up in November 2024, at **AMANDA NAGLER ROBERTSON’S** home—**TODD MARON, ALLISON NEIMAN DIVINCENZO, JENNIFER KATZ, ALEX WINNICK, JULIE STROM, GREG LEWIS, KALA SAVAGE** and **ERIC FREEDMAN**. “We were a close class and still get so much joy connecting with each other today,” Amanda writes. “Everyone in this picture is thriving in life, health, and work. Thinking about all of the Brentwood families, current and

past, that have been affected by the recent fires. Eagles Strong.”

**1997**  
**CORY SHOPPER** hasn’t checked in for a while, but he is married with children. Their family just moved to Woodland Hills in Los Angeles. He is excited to raise “Valley Girls”, 8 and 4. He has been working in the jewelry business for the past 22 years.

**1999**  
**SAM YEBRI** has a new title, Law Professor, teaching a course at his alma mater, USC Law School. Meanwhile, Sam and his wife Leah have four kids, he continues to grow his law firm Merino Yebri LLP, founded with fellow Brentwood alum **ALEX MERINO ’98**, and he serves as the Board President of a new political organization focused on improving public safety and quality of life issues in Los Angeles, Thrive LA ([www.thrivelosangeles.org](http://www.thrivelosangeles.org)).

- 1. Class of 1996 “reunion” in November 2024 in Santa Monica.
- 2. Kirk William ’92 and John Stieger ’92 in Sri Lanka
- 3. Elizabeth Kivowitz ’93 is proud to have supported her mother Alexandra Kivowitz in completing and publishing her first novel, *Eavesdropper*, about an adolescent girl growing up during the Red Scare.
- 4. Aaron Eckhart as “Jake Rosser” in *Muzzle: City of Wolves*, dir. John Stalberg ’94.





# 2000s

**2000**  
**CHELSEA COLEMAN’S** heart is with the many people from our community who have suffered due to the recent fires. She hopes you are coping and doing alright. Chelsea is also embarking on producing her first independent feature film and publishing her first book. Reach out if you’d like to connect: @chelseacoleman on BlueSky.

**2001**  
**JONATHAN BERRY** is managing partner at the Washington, DC law and strategy firm Boyden Gray PLLC. He recently defeated NASDAQ’s board diversity quotas in court and has sued Target for securities fraud. He and his wife are blessed with eight children and love living in an intentional Catholic community in Maryland.

**2002**  
**MICHAEL KOHL** has been touring the globe with an interactive video game concert experience called Extra Lives. He arrived at Brentwood as a video game nerd in 7th grade and graduated as a musician six years later, so he’s excited to bring things full circle. (www.extralives.band)

**2003**  
**MIKE GOLDFARB** and his wife Liz are thrilled to announce the arrival of their son Alexander Phoenix Goldfarb, lovingly called Xander, born January 19. They chose the name Alexander to embody courage and integrity. Phoenix wasn’t even on their radar for names until the Palisades Fire started. Knowing so many close friends who were directly

affected and recognizing that this event will shape Los Angeles for years to come, they felt compelled to give their son a name that will inspire hope and resilience. The phoenix, a symbol of renewal and rising from the ashes, represents the strength to recover and emerge even stronger. They are overwhelmed with love and gratitude as they begin this new chapter together.

**SEAN MURAKAMI’S** been living in Los Angeles, working on multiple projects like a jewelry and accessories business. He says he’d love to connect with any potential business partners or anyone from Brentwood. Go Eagles!

In March 2025, **ANDREA CUTTLER, LAUREN (ASPELL) ADLER,** and **BRIE (WINN) DORFMAN** gathered to celebrate Lauren’s 40th birthday. For Lauren, 2025 began much like it did for many in the Brentwood community—with the heartbreaking loss of her home. Among her gifts this year were the 2003 senior book and two additional Brentwood yearbooks. Revisiting these yearbooks has long been a cherished tradition after dinners or barbecues at their homes. The yearbooks have brought countless hours of laughter, reminiscing, comfort, and joy over the past two decades since graduation. Andrea, Lauren, and Brie are eternally grateful to **EMILY ELLIS ’94** and the whole Alumni Office and Communications teams for their help procuring the books and for allowing Andrea and Brie to return a little part of their treasured past to Lauren’s new home.

