WINGS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SANTA MARGARITA EAGLE FOUNDATION / SPRING 2025



CARSON PALMER

ON FAITH, FAMILY AND HOME

SANTA MARGARITA EAGLE FOUNDATION

A FOUNDATION FOR SANTA MARGARITA CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

WINGS

SANTA MARGARITA EAGLE FOUNDATION / SPRING 2025

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Greetings from the A Building!

There's so much to celebrate here at Santa Margarita Catholic High School. What happens on these magnificent 42 acres is nothing short of miraculous. Each day, we witness faith in action, character in motion, and our Eagles truly taking flight. These students are our future, and the future is bright!

In this issue, you'll read about Class of 1998 alumnus Carson Palmer returning to lead the next generation of Eagle Football, discover how our Eagles Edge Wealth Management class is empowering students to plan for their futures, and learn how our students – on campus and around the globe – are living as Pilgrims of Hope, making a meaningful difference in their communities. We're also shining a light on our incredible alumni, the transformative work of our Auxiliary Studies Program, and so much more.

This edition of WINGS also marks a season of transition. After a lifetime in Orange County and years of service in the Alumni Office, a move to Tennessee brings new beginnings. It has been an honor to celebrate our alumni community and to help revive WINGS magazine. I look forward to seeing how the department continues to grow and thrive with new leadership.

So, grab a cup of coffee (make it a Haute Coffee if you're feeling nostalgic), and enjoy the latest from your SMCHS family.

Once an Eagle, always an Eagle!

Brandi (Morales '98) Lopez
Alumni Coordinator

WINGS is published by the Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation. The foundation supports SMCHS in providing excellence in Catholic education, developing graduates who are people of faith, skilled life-long learners, healthy individuals and involved citizens of the world. For story ideas, email advancement@smeaglefoundation.org or call us at 949-766-6080. You can also read more about the Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation at **smeaglefoundation.org**

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SMCHS President
J. Andrew Sulick '91

SMCHS Principal
Cheri L. Wood

ROBOTICS TEAM TRIUMPHS AT VENTURA COUNTY REGIONAL

Santa Margarita Catholic High School's varsity robotics team, SMbly Required 5805, captured first place at the 2025 FIRST Robotics Ventura County Regional with their powerful robot, Scavenger 1. Teaming up with elite squads from Ventura and the Netherlands, the Eagles dominated the Reefscape-themed challenge in a thrilling final showdown.

The championship win followed a standout performance at the Orange County Regional, where the JV team SMbly 3020 achieved a historic third-place finish. Under the leadership of Robotics Mentor Alexander Klatt and Varsity Coach Teddy Bullockus, students invested countless hours designing, programming and building their competition-ready robots from the ground up.

"I'm beyond proud of every single member of our robotics team," Klatt said. "Their commitment to the big picture, their patience in crafting every small detail and their passion for winning are simply remarkable. This season wasn't just about trophies – it was about growth, resilience, and proving that SM robotics is a force to be reckoned with."





NATIONAL CHAMPS! DANCE TEAM TRIUMPHS IN FLORIDA

With their first-place trophy as a carry-on item for their flight home, the Santa Margarita dance team emerged victorious at Contest of Champions Nationals in March. They returned from Orlando, FL with a title in the Extra Small Open division, performing a contemporary routine to Fleetwood Mac's "Tusk." Additionally, soloist Kayla Tran '25 was awarded 11th place out of over 100 other senior soloists from around the country, a difficult feat to achieve.

"I am incredibly proud of the effort our team brought to this season," said SMCHS Director of Dance, Danielle Darwazeh. "They have gotten stronger with each performance, and all that hard work paid off in Florida."

The SMCHS dance team brought five group dances and four solos to every competition; each of their divisions was packed with talented teams, making this Contest of Champions victory even sweeter.



SONG SEASON ENDS WITH NATIONAL VICTORIES

The SMCHS song program capped off their winning season with a set of national titles at USA Spirit Nationals in February. Competing in the Song/Pom Advanced divisions, both varsity and JV song earned the top spot. This is the third consecutive year both teams have won in these challenging divisions.

"With nine seniors on the team, this year was special for all of us," said SMCHS Director of Dance Danielle Darwazeh.

"I am so proud of the perseverance and grit our girls showed through it all."

Varsity song's pom routine earned first place at all four regional competitions across Southern California and sixth place in the nation at UDA Nationals in Florida in addition to this final victory at USA Nationals.

WALKING IN FAITH:
ALUMNI JOIN THE JOURNEY

Each Holy Thursday over the last 25 years, Santa Margarita seniors have made the 13-mile trek to Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano from campus. While a time to reflect on the Lenten season alongside fellow seniors, the annual pilgrimage is often thought of as the true "beginning of the end" of the SM student experience.

While journeying from Santa Margarita to the Mission, seniors pass through familiar cities, walk by schools they may have attended, and see their families along the way at different stops. This pilgrimage is much more than just trekking 13 miles; it's a time for seniors to reflect on where they came from, where they are now, where they're headed next, and to find God's peace and presence in all of it.



This year, we were proud to introduce the first annual alumni senior pilgrimage, held on Palm Sunday. A group of dedicated alumni came together to retrace the journey and while walking alongside one another, they reflected not only on their own high school memories, but on how far they've come since then. This new tradition provided a meaningful opportunity for alumni to reconnect with their roots, reflect on their faith journey, and build excitement for the next generation of Eagles preparing to make their own walk just days later.



Phones prevent face-to-face communication

Research suggests that face-to-face communications are linked to better mental health.

Psychology Today

50%+

of kids get

237 NOTIFICATIONS PER DAY

Some receive as many as

4,500

EVERY DAY!

23% occur during school

Common Sense Media

"As individuals made in the image and likeness of God, we are called to foster meaningful face-to-face connections that build connectedness and belonging,"

Patrick Visconti '06, Assistant Principal of Mission and Ministry

UNPLUGGED TO CONNECT: EXPANDED CELL PHONE POLICY BUILDS COMMUNITY AND FOSTERS WELL-BEING

Recognizing the distractions cell phones can bring and their impact on peer connections, Santa Margarita Catholic High School recently expanded its cell phone policy. Students are now required to keep their phones off and stored in backpacks throughout the entire school day —including during lunch and passing periods.

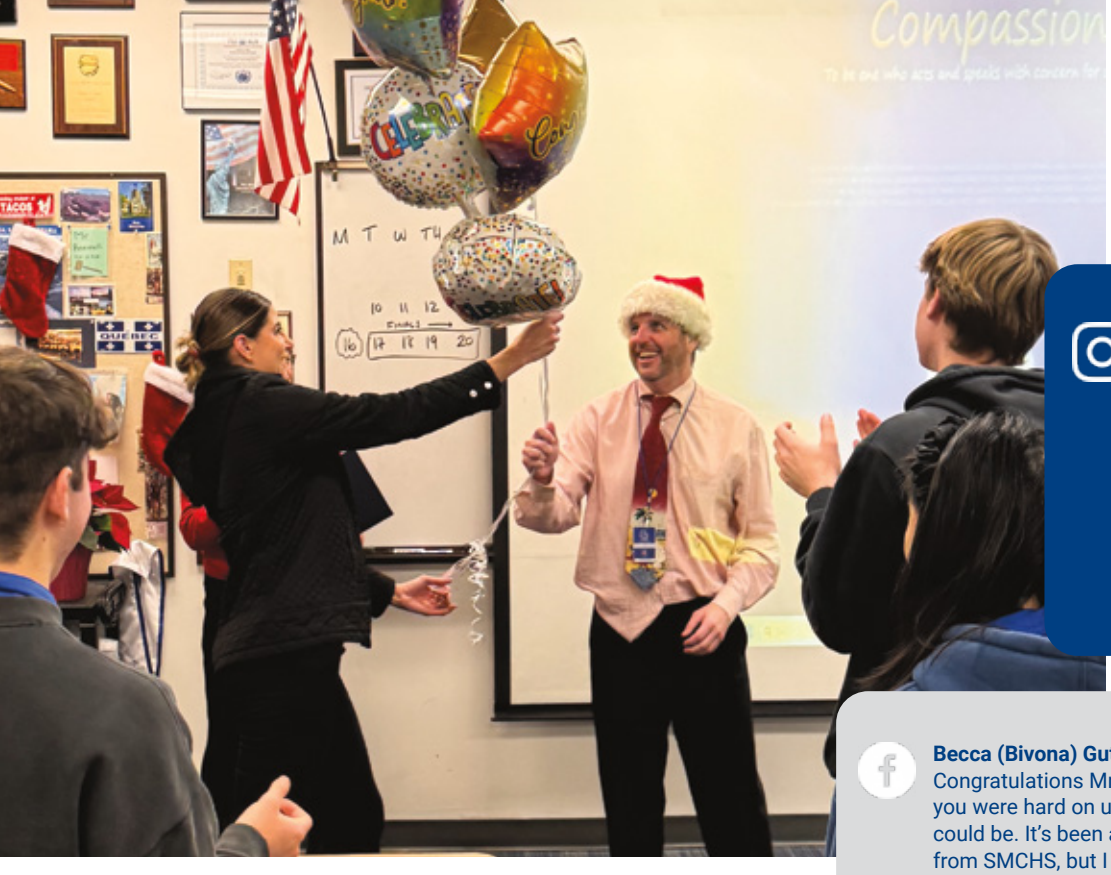
The initiative is part of a broader movement to prioritize student well-being as schools across the country adopt similar policies. California will require all schools to implement cellphone policies by 2026. Research shows bell-to-bell cellphone policies improve focus, academic performance, and social connections while also helping to reduce cyberbullying, anxiety and stress.