**2004**  
**PARISA ROSHAN** married her husband Eric Migicovsky in 2023 and they recently

welcomed a daughter named Arya. Parisa develops affordable housing in Los Angeles with Thomas Safran & Associates. She loves remaining connected to Brentwood School and hopes to see more of her fellow alumni in 2025.

**2005**  
**CARTER RUBIN** spent much of the year doing what he loves: building Brio train sets with his son Cary (age 4).

**2006**  
After selling their company Feedonomics to BigCommerce (Nasdaq: BIGC) a few years ago, **BRIAN ROIZEN** and his brother **ROBERT ’09** have founded a new startup PriceLasso.com, a revolutionary way to save money on products you frequently order and on your wishlist. They are passionate about helping people save money while shopping online during these difficult economic times. The average family is expected to save a few hundred dollars per year with PriceLasso.

**2009**  
This spring, **JENN BEATTY** earned her PhD in Psychological and Brain Sciences from Washington University in St. Louis. On June 1, 2025, she married Matthew Wright in St. Louis with Brentwood classmates in her bridal party and in attendance. Additionally, Jenn just accepted a tenure-track assistant professor position in the department of Psychology and Child Development at Cal Poly University, San Luis Obispo and will move back to California with her husband Matt in September.



1. Robert Roizen '09 and Brian Roizen '06  
2. Mike Goldfarb '03, his wife Liz, and their son Xander  
3. Carter Rubin '05 and his son Cary fly a remote-control plane straight into a tree.  
4. A scene with Michael Kohl '02, from the Extra Lives show in Christchurch, New Zealand  
5. Brie (Winn) Dorfman, Andrea Cuttler, Lauren (Aspell) Adler, all Class of 2003



# 2010s

**2010**  
**BRYCE CASTER** married Maisie Schloss on May 4, 2024. They are happily living in Studio City.

**EVAN MORRIS** got married to the woman of his dreams, Amanda, and they are both chillin’.

**2012**  
**ALEC BLIVAS, ANDY CURRIER,** and **JACOB WOOCHEER** (all Class of 2012) have continued to build BCW Integrated Strategies from the ground up, and have since expanded the firm’s reach to several continents. Most recently, the firm has been advising sovereign entities in and around the Jordan Valley with respect to advanced interrogation techniques. Here in Los Angeles, their work consists of security logistics for armament manufacturers and the rehabilitation and re-tenanting of under-performing residential rental properties.

**2013**  
At the ripe age of 29, **GAVIN PAK** is enjoying 17th grade pursuing an MFA in Theater Management at the David Geffen School of Drama (formerly Yale School of Drama).

**NIKKI TABIBIAN** taught a 1-time class “How to Protect Your Works with Copyrights” at New York University’s Production Lab.

**MAX MASUDA-FARKAS** and his wife Helena celebrated their wedding in Tuscany with several 2013 classmates, as well as his favorite Middle School teacher, Greg Smith!



1. Cory Shopper '10 and “the Shoppers” in Portugal

2. Nikki Tabibian '13, Esq.

3. At the wedding of Max Masuda-Farkas '13 and his bride Helena: Greg Smith (former faculty), Kazuo Robinson '13, Tony Hernandez '13, Max Masuda-Farkas '13, Connie Varela '13, Nick Newberg '13, Shane McDonald '13, Helena Masuda-Farkas, Emma O’Hanlon '13, Jordan Bostick '13, Ivan Gamez '13, Matthew Climan '14



## Remembering Ellie Novaes

By Shirley Blake

With the Brazilian flag flying overhead and bright sunflowers dotting the Lower School field, over 300 members of the Brentwood School community celebrated the life of Coach Ellie Novaes on Saturday, October 5. Gathered in a circle as if we were all part of one of Coach Novaes’ PE classes, we watched the morning fog lift above us and sunshine emerge, as bright as when Ellie’s smile would lift our spirits.

Dr. Mike opened the service with remarks about Ellie’s many contributions to the history of Brentwood School, followed by Pat Brown, who was the Athletic Director when Ellie was hired in 1992. Pat and Ellie worked together in the East Campus athletics program, where Ellie coached varsity boys soccer for 13 seasons, and they remained close friends over her 33-year tenure.

In a beautiful tribute to her dear friend, Brentwood Public Safety Officer Cher Arabalo sang “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” which was followed by moving remembrances from alum Eric Rudin ’00, who played for Coach Novaes as a member of the varsity soccer team, and former Lower School Director of Admissions Mary Beth Barry. Mary Beth reflected on how much she loved that her office was so close to the field, where she

could hear Ellie’s voice of encouragement and infectious laughter on a daily basis.

A friend of Ellie’s for 32 years, Lower School music teacher Olga Nevin explained that they forged a special bond when they realized that they both came to the United States in 1981. To honor Ellie’s commitment to attending so many student performances over the years with engagement and laughter, Olga wrote an original song for Ellie and performed it along with several faculty members — just as they had at Ellie’s retirement celebration last June.

Tad Bobak, a longtime friend of Ellie’s since her arrival in the U.S. from Brazil, shared Ellie’s love of soccer and how she was so proud of their shared Brazilian culture that she encouraged him to retain his Portuguese language skills over the years.

And finally, Ellie’s daughter Areanna ’14 gave a moving tribute to her mother, acknowledging Ellie’s deep love for her family, friends, colleagues, and students. “Ellie was everyone’s #1 fan, and her love was deep and lasting ... She was always looking for the silver lining and showing up with empathy wherever she went,” Areanna said. “She loved her work, her profession was her calling, and her leadership was grounded in integrity and love.”

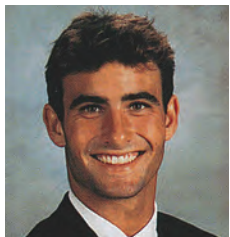
We honor the lives of our alumni who passed away too soon.



CHRISTOPHER PURCELL '91



CASEY THINNIES '93



MATTHEW NEWMARK '94



JESSICA PARTIDA '98



AZIZA BARNES '10





MOST REQUESTED: YEARBOOKS

# Replacing the Memories

When members of the Brentwood leadership team connected with families affected by the Los Angeles wildfires, the most common requests were for support replacing precious Brentwood memories — t-shirts, diplomas, graduation tassels, other Brentwood gear, and especially yearbooks.

While we could never restore all of the inside jokes, meaningful remarks, and signatures that filled the pages of students’ original copies, we did have a collection of spare yearbooks in the

Brentwood School archives to bridge the gap. What we couldn’t find on campus, we sourced from many of you.

This collection effort also inspired an important archival project — to digitize every yearbook, all the way back to our opening in 1972. In total, the Communications and Alumni Relations departments collected 424 yearbooks and were able to provide replacement yearbooks in either physical or digital form for 73 alumni and 14 current families.

— MEREDITH STORRS



*If you have school publications to donate to the archives — old issues of the Flyer, Aerie, Valhalla, amaranth, or anything else that was produced during your years at BWS — we’d love to have them. Contact [communications@bwscampus.com](mailto:communications@bwscampus.com) to coordinate delivery.*

# Are you the grandparent of a Brentwood Eagle?

Then get ready for the launch of:



We’re developing numerous new opportunities for you to connect with our school community — experiences large and small — focused on arts, athletics, service, and on your grandchild’s education. We’ll offer hands-on, virtual, and in-person events, and we’ll consider ideas for GrandEagles that you bring to us!

We will soon share a full calendar of events via email and on our website. To be included, please email Josh Melnick, Advancement Coordinator, at [jmelnick@bwscampus.com](mailto:jmelnick@bwscampus.com).

Or visit:





Brentwood School  
100 South Barrington Place  
Los Angeles, CA 90049

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## ***Our New Riera Field!***

*Nearly 700 people attended a farewell for Dr. Mike, where the Middle School field was named for the outgoing Head of School.*