"As individuals made in the image and likeness of God, we are called to foster meaningful face-to-face connections that build connectedness and belonging," said Assistant Principal of Mission and Ministry Patrick Visconti '06.

The updated policy has helped students become more present and engaged throughout the school day, school officials say. The expanded policy also seeks to prioritize student mental health as recent studies continue to highlight the effects of constant cell phone use on adolescent brain development and well-being.

"We have seen a significant increase in students talking, connecting, playing games, and catching up during lunch and passing periods rather than just having their heads down in their phones," said Director of Wellness Joy Cleary. "We look forward to the continued benefits and a growing sense of belonging across the campus community."





@stephschlink: As an MUN alumni of '08, when we also went to Ireland for St. Patrick's Day and a conference, he not only brought history and diplomacy to life, but he invested in us as holistic citizens and instilled in us that we could and would make a difference.

Becca (Bivona) Guttadauro:
Congratulations Mr. Remmell. So well deserved. While you were hard on us, you pushed us to be the best we could be. It's been almost 20 years since graduating from SMCHS, but I can still say without a doubt that being in MUN for four years helped shape the person I am today. At such a pivotal time in my adolescence, I learned what it meant to be a global citizen, to put myself in the position of someone else and to deeply understand their perspective, to learn about disasters and hope, war and peace, to work on collaboration and compromise and so much more. My experience was invaluable, and I am so thankful for the opportunity I had. Never forget, y'all...MUN is FUN.

GUIDING GLOBAL CITIZENS

JOHN REMMELL NAMED TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALIST

For nearly 30 years, John Remmell has taught social studies at Santa Margarita Catholic High School, where he has been instrumental in developing the school's world-renowned Model United Nations (MUN) program, serving as the program's director. Through his dedication, students develop critical thinking, embrace diverse perspectives, and engage in meaningful, respectful dialogue – leadership qualities essential in today's world.

Nominated by faculty and staff for his impact on students and Catholic education, Remmell was recently recognized as a finalist for the prestigious Diocesan St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Teacher of the Year Award finalist at the Celebrating Catholic School Educators awards and dinner.

"He is fostering SM students to be Catholic world changers and leaders," said Director of College Counseling, Melissa Fosdick. "Mr. Remmell truly cares for his students and takes them on as his own. He encourages them to push themselves out of their comfort zone and celebrates their growth, progress, and success."

Under Remmell's leadership, Santa Margarita's Model United Nations (MUN) program — founded in 1991 by beloved social studies teacher Richard Voelkel —has continued to thrive. Students develop lifelong skills in research, writing, public speaking, critical thinking, leadership, conflict resolution, and compromise as they participate in simulated United Nations conferences. Santa Margarita MUN delegates consistently earn top honors at conferences held locally, across the country and abroad including Boston, Washington D.C., China, Prague, Ireland, London and Panama among other destinations. Most recently, the program earned the "Best Class Award" at the 73rd Berkeley Model United Nations Conference, marking the third time the school has won this top distinction.

SMCHS is recognized as one of the world's leading MUN programs with about 250 students enrolled in the honors history classes that accompany participation. Each fall, the program hosts the South Orange County Model United Nations Conference (SOCOMUN), the world's largest one-day MUN conference. Held on campus, SOCOMUN welcomes approximately 1,300 students and nearly 30 high schools serving as a teaching conference for new delegates. In recent years, SOCOMUN has welcomed students from as far as the Czech Republic.

A faith-filled educator, Remmell integrates Catholic teaching into his classroom. By challenging students to think globally and step outside their comfort zones, he is inspiring the next generation of changemakers. SMCHS MUN alumni have gone on to pursue successful careers in international relations, government, law, nonprofits and public policy, among other fields.

"One of the things that keeps me going is seeing the alums that I have taught and the great things they are doing in the world," Remmell said. ". . .I am deeply honored to be a finalist for Teacher of the Year and profoundly grateful to Santa Margarita Catholic High School for fostering a community where faith, knowledge and service unite."

Top 5 MUN Mass Destinations

Over the years, Model United Nations delegates have had the privilege of attending Mass at some of the most historically and spiritually significant churches in the world. These experiences have offered students moments of reflection, unity and cultural appreciation, enriching the MUN experience beyond diplomacy and debate.



1 St. Peter's Basilica Vatican City (2024)
The heart of Catholicism and one of the most awe-inspiring churches in the world, surrounded by Renaissance masterpieces, students were immersed in the grandeur and solemnity of this sacred space.



2 Notre Dame – Paris (2008)
One of the most iconic cathedrals in the world, students marveled at this gothic masterpiece with its breathtaking stained-glass windows and centuries of worship history.



3 St. Patrick's Cathedral – New York (2006)
Amid the towering skyscrapers of Manhattan, St. Patrick's Cathedral offered a place of peace and reflection where students reflected on their role as global citizens in a city known for its international influence.



4 St. Stephen's Cathedral – Vienna (2025)
With its iconic tiled roof and Gothic spires, students connected with Austria's deep religious heritage while attending Mass in a cathedral that has witnessed centuries of European history.



5 Mission Santa Barbara – Santa Barbara (2019)
Known as the "Queen of the Missions" for its beauty and significance, students were immersed in California's Spanish colonial heritage while reflecting on the mission's role in the region.

Commencement 2025



President Andy Sulick '91 offered a poignant moment of reflection, reading from the beloved hymn On Eagles' Wings: *"He will raise you up on Eagles' Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of His hand."*

Class of 2025

418
CLASS SIZE

99%
GRADUATES ATTENDING COLLEGE

167
NUMBER OF DIFFERENT COLLEGE/UNIVERSITIES ATTENDING

100%
ACCEPTANCE RATE AT 243 COLLEGES

37
NUMBER OF DIFFERENT STATES GRADS WILL ATTEND

2,396
COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

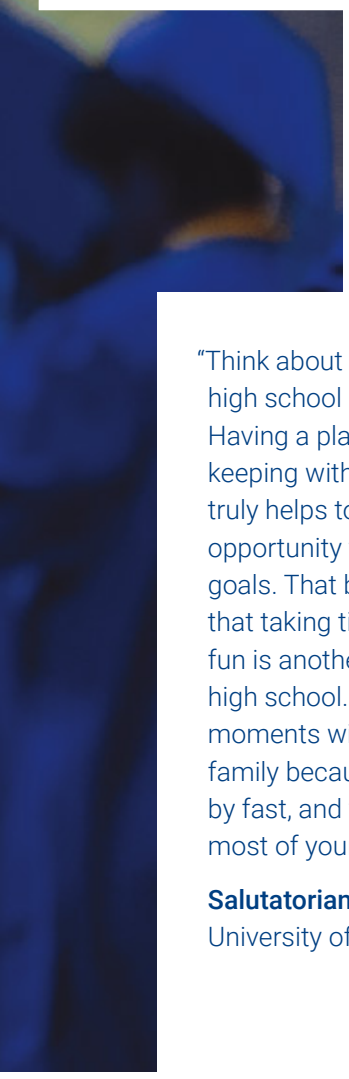
75
COLLEGIATE STUDENT ATHLETES

34
INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE FULL DIPLOMA CANDIDATES



Class of 2025 Legacy Families

The class of 2025 had 27 legacy students with one or both parents having graduated from Santa Margarita. As the number of legacy families grows, we are grateful that alumni parents continue to entrust their children to their alma mater.



"Think about your end goal for high school as early as possible. Having a plan for success and keeping with it for four years truly helps to give you the best opportunity for reaching your goals. That being said, I also think that taking time to relax and have fun is another important part of high school. Be sure to enjoy the moments with your friends and family because high school goes by fast, and you want to make the most of your time here at SM."

Salutatorian, Jocelyn Ferletic
University of Notre Dame



Wang offers these words of wisdom for those following in their footsteps: "Try anything that piques your interest, but don't be afraid to drop some things that are less important to you in order to prioritize what you care most about."

Valedictorian Evelyn Wang
University of California, Berkeley



A FAIRYTALE FIRST:

Theatre and Orchestra Collaborate for "Cinderella" Performance

Talon Theatre brought Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" to the stage this school year with a special twist. For the first time, the theatre and orchestra programs collaborated in a unique crossover concert, seamlessly blending live orchestration by students into the performance. Instrumental Music Director and conductor Ruben Puebla even became part of the enchantment – at one point, the Fairy Godmother used his conducting baton as a magic wand. This innovative production showcased the incredible talent and teamwork of Santa Margarita students, creating an unforgettable experience for the cast, crew and audience.

NEW VOCAL GROUP HITS THE RIGHT NOTES

The Talon Academy of Performing Arts (TAPA), an afterschool conservatory offered at Santa Margarita Catholic High School, proudly introduces the debut of Aquila Cantorum, an elite vocal ensemble.

This premier group explores a broad range of advanced vocal repertoire and offers additional performance opportunities, including paid travel for performance tours. Rehearsing for one hour per week, with the option to enroll in additional TAPA vocal courses, the ensemble is comprised of highly skilled singers with excellent tone, superior ear training, and advanced sight-reading abilities. Vocalists study bel canto technique, an Italian method known for its effortless sound, tonal balance and seamless phrasing.

Aquila Cantorum is an auditioned group open to singers from public, private, online and home-schooled students. Members are dedicated to achieving musical excellence and showcasing their talents through diverse and challenging pieces.

"Whether performing classical masterpieces, contemporary works, or intricate a cappella arrangements, Aquila Cantorum consistently delivers captivating and memorable performances," said SMCHS Executive Director of Performing Arts Francisco Calvo, who directs the ensemble. "Their commitment to superior vocal performance and artistry sets them apart, making them a standout ensemble in the region."

For their inaugural performance tour, Aquila Cantorum traveled to San Francisco, where they performed at Grace Cathedral before a large audience of choral musicians and clinicians. While in the city, students also enjoyed exploring the city's iconic landmarks, including Pier 39, Ghirardelli Square – where they enjoyed hot fudge sundaes – and Alcatraz Island.

With beautiful music, perfect weather, and unforgettable moments, the tour marked a spectacular beginning for Aquila Cantorum.





A WICKED OPPORTUNITY

Eden Espinosa, best known for her critically acclaimed portrayal of Elphaba in "Wicked" on Broadway and in Los Angeles and San Francisco, graciously provided a master class for Santa Margarita students. Open auditions were extended to all students, with eight students selected to work with Espinosa. The event was open to all parents, faculty, staff and students.

"It was amazing how we got the opportunity to work with Eden Espinosa, who is so well-known in the industry," said Emory Ratzlaff '27. "Her story is inspiring, and working with her was a dream come true. She helped me realize that storytelling through acting and song is something I want to pursue in the future and that you can achieve anything through perseverance and hard work."

Spring Vocal Concert Inspires with Message of Hope and Compassion

Santa Margarita's *Year of Compassion* perfectly aligns with the Catholic Church's Jubilee Year, celebrated every 25 years as a sacred time calling the faithful to deepen their spiritual lives through prayer, grace and renewal. This year's Jubilee Year theme, Pilgrims of Hope, serves as an invitation to embark on a spiritual journey rooted in hope and compassion.

Echoing this message, Santa Margarita's spring vocal concert, Hope of Compassion, inspired the community through music to embrace faith, seek renewal and live out compassionate in their daily lives.



Watch the full concert held at Christ Cathedral.



ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENTS 2025

GIRLS GOLF

Santa Margarita's girls golf team found success yet again this season. Coming off their 2024 PGA National High School Invitational victory, the girls earned the CIF-SCGA SoCal Regional team championship title for the third consecutive year. They also finished in the runner-up spot for the CIF State title. Emily Song '27 won the CIF/SCGA Individual Champion title, and Sam Daniels '28 was crowned the CIF-SS Individual Champion.

CHEER

SMCHS varsity cheer earned the CIF-SS D1AA competitive cheer title for the second year in a row. Four-year member and recent graduate Dotty Laster '25 says this past season was memorable for many reasons.

"This has been the best season of my four years on SM cheer. Not only have we been successful in our competition season, but our team is so close and has the best bond."

GIRLS SOCCER

Girls varsity soccer continued their legacy this season, winning the Trinity League title for the third year in a row and the CIF-SS Open Division championship. Head Coach Craig Bull was named CIF-SS Open Division Girls Soccer Coach of the Year. The girls swept post-season awards, receiving 28 recognitions from the Trinity League, CIF-SS, and OC Register.

BOYS AND GIRLS SWIMMING & DIVING

The Santa Margarita swim and dive program has achieved massive feats this season yet again. After sweeping all six levels to win the boys' and girls' Trinity League titles, both boys and girls earned the CIF-SS Division 1 champion title. This is the boys' fifth consecutive win, and the girls' 11th consecutive win of this honor.

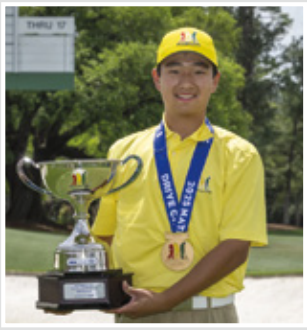
At CIF State finals, girls swim won their sixth consecutive CIF State championship. No other school in history has more than one. The boys earned 11th place out of over 350 other schools. USC-bound diver Valentino Nieto '25 also won the Trinity League and D1 CIF-SS diving title.

TRACK & FIELD

Track and field soared this year, breaking records all season long. At Trinity League finals, the Eagles earned significant recognition— Leo Francis '25 won the 200M, Alahna Thomas '26 won the 3200M, Olivia Smyth '26 earned the 300 H title, and Brady Furr '25 took the pole vault win. Three track and field standouts earned CIF-SS individual titles: Leo Francis '25 won the long jump, Brady Furr '25 won in pole vault, and Olivia Smyth '26 took the 300 H title. Boys track and field finished in third place at CIF State, with Leo Francis '25 winning the CIF title for long jump.

ANTHONY WU '28

After moving forward in numerous qualifiers, Anthony Wu played in the Drive, Chip and Putt tournament at Augusta National Golf Course this past April, where he won the boys age 14 category. This contest takes place the weekend before the Masters Tournament.





"My SM soccer teammates have impacted me by giving me a sisterhood and family I am forever grateful for. I could not have accomplished the things I did without their hard work, determination, and love for the sport."
Cora Fry '26

CORA FRY '26

Cora Fry earned numerous post-season accolades this year, including Trinity League MVP, Orange County Player of the Year, and CIF Open Division Player of the Year. For one athlete to earn all three of these titles is an extraordinary honor.

PEYTON TRAYER '26

SMCHS girls soccer goalie Peyton Trayer helped the USA U17 YNY qualify for the World Cup. The CONCACAF qualifiers took place in Trinidad and Tobago, where the US won all three games. Trayer saved the penalty kick in the game versus El Salvador.



IRELAND REAL '27

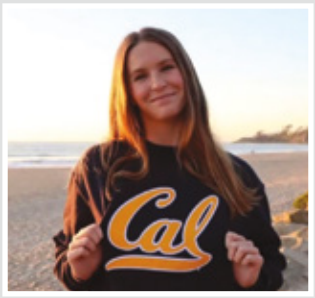
Girls volleyball standout Ireland Real was selected to be on the USA Volleyball Girls U19 National Team. Real was named to the 2024 All-County team and the 2024 All-CIF team this past season. She'll represent the U.S. this summer in Canada.





LEO FRANCIS '25

The senior season for track and field standout Leo Francis '25 was unforgettable. He broke the record in the long jump four times, the record in the 200 four times, the record for the 100 two times, and the 4x100 once. At CIF State, Francis won the state title for the long jump and third place in the 200, capping off an incredible high school career. Francis was named and OC Register Boys Track and Field Athlete of the Year. He is headed to the University of Pennsylvania to continue his academic and athletic pursuits.



TEAGAN O'DELL '25

Teagan O'Dell further secured her spot in Santa Margarita history with her accomplishments during her final high school season. She was named Orange County Girls Athlete of the Week by the OC Register three times this spring, as well as OC Register Girls Swimmer of the Year. O'Dell won four individual titles at the CIF State meet and swept other events at CIF-SS and Trinity League meets. O'Dell is headed to the University of California, Berkeley, in the fall to continue her illustrious swimming career while pursuing her academic passions.



CIF-SS TEAM CIF CHAMPIONSHIPS

Girls Swimming and Diving: ELEVENTH CONSECUTIVE

Boys Swimming and Diving: FIFTH CONSECUTIVE

Cheer: SECOND CONSECUTIVE

Girls Soccer

9 TRINITY LEAGUE TITLES

Boys Basketball

Boys Golf

Girls Golf: SIX-PEAT UNDEFEATED

Girls Soccer: THIRD CONSECUTIVE

Boys Swimming and Diving: SIXTH CONSECUTIVE

Girls Swimming and Diving: TWENTY-FIFTH CONSECUTIVE

Girls Lacrosse

Girls Tennis

Boys Track and Field: THIRD CONSECUTIVE

CIF STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Girls Swimming and Diving: SIXTH CONSECUTIVE

CIF REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Girls Golf: THIRD CONSECUTIVE



INDIVIDUAL CIF STATE CHAMPIONS

Girls Swimming

200 MEDLEY RELAY:
Gracyn Aquino '25, Eileen Song '27, Chloe Stinson '25, Victoria Mori '25

200 INDIVIDUAL MEDLEY:
Teagan O'Dell '25

200 FREE RELAY: Teagan O'Dell '25, Chloe Stinson '25, Victoria Mori '25, Gracyn Aquino '25

100 BACKSTROKE:
Teagan O'Dell '25

400 RELAY: Teagan O'Dell '25, Eileen Song '27, Valentina Delgado '28, Samantha Cummins '25

Boys Track and Field

LONG JUMP:
Leo Francis '25

HOMECOMING

CARSON PALMER

ON FAITH, FAMILY AND HOME



If you attended Santa Margarita anywhere from 1987 to 2015, you probably remember searching your backpack for a wrinkled one-dollar bill to purchase two chocolate chip cookies at lunch. Even after 14 memory-packed NFL seasons, Carson Palmer, SMCHS class of 1998, also remembers those cookies fondly. He shares the same experiences that many alumni hold dear: faith, friendship, fun, and "two for $1.00" chocolate chip cookies.

Carson Palmer's story is colored by years in cardinal, gold, black and orange, filled with success and setbacks, and forever changed by family and fatherhood. All of it starts here at the school nestled at the base of Saddleback Mountain. Carson Palmer's story begins at Santa Margarita.

Palmer entered Santa Margarita in the fall of 1994 with goals of playing on Friday nights to the best of his ability, but that was about as far as his expectations went.

"I came here like every other kid did," Palmer says. "I didn't know I was going to the NFL. I hoped and wanted and dreamt of it, but that wasn't really even on my radar."

After graduating from SMCHS, Palmer quarterbacked the University of Southern California Trojans, where he had his number retired after winning the Heisman Trophy in 2002. He was drafted first in the 2003 NFL draft and played 14 seasons in the league. When Palmer retired in 2018, he and his wife Shae moved their family to Idaho in search of a place to catch their breath.

They found much-needed stillness in the setting around them, raising their four children off the grid, out of the public eye, and away from the hustle of everything they had grown up with. When their oldest—twins Elle and Fletch—were proving themselves to be athletes who had the desire to train and play at the highest level, Carson and Shae discussed many options of where they'd want to relocate their family. They eventually realized they were comparing every place to what Carson had experienced at Santa Margarita.

"We wanted to give them an opportunity, and we decided that if the kids wanted more than what was available in Idaho, there's no better place than Santa Margarita," Palmer says.

The Palmer family relocated to Orange County in the summer of 2023, and in the fall of 2024, Elle and Fletch began their freshman year at Santa Margarita. Carson volunteered as a quarterback coach with the football program, and was just enjoying being back on campus; there was not a reality where he thought he'd be heading the entire program.

"If you had asked me even a year ago if I would be coaching in any capacity, I would've said 'no way!'" Palmer says, laughing through those words. "But it all just feels completely full-circle. It feels like this was all meant to be."



Faith played a major part in Palmer taking on this role, and it wasn't a decision he made lightly.

"Typically when you pray for an answer, you never get it when you want it or you did get it, but you didn't realize at the time that it was God giving you an answer," Palmer says.

When the head football coach job became available and he was considering taking it on, Palmer contacted a former Bengals teammate who has served as a sort of spiritual advisor for him over the years.

"I called him after not talking to him for a minute, and he picks up the phone and says, 'I don't know what you're calling about, but the answer is yes. I thought 'finally!'"

Palmer says he thanked God for that unexpected clarity, made his decision, and then knew everything would move quickly from there. He called Shae, telling her that this was the opportunity they'd been praying about.

"It needed to be done," Palmer says. "I have so many great relationships here and made so many great connections over the years. This is what I'd been waiting for."

As one of the largest athletic programs on campus, running the Santa Margarita football program is an obvious undertaking. Coupled with the level of expected excellence found in the Trinity League, this head coaching role is a demanding, tough job. Palmer says that even though he's learning through each challenge, the support he feels from the school eases the weight a bit. He mentions Athletic Director Donald Evans, Vice President of Athletics Jim Hartigan, President Andy Sulick '91 and Vice President Sergio Muniz '91 as resources of genuine support for him. Hartigan, Sulick and Muniz were three of Palmer's coaches when he was playing on Friday nights, and all three say they are ecstatic to welcome him home.

"These are all familiar faces I've known since I was 13, so there's a bond and a trust there," Palmer says. "That level of trust is something we built up 30 years ago that's still strong."

This sense of community is what defines Catholic education, and the alumni connection that continues to bond and bolster former Eagles is what SMCHS centers its culture around. For Palmer to return to Santa Margarita and be welcomed by the people who began this journey with him is an irreplicable experience.

"Carson's Santa Margarita experience is what brought him back. The friendships



"IF YOU HAD ASKED ME EVEN A YEAR AGO IF I WOULD BE COACHING IN ANY CAPACITY, I WOULD'VE SAID 'NO WAY!' BUT IT ALL JUST FEELS COMPLETELY FULL-CIRCLE. IT FEELS LIKE THIS WAS ALL MEANT TO BE."
Carson Palmer '98

he made, the experiences he had, and the sports he played were so meaningful for him that he now wants to be part of shaping that experience for current students," says SMCHS President Andy Sulick '91. "That is pretty remarkable."

Since settling into the role, Palmer describes his return to Santa Margarita as a "homecoming." Everyday moments at SMCHS turned into lifelong memories, and he says that the unforgettable experiences he had here are still enjoyed by students today.

"I had fun here. I started my walk with God here," Palmer says. "There's a bond and a connection with that shared faith that we started and built here. So much of the good about Santa Margarita is the same. It doesn't feel like I've been gone long."

When asked about his favorite memory from high school, Palmer doesn't hesitate to answer.

"Some of my greatest experiences are not in the NFL or college or even high school football, but winning the 1998 state championship in basketball was amazing. It was an incredible opportunity because no one expected anything from us. We were underdogs the whole time, and then we won the whole thing. I'll never forget that."

Palmer is gearing up for all that's to come for the 2025-2026 season and says he's looking forward to getting into the flow of coaching. The football field where Palmer will spend most of his summer and fall is the same 100 yards he once practiced on as a teenager and where he used to bring USC teammates to train in the off-season. He now has the opportunity to redefine the Eagle football experience, both making it original and exciting, but also maintaining the legacy and tradition that makes it beloved by so many.

"This is where it all started for me, and coming back really was like coming home," Palmer says. "So much opportunity was provided to me here, and I've got so much to give with what I was given in the NFL and the college level by so many great coaches and great teachers. This is an opportunity to share what I've been given."

Carson Palmer '98 is just one of **over 30 alumni** dedicated to shaping the next generation of Eagles.



EAGLES IN THE CLASSROOM
Scott McIntosh '94, a student favorite, has been inspiring Eagles for decades, bringing history and government to life in the classroom.



EAGLES RETURN TO GIVE BACK
Guided by a sense of purpose and pride, dozens of SMCHS alumni have returned to their alma mater to serve as educators, coaches and staff. Their presence is a testament to the lasting impact of the Eagle experience.



EAGLES ON THE SIDELINES
Mike Powers '03, head coach for cross country and track and field, also serves as a full-time substitute teacher, supporting students both on and off the field.



MAKING AN IMPACT FOR EVERY EAGLE EVERY DAY!

Your gift to the Eagle Fund helps our Eagles achieve more and soar to new heights!

Each year, the Eagle Fund provides funding for immediate needs on campus, strengthening every aspect of a Santa Margarita Catholic High School education. From enriching the many programs and activities to providing vital tuition assistance and maintaining and upgrading our beautiful campus, your generosity allows SM to flourish, impacting Every Eagle, Every Day.

Make a gift today that lasts a lifetime for our Eagles!

Visit www.smeaglefoundation.org/ef to make your gift.



La Dolce Vita

Bringing the "Sweet Life" to This Year's Gala

The Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation and the Blue and Gold Committee hosted the annual Blue and Gold gala in November, welcoming more than 375 guests. This year, guests were transported to the Amalfi coast and truly experienced *la dolce vita* with vibrant blue and white tilescapes and an abundance of lemons at every turn.

For many, the Blue and Gold gala is a Santa Margarita event that is not to be missed. The evening includes dinner, dancing, an auction, and the celebration of individuals who have helped shape SMCHS – all while raising funds for the school and tuition assistance, making *la dolce vita* possible for every Eagle.

"Your generosity tonight assists us with our core mission to bring Jesus to this time and place and prepare these young people for college, life and ultimately for heaven," said SMCHS President Andy Sulick '91. "We value and need your support and prayers not only tonight but always."

During the evening, one of Santa Margarita's founding families, Art and Gaye Birtcher, were recognized as this year's gala honorees. Surrounded by their children and grandchildren, who graduated from Santa Margarita Catholic High School, Art and Gaye accepted the Caritas Christi Award for Servant Leadership. The Birtchers were visionary leaders in establishing Santa Margarita Catholic High School, generously renovated the school's Sacred Heart Chapel to create a more prayerful atmosphere, and continue to play an active role today as influential supporters. We are deeply grateful for their lasting commitment and passion for SMCHS.

Thanks to the generosity of sponsors, underwriters, and donors, the Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation is thrilled to announce a net profit of $386,256, with $157,300 designated toward tuition assistance through the Fund-a-Student paddle raise.

It truly was another unforgettable evening, made possible by the support of the Eagle family. Mille grazie to Ruby Murdock, who served as this year's Blue and Gold Chair, and to the entire Blue and Gold committee for their time, talents, and dedication in making the gala a success.

BLUE AND GOLD 2024

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Kun Zhai and Zongzhang Yue

Beverages:

Hanna's Bar and Restaurant
Harry & Melissa Beck
Southern Glazers
Tito's Vodka
Total Wine and More



Save the date
for the next Blue and Gold
Oct. 25, 2025

Congratulations to this year's winners!



North Course Winning Foursome
Timothy McElfish, Patrick Green, Nick Grant, Adam Kuchyt



South Course Winning Foursome
Perry Valaskantjis '98, Sean Devlin '91, Kris Badame, John Casey



Best Dressed Foursome
Allison Mandel, Tatiana Beebe, Allie (Moffatt '98) Brennan, Christine (Pfrenzinger '99) Julianel

Helicopter Ball Drop Winner
Jerry Roberts

Most Ball Sold
Christian Lopez



The Luck of the Irish Shines at the Eagle Classic Golf Tournament

The luck of the Irish was in full swing at this year's Eagle Classic Golf Tournament. Held on March 17, the tournament returned to the beautiful Coto de Caza Golf and Racquet Club for this SM time-honored tradition. Blessed with beautiful skies overhead and an Irish tune in the air, more than 255 golfers teed off on both the north and south courses.

Since the tournament fell on St. Patrick's Day, players were encouraged to show their festive side by donning their best green gear for a chance to win a special prize. "Challenge accepted!" was the enthusiastic response from many, who came dressed not only to play — but to win! Congratulations to Allison Mandel, Allie (Moffatt '98) Brennan, Tatiana Beebe and Christine (Pfrenzinger '99) Julianel, who were voted this year's best-dressed foursome.

Adding to the day's spirited fun, this year President Andy Sulick and Dave Hanna, owner of Hanna's Restaurant, hosted a "Hole of Fun" challenge on the south course. Golfers went head-to-head with Sulick and Hanna, who proved they know their way around a golf swing!

The Eagle Classic Golf Tournament is the primary fundraiser for Santa Margarita's teams and programs. From registering to golf to becoming a sponsor, there were a variety of ways to get involved and support the tournament. The Eagle Foundation is pleased to share that this year's tournament raised a net amount of $347,677, with $292,662 going directly to teams and programs.

Thank you to the entire Eagle community for making this year's tournament a resounding success!

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Pilgrims of Hope

As the Church celebrates the Jubilee Year under the theme **Pilgrims of Hope**, we at SMCHS find a connection through our own annual Year of Compassion. Both call us to walk alongside others with open hearts and to see God's image in all people. Alumni and students featured here remind us that compassion is not just a feeling, but a movement outward, to serve and to uplift.



Students Honored for Fighting Hunger with Second Harvest

Students and staff from Santa Margarita Catholic High School are fighting against hunger in Orange County, and their efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Santa Margarita was recently honored with the prestigious "Feeding the Future Award" from Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County at their 2025 Volunteer Appreciation Lunch. The award recognizes the school's ongoing commitment to service through the Corpus Christi Project, part of the sophomore Christian service requirement.

SMCHS students participate in a comprehensive service-learning program throughout all four years. The goal of Christian service at Santa Margarita is to help students grow in their relationship with Christ through direct service to the poor and vulnerable, develop empathy, and gain a deeper understanding of the Catholic Church's commitment to life and social justice.

As part of the sophomore Corpus Christi Project, more than 450 Theology 2 students have volunteered at the Second Harvest Distribution Center or Harvest Solutions Farm in Irvine. This hands-on service supports the food bank's operations, allowing students to live out their faith through meaningful action.

The Orange County Register was on site when more than 20 sophomores harvested approximately 12,000 pounds of cabbage at the Irvine farm – enough fresh produce to soon be on the tables of hundreds of local families in need. Crops like cabbage and broccoli are gathered in winter, while summer brings harvests of zucchini, squash, tomatoes and more.

"Getting out here and working together really makes us feel like we're making a difference," said Nicole Punto '27, stationed at the end of a relay line packing cabbage into bins.

Faculty and staff also joined the effort through the school's Faculty and Staff Day of Service, lending their hand to pick cabbage and broccoli amid fields of greens.

"We are so blessed to partner with Second Harvest and to be part of the mission to feed our community," said Assistant Director of Campus Ministry Donnie Green. "It's more than just a service project – it's a chance to be Christ's hands in the world."

The partnership between Santa Margarita and Second Harvest continues to grow, embodying the shared mission to #FeedOC and serve those most in need.

FILLED WITH *love:*

Backpacks to Success



Santa Margarita sophomore Isabella Stuart '27 runs an organization with her sister, alumna Audrey Stuart '23, to fill a need in an under-advocated space. The Stuart sisters operate Backpacks to Success, a nonprofit dedicated to providing children in foster care with backpacks filled with school supplies.

With Audrey studying at Texas Christian University, Isabella has taken on a larger leadership role. They've been working primarily with Olive Crest, a home in Santa Ana for children navigating the foster care system.

"I have been so blessed to go to such great schools and have a great life, so getting to help in a little way means so much to me," Stuart said.

Olive Crest provides a list of items their residents need, such as highlighters, pencil cases and other school essentials. The Stuart sisters then purchase the items with donations from the community. Each backpack is filled and hand-delivered to Olive Crest with love. Their mission has drawn widespread support, including a donation of several dozen backpacks from Under Armour.



CHRISTINE LATHROP '13 DELIVERS HOPE

Moved by the stories of Syrian refugees during her time at Chapman University, Christine Lathrop '13 was inspired to spend her career doing something that would have a direct impact on people during the hardest period of their lives.

Serving on the Emergency Response Team at Project HOPE in Washington DC, Lathrop supports health programs in regions impacted by disaster or conflict. Whether on the ground or working remotely from Washington, D.C., her goal is the same, to meet urgent health needs with compassion and coordination.

In the days following the 2023 earthquake in Turkey and Syria, the Project HOPE team and others from around the world traveled to the region to support search and rescue efforts.

"In the depth of so much destruction, our team watched a few miracles occur, as children were found alive and rescued from the rubble after being buried for days." Lathrop recalls. "I'll never forget seeing dozens of grown adults scream, cry, and thank God on the street. In these moments, I was struck by the strength of the human spirit."



GAME CHANGER: KATIE (FERGUSON '97) RANDO EMPOWERS GIRLS IN EAST AFRICA THROUGH PICKLEBALL

When Katie (Ferguson '97) Rando discovered pickleball while living in Tanzania, she thought it sounded "silly" but soon fell in love. "Although I wasn't particularly any good at first, the barrier to entry is so low that you have fun even on day one," she said."I was instantly hooked!"

Now living in Uganda, she's using pickleball to empower others, especially teen girls.

"It was important to me to show teen girls that a woman can be an athlete too," she shared. She organized Uganda's first female pickleball tournament for teens, followed by a mixed doubles event "to normalize the boys playing together with girls."

To support the local community, she's hand-delivered over 50 donated paddles from California and reinvested all prize money back into East African players.

"It brings me so much joy handing players their first-ever paddles," she said. "We receive so much joy in playing and competing that we want to take any earnings and put them back into this amazing sport."

Follow Katie's journey: @dinkingaroundtheworld

LIVING SIMPLY, SERVING HUMBLY

In the southern district of Quthing, Lesotho, SMCHS alumnus Jackson McNamee '20 serves as a Peace Corps health volunteer in the rural town of Mount Moorosi. Working in a small clinic alongside incredibly kind and hard-working nurses, he helps manage pharmacy supplies and assists with outreach to remote villages — some patients travel up to eight hours on foot for care.

"My primary role is to support the efforts that are already ongoing," he says. "My work consists mostly of receiving drugs into the storeroom from the national supplier and keeping track of how much is let out to the dispensary."

In addition to his clinic work, McNamee has started teaching volleyball at a nearby high school and works diligently to learn the language, Sesotho, in preparation for more community-oriented work. At home, where he lives without running water, he studies for the LSAT.



McNamee credits Dr. Maria Johnson, his SMCHS Philosophy and Theory of Knowledge teacher, for her lasting impact. "She was a beacon of unhypocritical, virtuous Catholicism, and very much put me on the path I currently walk." Living simply and serving humbly, McNamee embodies what it means to be a Pilgrim of Hope.

These Santa Margarita alumni live out the Church's Jubilee call as true **Pilgrims of Hope**; meeting others where they are, lifting them up, and serving with Caritas Christi.

Leading with Faith and Purpose in the Age of AI

His Holiness the late Pope Francis described AI as "an exciting and fearsome tool," emphasizing that it must "serve to satisfy the needs of humanity, to improve the well-being and integral development of people."

Santa Margarita's approach reflects this vision. When used effectively and ethically, generative AI can foster innovation, personalized learning and deepen engagement.

"As students seek guidance and feedback, teachers navigate rapid technological shifts, and families wonder what the future holds, we are moving forward with goal of forming thoughtful, courageous, and caring leaders who leverage technology with integrity to improve the human condition," said Michelle Cho, Santa Margarita's Assistant Principal of Innovation, a newly established leadership role.

Cho brings experience in education policy and strategic planning to this newly established leadership role. She holds a master's degree in education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a bachelor's in economics, finance, and public policy from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

REFLECTIONS FROM CAMPUS LEADERS



"At a high level, over time, AI will likely place greater emphasis on skills over content and promote critical thinking when used appropriately. It is also creating new and powerful opportunities for students to receive individualized, real-time feedback, which can increase their engagement and accelerate learning."

Michelle Cho
Assistant Principal of Innovation

"AI isn't creating a brand-new shift — it's revealing and accelerating one that's been coming. It's pushing us to acknowledge that learning has already been evolving in response to technology, and we must be intentional in how we guide students through it."

Jorge Ledezma
Director of Educational Technology



Is AI More Terminator or R2-D2?

By Patrick Visconti '06
Assistant Principal of Mission and Ministry



Those of us in Catholic education are asking ourselves this question — and many others. In fact, the sheer number of questions surrounding AI can feel dizzying.

Recently, I had the opportunity to give a short presentation at a summit our school held on AI. The session was titled: "*Ethics, AI, and Theology — A Human-Centered Approach*." The goal was to explore some of the ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence and to offer a framework for discerning its ethical use. I did some reading, some research, some prayer, and some reflection. And after all that, I came to a conclusion: I have no idea.

What did become clear to me, however, is that we need to be asking a very specific set of questions — questions that guide our discernment in a Catholic and Christ-centered way:

1. What is the human person?
We believe, firmly, that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God — an embodied soul, created by a good and loving Creator. We are not utilitarians who reduce the value of a person to their popularity, productivity or efficiency. Every person has inherent dignity. AI must support this.

2. What is the human person for?
The Church teaches that the human person is made for communion — with God, with oneself, and with others. Our ultimate purpose is union with God — Heaven. The person is not without meaning or purpose. Nor do we create meaning and purpose on our own. We receive it, as a gift. Our use of AI mustn't replace this.

3. What is the nature of the universe?
St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "*The whole universe together participates in and manifests the divine more than any single creature.*" (Summa Theologica, I, Q.47, a.1) The universe is no longer formless and void. It is not meaningless. It is certainly not a wasteland of raw material for us to manipulate endlessly according to our own will.

These questions — and how we answer them — can help ensure that whatever version of AI shows up at our door, it remains firmly situated within the framework of a Catholic understanding of the human person and the world.



PREPARING STUDENTS FOR AN AI-DRIVEN FUTURE

Here's a look at how Santa Margarita is integrating AI effectively and ethically.

Microsoft Copilot 13-17 and Other Approved Tools

Santa Margarita uses Microsoft Copilot 13–17, an AI model developed specifically for students under age 18 with additional safeguards and filters. As a Microsoft Showcase School, SMCHS benefits from early access and support. SMCHS also maintains a list of pre-approved AI tools that meet rigorous privacy, security and educational standards.

AI Policy Implementation

Aligned with the school's charism of Caritas Christi, the love of Christ, the school's AI policy emphasizes academic integrity. Students must follow teacher guidelines, utilize AI to deepen – not replace – analysis and critical thinking, and properly cite AI-generated content.

AI Taskforce

A group of students, parents, faculty, staff, and administrators meet monthly to shape policy, share ideas and promote responsible use of AI campuswide.

Professional Development and Community Education

Ongoing professional development and education have been central to Santa Margarita's AI integration. The school year began with professional development led by Julie Smith, author and professor of media literacy, who challenged educators to be "mentors, not just monitors." She later returned for a student assembly and parent evening focused on AI and media literacy. Students then completed online curriculum to strengthen their digital evaluation skills. Santa Margarita is working to integrate media and AI literacy across all subjects.

"AI Tips and Bytes" on ETV

A student-run news segment regularly explores ethical dilemmas and best practices in AI use.

AI/Media Literacy Micro-Credentials

Through online activities, students can earn micro-credentials that recognize their ability to fact-check, identify credible sources, and demonstrate responsible digital citizenship.

Educator Workshop

This spring, Santa Margarita hosted an AI Summit for nearly 50 educators, featuring teacher-led workshops and demonstrations, classroom observations, roundtable discussions and expert insights.

Santa Margarita's Guiding Principles for AI Integration

- **Responsible Use:** Students must follow teacher instructions, fact-check, properly cite AI-generated content, and take ownership of their work.
- **Safe Use:** SMCHS is committed to protecting student data and providing tools that prioritize digital safety and security.
- **Ethical Use:** Students are expected to submit their own work, acknowledge and reject bias and uphold fairness.

AI IN ACTION



"During our Cold War Unit, I had my students take a deeper dive into the Vietnam War by speaking to two AI chatbots – one represented Vietnam War veterans and the other Vietnam War protesters. This allowed the students to explore the different experiences of those who lived through that time. It helped bring history to life in the classroom in a way that wouldn't cause a veteran to relive such a hard time."

Kristen Schmidt
MUN History Teacher



For more information on Santa Margarita's approach to ethically and effectively integrating AI as well as resources, please visit www.smhs.org/ai.



EAGLES EDGE:
Empowering Students Through Real-World Financial Education

Since 2017, Santa Margarita Catholic High School students have had a unique opportunity to gain real-world financial knowledge through the Eagles Edge Wealth Management seminars, led by CPA, attorney and financial advisor Frank Pisano, a dedicated parent of two alumni. This voluntary program provides students hands-on experience in managing investments and collaborating on the class portfolio.

What started with a generous $25,000 stock donation has grown into an incredible success story. With students at the helm, analyzing market trends and debating investment choices, the portfolio has achieved an impressive 15% growth. Pisano's impact doesn't stop at educating students. Every year, he donates the portfolio's earnings to support Talon Theatre, enriching Santa Margarita's theatre program.

Meeting once or twice a month before school, the program is open to all students and parents, completely free of charge. Pisano also brings in industry experts as guest speakers, covering topics such as bonds, cryptocurrency, and economic trends. Among the distinguished speakers was Josh D'Amaro, chairman of Disney parks, experiences and products, who shared valuable insights and advice with our students and parents.

By equipping students with financial literacy and real investment experience, Pisano is helping shape the next generation of financially savvy Eagles. Logan Minhas '26, who has been attending the seminars since his freshman year, says the course motivated him to open a Roth IRA.

"This has been a crucial step in securing my financial future and planning for retirement," he said.

More than just a class, Eagles Edge Wealth Management is a testament to the power of hands-on learning and the generosity of the SMCHS community.

"The success of my wealth management class and the profits made on a yearly basis from our investment account which the students manage will continue to be contributed to Talon Theatre as long as I teach this class. My daughter was able to make quality decisions and now has a successful career with the foundation she received in Talon Theatre." – Frank Pisano



Would you like to be involved?

Join the next Eagles Edge session and take the first step toward financial empowerment!

For more information, visit
www.smhs.org/eaglesedge

ASP Empowers *Every* Learner



The Auxiliary Studies Program (ASP) at Santa Margarita is more than just a support system - it's a transformational experience that helps students with learning differences thrive in and out of the classroom.

Over the years, ASP has evolved into one of the school's most impactful programs, offering individualized academic support, skill development, and an encouraging environment where students can gain confidence in their abilities. Whether through personalized learning strategies, accommodations or mentoring, ASP equips students with the tools they need to succeed – not just in high school but beyond.

"Coming into SM during my freshman year, I was not sure how much of a help ASP would be. However, I soon learned it was making a difference in my performance. Having a reader really helped improve my test-taking," said Brock Schroeder '26.

Many students have found ASP to be a lifeline. They receive the support and structure they need. By the time they graduate, they leave with an understanding of how they learn best and the confidence to pursue ambitious academic goals. The Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA) praised the program, saying, "The ASP program is significant to student success...The program does an excellent job of identifying and supporting students with diverse needs," in their 2024 Visiting Committee Final Presentation.

"ASP provided me with the support and confidence I needed to pursue my academic goals in an environment that matched my abilities," said Justine Sanchez, '25 attending Stanford University in the fall. "I'm deeply grateful for the time management, accountability and organizational skills I've gained - tools I'll carry into college and beyond. Thanks to everyone in ASP, I'm graduating with a clear understanding of what I'm truly capable of."

Teachers and ASP faculty and staff work closely with students to meet their individual learning needs. The program also partners with families to support students, creating a community of care that extends beyond the classroom.

The program helps prepare students for college by helping them understand and advocate for the accommodations available to them in college. Through guided support, students leave Santa Margarita with not just academic readiness but life readiness.

"Our goal is to empower students with the self-awareness, tools and confidence they need to navigate life beyond high school," said Suzie Cutter, ASP Director. "We're not just preparing them for college - we're preparing them to thrive."

> "ASP provided me with the support and confidence I needed to pursue my academic goals in an environment that matched my abilities."
>
> **Justine Sanchez, '25**





MARY MANESE: LEAVING A LEGACY

Santa Margarita ASP began with a father's hope: that his son, who had learning disabilities, could have a "typical" high school experience. With his support, a team of four eager specialists came together to build something unique. Mary Manese was one of the four. She later became the program director and spent 13 years in the role before retiring this year.

"The sense of community and care truly sets ASP apart," she said. "Students and families made the journey worthwhile. Students who once resisted the program and later returned after graduation to thank us are the real reward," said Manese.

Among her proudest accomplishments is ASP's acceptance and respect within the school.

"My goal was always to earn the trust and support of teachers and administration. I feel this ASP team has truly achieved that."

Reflecting on how the role shaped her, she says, "I learned to be a better parent, more tolerant and sensitive. I developed a passion for education that made me love my job. The people I worked with made it hard to imagine leaving."

After decades of leadership and impact, retirement beckons. Manese will be spending more time with grandkids and traveling.

"Grace under pressure is Suzie's superpower," Manese said of her longtime colleague Suzie Cutter, who was recently promoted to ASP Director after serving as assistant director. "She's an advocate through and through. I've learned so much from her."

ASP SERVICES

With 12 dedicated faculty and staff members to support the program, ASP offers:

- In house responsive, comprehensive and academic assessments by a licensed educational psychologist.
- Appropriately paced classes in math, science and Spanish
- Full-time dedicated ASP counselor
- Academic support period
- Organizational, time management and study skills development
- Self-advocacy programs
- Individual subject tutoring by appointment
- Informed, purposeful and measured accommodations
- Use of ASP Testing Center

For more information about the ASP Program, a comprehensive list of services and to hear more about the program from ASP Director Suzie Cutter, visit **www.smhs.org/asp**.



EAGLES RETURN TO INSPIRE: **ALUMNI CAREER DAY CONNECTS PAST AND PRESENT**

In January, SMCHS warmly welcomed back dozens of alumni for our annual Alumni Career Day, an event dedicated to guiding and inspiring the junior class.

The day began with a panel discussion led by comedian and writer Patrick Keane ’91, where alumni shared insights on topics ranging from college decisions, the importance of networking and building relationships, and navigating educational and career opportunities.

“We always talk about how your life as an Eagle doesn’t have to end when you graduate, and this day is confirmation of that,” said Alumni Coordinator Brandi (Morales) Lopez ’98 of the Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation. “To have so many alumni eager to mentor and interact with our students shows just how formative the SM experience is.”

A central theme throughout the panel discussion was the lasting impact of SMCHS connections, both personally and professionally. Many alumni in attendance shared that they conduct business today with people they first met at SM, underscoring the deep-rooted sense of community and support that defines the Eagle community.

We are grateful to the alumni who returned to inspire the junior class. Their participation exemplifies the enduring bond within the SMCHS community and the commitment of alumni to support and mentor current students. Career Day 2025 was a testament to the lifelong impact of a Santa Margarita education, reinforcing *“Once an Eagle, always an Eagle.”*

> “The emotional intelligence and the things you are learning about as far as working with each other are just as important as the things you are learning about in class.”
>
> **Patrick Strader ’94**
> CEO and General Counsel for Starpointe





Following the panel, students had the opportunity to chat one-on-one with alumni, similar to a job fair, gaining practical advice and learning about a wide range of industries and career paths.



The event concluded with breakout sessions by industry, where students chose which session to attend. This format allows for deeper discussions and more personalized guidance from alumni working in fields that students are interested in.

THE POWER OF AN SMCHS BOND

At Santa Margarita Catholic High School, the alumni network is often described as more than a community but a family. Like any great family, SMCHS Eagles show up for each other, believe in each other, and as in this case, make history together.

Gino Canori '96 and Patrick Strader '94 recently collaborated on one of Orange County's most ambitious real estate projects to date: Related Bristol, a visionary $3 billion development in the heart of Santa Ana.

Though they knew of each other as students at Santa Margarita, it wasn't until 14 years ago that their relationship truly began to take flight. Canori, a top executive at Related California, remembered Strader from their Eagle days and reached out to him. At the time, Strader, CEO at Starpointe Ventures, had already built a reputation for navigating complex land entitlements and local government relations. After working together on a few projects over the years, Canori had a big idea and knew Patrick was the perfect partner to help make it a reality.

"When Gino first came to me with the concept of Related Bristol, I told him, 'You're crazy!'" Patrick said with a laugh. "But he was persistent. He told me, 'I know we can pull this off together.' And he was right."

What followed was a true partnership built on mutual respect, complementary expertise, and, perhaps most importantly, a shared foundation formed at Santa Margarita.

"We have a deep trust in each other that stems from our shared history," Strader said. "Most business partners don't have that."

Canori agreed, reflecting, "SM was a great experience for me. From football and the discipline of Coach Hartigan, to academics and our religion classes, it all shaped how I think and who I am today."

That SMCHS bond continues to guide their professional lives.

"If I'm putting together a deal," Strader said, "I'm going to bring it to one of my friends, someone from the SM family."

"Absolutely," Gino echoed.

Their collaboration on Related Bristol recently earned Canori a major honor; he was recently named "Businessperson of the Year," by The Orange County Business Journal, a testament to his vision and leadership.

"Gino and Patrick's story is a reminder that the connections made at Santa Margarita go far beyond high school," said Alumni Relations Coordinator Brandi (Morales '98) Lopez. "At Santa Margarita, we don't just graduate students; we build a family."

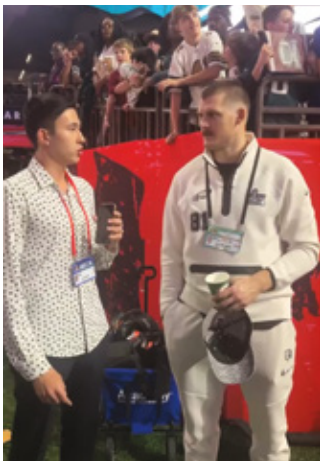
CLASS NOTES



Brandi (Morales '98,) Lopez, Alumni Coordinator, recently caught up with a group of Eagle alums in Washington, D.C. The mini reunion included Christine Lathrop '13, Maggie Morris '15, Shannon (Foley '03) Brady, Alex Kilander '18, Cara (Furman '14) Huner and Joanna Chou '17. It was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, share memories and celebrate the enduring Eagle spirit across the years. Make sure an update your contact info so you don't miss out when SM comes to your town!



Dr. Allen Jahroumi '98 returned to campus to speak with the SMCHS Pre-Med Club, sharing insights from his journey in medicine and offering valuable advice to aspiring healthcare professionals. He currently practices with MemorialCare Medical Group and inspired students with his passion for patient care and commitment to the field.



Tyler Ringhofer '23 earned a media credential to cover the Super Bowl for The Daily Pennsylvanian, the student newspaper at the University of Pennsylvania. While there, he had the unique opportunity to interview fellow Eagle alum Grant Calcaterra '17, tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles. When Tyler mentioned he was also an SM alum, Grant's eyes lit up and he gave a special shoutout to Scott McIntosh '94, his former history teacher. Grant and the Eagles went on to win the Super Bowl, making it a truly unforgettable moment for both SM alums!

Baritone Alex Granito '15 is making his professional principal debut. Alex was cast as Schnaurd in La Bohème at Opera Colorado. The show premieres February 22-March 2, 2025, at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House in Denver, Colorado. Alex was a four-year member of the SMCHS Chamber Choir under the direction of SM's Executive Director of Performing Arts, Francisco Calvo.





SMCHS hosted its first annual Hoops & Heritage night, celebrating the legacy of the boys' Varsity Basketball program. Alumni players from the classes of 2013 to 1991 returned to campus for a special evening of connection, memories, and school spirit. The night also included a heartfelt tribute to beloved former coach Jerry DeBusk (1945 – 2024), honoring his lasting impact on the program and the lives of his players.



Grant Calcaterra '17 is now a Super Bowl champion with the Philadelphia Eagles, completing an inspiring journey back to the NFL. After stepping away from football due to medical concerns, Grant was working construction in 2020 and pursuing a career as a firefighter in Southern California. Motivated to return to football after watching the 2020 draft, he trained hard and ultimately earned a spot in the 2022 NFL Draft, where he was selected in the sixth round by the Eagles. His comeback story is a testament to resilience, determination and believing in yourself.

This past January, Spencer Hogan '22 was invited to join the College Football Playoff creative team as a photographer and graphic designer for the inaugural 12-Team Playoff. While in Atlanta for the National Championship Game, Spencer was tasked with designing the visual identity for the College Football Playoff, with his work being broadcast to millions of people across the globe. On game day, Spencer got to lead a team of photographers in capturing, editing and delivering content in real-time during the biggest night in college football.

Spencer got his start in photography and graphic design while a student at Santa Margarita. After playing football for three seasons with the Eagles, he chose to step away his senior year due to an ankle injury, hoping to fully recover in time for track and field season. Serving as ASB as Commissioner of Video, Spencer took photos and videos at every football game his senior year and covered a variety of other sports as well. His growing portfolio opened doors, and ended up receiving a job with SMU Football, where he would pursue his college degree and develop his professional career. After three years at SMU, Spencer recently accepted a job in Tampa Florida where he will be joining the Tampa Bay Buccaneers full-time as a Graphic Designer.





Since graduating from SMCHS, Lizzie Bork '22 has been pursuing her passion for creativity at Chapman University, where she is majoring in graphic design and minoring in advertising, with plans to earn a BFA in spring 2026. Throughout her academic journey, Lizzie has remained deeply involved in the arts, continuing her love for performance, entertainment, and all forms of creative expression. In addition to her studies, Lizzie has recently launched her own business as a live event sketch artist. Specializing in capturing the essence of guests at weddings, parties, and events, she creates quick, custom sketches—each taking just about five minutes per guest—based on photos. Lizzie's sketches have been showcased at high-end pop-ups, including Nordstrom and The Mercantile Collective, as well as other luxury retailers across Southern California. To learn more about Lizzie's work and how she can contribute to your next event or commission, please visit the contact page on her website: lizzieborkdesigns.com

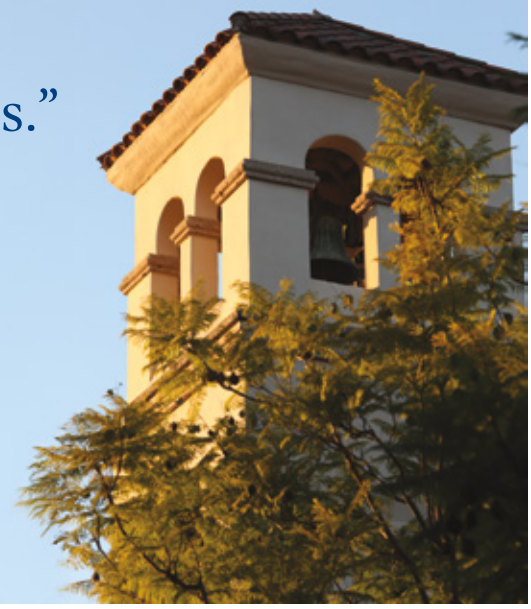
In Loving Memory

"He will raise you up on Eagle's wings."

Santa Margarita Eagle Foundation and Santa Margarita Catholic High School would like to extend our deepest sympathy to the family and friends of the following members of our Eagle community.

We will always hold you close to our hearts.

Jerry DeBusk - Teacher, Head Boys Basketball Coach (1992-2012)
Dennis Hands Jr. - Ice Hockey Coach
Eric Fannin '91
Laura Greco '93
Robert (RJ) Socci '01
Kyle Fethers '05
Emma Huke '18



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